Keeping Diary in Parentheses: The Absent Images and the Visible Voices in Jonas Mekas's *The Song of Avila*

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This paper aims to discuss the parenthetical audiovisual structure in the diary film. First, by combining theories and discussions from linguistic and literature, the author will compare both positive and negative perspectives and examine how the parenthesis is used in different texts. Next, the author will focus on how the notions of parenthesis turn from initially being considered as surplus, subordinate, and inferior, to the re-evaluation of their role as a significant and indispensable part of the text, and most importantly, as the sign of the author's presence in the text. Borrowing Laura Rascaroli's concept of "sonic interstices," the author will look at how the voice-over in the diary film functions and relates itself to the images in the space created by parenthetical insertion. Finally, the author will examine Jonas Mekas's diary film—*The Song of Avila* as a case study, analyzing the relationship between the voice-over and the images in this film by applying my concept of a parenthetical structure.

Keywords: Jonas Mekas, diary film, *The Song of Avila*, voiceover

I arrived in Avila early that day. It was hot and I have not eaten for two days. I did not feel like eating. I wanted to be...uh..., maybe just not eat. So I was...and I walked. The whole day I walked, all to every streets of Avila, and around the town. Every street and every place was important for Santa Teresa. And...ha ha..., I picked up some flowers from the field, and I put them in Santa Teresa's church. I said "This is from the filmmakers".

And I continued walking and walking. And then I...ha ha..., I was stood in the streets trying to decide to go to eat and not to eat. And that point a dog came from I don't know where, and began licking the dust from my shoes. And he licked all the dust from my shoes. And I felt like it was something that connected me and Santa Teresa to this little dog. It was like a... uh...I walked the streets for her. And this dust on my shoes was something that to this little dog connected, and brought us together. I walked the streets for her.

In the morning I walked to the station. It was still..., the city was still sleeping. And I jumped in to the first train. And I looked back, the sun was rising.¹

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1 The voice-over text in *The Song of Avila*, narrated by Jonas Mekas. The connection between Mekas and St. Teresa could be traced back to Mekas's mystical experience after he recovered from early childhood illness, as St. Teresa did in her early life. As Mekas mentions: "I was very sick when I was five or six years old. I don't know what the disease was but I was close to death...Then suddenly I began seeing things. I could tell who was on the next street. When there was a car crash on the other side of the building, I would see the red of blood." See Benn Northover, "Another Man" (2010) <http://jonasmekasfilms.com/images/anotherman-interview.pdf>. Another possible connection comes from St. Teresa's writings about the experience of rapture and ecstasy. In the same interview, Mekas seems to connect to notion of ecstasy with his diary filmmaking approach: "for me ecstasy is doing something when you don't even know what it is that you are doing...you are completely immersed in it...You are just in that moment." However, despite the obvious religious implication in the film, the discussion in this paper focuses only on the use of the voice-over in the diary film.

The relationship between the voice-over and the image in the diary film, unlike the conventional audiovisual one in film, needs special attention for the following reasons. First, the role of the voice-over should not be considered as an enhancement of the image. In conventional audiovisual film analysis, both audio and visual need to be either in alignment, associative, or in contradiction to produce meaning through montage. In the diary film, however, the intersection of the voice-over and the image is constructed through an apparently arbitrary relationship. Second, the voice-over in the diary film is not dominated by the image, and should not be seen as occupying a supplementary role. It is worth considering the idea of “image-over”² proposed by Jonas Mekas when analysing the audiovisual relationship in the diary film, as both the voice-over and the images contribute to the process of the narrative. Take Hollis Frampton's (*nostalgia*) for example, Frampton repeatedly replaces the photograph in the brackets with voice-over narration, and then replaces it again with a new photograph. The voice-over describes what cannot be seen in the photographs, and the images show directly what cannot be heard in the voice-over. This constant changing of position of voice-over and images in the parentheses and their supplementary relationships can shed light on the analysis of the voice-over in the diary film.

