

CONSTRUCTING THE VISUAL-ESSAY
IN
THEORY AND PRACTICE:
A HOME-DWELLER’S LIFE THROUGH THE ESSAYISTIC

A Master’s Thesis

by
ARIN ADA ÇAKAR

Department of
Communication and Design
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
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by

ARIN ADA ÇAKAR

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I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ersan Ocak
Supervisor

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Ahmet Gürata
Examining Committee Member

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Media and Design.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Umut Şumnu
Examining Committee Member

Approval of the Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences

Prof. Dr. Erdal Erel
Director

ABSTRACT

CONSTRUCTING THE VISUAL ESSAY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE: A HOME-DWELLER'S LIFE THROUGH THE ESSAYISTIC

Çakar, Arın Ada

MFA, Department of Communication and Design

Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Ersan Ocak

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Montaigne's establishment of the essay as a literary genre brought about a revolution of the mind in that it made possible an infinity of new manner's of expressing thought and human emotion possible. The essayistic spirit thus born by Montaigne's midwifery infiltrated in the last century the artistic genres of film and photography. The essay found a visualized mode of practice, commonly observable in contemporary art today. This more recent embodiment of the essayistic expression, however, appeal to qualities and operates through principles that expand on what the literary genre entails. In light of what these are, this thesis explores the evolution of the essayistic from its literary expression discussed by Adorno and Lukacs, to its examples in film and photography and these examples' scholarly consideration in the available literature. Generic utility of the term essay is then problematized and "visual-essay" is proposed as a more proper and comprehensive term.

The point of origin of these discussions are found in a visual-essay project, entitled "A(WAITING) HOME / EV (DE) BEKLER", which I have produced. Accordingly, the evaluation of the essayistic mode of expression in contemporary art is conducted in perspective of the thematic of home, home-dweller and the seemingly essayistic relationship of the two. This is done in terms of both a theoretical deliberation of home-dwelling, and a reflection upon how this thematic had been explored by my project, thus purposed to be reflective on home as much as on the very generic form in which it found expression, that is the visually-essayistic.

Keywords: essay, literary-essay, essay-film, photo-essay, essayistic, Adorno, Lukacs, home, home-dweller, subjectivity, video, photography, material objects

ÖZET

TEORİDE VE PRATİKTE GÖRSEL DENEME: DENEME TÜRÜ ÜZERİNDEN BİR EV SAKİNİNİN HAYATI

Çakar, Arın Ada

Yüksek Lisans, İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü

Tez Yöneticisi: Yrd. Doç. Dr. Ersan Ocak

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Düşüncenin ve duygunun irdelenebileceği sonsuz yeni yolu mümkün kılmış olması nedeniyle, Montaigne'nin denemeyi edebi bir tür olarak kazandırması bir akıl devrimine denk düşer. Öyle ki bu türe has yaratı-ruhu, son yüzyılda ortaya çıkan fotoğraf ve film gibi görsel sanatlarda da sıkça vücut bulmuştur. Denemenin yakın zamandaki bu ifadelerinde, edebi karşılığındakinin ötesinde özellikleri gözlemlmek ve denemenin edebi olmayan örneklerinde deneme ruhuna sadık ancak farklılık gösteren prensipler üzerinden işlediğini tespit etmek mümkündür. Bu özellik ve prensipler çerçevesinde bu tez, deneme türünün edebi halini Adorno ve Lukacs üzerinden inceleyip, film ve fotoğraftaki örneklerini ve bunların akademik literatürde değerlendirmelerini tartışmaktadır. Bu yolla “görsel-deneme” teriminin jenerik kullanıma ve akademik tartışmaya kazandırılması ve deneme türü sorunsallaştırılarak, günümüzde bu terimin bir tür olarak neyi ifade ettiğini anlamak mümkün kılınmaktadır.

Çerçevesi tespit edilen bu tartışmanın çıkış noktasını bir görsel-deneme projesi olarak nitelendirilebilecek, “A(WAITING) HOME / EV (DE) BEKLER” başlıklı sergi çalışmam oluşturmaktadır. Ana tema olarak seçilen ev, ev-sakini ve bu ikisinin deneme ruhunu açıkça çağrıştıran biçimde şekillenen ilişkisi aracılığıyla deneme türünün güncel sanat eserlerinde ifade buluşuna referans amaçlanmıştır. Ev ve ev-sakininin görsel-deneme yoluyla irdelenmesinin hesabı, bu temaya denk gelen kuramsal tartışma da yukarıda belirtilen çerçeve içerisinde yer almaktadır. Böylece projenin sadece evi, bu tezin de sadece denemeyi değil de, aynı zamanda birbirleriyle diyalogik bir bütünlük oluşturdıkları görülecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: deneme, edebi-deneme, deneysel film, fotoğrafik deneme, Adorno, Lukacs, ev, ev sakini, öznel, video, fotoğraf, nesne

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

What is to be offered in the following chapters constitute only—or, if not more, at least—half of the story. The other half—or the rest—of this enterprise is the visual essay project that I have produced with the title “A(WAITING) HOME / EV (DE) BEKLER”. What is to be found here as the written portion of my thesis, could have been expected to be strictly complimentary to this project. Yet, the stages of the project and the conceptualization of it that was to be offered in this written text developed and unfolded in a peculiarly interesting and unexpected fashion. And on this account, offering the very (hi)story of this project clearly promises one of the most appropriate ways to introduce this thesis.

The primacy of the project, what its thematic would be and by virtue of which medium it would be produced, dominated the preliminary conceptualization stage of this enterprise. In other words, the project itself was allocated precedence over what was to later accompany it as its written account. This written portion was to evaluate the project in terms of a justificatory

theoretical framework. The subject matter of the project, then, had already been put in an antecedent position even at the early stages of this history. And it is important to note this, because the decision about the generic stylistics of the project as a visual essay, it seems, had already been planted unconsciously at this preliminary phase. This is because one of the fundamental characteristics of the essay genre and the essayistic attitude is the precedence it gives to substance over form.

Accordingly, in terms of the thematic of the project, I decided on the theme of home. This was primarily due of my interest in human spaces in general and in the ways in which such spaces are constituted by and constituting of the human person. With regards the medium to use in exploring the thematic of home, I was confident that one appropriate medium would be the photographic image. The camera seems to have the function of documenting inherently hard-wired into itself, and the photographic image, put in whatever context, always in part serves the purpose of documenting. It was not only that such characteristic was clearly suited for the exploration of human spaces such as home, but it was also that I am comfortably and confidently fluent in practicing photography.

On the other hand, while the project was evolving hand in hand with its theoretical discussion around the essay, the essay necessitated the usage of some other medium in order to fulfill the essayistic experience. Two videos and several material objects from home were added to the project and the details of such decision is discussed along with the theoretical basis of visual-essay.

The aim of this thesis is of twofold nature, which is necessarily determined by its scope. On the one hand, there is the acute concern to offer an account of what is at play in my project itself, particularly from a generic point of view. On

the other hand, there is an acute concern regarding the shortage in scholarship of theoretical reflection and deliberation that would sustain or at least inspire the working out of such account of what is at play in my project.

There are four main parts to what is to follow:

In the second chapter, what is offered is a discussion of the literary essay. I chose to take two influential texts—one by Adorno, and the other by Lukacs—as a frame of reference to explore what is recognized to be fundamentally at play in the essayistic form. The perspectival framework of this and following chapters are, however, set by the pioneer of the genre, Montaigne. This perspective is encapsulated in Montaigne's observation that the essay portrays passing, and not being—where the former entails process, something dynamic, something moving or in movement, while the latter indicates something static, exhaustive or exhausted, something that has finished or been done.

What is to be found in both Adorno and Lukacs' consideration of the essay is essentially in line with what Montaigne had observed. There is, nonetheless, an issue to be taken with this set of circumstances. Attempts to answer the question concerning what the essay is, accordingly makes it problematic to write about the essay in a non-essayistic way.

In the third chapter, what is proposed is a consideration of the thematic of home. The aim of this section is to elucidate how home may be seen as inherently open to essayistic consideration, because what is at work at home is itself somewhat characteristically essayistic.

The succeeding fourth chapter returns to problematic of the essayistic as proposed in the first chapter. Expanding on what had been said about the literary essay, this chapter explores the film essay and the photo essay, ultimately arriving at the conceptualization of the visual essay as a proper essayistic genre.

The fifth chapter, bringing together elements from the previous chapters, accounts for how my project works as a visual essay. It stands as the unifying chapter since it not only comprises those theoretical discussions that have been evolved with the previous chapters, but also the project itself has been discussed by at the same time revealing the concrete reflections between the theoretical discussion, mostly the preliminary keywords and the project itself.

In the last and concluding, two main observations will be offered. The first one will argue that my project is probably the most proper conclusion of which one may speak. And in that sense, the preceding fifth chapter may be thought to contain a number of concluding remarks. The second observation will concern what bearing the discussion theretofore and my project have on the generic notion of the “visual essay”. Accordingly, in light of such discussion, the project, and what could be observed during the exhibition, how the debate concerning the essayistic in contemporary art and the scholarship on it may be furthered will be proposed. For this end, two particular issues will be considered—one regarding the matter of authorial voice, and one concerning how the visual essay is essentially not installation-art.

CHAPTER II

THE ESSAY AS A LITERARY GENRE

“Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You're by no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and stimulated to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry”

J.D. Salinger – The Catcher in the Rye

Concerning the essay, its pioneer had once written: “The essay cannot portray any being, it portrays passing” (Montaigne, 1948: 610-611). Such observation uncovers something fundamental about the essay as a literary form, something that cannot really be doubted. The essay is first and foremost a process, an attempt, a trying without a definitive destination, and it is dynamic in a way that is not preconditioned or preset. How does a generic form itself be represented—it may then be asked—not as a being/thing, but as an attempting, a

trying—*viz.* assaying—, if the essence of this genre pertains to the representation of passing in the first place?

This explains in part why the core literature on the essay and the essay form are founded on writings on the essay that are themselves generically essayistic. Theodore Adorno's "The Essay as Form" (1958) and Georg Lukacs' so-called letter to Leo Popper published under the title "On the Nature and Form of the Essay" (1910) are two such texts that take the essayistic into consideration in a form none other than the essay. The influence that these two texts have hitherto enjoyed upon the literature on the literary essay has seldom been surpassed, and they constitute the main focal point and frame of reference of the discussion to follow.

First, however, what is meant by essay, and assay or the act of assaying requires the standard clarification. Essay, as is commonly known, has evolved from the old French word *essai*, meaning 'trial' and taking its recent shape in the English verb *assay*, meaning 'testing or a test of'. When such things as 'attempting' or 'trying' are identified as the fundamental qualities of the essay, it seems that a certain kind of ambiguity begins to haunt it as a literary form—an uncertainty about where it is to be located. Most naturally, for all other literary genres, the attempt made never takes precedence over the specific aim, in terms of which that very genre is ultimately defined and thus located within the generic spectrum of all literary forms.

An interesting quality of the abovementioned authors' discussions is that they alternate between elaborating the characteristics of the essayistic genre in terms of what one should have in mind while discerning its essence on the one hand, and with what one is not to confuse the essay, on the other. This alternation

is symbolic of what is at the center of the essay form: process. It is clearly by virtue of their recognition of the precedence of process—i.e. the portrayal of passing over any portrayal of any being—that both Adorno and Lukacs’ texts unfold in the form of an essay in their attempted evaluation of the essay itself. The essay therefore reflects, in the image of Montaigne’s assertion, upon the building process, the formal aspect and the subject matter or content of the essay by also acting (or re-enacting) the assaying of the essay—including even when that very subject matter is itself. One may observe that this points to the inherently self-reflective quality of the essayistic.

The answer to the question “what is essay?” cannot accordingly encompass the infinity of form and substance from which the essay derives its shape and content. Every genuine attempt to answer this question—or any subject-matter thus weighed essayistically—, it seems, leads to another working out of what the essay is, and simultaneously, what it is not. That there are many conceptualizations of the essay is therefore unsurprising. Thus, the discussions we find about what the essay is often revolve around what it is not—at least as much as it does around what it is. This attitude towards the essay echoes Montaigne’s (1948) claim about it: what the essay does not portray, namely a being, indicates what it does actually portray, namely passing.

There is one significant point where the likes of Adorno and Lukacs diverge from the mode of thinking unique to Montaigne and his contemporaries. The essay may portray passing and not being, but for Montaigne, the portrayal of being is possible in a fundamentally different way to the manner it is possible for Adorno and Lukacs. It is by virtue of what the essay makes possible in its manner and content of portrayal that Adorno and Lukacs becomes evermore deserving of

urgent consideration as a literary form.

What is to follow for the rest of this chapter is intended to provide a brief exposition of this consideration in light of what Adorno and Lukacs put forward about the nature of the essay. Accordingly, the observation of Montaigne that was referred to at the outset will nevertheless remain as a guiding principle for the succeeding presentation. This is so because although distinct from Montaigne, for Adorno and Lukacs a certain inevitable precedence is enjoyed by passing over being, by virtue of the former, a unique and essential knowledge of the latter may be achieved, which differs categorically to the knowledge of beings put forward by scientific/empirical method or positivistic modes of discourse, or the forms of purely artistic expression.

2.1. What is at play in the essay? *Mirroring, Ordering, Judging*

That the essay portrays not a being, but a passing indicates something important about the very process that goes into its production. The essay deals with something whose borders are not predefined, which makes the writing of it difficult to subsume under a distinct formula. Having passing and not a being in its focus—in other words, portraying something dynamic and not static—the essay does not build itself on a given norm or depend on any standard structure. This is to say, then, that the essay is not the product of identifiable forms or standardizable procedures.

The observation that the essay is not the product of a procedure is something both Adorno and Lukacs share. This is not to say, however, that the essay is independent of any restraint or method. It seems that the essay is still

procedural without being the product of a predetermined procedure. In a similar way, the workings of the essay is systematic, but not in the sense of being the outcome of or in the sense of itself producing a system (e.g. of thought, values, ideology, *etc.*). This means that the essay avoids any limitation towards its content, which in turn makes it possible for such content to dictate the manner in which it is treated procedurally and systematically.