Parentheses: Negative and Positive Perspectives

There are negative perspectives or misunderstandings regarding the use and the implications of parenthesis as early as the Renaissance. In Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577), Peacham categorizes parenthesis as a subclass under hyperbaton, and identifies it as an “alteration by the improper placing of words or clauses” (Williams, p. 56). He further describes parenthesis as “dispensable” for “when a sence is case between the speache before it be all ended, whiche although it give some strength, yet when it is taken away, it leaveth the same speach perfect enough, thus” (Williams, p. 56). There are a few points worth noting from Peacham's argument. First, he considers the parenthesis as an “improper placing of words.” This is a false impression; the parenthetical segment is not (or never) merely a rewriting or rearranging of words from the previous sentence (speech). The parenthesis and the hyperbaton are quite different concepts. The hyperbaton is the rearrangement of the existing words, and yet the words in the parentheses are not from the existing text, but often added later. Second, while Peacham thinks that the parenthesis gives some “strength,” this positive connotation (strength) is limited. The meaning of the speech remains the same with or without the parenthesis structure; it is still “perfect enough.” The sentence exists perfectly well without the help of the parenthesis. The parenthesis, however, is just not important, not valuable, and not worth further discussion. In *The Harper Handbook to Literature* (1983), there is a different but equally critical opinion of the parenthesis. It defines parenthesis as “a word or words included as a deviation from or addition to the primary flow of thought in a sentence or paragraph” (Fyre, p. 338). Here, the parenthesis is presented as a *deviation* and obstacle which would cause problems for the reader, it stops the reader in the process of reading and diverts them away from the text (“the primary flow of thought”). Furthermore, there is also a concept of ranking deriving from the quotation in the *Harper Handbook*. The parenthesis does not belong to the “primary” text, it is additional and secondary. Similar evaluation also appears in 1989 in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. One of the quotations

² Mekas, Jonas. Personal Interview. 14 Dec. 2014. In the interview, Mekas talks about his idea of the vocal narration in his films: “I don't know if I would call it voice-over. It's just part of film. It's the same function as images, which is not a voice-over; it's just another element. Voice-over is like you make comments about the images that you see. I don't make comments about the images. I add another level of content. So it's not a comment, not a voice-over. You could say that [it's] image-over...sometimes the sound is more important, sometimes images. Images illustrate the sound.”

referring to the word “parenthesis” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* states as follows: “You see the inconveniency of a long parenthesis; we have forgot the sense that went before” (Williams, p. 59). The parenthesis, not only hinders the act of reading, it also “divides meaningful passages in two” (Williams, p. 59). This quotation resonates with Quintilian’s attitude about the parenthesis in *Institutio Oratoria* (*Institutes of Oratory*) (1921). The parenthesis “consists in the interruption of the continuous flow of our language by the insertion of some remark” (Morrissey, p. 50). In both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Institutio Oratoria*, the “textual unity” is prioritized, while the insertion of the parenthesis is a destructive act which could break off the continuity of reading and the unity of the text. From the early discussion of parenthesis, it is obvious that the parenthesis was considered as a foreigner who invades the text and damages the unity of the text, and hence, the use of parenthetical marks was restricted as often as possible.

Despite these negative views concerning the conceptual use of the parenthesis, some scholars also argue for a positive perspective. In his article “Reading the Parenthesis,” Robert Grant Williams argues that if the parenthesis, according to Peacham and Cuddon, is indeed dispensable, then “why bother insert them at all” (Williams, p. 58) in the first place? Williams believes that every literary device has its own purpose. This assumption then becomes the starting point of his reversion of the previous pessimistic judgment on the use of the parenthesis. The act of insertion must happen for a particular reason and it is certainly not dispensable. Williams digs out a number of views opposing the previously negative accusations: if the act of parenthetical intrusion implies the supplementary nature of the parenthetical discourse, what exactly is this supplementary nature? Do these statements, by degrading the parenthesis as supplementary, inadvertently confess that, to certain degree, the text is incomplete in some way? And is it because the text does lack something, that the help of the parenthetical intrusion is needed promptly? In Williams’ discussion, the parenthesis is first considered as “an obstacle or hindrance to the primary flow of thought” (Williams, p. 57). Here, the “primary flow,” as Williams identifies, is the unity of the text, its organic oneness. Yet Williams’ argument goes on to suggest that no text has complete unity, and every text has its defects, and furthermore, with the insertion of parenthesis, the illusory status of textual unity is destroyed. The parenthesis structure appears when the text makes the confession—the confession that within the grammatical structure, the text has difficulty fully expressing itself—and the parentheses come as a rescuer rather than an invader to complete the text.

Robert Morrissey in his article “Breaking in (Flaubert in Parentheses)” argues that one of the functions of the parenthetical insertion (by Flaubert) is “to lay more stress on what is not included in the text” (Morrissey, p. 57). And more importantly, “they [parenthetical insertions] also might represent that which remains unspoken...” (Morrissey, p. 58). This raises two questions. First, who do the unspoken words in the parenthetical insertions belong to? And second, why is the parentheses needed? In order to answer the first question, I would argue that the answer can be found in the *act* of insertion. In Robert Williams’ “Reading the Parenthesis,” he analyzes a poem “l(a)” written by E. E. Cummings in 1958. He notices that with the insertion of the parenthetical marks, it forms a boundary between words. In “l (a,” Cummings separates the word “loneliness” by inserting parenthetical marks between the first and the second letter of the word. Inside the marks there is a short sentence “a leaf falls”. The insertion of parenthetical marks and the separation of letters thus create an “alternative syntactic space” (Williams, p. 64).

The poem goes like this:

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Obviously, Cummings is using the parenthetical insertion as means of deconstruction and for aesthetic purposes. The inserted sentence “a leaf falls” does not operate simply as a supplement, nor does it occupy a secondary position in the text. It certainly has deeper meaning which Cummings wishes to express. However, my discussion here is not trying to discuss the poem, but rather the use of parenthetical insertion and its relationship to the text. Susan Suleiman in her article “The Parenthetical Function in *A la recherche du temps perdu*” classifies the functions of parenthesis into three major categories: “narrative, interpretive, and associative” (Suleiman, p. 465). The parenthetical insertion “A leaf falls” is certainly a narrative, but not interpretive, since it does not explain the word “loneliness”. Here in the poem the relationship between the text and the parenthetical insertion is produced by arbitrary association (the falling of the leaf perhaps connects to the feeling of loneliness) rather than narration and interpretation. The text (loneliness) and the parenthetical insertion (a leaf falls) together contribute to produce the third meaning that is describing neither the feeling of loneliness nor the falling of a leaf, but the intersection and the combination of the two. Furthermore, the invasion of the parenthetical insertion destroys the structure of the text, and creates a space between the text and the parenthetical insertion. When analysing the use of parenthesis in Flaubert’s novels, Morrissey concludes that “parentheses constitute an irruption into the text, which frees the encapsulated discourse from the constraints imposed by the text’s established syntax and voice” (Morrissey, p. 49). And the alternative syntactic space created by the insertion transforms into a moment of freedom and of power. In Cummings’s use of parenthetical insertion, the conclusion that Morrissey makes might be applicable, as the insertion functions both to destroy the general meaning of words (the “loneliness” becomes “one” and “ness”) and as the manifestation of authorial power (the manipulation of structure and the meaning of words by Cummings). Therefore, in this alternative space, where the author can freely make any intrusion, the marked discourse carries more weight on énonciation (the act of narrating) than on énoncé (the narrated text). In Cummings’s example, the important thing is how the sense of loneliness is expressed, not merely stating the fact “loneliness”. Therefore, aside from dividing words, the significance of this space is that it is reserved for the author. Within the parameters the parenthetical marks provide, the author is able to speak his mind and say what is unspoken. However, by doing so, the trace of the authorial insertion is also uncovered, and the authorial power is manifested.

The second question raised by Morrissey’s argument is why are the parentheses needed and why are they

³ This poem can be found in George James Firmage (Ed.), *E. E. Cummings: Complete Poems 1910-1962. Volume Two* (London: Granada Publishing, 1981), p. 673.