2.1.1. Mirroring

A definite point of origin that all essays have—i.e. a ground serving as their starting point—is complimentary and in part illustrative of this observation. Adorno describes this aspect of the essay in terms of a ‘mirroring’. The essay reflects on or is reflective of what is loved and/or hated (Adorno, 1884: 152)—or, in other words, what is at play in the essay is a reflecting or reflection of what is loved and/or hated. This mirroring discloses something significant about the kind of creating that takes place in the essay, which is, accordingly, not a creating out of nothing but creating by retrospective reference to something.

The essay does not intend to explain by virtue of its reflectivity. The exercise of explaining involves exhausting all that may be said of the essence of a thing in order to achieve a comprehensive presentation of the matter. The kind of writing that aims to portray beings over passing as such, on the other hand, “do not deserve to be described as essays, because they can never give us anything more than information, facts and ‘relationships’” (Lukacs, 1974: 2).

As mentioned above, the essay “does not permit its domain to be prescribed” (Adorno, 1884: 152), and as a result, its starting-point is not only

seemingly arbitrary, except it has an immediate, concrete anchor in everyday life. The essay begins from somewhere that has already been evolved as an experience, something that has already been realized. Yet the essay is also free from efforts of exhausting the subject matter it entails to the limit that there remains nothing about it that is not uncovered.

2.1.2. Ordering

Lukacs is particularly instructive in this context:

The essay always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past; hence it is part of the nature of the essay that it does not create new things from an empty nothingness but only orders those which were once alive. And because it orders them anew and does not form something new out of formlessness, it is bound to them and must always speak ‘the truth’ about them, must find expression for their essential nature. Perhaps the difference can be most briefly formulated thus: poetry takes its motif from life (and art); the essay has its models in art (and life). Perhaps this is enough to define the difference: the paradox of the essay is almost the same as that of the portrait. (10)

So, the essay approaches its subject matter, art and/or life, in the way a portrait-painter does towards his model. The portrait that is painted mirrors its subject in the pattern Adorno indicates, but in a categorically different way to the image produced by mirrors or by a standard headshot photograph. It is by virtue of the ‘ordering’ Lukacs speaks of that this difference is produced, and after such ordering the essay closes itself “where it feels complete, [and] not where nothing is left to say” (Adorno, 1984: 152).

Hence, the nature of the essay does imply its starting point: an evolution out of an experience that has already taken place—a point that is accentuated by both Adorno and Lukacs. But Adorno goes on to assert from this claim, the

extension of a key principle of the essayistic form: “Nothing can be interpreted out of a work without at the same time being interpreted into it” (1884: 153). It seems this in turn offers insight to the manner of ordering Lukacs speaks about.

As its model, the essayist takes the individual as opposed to the universal. S/he constructs the essay, as it were, upon or in reference to this model. In this process, the essayist remains absolutely independent of the form—e.g. aesthetic qualities or artistic style—of what is being essayistically interpreted with regards what is loved or hated, that is, what is being ordered by such interpretation. This means that something of the substance of the subject matter of the essay is transferred to the essay itself:

It was you [Leo Popper] who once formulated the great demand which everything that has been given form must satisfy, the only absolutely universal demand, perhaps, but one that is inexorable and allows of no exception: the demand that everything in a work must be fashioned from the same material, that each of its parts must be visibly ordered from one single point (Lukacs, 1974: 6).

In other words, the essay must be *made*, as it were, of the same *stuff* as its subject matter. It seems to be the case that otherwise, the subject matter would not be able to guide the unfolding of its formal expression in the essay.

How this ‘making’ happens, what goes into it, and what this sameness of material amounts to, are questions that need clarification. Both Lukacs and Adorno are very much involved with these problems, and it is difficult to say that they overcome the problematic underlying them. However, what is crucial at this stage of the discussion is that in the context of the essay, it is not possible for the matter to be simply interpreted (Lukacs, 1974: 10). In other words, the essay is not a mere generic form of representing and communication of an interpretation. It is, essentially, the presentation of the very act of exercising interpretation.

This should also mean, then, that from the perspective of the essayist's audience, the essay cannot be a mere commentary on what has already been done. However, just like it is the case with a commentary, the essay seems to require its reader to have a decent knowledge of the subject matter taken at hand in the essay. This often leads to the contrary of the first observation, as Lukacs comments, for the essay is confused with being a commentary or commentative/exegetical interpretation:

The experiences which the writings of the essayists were written to express become conscious in the minds of most people only when they look at the pictures or read the poems discussed and even then they rarely have a force that could move life itself. That is why most people have to believe that the writings of the essayists are produced only in order to explain books and pictures, to facilitate their understanding (Lukacs, 1974: 9).

This is, however, only a natural effect of the essay, which coincides with its immediate usefulness for its audience, and it is something “which we find in the writings of every truly great essayist” (Lukacs, 1974: 9). Yet, it is still essential both for the production process and for the produced piece that its dissociation from being mere commentary or interpretation is accomplished by the essayist. This is vital for it to preserve a status of being a unique literary piece, and the essay is, without doubt, quite a special literary form.

2.1.3. Judging

The essay, then, mirrors and orders, and has an arbitrary, but definitive point of origin. While doing this, it necessarily interprets out of a work as well as into it, and this double act has a naturally effective by-product, an immediate usefulness for its audience with regards its subject matter—that is to say, in other words, the essay explains without the intent of explaining. But ultimately, this

twofold exercise of interpreting/interpretation terminates in what is discussed by both Adorno and Lukacs in detail: the possibility of a judgment.

Let us note here in passing that one can and often does evaluate whether an essay is good or bad, or authentically essayistic. It seems that the essayist achieves and preserves the unique character of the essay by constructing it through certain qualities, which ultimately revolve around the making-possible of the essay. This so-called making-possible pertains both to the essay itself and to that which the essay itself makes possible, namely a very specific kind of experience or knowing. These characteristics account for the procedural quality of the essay and how it avoids becoming a product of a predefined procedure at the same time.

The discussion about the way the essay is produced leads naturally to the answer of another important question regarding the essay: what does the essay itself produce? It seems that for both Lukacs and Adorno, this is the underlying issue in need of explanation about the essay. In the case of Lukacs, we see the regular association of the essay with the term critique, which exemplifies a preference of the question “what does an essay do?” or “what happens in an essay?”—that is to say, what does the ‘assaying’ involved in the ‘essay’ entail—over the question “what is the essay (as a fixed, definable literary genre)?”

In the case of Adorno, the conviction seems to be that the fact “that in Germany the essay is decried as a hybrid; that it is lacking a convincing tradition” (1884: 151) is in some way due to asking the wrong question about the essay. One could then think of their consideration of the essay in terms of what the essay is not also as a discussion about how the essay inherently resists certain types of evaluation. This is precisely why Lukacs and Adorno continue the emphasis on

the portrayal of passing when it comes to the essayistic form.

2.2. Epistemology of the Essay

The way that the essay is produced leads to the question regarding what the essay itself produces, because the former consideration eventually raises the issue about the epistemology of the essay, which relates to what is considered by the latter question. It was claimed that by constructing the essay with certain characteristics, the essayist achieves and/or preserves the unique character of the essay. What is fundamental to these characteristics is that they indicate a very specific kind of experience or knowing.

The clue, I believe, to what this specific experience or knowing is can be found in the conviction that the essay ends when it feels complete and not where all that could be said is exhausted. The essay finds its own unique kind of completion when its mirroring and ordering (or ‘interpreting’) terminates in a judgment/judging or in making such an act possible. It has its origin in what is traditionally called the singular experience or experience of particulars, and it is the kind of knowledge of such experiences that Adorno and Lukacs initially emphasize in unfolding the epistemology of the essay.

According to both, the essay begins with such kind of experience or knowledge and eventually produces the above-mentioned kind of experiencing or knowing where the latter is quite different to the character of the former. What the assaying of the essay amounts to is the derivation or secretion of what may essentially be the universal or general that the mirroring and ordering of the essay accomplishes.

It must be noted that Adorno and Lukacs are both very careful in their terminology. They appear almost unwilling to use ‘universal’ and ‘general’ and this is understandable. These words are not only philosophically loaded, but also very rich in their connotations in ordinary language. Moreover, the historical context in which Adorno and Lukacs wrote meant that such terminology had already been monopolized by epistemologies from which they wished to distinguish the epistemology of the essay.

Lukacs, for example, only mentions the dichotomy of universal-particular by a historical reference to medieval philosophy:

It would seem that the question was posed most clearly in the Middle Ages, when thinkers divided into two camps, the ones maintaining that the *universalia*—concepts, or Plato’s Ideas if you will—were the sole true realities, while the others acknowledged them only as words, as names summarizing the sole true and distinct *things* (Lukacs, 1974: 4-5).

The fact that Lukacs seldom makes explicit use of this dichotomy is interesting, because Lukacs’ overall discussion of the essay operates through a mechanics of dialectical reasoning. For instance, the immediate context in which we find the above quoted extract considers a certain character of the reality of the soul:

“There are, then, two types of reality of the soul: one is *life*, and the other *living*; both are effective, but they can never be effective at the same time” (Lukacs, 1974: 4).

This allusion to the Middle Ages is particularly significant, because both Lukacs and Adorno are reacting to the dominant mode of thinking that replaced the one specific to the Middle Ages. One could advocate that for Lukacs and Adorno, the paradigm that replaces the medieval one is still operative in the traditional conceptualization of the essay as a literary form or genre. One may note here that this is further justification for Lukacs and Adorno to dwell upon the

question about what the essay is not over what it is, in addition to reasons embedded in the inherent nature of the essay.

2.2.1 Essayistic versus positivistic paradigm

What is first to be found in Lukacs and Adorno's discussions about the essay in the texts being considered here and regarding the epistemology pertaining to the essay in the context of the question concerning what the essay produces, is what kind of knowledge the essay does not produce. There is, therefore, a definite theoretical basis in addition to a set of historically accountable reasons to undertake an account of the essay in relation to the scientific/positivistic paradigm.

The essay should not be confused as serving a purpose or having a motivation that is essentially reactionary. The epistemology of the essay is, it seems—at least from an experiential point of view—, only an indirect consequence of its execution, and it is accordingly not intended to produce a body of knowledge to serve counter-factual function against the positivistic forms of discourse. What it does do, however, is cast doubt against the already established knowledge derived from such and similar inclinations.

Adorno and Lukacs aim to disclose the positivist knowledge and therefore construct their argument from how the knowledge the essay embodies is categorically different from that of the other. The fact that the epistemology of the essay promises distinction from the positivism to which Lukacs and Adorno are clearly reacting, and the fact that it fulfills this promise by way of doubt and not by a reactionary formula—which would indicate a paradigmatic kinship with that

from which it is categorically distinct—, explain why Lukacs and Adorno, and their contemporaries, were interested in the essay as a literary genre.

The knowledge produced with a positivist inclination operates through the “...net of science” (Adorno, 1884: 156), where “...all knowledge can potentially be converted into science” (Adorno, 1884: 156) and those that are being acquired “...like a design for a machine part, lose all their value at a precise moment when a new and better one becomes available” (Lukacs, 1974: 2). Such constructive attitude produces a knowledge paving the way to reach a universal truth. The epistemology at work here, then, assumes a linearity regarding all the replacements and transitions that may take place while achieving universal truths. This assumption of linearity is significant in the context of the discussion of the essay in Lukacs and Adorno for several reasons, two of which are worthy of mentioning.

First of all, it is an assumption not a deduction. For the likes of Adorno, there is ultimately an underlying ideological factor at play, which is the progressivism that is characteristic of positivism. This in turn makes the essay particularly relevant to human intellectual activity in the twentieth century; because,

The essay freely associates what can be found associated in the freely chosen object. It does not insist stubbornly on a realm transcending all mediations—and they are the historical ones in which the whole society is sedimented—rather the essay seeks truth contents as being historical in themselves (Adorno, 1884: 159).

The essay is therefore a genre through which ideological (i.e. socio-cultural, hence historical) preconditions to knowledge may be brought out into the open, since they are found by the essayist as already associated in the chosen object of essayistic discourse.

Secondly, the essay itself often serves to interrupt or challenge the linearity supposed by the positivistic framework. The essay appears to do this in two levels. On the one hand, there is definitely a unique epistemology to the essay, yet the essay does not put forward anything that directly contributes to the accumulated total of human knowledge. In other words, essays do not ‘add’ to human knowledge in the way that natural science does; instead, “the essay seeks truth contents as being historical in themselves” (Adorno, 1884: 159). So the essay does indeed make a contribution to human life and knowledge understood in a broader sense. However, it resists being reduced to, for instance, a commentary, a simple interpretation, or a re-iteration of something that already exists. What the essay does is that it “silently abandons the illusion that thought can break out of *thesis* into *physis*, out of culture into nature” (Adorno, 1884: 159).

On the other hand, the subject matter of the essay often derives from or finds nourishment or a frame of reference in the wisdom of the past. This is in part why the essay’s point of origin is identified as already having been given form (Lukacs, 1974: 10) and as promising reflection upon what is loved and/or hated (Adorno, 1884: 102). The essay is, therefore, reflexive of things that are hardly ever replaced by something new, and the knowledge to be discovered in its portrayal of passing is accordingly not the sort that will or could be replaced with something newer and better.

“Two essays can never contradict one another: each creates a different world,” writes Lukacs (1974: 11), which further indicates that the essay not only anchors itself in one of a multiplicity of irreconcilable worlds (as opposed to the one and only of the positivistic mind-set), but also makes possible a genuine kind

of human knowledge that is accordingly and inescapably fragmentary. It should be noted that what is claimed to be fragmentary here is the epistemology of the essay, not the essay as a literary genre.

The presuppositions of the positivistic attitude are not limited to this linearity, but extend to the procedural realization of knowledge proper. The process of this achievement often passes through a certain kind of experimentation, and theses or hypotheses. The experimental process, which may perhaps be seen as roughly corresponding to the assaying of the essay must lead to a specific solution where such solution is applicable universally whenever the experimental conditions are reproduced or arise. The essay, contrarily, casts or serves to raise doubts against this mode of discourse and its limits; but it still aims—assays as it were—to reach truths of universal character without really having it as its sole intention.

2.2.2. Essayistic doubt, truth and historicity of knowledge

One of the things that is particularly appealing to Lukacs and Adorno in their respective discussions of the essay is the way the essay challenges the conviction that all knowing is reducible to the kind that positivist processes produce and that the positivistic procedures provide as solutions. Those that cannot be reduced operate through the singular, individual experiences. The kind of knowledge such experience entails is reflective of an observation of men's social relations and psyche, and it is no less objective, and certainly no less important, than the positivistic knowledge.

In order to justify the existence of such knowledge and its status as epistemologically valid, Adorno refers to people like Proust or Bergson. He points out that although their works are constructed as passing through the scientific net, they are still aware that there is this other kind of authentic knowledge. The knowledge derived from the experiences of a man, in its “individually grasped unity” (Adorno, 1884: 156), presents a whole that “could not be divided up and reorganized under the separated *personae*” (Adorno, 1884: 156). The following, then, becomes the question: how do these singular, particular experiences lead to a whole that can appear as another type of proper knowledge that is not positivistic?

Seeking an answer to this question is significant in achieving a comprehensive framework of the epistemology of the essay. For both Adorno and Lukacs, the key to resolving this issue seems to be in the kind of truth that one finds in the essay as opposed to the one natural science produces or art appears to embody. The fundamental characteristic of the truth of/in essay is that it is, ultimately, historical. This is not to say that one encounters historical facts or historically justified truths in the essay. It means that the truth—and in extension, the knowledge—that the essay deals with is of historical character in the sense of truth itself being or at least having a historical condition or determination.

Contrarily, science constructs monoliths of knowledge by way of stacking truths on top of one another, where what is at the top is nourished, supported, even proven or justified by what holds it in place from below and ultimately divorces it—or transcends it—from that from which it is to originally derive. Scientific truth makes knowledge terminate in a universality that disregards all contexts for the sake of validity. In other words, truth precedes, in a way, all

circumstances for which it makes possible true-judging/-judgment. So when the case is a scientific truth, it produces a universal fact, and "...then the full historical content becomes an integral moment in truth; the *a posteriori* becomes concretely the *a priori*" (Adorno, 1884: 158) within the process of essay writing.

The category of historical knowledge, about which Adorno is particular explicit in the context of the essay—and let's speak of the process of essay-writing here as it operates in terms of this knowledge—operates only through the aforementioned practice specific to the essay: judgment (or interpretation) as a knowledge-act is of twofold character, for nothing is judged (or interpreted) 'out of' without something is judged (or interpreted) 'in to' the matter itself.

That meaning, the validity, or even the universality of a singular, individual experience is still at some point being evaluated within that single experience as it can only speak for itself by its nature. All the steps the scientific knowledge has, the preconditions, the basis, the construction process must be involved in that experience in order to speak of a 'true', valid conceptualization. Therefore, one cannot refer to a replacement, transformation when the essay is in question and "...two essays can never contradict one another: each creates a different world, and even when, in order to achieve a higher universality, it goes beyond that created world, it still remains inside it by its tone, color and accent; that is to say, it leaves that world only in the inessential sense" (Lukacs, 1974: 11). The two dynamics of truth formation are shifting within the process of essay writing when "...the full historical content becomes an integral moment in truth; the *a posteriori* becomes concretely the *a priori*" (Adorno, 1884: 158). When the essay transforms its truth into an integral moment, it exposes its priorities. It constantly prioritizes the fragmentary, particular, individual experiences to disclose

something about the total. The totality that positivist knowledge prioritizes is excluding those experiences for the sake of producing the universal and timeless, regardless of the context they are being used or observed. The context, however, alters the result when the case is historical knowledge and that seems as the reason why Adorno talks about the (historical) social relations that are the *sine qua non* motivation for the essay. Including the social relations, what the essay does by its nature -assaying-, is not considering what is timeless and universal, but what is rather transitory, temporal. In a way, the essay freezes the transitory, catches the fragments and by doing so, constructing a *process* that is not aiming to settle a conclusion or judgment, but rather as a whole, a reflection of this process of judgment.

Here, then, we leave the act of discovering a truth—which quite often associated with positivistic truth making—aside and rather speak of unfolding, or with Montaigne’s words, “laying open” (Montaigne, 1948: 781) of the singular experiences which again precisely indicates a process. The essayist thus “...preserves something of the *process* of thinking” (Good, 1988: 20) that is not necessarily operates through a linear structure, but can rather “interweave as in a carpet” (Adorno, 1884: 160).

It is by means of what is thus far identified as the properly essayistic qualities of expression that my project undertook the consideration of the thematic of home. The essay, in its literary example, has been seen to first offer something experiential. The very same thing may also be said of the home, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III

HOME

*This is my house
And I live in it
It's made of cracks
And photographs
We rent it off a guy who bought it from a guy
Who bought it from a guy
Whose grandad left it to him
And the weirdest thing is that this house
Has locks to keep the baddies out
But they're mostly used to lock ourselves in.*

Tim Minchin, *Not Perfect*

The principle guiding my project is the representation—that is, a kind of portrait—of a particular person via the presentation of that individual's house. The person referred to as such is my grandmother and the portrait my project paints is substantiated through a (re)presentation of her house. This approach or guiding principle is justified in this unique case on grounds that the majority of this person's days are spent within this house—that is, her home. However, there is something further that is to be disclosed by this project. Home and the human

subject or self are inexorably intertwined. A careful discursive and/or artistic look at one's home is potent to reveal something quintessential about personhood in the context of or in relation to the home, which transcends, in the case of my project for example, the specificity of my grandmother's life.

What is to follow now intends to offer a presentation of not only the relationship between home and self, but also the suitable character of the essay for such subject matter. In the previous section, a theoretical investigation regarding the essay as a literary genre had been conducted. This previous investigation serves as a background in the discussion to follow, so that the most basic methodological question my project faces—that is to say, the issue of the choice of medium—could be addressed as well. Hence, it is in response to such matter that the essay becomes an integral part of my project.

Although my project has the potential of revealing much more than a portraiture of a single person through her home, it ultimately has its origin in something specific. This specific or particular origin of my project's consideration of "home and dweller" has its correspondent in the essay—namely, in that the essay also derives from a particular, a basic experience. This is only one example to the aptness of the essay for the discursive and artistic evaluation of home and dweller that guides my project. In any case, the most significant common concepts that find some form of expression in both the essay and home that are worthy of discussion include: the construction or presentation of a subject, the process of narrativization in that construction or presentation, the appeal to dynamic and metonymic qualities observable within that construction or presentation. The succeeding deliberation will also contribute—although indirectly—to one of the key themes of the following chapter concerned with the

visual-essay, that is, the reflection on the relationship among the creator/author, the created/text and the outside observer, that one may derive from such construction or presentation.

3.1. Home as a context in which the self dwells

A description of home solely as a physical space—or, first and foremost as such—is improper and overly reductive. Space indicates a somewhere, which exists and continues to do so regardless of any (human) subject; whereas homes are places that serve as “contexts for human experience, constructed in movement, memory, encounter and association” (Petridou, 2001: 88). In other words, meaning is attached to and harbored in a home. Home, therefore, is a concentrated and dynamic cosmos of meaning and the possibility of meaning-making.

Concerning such cosmos of meaning, Heidegger’s conception of home and dwelling is valuable, because Heidegger’s distinction between home and house is elucidated first and foremost by the idea that home carries with itself “a strong sense of cultural belonging, existential and essential shelter” (Şumnu, 2012: 40). This is why Heidegger refers to an otherly quality of the home, dissociated from the ‘here’: “the idea of home, different from house (or residence), does not solely refer to a corporeal interior; rather, it designates a sense of ‘interiority’ ... [and] the image of home -whether at the level of the private dwelling or at the level of cities and communities ...- directly associated with identity, representation, and subjectivity” (Şumnu, 2012: 39). The dweller is therefore to be located at the center of home, which means that the construction or

making of home entails for the human subject the self-referential act of both presentation and representation.

Constructing a home—that is to say, transforming it from a mere space (i.e. a house) to a home—is a creation of a self-(re)presentation, which one may exemplify, for instance, by the choices a person makes in decorating this place. The home eventually becomes an extension of the self in that it is a *presentation* of one’s “appropriation of the larger world” (Miller, 2001: 1). It is also a *representation* of that dweller’s situating of itself in that larger domain, which one may possibly describe as that dweller’s reflection on/of that world to the private domain of that person. Therefore, the home is also a medium for self-(re)presentation. This twofold character of home in terms of the self’s involvement with it and in extension with itself as part of the larger world within which it dwells, is the key to the construction of home as well as the dweller that makes it. Home, without doubt, carries out the purpose of presenting dweller’s himself/herself to others, and what is presented through home to others is ultimately a carefully constructed representation of the self.

The home serves as a context that a person self-reflexively constructs. The self-reflecting act(s) involved in such construction comprise of both presentation and representation of that dweller reflecting itself—and hence the usage of the term “self-(re)presentation”. The self is not only engaged in an act of exhibiting itself as a dweller in the instance of the home. It is also involved in the re-presentation of an already existing self, which is carried out more freely as home offers a liberty to the dweller—namely, the freedom to choose only what it wishes to be used in its representation. In other words, the dweller is able to create by virtue of transforming a space into a place deserving of the name home, and in

extension of such creation, the home becomes an expansion of the dweller's self. In that sense, home comes to re-present the dweller not only to itself, but to others, in a way that is perhaps more authentic since such representation of the self grows out of how that dweller chooses to self-identify and wishes to be identified by others. And in this context, one may see how home is potentially a certain kind of social statement—and this point will duly be explored further.

3.2. Home as narrative

It must be noted here that the subject neither encounters a space (i.e. a potential home), nor to such space arrives a subject, where either the space or the subject are clean slates. In relation to home, both the person and the place have their own histories and their own particular characteristics that disallow an infinitely many ways for the above-mentioned self-(re)presentation. It is in this context that the (re)presentational role of the home for the self brings about the production of a narrative or the process of narrativizing. It is not difficult to imagine that whether in the context of the home or not, narrative-building is fundamental to the way a person (re)presents oneself. Accordingly, construction of a home, with its role of such (re)presentation is significant, if not potentially vital, element in the process of one's identifying himself/herself.

In light of the relationship between home, self-(re)presentation or – identity, and the construction of personal narrative or self-history, my grandmother and her home are promising and suited for a further exploration. My grandmother has been residing in her apartment by herself for a very long time; forty years, which means that all the decision-making that went into decorating

the house and into determining what objects are to be displayed derives mostly, if not solely, from her. Proposing that her home has not been intruded or disturbed by anyone else might be pushing it, but it is reasonable to say that she has not been constrained by others in creating/constructing the narrative(s) that her house entails in way that most people are by virtue of living with others.

3.3. Home as a social statement

As it was previously implied, however, this domestic-narrative of self-(re)presentation is not independent of psychological, physical, social or economic variables at play in that person's life. Such factors have an undeniable presence in the dynamics that go into this construction of home, narrative and (re)presentation of self. At times, they seem to even play a unconscious role in the person's actions, which turns that person's home into a pool of one's social relations. This pool of social relations includes what one may call, as one scholar, Ian Woodward does, the involuntary life experiences. The domestic narrative is significant for such experiences because in it, one is able to observe "people's socially determined sense of who they are" (Woodward, 2007: 134). This transforms such narrative into "a social statement" (Woodward, 2007: 134.), which in turn shapes both the person involved in its creation and the life experiences that person goes on to have *in*-voluntarily.

3.4. Home as (an) essay

The centrality of the process of narrativization in the case of the home is also significant in that it follows a path resembling the process by which the essay

narrates its subject matter. In the context of this similarity, the first thing that deserves being identified as analogous to the essay in the case of home is the non-linear and multi-layered character of its narrative. Just like the contrary-qualities of the essay's narrative to linearity, home is fragmentarily constituted both in the way it is put together and perpetually experienced by its inhabitants and visitors. In other words, a home does not offer a complete, uninterrupted and exhaustive (re)presentation of a self, but one that is a certain collage of impressions of scenes, thoughts, circumstances, acts, stories, memories and suchlike pertaining to that self.

The elements comprising this so-called collage are enclosed within the space of the home in the manner decided by the protagonist of the narrative in consideration. The self-(re)presentation of the person in the case of the home is thus constructed—or exemplified as having been constructed—by way of these decisions, which essentially involve a set of choices about how that person self-identifies and desires to be identified by others. This is because the person dwelling a home chooses the narrative thus constructed and possible to be observed in it. And this described constitution and interrelation between home and the self through a non-sequential and multi-layered narrative is possible in the first place by virtue of the certain epistemology that underlies them.

3.5. Epistemology of the home

It was previously noted that home is to be differentiated from a mere space by virtue of expressing a concentrated and dynamic cosmos of meaning and/or (possibility of) meaning-making. To speak of an epistemology of home is

therefore possible and involves recognizing home as a realm of meaning governed by and/or of the making of meaning undertaken by its dweller. Home is thus a mirror, and its reflecting/reflection is of a (re)presentation of self (namely, the inhabitant(s) of home). This reflecting or mirroring happens in terms of what may be deemed a visual-narrative and its mirroring communicates a judgment or statement regarding a dweller, and it is this that has an undeniable epistemic value about itself. Due to what is at least in part mirrored by home—namely, a statement of self—and what is made possible by that statement—namely, a narrative of self open to judging and furthering—that a description of the inhabitant of the home not only as an author of sorts, but also as a dweller.