placed beside the text? Why can't these unfinished words, these missing sections, be used in the next sentence and paragraph? Why do they have to be placed side by side or within? Could it be said that there is certain connection between the primary text and the parenthetical insertions that makes them inseparable? To answer these questions, I'd like to use the example of word translation in dictionary to elaborate. In some cases, the parenthetical structure also functions as translation to another language. In Morrissey's article, there is an example from Stendhal in *Le Rouge et le noir* (*The Red and The Black*): "*Loquerisne linguam latinam?* (*Do you speak Latin?*)"⁴ (Morrissey, p. 52). From the translation of this sentence from Latin to English, it can be said that the relationship between parenthetical structure and the text is not simply supplementary. The translation ("*Do you speak Latin?*") seems to directly translate from the text ("*Loquerisne linguam latinam?*") and clarifies the meaning of the text. Although they are two different signifiers expressing the same thing (signified), their relationship is not fixed but arbitrary (it is similar to Saussure's notion of the linguistic sign in which the link between signal and signification is arbitrary) (Saussure, pp. 67-68). Another example can be found in the process of looking up words in dictionary. When looking up the word "parenthesis" in dictionary, two explanations are available: "either of two punctuation marks (or) used to enclosed textual material", and "a message that departs from the main subject".⁵ In this example, the two translations can both explain the text, but they are at the same time not completely representing the text. The relationship between the text and its translations here is also arbitrary. Both explanations of the word "parenthesis" explain it very well. Conversely, their relationship is also weak, since the explanation "a message that departs from the main subject" does not necessarily indicate "parenthesis" *only*. As in "*Do you speak Latin?*" there are many other ways to make the same statement. Therefore, between the text and the parenthetical structure, especially in the case of translation in dictionary, the parenthetical marks can switch places randomly, since the signified they refer to is the same. By the same token, if we consider the explanation "a message that departs from the main subject" as the text, and switch the word "parenthesis" as the translation of the text, the overall structure and meaning will still be the same. Hence, in the example of word translation, the primary text and its translation are able to function only by being placed side by side with parentheses instead of in different sentences, and supplement each other on the premise of expressing a shared purpose (signified).

Parenthetical Structure and Sonic Interstices

Laura Rascaroli, when analysing Robert Cambrinus's essay film *Commentary* (2009) in her article "Sonic Interstices: Essayistic Voiceover and Spectatorial Space in Robert Cambrinus's *Commentary* (2009)," brings up the concept of "sonic interstices". Even though her focus is on essay film, I would like to discuss the similarities between sonic interstices and parenthetical structure in this section, and push them further to the analysis on the voice-over in diary film.

Rascaroli proposes, borrowing from Deleuze's idea of "spacing," that the interstitiality in the essay film exists in multiple ways: it is a spacing "between two actions, between affections, between perceptions, between two visual images, between two sound images, between the sound and the visual..." (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 3). She considers the interstice as a kind of "vertigo of spacing"—meaning that by placing the voice-over in the position of the extra-diegetic, the voice-over and the meaning produced by voice-over interact with other

⁴ These sentences can be found in: Stendhal, *The Red and the Black: A Chronicle of the Nineteenth Century*. Trans. Catherine Slater. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1991):181.

⁵ ColorDict. Version 4.2.1. Social & Mobile, Inc.

elements in the essay film (such as the visuals, soundtrack, frames, enunciator and spectator) as a reciprocal imbrication. It is a space between the layering and stratification of text and the extra-textual. It is also a space “between the text on which it [the voice-over] comments and the audience it [the voice-over] addresses” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 2). The relationship between diegetic and extra-diegetic seems familiar to the one between the primary text and the parenthetical text in the parenthetical structure. First, the voice-over is an “extra” structure, it is as if the voice-over is bracketed by marks and placed next to or above the diegetic (“superimposed” may be a more proper word). Nevertheless, Rascaroli continues to explain that “what the voice-over brings out, ultimately, is a series of interstices” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 9). This placing of extra-diegetic structure is analogous to the parenthetical insertion into the text: it creates a space, an interstice. What is more in the essay film interstices are also “shaped by the speaking voice as spaces of thought, and thus as gaps that enable reflection” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 9). In the essay film, this place of thought is not only a place for the author to highlight his/her authority (by addressing the voice through different means such as the quality of the voice, the way of expressing the voice, the accent, and the personal viewpoint, etc.), but also a space for direct communication and negotiation to take place between the author and spectator. As in the essay film, the “spectator may establish a relationship with the speaking subject and negotiate between the superimposed commentary and the images that are commented upon” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 2). The essay film invites spectators to enter into a dialogical situation with the enunciator, to “follow his/her reasoning, and to respond by actively participating in the construction of meaning” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 2). However, the quality of communication and negotiation belongs to the essay film, not to the diary film. The diary film spectator is implied rather than targeted. As mentioned in the previous chapters, some diary films are only made for the sake of the filmmaker him/her-self. The diary film does not invite the spectator to “actively” participate the production of meaning. It only shares. The diary film does not try to converse with the spectator; Mekas’s reflective mode of filming is a conversation between the filmmaker and the object filmed, not with the spectator. In my opinion, however, the sonic interstices, the parenthetical structure and the audiovisual relationships in the diary film have something in common and can resonate with each other, especially from the perspective of “space,” which I will discuss next.