One may further observe the non-linear or fragmentary character of the home as akin to that of the essay in its fundamentally non-terminating or non-ending quality. That is to say, someone's home continues to be that someone's home as long as they live there, but home is only one of the sites—although a unique setting—in which a person dwells¹. So, as long as that someone lives there, her home remains to be a central site of a process of self-presentation and self-representation, because such setting provides that self's dwelling a space that it can fill and order. In the final analysis, the home-dweller obtains the material objects that find a place in her home with conformity to external factors. These are external limitations like economic freedom and/or level of education of the person, physical constraints of the space at issue, environmental factors (like climate) at play in this setting, social and cultural norms of the immediate urban

¹ A very basic example that illustrates the uniqueness of home is the expression 'homeless'.

context, and many others.

However, none of these limitations or the way that the home-dweller adopts to these restrictions in constructing its narrative through home, or the home-dweller herself, can be seen as static. What is essential to their being is their dynamic character: they are all, first and foremost, *passing*. The home, just like self, is a non-terminating, non-ending—i.e. a fundamentally temporal in-passing—thing. Accordingly, the epistemology of home is also continually fragmentary, because it is always the epistemology of (an) unending *passing*.

Yet, it should be noted that it is only in a figurative sense that home and self—and in extension, their characteristic narrative and/or epistemology—are described as continually fragmentary and eternally recurring. In effect, neither home, nor self is never-ending or fragmentary, but only transient and wholesome. An account of home and self (or home-dweller) for which the visual-essay seems particularly suited, discloses a narrative and an epistemology of the former kind, not of the latter description. It is not only odd but seemingly improper to think of a home as deserving such name because it is something that has found completion. Contrarily, it is the notion of process that seems to pertain to home most accurately, which is in principle an essential characteristic of the essay. This is also an important example to how the dweller and home are reflective of each other and why the essay is properly apt to disclose this relationship.

Just like one cannot really speak of a living person to be complete or to have completed her/his self, one cannot speak of a home as something completed or finished either. So the home, just like the self that calls it his or hers, indicates continuity that is characteristic not of things, but of passing. However, this dynamic cannot be all encompassing or totalizing. The home as a (re)presentation

of dweller is instead fragmentarily constituted—that is to say, the home is made up of bits and pieces chosen and ordered by the very self they are supposed to mirror. Such mirroring quality that could be found in these objects takes another step when the observer releases them from what they recall and the object starts to speak for the observer self-reflexively.

The home, therefore, has a specific ‘system’ (or systematicity) that is almost exclusively dependent upon the person who owns it. The system or systematicity that would correspond to that of the essay, as it had been elucidated in the previous chapter, is shaped by the subject matter that the essay takes at hand. It is accordingly possible to observe a kinship between home and essay in terms of their systematic constitution and dynamic character. Fragmented units appear to meander within this system, and at times, they climactically come together, but never terminate at a settled conclusion. It is imperative to reiterate that a home does not end, for as long as the person inhabiting it continues to do so, the house sustains itself for that person and any other who visits it. This self-sustenance of home, I believe, is made possible—at least in part—by the systematic choices and ordering on part of the self that lives there. The home is produced out of a space because the dweller systematically transforms that space by virtue of the meanings with which it surrounds itself, that derive from that person’s life and are carefully chosen and ordered to be a (re)presentation of the self occupying that home.

At the outset of this chapter, it was asserted that the discussion to follow intended a presentation of the relationship between home and dweller herself, and the suitable character of the essay for such subject matter. What has been offered thus far should provide a decent account of both these issues by way of

elucidating a ground for all in terms of the certain narrative and epistemology discoverable in each concept in consideration. However, let us recall that one of the major points of the chapter on essay as a literary genre established the essay as first and foremost a process, an attempt, a trying without a definitive destination, and it is dynamic in a way that is not preconditioned or preset. This means that the essentially essayistic qualities of home and the suitable nature of essay—i.e. visual essay—for considering home as the self-expression of its dweller, make it necessary in this case to now refer to the actual domestic domain that offers the content of my project.

Bringing the content of what is at offer in my grandmother's home and my knowledge of her life and of the objects she cherishes in her house into the discussion of home, she as a dweller and essay is further justified due to the fact that the essay begins from what has previously been called basic or particular experience. In other words, the essay begins from somewhere that has already been evolved as an experience, something that has already been realized. This indicates, I believe, that it is from contemplating home and home-dweller as herself occupying and appropriating a space, and from a desire to explore by expressing that contemplation, that one comes to consider the essay as a possible tool for the expression of that contemplation.

Moreover, the way that I had envisaged my project at the beginning is also in line with this observation. I was first interested in the phenomenon of home as a space for an individual like my grandmother, who is 93 years old and has been living in the same house alone for forty years. Contrary to the organization of this written element accompanying my project, research on the essay as a literary genre and the visual-essay as a derivative and contemporarily more popular form

of this genre came second. Unsurprisingly, however, the essay may naturally lead to a consideration of home like home has lead to the essay in my case.

Another important issue that was discussed about essay as a literary genre was concerned with the formal characteristics of it. Lukacs was instructive in the context of that discussion and seems to be so again in this context:

The essay always speaks of something that has already been given form, or at least something that has already been there at some time in the past; hence it is part of the nature of the essay that it does not create new things form an empty nothingness but only orders those which were once alive. And because it orders them anew and does not form something new out of formlessness, it is bound to them and must always speak ‘the truth’ about them, must find expression for their essential nature (1974: 10).

Now, a reference to this aspect of the essay is crucial with respect to my project, because it also summarizes my position as the one constructing a composition (viz. a visual-essay) out of something (viz. my grandmother and her home) that have, without doubt, already been given form and order. It is the already formed and ordered nature of home that makes essay possible in this instance, and the form and order that exists in the case of my grandmother’s home need to be explained independently of my project.

As mentioned above, every home has its specific system, which inter-relates with the domestic narrative that the home produces. In the case of the particular characteristics of the home that I have chosen for the subject matter of my visual essay, one must first recognize that this space has been the home for the same, single person for the last forty years. Hence, the home in consideration escapes from the constraints of a description of home as just being a “silent backdrop or frame to everyday life” (Miller, 2001: 8). This domestic space seems to have acquired a further purpose of being an accompaniment to the dweller who inhabits the space it provides. I am of the opinion that in a way, my grandmother’s

home has become a member with its own discursive position.

Home was previously discussed with reference to it as a dynamic entity due to its being an integral part of persons' everyday life. As a domestic space, home is therefore more than mere space or some place, because it is indicative of a process: "[home] acquires its meaning through practice; and as such, forms part of everyday process of the creation of the self" (Petridou, 2001: 88). This dynamic quality and home's function for the everyday dwelling of the self have found an interesting expression in the case of my grandmother's home, because most, if not all, of her energy seems to have been concentrated in preserving this domestic space like it has always been.

So this home is a dynamic entity in a unique way. It has never been renovated—the floor, the furniture and even pots and pans are the ones my grandmother had at the time she moved in. The stability of the home and the constancy within it, and the continuous effort to preserve the status quo are two of the most salient and prominent of its features. This habitualized stability is accompanied by some routines that "help to constitute a framework for existence by cultivating a sense of 'being' in the individual" (Garvey, 2001: 54). Feeding the cats on the street with leftovers, closing the curtains when the weather gets dark and the need for turning the lights on arises, praying and following the news form TV are some examples for these routines.

In addition to such routines that emphasize the ongoing being of the person, there is one more aspect in need of recognition. The material objects in the home seem to primarily function as a reminder for almost a century of lived-experiences and further-contribute to this sense of being and personhood of the home-dweller. The canvas of the home is filled up with objects that are

essentially aide-memoires: photographs, pictures, and what may be portrayed as relics. These objects occupy this domestic space not only due to decorative reasons, but also because they are transformed into metonymic significations for the person inhabiting this space. For my grandmother, these objects stand for people, incidents of and memories from her past.

3.5.1. My Grandmother's Home

Ultimately, my grandmother's home is a "bricolage" of metonyms. It is almost without exception that every item one may also see as serving some decorative function, is standing for some experience and in whole, for the years lived and passed. These are therefore "objects that are cherished for affording contemplation" (Woodward, 2007: 146). One example might be the mother's day gift that my uncle gave my grandmother in 1971. There are also lots of photographs of her grandchildren and my late grandfather who passed away in 1976. Another group of things that one encounters in this domestic space are her handcrafted lacework, which she has making since she was only twelve. The majority of the rest of the relics are gifts from loved ones. In this house, one rarely comes across an object that does not remind my grandmother of something or someone. And in that sense, her home has a museum-like quality to her, tempting visitors to stroll around and try to experience this fragmentary "cosmos of memory" (Woodward, 2007: 125). I find this character of this space somewhat romantic.

Let us note here in passing that the key constituents of this canvas are the memories of one, and they follow a rather sporadic line. This emphasizes the non-

linear composition of the home once again. What is being identified here as such is an externalization of the memory of a person; it is the management of an explicit presentation and/or discarding of objects (Woodward, 2007: 8). This non-linear and fragmented composition of this dynamic space that is home, thus presents an “intersubjective space” (Woodward, 2007: 51) encompassing ongoing interpersonal relations and social interactions. And in the case of my grandmother’s home, we are able to observe the accumulation and careful selection of things anchored in many decades of a life. Accordingly, it should be noted that the effect that transformation of self-identity, the voluntary-involuntary experiences, memories on the domestic narrative had not been unilateral. At some point, the home began to act as a guiding authority, a defining frame of reference for her in the everyday activities she is involved with.

It is possible to say that the physical location of her apartment has made it possible for her home to acquire this role. Located on the first floor, this is not a space that receives any direct sunlight. The inevitable darkness that is accordingly the case is then coupled with a quietude, which is rarely interrupted, except for the ringing of her doorbell and the noise her walking stick makes. Although the volumes of the ringing of the telephone or of the doorbell are not louder than what is standardly the case, silence of the home augments their loudness and intensity. In fact, they often make a person leap up when either goes off. The sound of something unusual, for instance a car alarm, does not appear as something ordinary but seems like a stranger subverting the security provided by the stability of the familiar noises. The smell of the antique furniture has penetrated the entire area. In the kitchen, a very small amount of gas leak from the old stove mixes up to the smell of the food whenever she cooks and eats. All the above-mentioned

sensory aspects of the home further help us one to attribute a personality to it and even create a strong urge to anthropomorphize.

This urge to anthropomorphizing her home was one of the primary triggers for me to conduct a project, as it was the main thing that made me realize that I fully experience this place and reflecting such experience is possible. It was an aspect which made me notice that the home might have a separate discursive position, that is to say, could claim itself as a member for the narrative of a life, which is significant to mention prior to undertaking the next two chapters in which I will discuss the construction of visual-essay and details of how my project is evolved respectively.

CHAPTER IV

“VISUAL ESSAY” AS AN ESSAYISTIC FORM

Expanding on the discussion about the literary essay, this chapter has the purpose of exploring and evaluating the cases of the photo essay and the essay film. Accordingly, the following discussion is aimed to reveal the existence of an in-between space discoverable in the instances of both photography and film, wherein the paradigm neither of fiction nor of documentary can be said to be the principle. The essay or the essayistic impulse or attitude corresponds to the working of this in-between space where the production of an objective reality is observed not to be the motivation or the result. My project—particularly in the context of its description as a “visual essay”—is shaped by this mentioned impulse and the curiosity of the kind of reality and/or knowledge that is operative in the essayistic. Moreover, the material that provides the substance of my project is also greatly dominated by the presence of an inevitable subjectivity or the inevitability of subjectivity. By these, what is meant is a particularity or singularity that rejects being represented in the generalizing and simplifying rhetoric of a so-called objectivity or objective reality. The inescapability, but also

the irresistible appeal, of such individual subjectivity is exemplified first and foremost in my personal—emotional, physical, and even legal—relationship to the subject and her subjectivity. It is this subjectivity that finds expression in my project via the thematic of home.

It must be noted in this context that expanding the discussion from literary essay to photo- or film-essay, and hence—in a way—, from the notion of the ‘essay’ to the ‘essayistic’, is ultimately done for the sake of proposing a framework that may be deemed as the “visual essay”. It should go without saying that the tension exemplified in the dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity—as has been observed several times in the previous discussion—, and the consideration of an in-between space amid any such dialectic, are best explored by the essay and the essayistic mindset. This is because what is most regularly observed in the essayistic is its unreservedly critical and problematizing character, and it must be observed that the essay itself is not free from such reflection. These qualities that are attributable to the essayistic and/or the polarity set by the objective and the subjective, come together convincingly in the context of an exploration of the thematic of home.

What is to follow is intended to explore this and establish its validity at least in the case of my project and in the decision to describe it as a “visual essay”. It is my sentiment that this discussion will ultimately respond to what I observe to be an absence in the literature, particularly in the case of the photo essay. This will become duly clearer as the transition from essay to essayistic finds an analogous transition from a *portraiture* to the *portrayal* of a particular subject(ivity) that operates in my project, but also achieves expression in the currently growing essayistic qualities in photography and film. The investigation

of such aspects discursively here and by virtue of my project is a worthwhile undertaking as photo essay goes unrecognized as a proper genre—that is to say, the word ‘essay’ in ‘photo-essay’ is not used and understood as indicating a genuine essayistic form.

A major concern in the chapter on the genre of the literary essay pertained to truth and the epistemology at play in the essay. This thematic of truth and knowledge is necessarily a fundamental issue for the visual essay as well; however, the use of the same terminology might pose issues. The relation that the visual essay has to what had been previously termed truth, knowledge and reality does provide a noteworthy issue that has not been thoroughly evaluated in terms of the properly essayistic in the photo-essay. In the context of the essay and the essayistic attitude, terms like knowledge and reality are used to describe what is effectively at play in the essay and in the essayistic attitude. The underlying question in operation here is, in the final analysis, “what is at play in the essay?” and what is at play in the essay is a certain kind of reality, with its own kind of epistemology. The manner of play that is the case in the essay, accordingly, pertains to the business of representation or expression—as termed in the first chapter—of individual or singular experience, which is accessed within the aforementioned in-between.