The Missing Images and the Unspoken Words in *The Song of Avila*

The Song of Avila was completed in 2006 by Jonas Mekas. The film depicts a day Mekas spent in the town Avila on 22 July 1967 in Spain.⁶ The images were shot during that day in Avila. As always, he carried his camera everywhere and filmed whatever he could. Nevertheless, the film (the voice-over version) was not completed until 2006, when Mekas decided to initiate a new internet diary film project.⁷ The basic structure of the film remains the same, there is no big alteration, except adding the opening title “*The Song of Avila*” and the closing title “Jonas Mekas © 2006” and the insertion of the voice-over. The film proceeds chronologically as the way the images were shot. The image track can be divided into three sections: the arriving at the town of

⁶ Jonas Mekas explains the purpose of this trip on his official website: “This is in Timothy Leary’s place. In 1966 I came up upon a book of Meher Baba, the Indian guru/scientist, in which he said that there are three great holy places in Europe: Avila, Assisi, and Fatima. In 1967, I decided to visit Avila where I had an enlightening experience. This is a filmed record of my visit to Avila, with my voice telling how I felt there and what happened (especially with the little dogs)”. See <http://jonasmekas.com/40/film.php?film=29>.

⁷ This new project is called “The First 40”: “The cycle of FIRST FORTY I made in late 2006 as an introduction to my work for my new, Internet audience. All of them are based on my earlier films but slightly, sometimes more than slightly, changed. I consider them works complete in themselves, separate from the main body of my film work”. See <http://jonasmekas.com/40/>. The silent version of *The Song of Avila* was a part of *Travel Songs*, which was completed in 1981.

Avila (00:16-00:20), the people and things in Avila (00:21-02:40) and leaving the town of Avila (02:41-02:44). The narration of the film starts from the train approaching the town, followed by the observations of the people and the landscape of the town, and finally ends with the train's departure. Mekas spent about twenty-four hours in Avila, and the images are highly condensed into less than three minutes. In my interview with him, I asked him why didn't he film the dog he mentions in the voice-over? Mekas says "No, I did not film the dog. I stayed there at least twenty-four hours, and I filmed only two minutes. I filmed only two minutes of footage, and you see it all. I did not cut out anything. So it means that I omitted twenty-three hours and fifty-eight minutes. So many things are missing, not only the dog".⁸ That the dog is mentioned in the voice-over but absent in the images brings up the question of parenthetical structure.

The initiation of the new project in 2006 provides this opportunity for Mekas to fill the gaps, the omitted things, by adding voice-over to the images. The voice-over in the film can also be divided into three sections: the arrival and the offering of the flowers to Santa Teresa (00:04-01:19), the wandering in the town and the meeting with the dog (01:22-02:29), and the leaving (02:33-02:52). From the perspective of completion, the recorded voice-over in 2006 comes later and should be considered as a parenthetical structure; it is inserted into/superimposed to the images shot in 1967 (the use of the word "insertion" would be more proper in the sense of discussing the meaning production relation between the voice-over and the images, while "superimposition" is the physical doubling of two tracks). As a parenthetical discourse, the voice-over does act in a supplementary way to fill in the gaps between the images. These gaps are things missing in the images, but mentioned in the voice-over. They include (my italics):

Feelings (weather and hunger): "It was *hot* and I have *not eaten* for two days" (00:12-00:19).

Offering flowers to Santa Teresa: "I picked up some *flowers* from the field and I put them in Santa Teresa's church" (00:23-00:25).

The dog: "At that point a little *dog* came from I don't know where, and began *licking* the *dust* from my *shoes*" (01:42-01:52).

The sense of belonging: "I felt like it was something that *connected* me and Santa Teresa to this little *dog*. It was like...uh...I walked the streets for her" (01:59-02:13).

The sunrise: "I jumped into the first train, and I looked back, the *sun* was *rising*" (02:41-02:53).

Interestingly, the real narrative starting point begins from the voice-over, not from the images. It is not until the first voice-over finishes ("I arrived in Avila early that day," begins from 00:04) that the first image of the film (the traveling shot on the train, begins from 00:16, not including the opening title card) appears. In other words, the duration of the voice-over segment is longer than the image segment: the voice-over starts from 00:04 and ends in 02:52 (totally 2 minutes and 48 seconds), and the image starts from 00:16 and ends in 02:56 (totally 2 minutes and 40 seconds). From this perspective, the parenthetical identity seems to shift from the voice-over to the images. The voice-over now occupies the primary position, and the images become supplementary—the images are enclosed by parenthetical marks. The list below shows this shift of parenthetical marks from the voice-over to the images so that what is *not* mentioned in the voice-over, but appears in the images:

Donkeys (00:21-00:22, 00:41-00:44, 02:11-02:12, and 02:18).