Essay’s dynamic and preconditionless character, and its tendency to transgress conceptual and formal norms (Alter, 2007: 44), makes it a unique mode of expression in terms of its epistemology. In order to articulate this, what was emphasized in the previous discussion revolved around Montaigne’s dictum, which preset, in a way, the entire proceeding evaluation: “The essay cannot portray any being, it portrays passing” (Montaigne, 1948: 610-611). This

characterization applies to all essayistic modes of expression, and it explains the dynamic quality of the essay whether it be formally literary, photographic, filmic, or—possibly—a combination of these.

The attempting, assaying, weighing of a matter, which the essay undertakes, thus puts forward a more fluid representation. In order to distinguish this kinetic aspect of the essayistic, portrayal appears to work better in capturing the fact that an essay is only one of the infinitely many particular ways to depict a specific experience. In the case of the literary essay, this was in part why substance was argued to have precedence over form. Identifying this precedence recalls why the essay or the essayistic is difficult to define, which is because no overarching formal format may be observed in it—the essay does not follow any strictly generic rules, but allows the subject-matter to find its own course. Such a thing is also seen to be the case for both the photo essay and essay film, but more so in the latter's instance: “the genre of the essay film poaches across disciplinary borders, often transgressing conceptual and formal norms” (Alter, 2007: 44).

4.1. Essay film

The academic literature—particularly the one on the essay film—presents a consideration of the audio-visual forms of the essay either in comparison to the literary essay or to other generic styles of the audio-visual medium (*viz.* documentary and fiction). This kind of a comparative approach was seen to be inescapable in the previous chapter where literary essay was discussed. One may say that such approach is due to the very nature of the essayistic genre and its ill-suitedness for a straightforward definition. The same is observed in the case of

the photo- and film-essay, but matters seem to be further complicated in their case, because, as aforementioned, they are not only compared to and contrasted with their literary counterpart, but also to and with other generic audio-visual styles of expression.

When juxtaposed, the essay film's kinship with its literary counterpart may be observed in one straightforward instance, which makes a convincing—although somewhat preliminary—case for the visual essay and its critical disposition. As one scholar, Nora Alter, notes, “the essay film [...] has increasingly come to perform the critical function of the written film theory essay” (2007: 45), which is indicative of the fact that the ‘essay’ of the phrase ‘audio-visual essay’ is no less than that which is part of the phrase ‘literary essay’.

This example is also indicative of the deeply reflexive character of the visual essay, something that was noted to be a quality of the literary essay. Just like its literary counterpart, the visual essay is an open-ended, evaluative search for something genuine and possible (Alter, 2007: 45), which it does by virtue of problematizing already existing categories of representation. It is clear that in the case of the essay film's replacement of the traditional film theory essay, the former problematizes the latter in a fundamental way. Furthermore, one needs to note here that the very talk of visual essay generically—that is to say, as a genre in its own right which derives from its essentially essayistic character—where what is meant by “visual essay” is a generic term encompassing the essayistic in its photographic and filmic expression, is probably of the utmost significance for conceptualizing and contextualizing my project.

One of Alter's other observations deserves being noted in this instance: “Theorists of the essay have argued from the onset that the genre manifests itself

in moments of crisis—political and representational. The function of the essay is not therapy or healing the wounds produced by the upheavals of the day, but crisis diagnosis enabling and encouraging future social and cultural transformation” (2007: 51). It is therefore possible to advocate that the essay(istic) does not only offer the artist to work with a different kind of epistemic or semantic domain. It is also possible to argue that the essay(istic) also—if not first and foremost—partakes in the presentation of why a tendency in favor of itself might be on the rise, because this epistemically and semantically different domain is in fact the in-between space recognized at the outset of this chapter.

This “neither objective nor subjective” or “amidst the objective and subjective” space is significant first and foremost because it points to where the very link between what is deemed objective and subjective may be discovered. The exploration of this space, is promised and performed by the essayistic attitude. And the reference in Adorno to the essay as a critique of ideology further compliments this observation, because we see in this context that the essayistic is thus as much an attempt to make sense of the world, as it is an attempt to make sense of the ways in which we consciously or unconsciously make sense of the world—hence the relevance of the cultural, political, social determinations of human existence.

The essayistic has therefore become increasingly appealing for contemporary artists, because it dwells in an in-between epistemic and semantic domain that is not inhabited by either what one may term unambiguous truth or fiction. Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1982) appears as the most well known example for essay film. Other than that, Michael Renov presents an extensive list of film and video works, including Jean-Luc Godard’s *Scenario Du Film Passion*

(1984), George Kuchar's *Cult of the Cubicles* (1987), James Benning's *American Dreams* (1981), all of which "...tend to *textualize* rather than *theorize* the double action of the essayistic in its regard for self and other, its portrayal of the historical real filtered through the flux of subjectivity" (1989: 8).

Thinking of a spectrum where unambiguous truth and fiction constitute the two poles is also useful in terms of where the literary and the visual essays stand among other genres within the same mode of expression. Nora Alter summarizes this positioning concisely and elegantly: "Positioned, as is the literary essay, between genres that are more stable and firmly established—in the case of the written essay between literature and philosophy and in the case of the essay film between narrative fiction and documentary—audio-visual essays problematize binary categories of representation" (2007: 44-45). In contrast to Alter's placement, however, the literary essay was located between the artistic and positivistic/scientific attitudes in the first chapter. From an epistemological point of view, this positioning seems suited in order to see how the film essay—and in extension, the visual essay—is to be found between narrative fiction film and documentary.

The development of the essay film has happened in opposition to the strict genre of traditional documentary and this is evinced by the history of film. The nature of this opposition is discovered in the essay film's allowance of contradictions and play, while the traditional forms of documentary film makes a claim to offer unambiguous truths, with a set of reasoned relationships to history (Alter, 2007: 52). Contrarily, the essay film tends to pose questions that are often without answers—thus making it a deeply reflexive form of expression and representation—and it is able to do this because "it plays with fact and fiction,

untruths as much as truths” (Alter, 2007: 52).

Hans Richter, in his *Der Filmessay: Eine neue Form des Dokumentarfilms*, argues that the new genre of the essay film, even in its rudimentary form, enables problems, thoughts and ideas to become perceptible, rendering visible what is not visible (Alter, 2007: 50). According to Richter, the filmmaker is not bound by the rules and parameters of traditional filmmaking practice—especially of the documentary—, and therefore, s/he is in a better position to develop complex thought—the kind, which may deal with untruths as much as it does with truths, rather than undertake a simple presentation of facts and information. (Alter, 2007: 50.) The essay film is thus not grounded in reality *per se*, and it may embody that which is contradictory, irrational, playful and fantastic (Alter, 2007: 50). This fundamental characteristic of the audio-visual essay is in part grounded in the fact that the essay is an open-ended, evaluative search.

4.2. Critical disposition of the essay film

The critical and problematizing disposition, and self-reflexive manner of the essayistic—as proposed to be shared by the visual essay with its literary counterpart and ultimate origin—, is accounted for by what is essentially at play in the essay—namely, a certain kind of reality and its knowledge. The epistemology of the essay—including its relationship with truth—was previously taken to be of complex but decipherable nature. Presented in the last chapter as in contrast to the kind of reality one finds in the product of the positivistic mindset, it had been argued that the literary essay prioritized the fragmentary and particular,

through which it discloses a totality. This totality is—and was said to be—of a historical character. By way of thoroughly evaluating the specific, the essay brings forth this wholeness somewhat encapsulated in a particular that it ‘weighs’ (Alter, 2007: 45). One may observe in this the undeniably critical quality of the essay genre.

For the likes of Adorno, “the essay remains what it always was, the critical form par excellence” (1884: 166). Accordingly, the essay is said to confront culture and its production by virtue of the multiple immanent criticisms it constructs of its artifacts—that is, of its intellectual constructions. The essay thus embodies a critique of ideology (Adorno, 1884: 166), perhaps not a comprehensive one, but at least a diagnostic one at that. The phrase “critique of ideology” should not necessarily be taken in its traditional meaning in the context of my discussion in this chapter. What is to be understood by a critique in the framework of the essayistic is a working out of the essential, underlying principles by virtue of which the human subject relates to the world, to others and to itself. The substance of what is accordingly worked out sufficiently explains why we are referring to this critique as one of ideology. The growing tendency of the essayistic in the world of contemporary art is in part due to what the essayistic promises in this regard; because, other generic forms of expression appear to have become unsatisfactory in communicating or representing reality and meaning(s) that the essayistic accordingly does.

The open-ended and evaluative searching that one identifies with the essay film and also with its critical disposition is therefore also complimentary to the ideas of mirroring and ordering that were scrutinized in the previous chapters. Essay film’s tendency to bypass the rules and parameters of traditional

filmmaking practice, as in Richter's case, echoes the way the literary essay is observed to be untamed by literary conventions. Proposing that "this [open-ended, evaluative] search is haunted and constrained by the presence of individual subjectivity" (2007: 45), Alter also refers to a possible link between the essay and the problem of human agency. For the purposes of my project, the identification of such a link and its description as haunting and constraining is crucial, because it is in part by virtue of this link and description that the essayistic presents the most suitable attitude to the substance from which I derive the contents of my project.

To speak more concretely, it is possible to describe my project to be constrained and haunted by individual subjectivity. What I attempt in it is a portrayal of home and home-dwelling, which is inescapably and inevitably constrained and haunted by the person inhabiting that space. It is the person living in a home that holds it together a totality and distinguishes it from a mere space. The relationship that a person has to his/her home is, therefore, in many ways, open to an essayistic interpretation. This means that a proper portrayal of this essayistic constitution of and relating to home is in the manner of the essay. The way a person makes a home out of a space is in many ways representative of the manner in which that person relates to and locates itself in its world. And in this context, the critical work of the essay is observer; because the home does not only embody an historical accumulation of its dweller's subjectivity, but also presents how that subjective historicity shaped that accumulation that was to then and in the proceeding times account for who the home-dweller saw itself to be.

There is a further relationship that requires recognition in the case of my project. This is the correspondence between the artist that produces the certain

essayistic portrayal as exemplified here and the person who comes to experience that portrayal. In other words, the wholeness of the work I have produced operates through a representation of a tripartite relationship between the subject of my project, my grandmother, the formal ‘author’ of my project, me, and the spectator as the effective co-author/-producer of my project.

The fragmentary and suggestive composition of the project is therefore not only due to the inherent character of the essay-form, but also because the above-mentioned relationships are ultimately fragmentary. By augmenting these disjointed and discontinuous qualities of what is at hand, a certain kind of reflective and reflexive experience is made possible. The spectator is invited to contemplate further derivative relationships, thus dwelling into a set of differing—and possibly more personal and genuine—realities and corresponding knowledge that substantiate the work. The possibility of these derivative relationships of reflexive and reflective character is also important as the spectator is most probably in possession of similar experiences to those from which the substance of my project originates. These experiences comprise the set of filters (social, cultural, political etc.) through which the observer forms a personal and unique narrative, which is also why the essayistic was appealing to me.

The term that I use to describe my project, visual essay, encapsulates the flexibility offered to the artist due to the indifference the essayistic shows towards convention. This is something that is not, for example, observed in the case of traditional documentary, which follows its own conventions of communication and representation. I leave the more comprehensive and exhaustive discussion of my project as a visual essay that combines photography, video and objects to the concluding chapter of this thesis. However, the essayistic observed in the essay

film and its categorical distinction from documentary is most relevant to my project and the discussion of the visual essay in this thesis. What is called for now is a more thorough elaboration of the status of the photo essay.

4.3. Photo-Essay

As opposed to the theoretical literature one may find concerning the literary essay and essay film, the debate about photo essay as a proper essayistic and artistic genre is disappointingly limited. Such limitedness is disappointing because, as aforementioned, the essayistic is without doubt on the rise among contemporary artists and art theorists. Some works should be mentioned in this context as exemplifying the essayistic at play within the photo essay.

When their content is regarded, *Fire* by Aaron Vincent Elkaim and *The Last Hunt* by Alexi Hobbs may be said to provide narratives that aim to document, but do so essayistically and not in the form of documentary². In *Fire*, Elkaim visits his grandparents' cabin after it burned down completely and extracts the traces that are left from their lives and home-dwelling. In *The Last Hunt*, on the other hand, Hobbs presents witnessing his grandfather's last hunt, who will not be able to continue hunting due to his old age. In the works of both Elkaim and Hobbs, what we encounter cannot properly be deemed documentary

² Both *Fire* and *The Last Hunt* are online works and can be found under the website of National Film Board Canada (www.nfb.ca).

For *Fire*: <http://fire.nfb.ca/#/fire>

For *The Last Hunt*: <http://thelasthunt.nfb.ca/#/thelasthunt>

photography. What distinguishes them from what would be a series of documentary photography is the subjectivity that is at play. This subjectivity is strengthened by the opportunity of interactivity and play between the texts and the photographs by virtue of which the spectator is forced out of its passivity. Allowed to participate in the story with the liberty of choosing among the transitions between the texts, photographs or even both, the spectator's involvement as such also show that these works exemplify soft-montage where the story, both by photographs, texts and sound is not strictly structured and narrativized, but more fragmentary, open-ended, playful and inviting.

Another work is Sophie Calle's *The Address Book*³, which is also a very good example for a *portrayal*. Calle finds an address book on the street in Paris and before returning it to its owner she makes a copy. She calls and meets with everyone in it and produce a portrayal from those meetings comprised of photographs and writings, thus, tries to discover who the owner is without ever meeting with him. Calle's endeavor to construct a portrait of the owner of the address book relates to my project in another way. There is also the decision to leave out the person being portrayed in my portrayal of my grandmother. The reasons for this will be discussed in the succeeding chapter devoted to the evolution and details of my project. However, there is one point that may still be noted in this context. The choice of terminology here—i.e. portrayal over portrait—is in part due to the fact that the person being portrayed is absent in terms of any direct representation.

³ *The Address Book* is published as a print book.

One other work that deserves being mentioned in addition to *Fire, The Last Hunt* and *The Address Book* when the photo essay is in discussion, is John Berger's book, *Ways of Seeing* (1972). *Ways of Seeing* is a particularly good example for the properly essayistic. Published in the early 1970s when documentary photography was on the rise, *Ways of Seeing* is composed of seven essays that all take "ways of seeing" as its main theme. A note for the reader prefaces the work, which is particularly instructive in seeing how this work is to be categorized as a genuinely essayistic photo essay:

This book consists of seven numbered essays. They can be read in any order. Four of the essays use words and images, three of them use only images. These purely pictorial essays (on ways of seeing women and on various contradictory aspects of the tradition of the oil painting) are intended to raise as many questions as verbal essays. Sometimes in the pictorial essays no information at all is given about the images reproduced because it seems to us that such information might distract from the points being made." (Berger, 1972: 1).

Not only in terms of its content—*viz.* seeing, looking—, but also in the manner it offers its reader an essayistically patterned reading experience, should Berger's book be seen as an undeniably critical work. Berger's *Ways of Seeing* offered a wholly different point of view by using pictorial essays both in their pure form and with the addition of literary elements. This stood against conventional readings and interpretations of art history, which provide much of the substance of these essays.

The major difference in Berger's approach pertains to pushing the spectator to be a creative, productive, active participant of the work. And this, in turn, compliments the very title and thematic of the work; because, it discloses to the spectator that ways of seeing is as significant as, if not more, that which is seen as represented. Accordingly, what is significant here with *Ways of Seeing*,

when evaluated within the perspective of my project, is that it allows—even forces—the spectator to be the co-author of the book.

That essayistic attitude is identical with what I intend to create with my project, namely, requiring the spectator to participate in the work and construct a meaningful and personal narrative and experience. This breaks photography from being suppressed to the conventions of documentary, or even of fictional photographic composition or storytelling. It may also be said to challenge the habit or tendency of interpreting the properly essayistic photo essay as documentary photography. Since as much of narrative-formation is performed by the spectator as it is composed by the author in essayistic photography, one may rightly say of these aforementioned works that they attempt something distinct especially from documentary photography. Accordingly, the author is ultimately only attempting a certain account that invites as many connections to be formed by the viewer among the parts making up the whole of the photo essay. It is also possible to observe in this context that the visual essay is to be seen as offering a portraying more than a portraiture, because the latter does not emphasize this dynamic characteristic of the essayistic in its relation to the matter of the narrative.

Nonetheless, in comparison to the essay film, the number of examples to the properly essayistic photo essays is limited. An even more acute contrast may be observed when it comes to the scholarship on the photo essay, which is why I believe that there is a desperate need to problematize what is generally understood by what it is that makes a photo-essay an essay or essayistic. What was said of the essay film and its markedly critical function—that is to say, that the essay film is observed by some to replace the traditional film theory essay more and more—

cannot be said of the photo-essay as straightforwardly.

What is most often understood by photo-essay today is actually quite poor of much of the essayistic impulses that have been considered thus far in this thesis—the above-considered examples notwithstanding. A key characteristic of the photo-essay, continually and systematically problematized by the essayistic attitude, illustrates the extent to which the ‘essay’ in the ‘photo-essay’ is not properly essayistic. The non-sequential, non-linear or multi-layered qualities found in the essayistic that directly challenge conventional narrative-formation is not characteristic of the photo-essay as is commonly observed today. As it is currently practiced, the photo-essay is involved in and constituted by narratives akin to those people are most familiar with, and in that sense, the term photo essay is closer to documentary photography, especially in the way of its delivery, in its traditional usage.

A documentary photography project, for instance, presents its subject matter by simply creating a narrative out of the single shots that comprise its parts. This is to say that the essayistic qualities of fragmentariness or play are often very difficult, if not impossible, to observe in the generic of the documentary. Simply building a narrative, on the other hand, does not comprehend or satisfy for the photo-essay to end up as a unique genre that fulfills the specific conventions—or lack thereof—as in essay-film.

The difference here is one between portraying a certain *getting there* and portraying the *effort of getting there*. In other words, the documentary photography and the photo-essay as observed today, seem to guide the spectator through a journey, while the properly essayistic impulse is involved with the effort involved in a journey, which is also, in extension, greatly relevant to any

journey or journeying. In this framework, these qualities of the essay may be delivered in the visual medium through what is termed soft-montage in the case of essay film. This term may also be used for the visual essay, because it denotes “an increased flexibility and openness of the text for the spectator, [where] associations are suggested but not formally mandated” (Alter, 2007: 53). The flexibility and openness hereby recognized has clearly been a regular characteristic of the essayistic that has hitherto been observed.

The case of the photo essay and its relation to documentary photography offer a point of divergence to the case of essay film and its relation to documentary film. Essay film is now recognized as a proper genre—at least, as a generic style somewhat emancipated from documentary or fiction film—and enjoys growing appeal in the art world. The photo essay, on the other hand, continues to be overshadowed by the long-existing genre of documentary photography. Nevertheless, the examples of Elkaim, Hobbs and Berger clearly present a break from the generically traditional principles of photographic expression. As considered here, their works embody photography practiced for what are essentially essayistic ends. Contrarily, however, there seems to be a tendency to use photo-essay as a broad umbrella term to denote any composition of a series of photographs that is not strictly an example of documentary photography. I am of the opinion that this does not only inevitably lead to a misuse of the term, but also prevent the genuinely essayistic photo essays to be properly and scholarly investigated. And it is in this context that I find it more useful to appeal to a term like “visual essay”.

4.4. Visual Essay

These observations regarding the photo essay are necessary, because the substantially photographic constitution of my project cannot be properly accounted for with the use of the literature at offer. These aforementioned aspects of the essayistic—i.e. its non-linearity, multi-layeredness, fragmentariness, transgressiveness, criticalness—that are often unobserved in the photo-essay are delivered nonetheless delivered in what I term the visual essay. By introducing the term visual essay with this project, I intend to bypass such traditional usage of photo-essay and create a more comprehensive term that allows the essayistic quality of my work and similar works of art to be recognized as such. In order to avoid confusion in terminology and to capture the sense of the essayistic in visual essay, it is more appropriate to call what is at play in the visual essay as portrayal, not portrait(ure).

It was indicated in the first chapter that the essay approaches its subject matter in a way that is akin to the way a portrait-painter approaches his model. This is appropriate and was done because a portrait mirrors not only an image, but also a representation of a person. A portrait is intended to reveal realities about a person that cannot only be verified by looking at the person and evaluating whether the portrait corresponds to such truths. Therefore, a portrait necessarily attempts a more comprehensive portrayal than can be achieved by mere facts and information. This allows the person observing to make a judgment that may, but not need be, checked by a proper acquaintance with the person in the portrait.

The use of the term portrait should not, therefore, be overemphasized.

What seems to be much more significant is the very act or attempt of portraying, which one may hear as an echo of the assaying and/or weighing of the essayistic. A portrayal as opposed to a portrait suggests a dynamic as well as an open-ended and evaluative form of expression. Portrayal is clearly more suited in describing the visual essay and its approach to its subject matter. The visual essay, in its fragmentary and transgressive character, is a multi-layered product, which comprises the very process of constructing the visual essay explicitly. More significantly, the visual essay requires the cooperation and to an extent the coproduction of the spectator. Seeing the artistic decisions that belong to the process of creating explicitly, is crucial because of their role on the final experience of the work. Moreover, the cooperation and coproduction of the spectator is vital to bring together the multi-layered constitution of the project, because it is through the spectator's involvement and act of synthesis that a unique narrative and hence a complete experience is made possible. The spectator thus becomes "a full-fledged participant in the construction of meaning" (Alter, 2007: 48) in something that has traditionally been associated with passivity.

The emphasis on 'portrayal' over 'portrait' is sustained by the fact that my project is neither a photo-essay, nor an essay film, but a visual essay. In this instance, what is most relevant is Alter's (2007: 53) reference and discussion of Harun Farocki's work, regarding which she claims that its form is a three-dimensional installation. The same thing is also the case with my project, which is comprised of photographs, video and actual objects from my grandmother's home. The organization of this content that comes in three different forms may be described to be done in the style of a soft-montage. What will be shortly

discussed with the last chapter is the process of this visual essay project itself, from the very beginning of me shooting the home; to the spectator receiving the exhibition by which the portrayal that has been intended to be presented as a visual essay has been constructed.

CHAPTER V

PROJECT – AWAITING HOME / EV DE BEKLER

The proceeding discussion is to be thought in perspective of how my project came into existence and be considered in light of the theoretical account of the essayistic and the notion of home and home dwelling. Accordingly, what is to follow intends to entertain several essential characteristics that I believe to be crucial to what is ultimately at play in my project.

5.1. Part-Whole Relationship – How does this work come together to constitute a totality?

The following is to explain how the work/project I have produced is intended to come together. It needs to be noted that for this explanation, the conceptual framework of the part-whole relationship is most suited. The fragmentary, disjointed, non-linear and multi-layered aspects of the essayistic have been most relevant in my project and thesis; because what is ultimately the issue concerns how one is to talk about a picture/totality where either there are not enough parts to constitute a complete whole and the spaces between them have to

be filled in by the involvement of the spectator, or the existing parts do not necessarily fit in and need to be ‘made’ to compliment each other. And sometimes, both are necessarily the case—that is to say, one is made to encounter a group or collection of items (e.g. photographs, video, objects, perhaps also writing, or a combination of these) that are organized in such a way that they are intuitively conceived as necessarily constitutive of a whole, but as requiring a certain kind of meddling and a further involvement of sorts. It is in part this characteristic of the essayistic that one may speak of a dynamic relationship between the creator and experiencer of essayistic work—i.e. between the author and the reader in the case of the literary essay, and the artist and spectator in that of the visual essay. My project is intended to work in such similar fashion, but there is more to be said of the actual mechanics of how this is aspired to happen.

The static and moving images that are used in my project have been created in such a way to imitate how I ordinarily experience my grandmother’s home. What is to be understood by ‘imitate’ in this context is that the photographs and videos used are produced as most resembling the human-eye perspective. Accordingly, the objects photographed or recorded with video do not always appear in their entirety. There are also a considerable number of close ups that are intended to mimic what one naturally does when wishing to inspect an object in more detail—i.e. physically coming closer to the object. Such constituted parts that comprise the whole of my project are therefore particularly disjointed and discontinuous. However, the lighting, the colors and the content to be found in this domestic space imply an undeniable continuity despite how fragmented they may be represented in these static or moving images. The crucial matter, then, becomes how they are to be related to each other, and it is in this

instance that the essayistic impulse becomes operative. It is only possible to suggest links in a framework of the above-described kind where the parts at offer do not immediately present a comprehensive and exhausted whole, but invite the constitution of a multiplicity of possible wholes to be enacted by the spectator.

What was suggested to the spectator and what the spectator was invited to do may be qualified further in the following way. The photographs and video excerpts that I have used are suggestive of a kind of extrapolation to be conceived as complete. In other words, even when they are taken by themselves, the constituent parts of my project invite the viewer to imagine extensions to that which is represented incompletely. When considered altogether, the contents of the project and these imagined and extrapolated spaces that derive from it, suggest even further holes to be filled in. And it is in the context of such necessarily imagined spaces calling for furnishing, as it were, that cue the spectator to appeal to his/her own person and history to find the items to transform an empty space to a home.

This transformation is precisely that which has been done by my grandmother, though in considerable part unconsciously because she inhabits that space—she lives there, that is her home. So in a way, the spectator of my project enacts how a home is ‘put together’. But further, this enactment is consciously recognizable because the home that is being put together is not the spectator’s own, but as belonging to an other. This other in the case of my project was my grandmother, an old woman, which meant that expecting the average spectator of my project would associate her home thus represented as possibly belonging to someone they know and not to their own. This is significant because it is by virtue of this difference that the spectator is then put in a position more akin to

what had been the place I stood while putting this project together. Accordingly, I have intended to put the spectator in a position where s/he is forced to make sense of what is undeniably fragmentarily constituted; but also to invite him/her in such endeavor, to attempt to understand how one makes sense in such particular circumstance in the first place. The former of these corresponds to the viewer's position towards the subject matter of the work, and the latter, towards me, the author.

In the final analysis, I believe my project is like an incomplete puzzle where the incompleteness does not derive only from the fact that there are missing pieces or some pieces do not fit perfectly, but also from the fact that the most of the pieces themselves require editing or finishing.

5.2. Why photographs and video? Why stable videos with no sound?

There are several reasons to why I decided to include video as well as photographs. Before accounting for these reasons, it might be helpful to briefly explain why photography had been the point of departure of my project in terms of its medium of expression.

5.2.1. Photography as an act of Documenting

Even the most basic evaluation of photography would associate it with documenting. The literature on photography that revolves around whether or not it is an objective medium is, to say the least, substantial, and this is derived from photography's conception as a neutrally documenting medium. With my project, the photographic medium exceeds the evaluation of having merely the purpose of

documenting. But this is not to say that the documenting quality of photography plays a less vital role. That the photograph documents is crucial to my project as it is necessarily involved in document-ing, but it is not to be conceived as a document-ary. By virtue of partaking in documenting with resistance to generic style of the documentary, the intention behind the project becomes genuinely possible. This intention—as it has been noted in the previous chapters—is simply the passing and reflecting on a certain kind of experience. Other than documenting the home, there accordingly is another effort on determining the photographs with an attempt to embrace such experience.

5.2.2. Photography as inherently Fragmentary

In addition to its documenting character, photography also had the appeal of inherently being fragmentary when used to offer a narrative. In such context, the fact that the photographic images are physically separated from each other as single shots contributes, without the shadow of a doubt, to the fragmentary nature of my project. On the other hand, I also intended to reflect, from the very beginning, on this intrinsic quality. For this end, I attempted to push the boundaries of the single shots that comprise the whole of the project also by framing the contents fragmentarily and incompletely. In this context, the static quality of the photograph also became useful. It is possible to imply movement in photography by virtue of an appeal to long exposure, which creates a sense of continuity within the frame of the shot. However, the very opposite is also easily possible and I wanted the images to be as static as possible for them to be as disjointed and fragmentary both internally and together.