⁸ Mekas, Jonas, Personal Interview, 14 Dec. 2012.

Boy riding a donkey (00:29-00:33 and 02:45-02:50).

A kid wearing white underwear (01:13-01:14).

Kids playing in the town square (01:25-01:54).

Birds flying (02:00 and 02:28-02:32 [intermittently]).

Tourist/Crowd (02:02-02:10 and 02:20).

Sunset (02:12-02:25 [intermittently]).

These events are objects appearing in the images and never mentioned in the voice-over. It seems that the images, when understood as being within parenthesis, fill the gaps in the voice-over as well. Therefore, the audiovisual relationship in *The Song of Avila* is asynchronised as Frampton's (*nostalgia*), and yet they are not deliberately separated from each other as a narrative strategy as in (*nostalgia*). The voice-over in *The Song of Avila* does not explain any of the images, nor do the images explain the voice-over. They are like the example of translation in dictionary given earlier in this section: the two different narratives (the voice-over and the images) narrating the same events (a day in Avila). This means that their relation is arbitrary but also supplementary; they accompany each other as the narration proceeds, filling up the gaps of the film text.

Parenthetical Interstices

The random switching of places of the parenthetical marks between the voice-over and the images creates fragments and interstices in the film text. I believe that the notion of interstices in *The Song of Avila* to be more complicated than those described by Rascaroli. The interstices in *The Song of Avila* occupy a space between the diegetic and extra-diegetic, but are also prompted by the exclusively retrospective temporal structure of the diary film. Mekas looks back from the Avila in 2006 (by the voice-over, in editing) to the Avila in 1967 (the images)—there is a temporal distance between filming and editing. On another level of temporality, we encounter the different narrative duration which also create interstices—the time Mekas stayed in Avila (24 hours), the time of the voice-over narration (2 minutes and 48 seconds) and the time of the visual narration (2 minutes and 40 seconds). These three narrative times parenthesize one another, creating a threefold structure with temporal differences which not only provide spaces for spectator to freely associate images with voice-over (or voice with image-over), but also allow the author (Mekas) to travel back and forth between past and present. Unlike the essay film, the registration of authorship in the diary film is confirmed not by providing subjective commentary on images, but by the act of narrating. Authorship in the diary film is manifested through the words spoken by enunciator throughout the film. In *The Song of Avila*, Mekas's identity as an author is expressed by the first-person narration, the use of subjective pronoun "I" in the voice-over ("I walked..., I felt..., I wanted to..."), the slow tempo of his talking, the hesitation when he speaks, and the sounds of his laughter (appearing twice in 01:00 and 01:33). I asked him in my interview with him about the voice-over recording situation in his diary films and he replied that "I was not reading (meaning there is no scripts for the voice-over). I was talking".⁹ He is just talking, to himself. It is just as in the diary writing scene, when the diarist stays alone in his/her safe space, in his/her bedroom usually, where he/she would feel secure

⁹ Mekas, Jonas. Personal Interview, 14 Dec. 2012 (excerpt from the interview):

"Q: In your short film *The Song of Avila*, near the ending there's a sound of page turning. So I was thinking, did you also read something like notes or your written diaries when you recorded the narration for this film?

A: No, I was talking, I was not reading, I was talking. I don't know what that sound was."

and protected from the outside world. This private space refers to both the actual room and the space inside the diary notebook where he/she can write anything he/she wants. This is the authorial power of the diary writer, the control over how the writing is going to take place and how it will be presented, rather than control over what to write (as the diarist does not necessarily control what to write, he/she may write whatever comes to mind, as a surreal-like automatic writing practice).