5.2.3. Personal

The last, and perhaps the weightiest, reason to why I chose to use the photographic medium has to do with personal reasons. The photographic camera is the instrument with which I feel most comfortable in expressing what I want to say. My personal history has also given me the opportunity to be surrounded by photography and photographers. And I must recognize here that I had chosen to use photography before actually deciding on the subject matter of my project. However, as the essayistic impulse had increasing influence on the general manner of execution, photography proved to be capable enough to ‘play’ with the content to dictate the unfolding of the project.

5.2.4. The kind of photographs I chose to take

As the passing of a certain kind of a spatial experience was the main concern of my project, I chose to adapt the camera to the space as opposed to try pushing the spatial borders by way of using different lenses. While experimenting with a 50mm lens, for instance, I saw that the object or the area I aimed to photograph exceeded the frame. Instead of switching to another lens when such happened, I chose to move away as far as I could to fit as much of the object or space as possible. If some portion of the subject still remained out of the frame, I chose to leave the composition it that way, and I still did not appeal to a different lens, because the image would become less alike of the normal human sight.





This is essentially why some of the photographs are cut from uncanny places, which I went on to fully embrace in the later stages of the project. I believe adapting the home was an essential part of the whole experiment and experience since the home is intended to have the discursive position. The photographs that were chosen to be used in the final piece and their arrangement was in a manner that which somehow breaks the linearity in terms of both the content and the physical features inherent to the photographs such as the angle, perspective and the distance from the object.

5.2.5. Appeal to moving images

In addition to several other minor points, there are two major reasons to why I decided to add video to the photographs I took for my project. The first one of these concerns the stylistic issue of the essayistic, and how the inclusion of video interrupts the monotony of a single medium. The second reason has to do with what was ultimately demanded by a particular quality of my grandmother's home, for which the inevitably static character of the photograph was not enough.

One of the aims of the previous chapter on the visual essay was the thorough problematization of the manner in which the photo-essay is traditionally practiced and experienced today. What pertained to the problematic of the photo essay in the context of my project and its discussion here is the diagnosis that the photo essay is not essayistic enough—both in its composition and interpretation. It was argued that quite contrary to this, the essayistic had been more comprehensively embraced in the case of the essay film both by artists and scholars. Expanding on these observations, I proposed the phrase visual essay as a more suited term to stand for the properly essayistic to be found in photographic and filmic composition, and also where an appeal to both are made.

A point that was made in the first chapter on the literary essay deserves being recalled in this context. It was observed then that one of the issues that made defining the essay difficult pertained to the fact that the essayistic entailed no generically stable form. Contrarily, the uniqueness of the essay derived from its allowance of its subject matter to dictate the form in which it is to be expressed. This is to say that in the framework of the visual essay, it is possible, if not mandatory, to speak of an appeal to both static and moving visual representations. Accordingly, since it is the subject matter in consideration that

enjoys precedence over form, the decision I made to use both photographs and video is, to say the least, theoretically justified.

On the other hand, arguing that the use of both static and moving images are justified by the essayistic with reference to a prioritization of content over form, makes it necessary to explain why in the case of my project, the subject matter being explored required an appeal to video in addition to photographs. This explanation is what the abovementioned second major reason is concerned with.

Although my project is not site-specific, that subject matter that it explores and portrays necessarily is. It goes without saying that every home is the product of a certain process where a mere space is transformed into a personal domestic dwelling. This transformation happens within the framework and limitations of this space, and must take into consideration the inherent characteristics of this space. One obvious example that factors in significantly in this sense is lighting, and in the case of my grandmother's home, one encounters a particularly dark setting. This characteristic is straightforwardly reproduced in the medium of the photograph. Another quality of this home—just like lighting is—has to do with the seemingly never-ending, continuous movement I find particularly unique to this space. This could not be communicated sufficiently and effectively enough with only static images, and this gave me the idea to experiment with video as well.

The constant, ceaseless movement that is to be found in my grandmother's home happens through inanimate objects present in this space. In other words, the movement to which I refer is one that does not find its source in human agency. Such movement derive either from the objects themselves—as in the case of the

many clocks scattered around this space—or from the elements—as in the case of wind, circulation of heat etc. Accordingly, this movement that one finds as accompanying this entire space is acutely repetitive and homogenous in its tempo, thus making movement as such an essential characteristic of this home. The appeal to moving images was therefore inevitable, as movement itself is fundamental to the subject matter of my project.

The decision to include video, then, required further choices to be made concerning the manner in which it would be implemented. Following some experimenting, using stable video proved most effective. This was due to the fact that it was by way of a static camera that the movement portrayed in the project would solely belong to the home. On the other hand, the height adjustments of the camera were chosen deliberately to correspond to the average human height either standing up or sitting down. It should be noted these heights also complimented the photographs, which I took with settings that were closest to the way the human eye naturally sees. So, although I wished the movement in the frame to correspond solely to the home, I also wanted it to be clear that it was presented from a point of view that was most natural to a possible spectator's standpoint. The choice of camera location and the angle of the shot was also accordingly decided to augment movement as derivative of the space, but as perceived by an observer in a most natural position.

The last matter about the use of video regarded the issue of sound, which I could not resolve in my mind until I had the chance to inspect the gallery space. How such resolution came about in my mind will be offered in my discussion about the exhibition space. The fundamental problem with using audio from the video recordings was threefold. First, it was impossible for me to impose

constraints on sound like it is possible to do on images. Although it might have had a nice, enhancing effect, sound had the potential to have a powerful sense of unifying the contents of the project. This would have been a particularly undesired consequence, because one of the underlying principles of the project was its fundamentally fragmentary character and how this quality necessarily gets the spectator more intimately involved with it. And secondly, I decided to use two videos that had two different sound tracks, which would have conflicted with each other, thus creating an undesired audial confusion. Accordingly, there would have emerged the issue of choosing one track over the other, and this, I believe, conflicted too much with the general tenets of the project. For one, it would have augmented the aforementioned unifying effect I did not want to have in the first place. Lastly, it was necessary to have the videos on loop, and because the lengths of the videos were different, sound and image would have been out of sync possibly in an undesirable manner.

Lastly, the use of video in addition to static images made it possible to play with the contrast the two media offer in terms of the choice of contents. One of the two videos I ended up using shows the movement of curtains in front of an open window. The movement of the fabric ended up creating various contrasts within the image-frame. First of the two that deserve mention pertains to the change in the lighting of the room, which naturally altered the emphasis on the image as shadow fell on places it had not in a previous moment. The second contrast is more of a semantic and suggestive one, which draws upon the spectator's encounter with a movement involving both the interior and the exterior of this domestic space. The open window allows air to come in and the curtains allow light to infiltrate this house, but there are also iron bars suggestive of the

need of the security of this space from unwanted intruders. This is implicative of a certain in-out or interior-exterior dichotomy, for the spectator is reminded of the outside while exploring a highly personalized inside. Moreover, by virtue of locating the home within a greater urban space, not the interior, but also the interiority of home is ultimately suggested.



The playful contrast of the second video is, it seems, easier to observe. In this frame one is able to observe the movement of one of the room doors in the house. This movement is due to the air circulation in this domestic space. In this sense, there is certain continuity among the moving images I have used, because the drapes shown in the first video also move as a result of air movement. When thought together, perhaps it is also possible to induce ethereality from the similarity in the two movements. Unlike the curtains, however, a door seldom moves in the way it did in the case of this door—open windows and doors, more often, create air corridors that usually make a door slam on its own accord. Yet, in the case of this door in my grandmother's home, the door moves back and forth

a couple inches, and this goes on continually for considerable periods of time.



The door is, therefore, a slightly odd example to where constant movement would be observed. I believe this creates a relatively sharp contrast to one object in particular where such kind of constant movement may be expected. This is the clock, many of which inhabit the space in which my grandmother lives. It was a conscious decision to not use a moving image of one of these clocks, and this choice was made after having experimented with such video recording. Using static imagery where one might expect movement, and an appeal to moving imagery where movement is not naturally expected, it seemed to me, would bring about a playful contrast characteristic of the essayistic, and also imply a certain reference between the parts comprising the whole.

5.3. Why objects as well as representations (static and moving images)?

There are several reasons to why I decided to include objects, in addition to photographs and video recordings, taken from my grandmother's home. This decision was taken in the later stages of the production of my project—after, for instance, the decision to include moving images as well as static ones. Noting this is important and helpful, because the decision to use objects was not only because it complimented the aims of my project, but also because they essentially responded to an issue photographic and filmic representation could not resolve. This issue may be conceived most properly in the difference between subjectivity and anonymity. It was crucial to my project that the portrayal of the home-dweller through home would not be conceived as a portrayal of a merely anonymous subject that may possibly stand, in a way, for any home-dweller. The use of objects was intended, therefore, to remind the spectator of the fact that these photographs and videos originate from a genuine, real space, inhabited by an actually existing individual subject. Nevertheless, the objects that are used are done so with strict reference to the representative character of the project, and not with direct reference to the domestic space to which they belong. This is why I have chosen some of the objects to be ones that I have also photographed or recorded with video. Yet, neither the photographs nor the videos I have used communicate sufficient information for the spectator to serve as a blueprint of the layout and organization of this domestic space, and it must be noted that the objects that I have used do not contradict this insufficiency of knowledge on this matter.

The contents of the photographs and the videos that I use derive from an acutely personal and personalized space, the authenticity of which, it seemed, can only be communicated in part with photographs and videos alone. On the other hand, it was not my desire to use such intensely personal contents in a way that simply recreated my grandmother's home and stood for her subjectivity alone. The primary intent of the project, in which the relevance of the essayistic may also be seen, was to prepare the grounds for a certain reenactment of the constitution of a highly personalized and subjective space, the home. For this reason, a balance had to be struck which preserved enough anonymity on the one hand, and communicated not too much of the specific person who lived in this space. In this way, the project needed to use the gallery space in a way that did not invite the spectator to attempt a reconstruction of the very home in which my grandmother lives. I did not wish to propose, contrarily, a portrayal that would invite the spectator to imagine a possibly fictional person that s/he could see inhabiting this domestic space. I believe that this would possibly have, in effect, fictionalized my grandmother's home as well. Antithetically, my aim was to keep the project as real as possible without letting a sense of documentary infiltrate the experience of the work.

In other words, I aimed to portray by documenting, not by way of a documentary impulse. Hence, the use of objects from my grandmother's home help me to reach a balance between an overt anonymity or subjectivity, as they bring forth a sense of reality to the images in which they necessarily find a reference. It was imperative that the spectator knew that the images were, in a way, genuine and authentic. One of the aims of the project was to communicate the reality of this domestic space—in fact, it is possible to say that the images are

intended to propose how more real this space possibly is. And in that sense, the effect that the objects promise to have is one of a certain kind of rupture.

The formally representative quality of photography and film are thus complimented by the acutely real sense of the objects. The objects necessarily interrupt such formal quality of these media, which ultimately pays testimony to the currently sustained authenticity of the constitution of my grandmother's home. And in turn, the use of objects may also be thought of having been mirrored in this framework, producing a playful byproduct. This is because a similar kind of interruption to the one made on the images by these objects in the context of the gallery hall has been done on my grandmother's home from which these objects were borrowed. During the period of the exhibition of my project, these objects will necessarily be absent from my grandmother's home. The function they ultimately play in that domestic space will be accordingly be interrupted, while, of course, they will be made to serve a different but similar function in the setting of the gallery space.

The choice of using objects was also affected by the fact that this domestic space has an almost museum-like quality to it, which deserved emphasis in my project and I believe I achieved such effect by this decision. However, the use of objects also needed to be in such a way as not to be reduced to artifacts—namely, as representative of a past and lost world that could have been an object of experience for anyone. Contrarily, the objects are representative of the fact that this domestic space is almost an infinitely subjective, which mandates that while the museum-like atmosphere of this domestic space is explored, the portrayal of this home should not be transformed into something like a museum exhibition.

Lastly, it needs to be noted that using objects adds a kind of playfulness to the project, which is a quality of the essayistic. The objects, by virtue of having clear and direct references to the images I have used, break the formal and passive atmosphere of the gallery space. They, I believe, invite the spectator to pay further attention to what is being represented in the images as the objects themselves may provide further information about them. For instance, only one or two photographs can be seen in the image of the family album; however, the family album itself is part of the work and the spectator is allowed to take a further look at the originals. In this way, the spectator is invited to go back and forth between images and objects, and in extension, I believe the same kind of going-back-and-forth is also performed between the images. Such experiencing of the work is further complimented by the fact that a number of images are of reflections and in some cases, the reflected parts of the home as such also find a place in other photographs. By virtue of this, some parts of the home find repeated representation in the work, which creates the sense of unity and coherence of the project in its fragmentariness.

Repetition of this kind of a reflective and referential nature is a further hint for the spectator that s/he is more than welcome to experiment with what is at offer in the work. What is meant by experiment here is to be taken as relating to the issue of the construction of narrative. The images and objects that I use in my project are intended to lure—as it were—the spectator into trying different paths of connecting the bits and pieces to which they find themselves exposed. While the sense of play that is thus created may make way to a feeling of game, the presence of the objects themselves are to remind the spectator of the reality in which the contents of the work is grounded.

Moreover, the objects also help break the two-dimensionality of images, which is attempted repeatedly in a considerable number of the photographs where depth is accentuated. Groupings of the images played an additional role in emphasizing this quality of depth. By virtue of placing photographs where the observed depths are in effect contradictory when thought together, not only the non-linearity and multi-layered character of the work is augmented, but the spectator is also invited to puncture the two-dimensional representations to seek further possible paths to compose a meaningful story.