As for the interstices created by the parentheses, the diary film and the essay film share the same characteristic, but with some differences. There are both spaces for the spectator to work with what the film provides in order to produce meaning out of the film. In the essay film, as Rascaroli states, this is the place “from which the spectator may establish a relationship with the speaking subject and negotiate between the superimposed commentary and the images that are commented upon” (Rascaroli, 2011, p. 2). In the diary film, the situation is slightly different. The diary film does not invite the spectator to participate in the negotiation of opinions and the production of meaning. The intention is very different. In Eisenstein's montage theory, the audiovisual relationship creates certain effect *for* the spectator; in the essay film, it asks the spectator to *join* the dialogue with the author. In the diary film, the space *simply* opens up so the spectator can enter or leave *at will*, or to engage in their own parenthetical thoughts.

Impossible Retrospection

Regarding the way in which the voice-over and image-over function in the interstice in diary film, I'd like to continue the discussion of the parenthetical structure between the voice-over and the images in *The Song of Avila*. There are two animals in the film worth emphasizing here—the donkey we see that carries a boy and the dog that we hear of, who licks the dust from Mekas's shoes. According to the voice-over, it is this dog that makes Mekas feel “connected” to Santa Teresa. Whereas the donkey that carries a boy, on the other hand, does not at first glance seem to be important. The question raised here is, if the donkey is not important for Mekas, then why does Mekas use the image twice (00:29-00:33 and 02:45-02:56)? [Figure 1]

Figure 1. Stills from *The Song of Avila*.

Its inclusion is not random. The second use of the image is obviously against the chronological development of the film, as it appears *after* Mekas leaves the town on train (02:41). If we follow the order of this narrative, it is physically impossible for Mekas to shoot and even see this image in the first place. However, one might notice that these two images are nearly identical except they are left-right reversed. So the question remains the same: why does Mekas use it twice, and reverse it from left to right? Interestingly, when the second left-right reversed image appears, the voice-over in the soundtrack says: “I jumped in to the first train. And [as] I looked back, the sun was rising”. Although I have established that the interstices in the diary film are a space

of arbitrary association, I believe that this is the point where Mekas tries to conduct a certain montage effect by deliberately juxtapositioning the image with his voice-over: the reversed image of the donkey with the voice-over “and [as] I looked back” is now understood as a retrospective gesture in both cases. The spectator never sees the sun rising. The images show only sunset, not sunrise. The sunrise on that day was in Mekas's memories, in his voice-over. This retrospective gesture “I looked back” could be seen as a metaphor on many levels: Mekas physically looks back on 22 July 1967, on the train leaving Avila and Mekas looks back in 2006 editing film footage he shot in 1967. He looks back to his memories through the train window and through the little screen on the editing table; and the images of memories distort and reverse through the glass of time, through refraction. Which image represents the actuality of that day in Avila? Which side of the road is the boy riding the donkey really moving, the left or the right? Memories blur through the distance of time, in the case of *The Song of Avila* the temporal distance is thirty-nine years (1967 and 2006). The questions may never be answered, even by Mekas himself.

Conclusion

By providing the parenthetical structure as an analytic tool, I aim to establish a new perspective for treating the voice-over and its relationship to the narrative in the diary film. The voice-over in the diary film should be differentiated from the subjective commentary often seen in documentary and should be treated seriously and with special attention. As Roger Odin suggests that the narration of the diary film “is in the voice-over rather than in the images,”¹⁰ the use of the voice-over in the diary film is not only the most common approach, but also a key aspect for the registration and the identification of authorial presence. Through the voice-over, the author is able to re-visit the past, and at the same time to add another narrative and temporal dimension to the diary film. The spectator, on the other hand, confirms the identity of the author by the quality of the voice, which “describes the author's subjectivity,”¹¹ and moreover, gathers information provided by the voice-over, in order to unlock the secrets of the diary. The principle of the parenthetically audiovisual structure follows the spontaneity of positioning between the image and the voice of the author, and result in the form of the voice-over or the image-over. The parentheses constantly oscillate between the voice and the image creating interstices of discontinuities and temporal gaps. In the case of Mekas's donkey, the image illustrates the voice-over as well as the voice describes the image-over, even in an asynchronized situation. However, ironically, the gap generated by the adding of the voice-over suggests that, in this mode of the diary film, in keeping a diary, the primary psychological need is always about filling the gap which the diary filmmaker created in the first place between the image and the voice-over, and also between the past and the present. For the diary filmmaker, it is a gesture of rescuing the past from “its proper corruption” (Bazin, 2005, p. 14), to use Bazin's term, and from forgetting.

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¹⁰ Odin, Roger. Personal Interview, 12 Dec. 2012.

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