5.4. Why KA-Atölye?

The choice concerning where my visual essay would be exhibited depended on a set of requisites. However, since the project is not site-specific, these requisites mostly deal with the extent to which the space of exhibition reflected and allowed the intended essayistic experience. Ultimately, there were three main reasons that persuaded me to settle on KA Atölye.

First of all, although open-ended and reflexive, and therefore asking of the spectator's participation, my project still required space where the spectator could be loosely guided in the way s/he experienced the work. The photographs, videos and objects needed to be arranged in a manner where the spectator could take in the whole from at least one location in the gallery space. It was therefore needed for it to be possible that the work may be exhibited on one wall, or on the walls of a not fully enclosed square or rectangle room. And I believe that the presentation had to retain a kind of openness, which would have been compromised if the project were to be exhibited in closed space.

KA Atölye presented a setting where these spatial concerns were not a problem. Offering a 20m² square room filled with boards to hang the photographs and project the videos, this space also offered the option of exhibiting objects from my grandmother's home in places that were inherently a part of the room, such as the upper surface of the radiator and several niches. Being square, the room offered the possibility of a certain balance to be retained in the gallery space, which was helpful as hardly any two images that I used, was the same size. At the same time, the size of the space was also ideal: not too small in that it allowed ease of movement between the walls for one to observe the photographs, videos and objects separately from a closer point; and not too big to make any part of the project to be lost out of sight. These mentioned facilities provided a substructure for the work to be exhibited in manner I intended.

In addition to what the gallery space offered, the apartment building⁴ in which it is located gave further reason to chose this space. Located in a very old and well-protected building, and situated in the city center, the apartment building complimented the contents of my projects. Moreover, the original leaded windows had been preserved in both the building and the flat thus carrying through further the oldness of the apartment, which corresponded to the home that I attempted to transform into a visual essay with my project. I believe that the building would help break the otherness of most such exhibition spaces that ultimately create a certain heterotopic experience, which I did not want.

⁴ The architect of the apartment is Sabih Kayan.

Lastly, the choice of this gallery space seemed most reasonable as it also resolved the concerns I had with the use of sound. Being an old building and situate in a considerably old neighborhood, the sounds surrounding the location of KA Atölye were desirably similar to the ones that may be heard in my grandmother's home. Not using any sound also allows the exhibition space to be one where spectators would not necessarily think it inappropriate to speak, which I believe would enhance the experience of the project. And by virtue of allowing sounds from the outside to be heard, the outside is also ultimately, although indirectly, integrated to the project.

5.5. Why is the home-dweller herself absent from the work?

The question concerning whether or not the home-dweller herself would appear in any of the photographs or videos was, without the shadow of a doubt, the most difficult—but also, in a way, the easiest—decision I had to make regarding this project. The following is intended to account for the reasons that convinced me to not include any of the photographs I have taken of my grandmother throughout the production of this work.

One of the underlying and rather hidden conceptual principles at work in this project is one of absence. The importance and function of absences were in part explained in discussing the part-whole relationship above (see [1]). In that instance, the role of absences—whether directly or indirectly—was primarily due to its complementariness of the fragmentary constitution of the project. The point of emphasis in that context regarded what are essentially a disconnect among the contents of the photographs and videos that I use. A considerable number of

photographs are images of objects from my grandmother's home that have not appeared in their entirety. In such cases, what is absent is that which is missing, namely, the rest of that object or part of the home. The relevance of the absent or of absence, in this context, to fragmentariness of the project, is to be seen in its coupling with the quality of incompleteness.

The decision to not include any image of my grandmother—static or dynamic, complete or in part—relates to this business of incompleteness in a fundamental manner. This relating, however, is distinct to the abovementioned instance, where incompleteness was pursued in favor of fragmentariness—that is to say, in order to create a discontinuous and fragmented composition and experience. The absence of any direct representation of my grandmother from my project compliments fragmentariness in rather a different way. By virtue of being absent in the depiction of the domestic space that she inhabits, the home-dweller makes possible the essentially fragmentary, incomplete and dynamic character of that very space. In other words, were my grandmother to appear in the images I have used for my project, the project would have acquired a certain kind of completeness that I did not want.

Such completeness would have been categorically unlike the kind of the open-ended and evaluative exploration the essayistic necessarily performs and in which it asks of its reader or spectator to join. It is because my grandmother does not appear in the images that I use that the project can enjoy an essayistically proper totality in the construction of which the spectator necessarily undertakes a crucial role. It would have been a completely different totality if she did in fact appear in these images, because firstly, the very fragmentariness of the project that derive from the incompleteness of single images that I use would have been

thought incomplete in the context of not the home, but of the home-dweller herself. What is essentially fragmentary is not the home-dweller, but the home in which she lives, which is representative—although fragmentarily—of the home-dweller, her life and history.

The home-dweller's absence from the portrayal of the domestic space also compliments and enhances the essayistic of my project. This is because my grandmother's photographic or filmic absence from the portrayal of her home necessarily makes this portrayal an indirect one. It is by virtue of this indirection that what is explored is home-dwelling as a passing and process, and not simply the home-dweller as a thing *per se*. Related to this, another point concerning the decision to exclude images of my grandmother deserves recognition. One of the most challenging set of decisions I had to make concerned the organization of the contents of the project in the gallery space. The set of preliminary plans I have made did not work as well as I wished, and I had to reconsider where each photograph was to go, where the stable videos were to be projected, and how the objects were to be placed. One of the reasons why the original organization I had in mind did not work well enough was due to the fact that organized as such, the project portrayed not so much a home, but an old, empty apartment in which more items than the usual had been left or forgotten. And it should be said that the primary cause of this effect was the absence of my grandmother, the home-dweller. Making sure that the spectator felt presence of the home-dweller was crucial, but the source of such experience had to be grounded indirectly.

Not so surprisingly, but interestingly, a particular aspect of my grandmother's home further-compliments this point, which is that there are no

photographs of her out in her home for the open view of anyone who visits this domestic space. Ultimately, the one and only subject around whom all these photographs gravitate and are held together in any meaningful way is actually absent from these images. But the contents of the static and moving images that I have used, which I have supplemented with real objects from this home-dweller's domestic environment, do promise a story or a narrative of sorts. It is almost as if the one to tell and the one who is the protagonist of the story are one and the same person, which one may realize when that same person is absent from the scene and only indirectly constituted. Moreover, the conscious decision to keep a photographic image of my grandmother out of the contents of the project invites the spectator to not only imagine the unity of the story-teller and the protagonist (and I use these descriptive terms heuristically), but also to put themselves in that very same position.

This is possible because in the context where the story is told by its protagonist, the story is told—at least derives from—a necessarily first person point of view. In the case of my project, I, as the visual essayist, also partake in an akin role and reenact or perform what is ultimately represented in my project—the portrayal of how an individual puts together of a home and dwells in it. I am able to transport what I have personally experienced this domestic space and translate it into a set of images for the experience of other, because I personally have an organic link to this home and the person inhabiting it. But just like the home-dweller's image is absent from the contents, I am, as the essayist, also absent from the same contents in a similar, if not the same, way. Distinctly to where my grandmother stands to her own home, my position—despite the relations I have with her—and my experience of this domestic and how she

compounds it into one coherent, comprehensive and meaningful dwelling place, may be reproduced. And ultimately, it is not my grandmother's, by my position that makes it possible for the spectator to necessarily become an integral part of the constitution of the work I have produced.

The spectators are intended to be put in the same place of the story-teller. This is inevitable in any case due to the fragmentary nature of the contents, which leave it to the spectator to construct whatever narrative seems most coherent and meaningful to them. And the appeal to the essayistic was in part made, as it has been previously recognized, so that the reading of my project would be one of a fragmentary, non-linear, multi-layered work, thus requiring the direct involvement of the spectator. However, the narrativizing of the contents of my project as such, which justifies the use of the term 'story-teller', also puts the spectator in the position—at least one that is imitative—of the two already existing—although only indirectly present—protagonists, my grandmother and me. Accordingly, it is really also by virtue of this second role that the work intends to allocate to the spectator that the project is able to come together and portray a certain totality. For one, I believe it accounts for how the spectator is not only expected to compose a continuous, wholesome experience of an intentionally fragmentary and disjointed work, but also required to fill in the gaps that are indubitably there, which the spectator does by appealing to his/her own personal history, memories of other persons and experience of such spaces.

This is also necessarily a way to observe the fundamental tripartite relationship between my project's subject-matter, its author, and the third party to experience it. A certain equilateral triangle where the artist, the artwork and the spectator are found at each corner, is necessitated by the essayistic. This seems to

be because it is by virtue of this that the essentially self-reflective and –reflexive character of essayistic composition and experience is made possible.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The epigram prefacing the first chapter of this thesis was an appeal to Sallinger's *Catcher in the Rye*. And the main discussion of this thesis has revolved around in a specific kind of knowledge and reality that had first appealed to me while reading those lines by Salinger. The very same lines also offer a way of concluding this investigation, especially the following few:

Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them—if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry (1951: 60).

Keeping record of ones troubles, having something to offer, partaking in a beautiful reciprocal relationship—I believe that these are phrases that are also emblematic of the home.

My project is accordingly the only proper conclusion of which one may speak this entire enterprise. It was the records about which Salinger speaks that I discovered in my grandmother's home and attempted to put under record myself

in what I believed to be the most suited generic style. In the process of this undertaking, the essayistic genre in its visual execution needed a certain kind of elucidation, as it was the essayistic approach that I took in my putting under record what had been put under record by my grandmother.

The discussion about the essayistic that has comprised so much of this thesis is crucial, however, not only in terms of offering an account of how the project—namely, the only proper conclusion of this enterprise—may be conceptualized and contextualized. Such discussion is not only worthwhile because it might perhaps have the tiniest potential to make a contribution to the literature on the essayistic impulse in contemporary art scene—an impulse that is, without doubt, on the rise. In the final analysis, my project, just like the transitory nature of its subject matter, was put together and exhibited in a gallery house. When the exhibition came to an end, so did the project. And it is by virtue of what is to be found about it in this written document, that it has been put under some sort of record, awaiting someone willing to come across and perhaps learn something from it.

Although the abovementioned epigram provides insight to the underlying inspiration that set into motion my project, it would not be proper to overlook another observation that I made in the introductory chapter to this thesis. This observation was the one regarding the fact that what was to be found in this thesis pertained to only—if not at least, but possibly more than—half the story. In preliminary context of the introduction, the motivation was to inform the reader of the fact that the project had precedence over what was envisaged to constitute the written account of it that have been presented above. Nonetheless, the evolution of this account—just like the (hi)story of the project—saw a certain progress that

transformed the text—and in extension the project—into potentially being part of yet another, different story.

And this other story is the one about the generic form of the “visual essay”, and how there is need for it to be made a point of proper scholarly discussion in the academia. The presentation of a satisfyingly comprehensive picture—or at least, to continue the analogy, storyboard—of what the visual essay as discussed in this thesis and practiced in my project, however, falls beyond the limits of what I had envisaged to undertake. It is still worthwhile, and to an extent necessary, to note where the discussion may be taken from this point onwards. In proposing several comments for this end, I shall take into consideration several observations I had the chance of making during the exhibition of my project as much as the theoretical dimension of what has been discussed here so far.

One key characteristic of the essay film genre is the authorial voice. This aspect of the essay film had not been considered in the previous discussions; however, the experience of the exhibition had provided me with reason to contemplate it. The authorial voice, as the name indicates, may indicate two things. The first is the usage of voice-over in the sense that the words used by a literary essayist give the impression to the reader as if uttered by the essayist himself. The other sense of the term would regard the presence of the author in the work in terms of not only a voice, but also stylistically.

The authorial voice became a relevant issue for the experience of my project, because as it had been discussed earlier on, what I wanted to be missing from the project was any explicit presence of not only of my grandmother, but also of me as the artist. There were two main reasons for trying to stay out of what constituted the project in the end. Firstly, my personal relationship with the

subject-matter was too close and it was my wish to situate my grandmother at center stage alone. Secondly, by virtue of not providing anything corresponding to an authorial voice, what was offered by the project in a fragmentary, discontinuous manner was left almost exclusively to the spectator. And I did indeed have the pleasure of observing the actual happening of this during the exhibition.

Moreover, something that was not anticipated also happened. It was my expectation that the construction of narrative that the experience of the spectator would necessarily entail to happen individually. There was, however, as much collective engagement with the work as there was individually. The exhibition space was much more noisy than I had expected, and in this instance, the decision to not include any sound with the videos proved effective. In a sense, although an authorial voice as belonging to me as the artists was missing, there were a multiplicity of such similar voices that originated from the spectators.

The other noteworthy point of discussion about the project pertained to the question why it could not have been interpreted as an installation. Cataloging the ways in which the visual essay does not produce something in the form of installations is, as my project showed, open to further deliberation. What is worthwhile to say in the instance of my project, however, is the manner in which it could be observed to relate to the gallery space during its being experienced by spectators.

This visual essay project I have put together was strictly not site specific, which is often, but not strictly, considered a quality of installations. It was impossible to stay indifferent to the site-specific qualities I encountered when preparing the project for the exhibition. I had not in any instance, however,

attempted to transform the space into something that it was not, namely, something to stand for my grandmother's home. All the information to be had of my grandmother's home derived from things that had no source in the gallery space, yet this space was not overlooked but exploited to augment the effect of the photographs, the videos and the objects. The result was a completely different involvement of the exhibition space than it would have been the case in an installation.

The affinities of the gallery space and the contents of my project also rendered the borders between the spectator and the project to be slightly indeterminate. This had the effect of reducing the distinction between the work and the spectator to something insignificant. Accordingly, what is often experienced in gallery or museum spaces where there is a division between what is being exhibited and persons visiting the site was to a significant extent overcome.

The issues related to authorial voice and installation are only two of numerous other potential points of discussion that I believe my project to invite for further debate. Accordingly, what some of these other points could be may be discovered by reference to the pictures I have taken during the exhibition, which may be found in the appendix.

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APPENDIX











