

SUBJECTIVITY IN SOUND.  
LISTENING TO ANTON SAROKIN'S «POSTFILMIA»

**Maria Yashchanka**

MA in Aural and Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College,  
University of London

64 De Laune street, London, SE17 3UR, United Kingdom

E-mail: Marija.Yashchanka@gmail.com

**Abstract**

Drawing on the work of Belarusian artist Anton Sarokin and his use of acousmatic sound and audioscapes, the article considers listening as a specific mode of engagement with the world. Through a close reading of «Postfilmia», a notion of sonic subjectivity as theorised by Salomé Voegelin is juxtaposed with Lacanian ideas of a split subject as proposed by Bruce Fink. In arguing for a psychoanalytic reading of Sarokin's work, attention is drawn to how his artwork inquires into the functioning of a voice detached from its origin, and into the interrelation of collective memory and personal history.

**Keywords:** Acousmatic sound, voice, listening, symbolic order, sonic subject, split subject, sonorous envelope.

*I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming.*

Jacques Lacan<sup>1</sup>

**Listening to Piece 3**

«Postfilmia. Piece 3. USA, 2001, 147 Min»<sup>2</sup>

*Breathing (man?), laughter, tense ambient sound, increasing in volume. Opening doors, steps, breathing(?). A female voice far away, singing, somewhere very far away, hardly audible. Bong! Something being ripped apart or cut through. Steps and a knock.*

Unease grows. Are we listening to what someone else is hearing? Is it the listener who is breathing, or is it the person they might be listening to who is breathing? Is it «Lost Highway»?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lacan J. (1997) *Ecrits: A selection*. London: Routledge, p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Anton Sarokin, *Audio*, 2012. 4:30 Min

<sup>3</sup> *Lost Highway* is a 1997 French-American film written and directed by David Lynch. This is probably an erroneous guess, since the year

*Knocking. Banging into a door(?), and again. Laughing and screaming. Gaspig. The sound of some-thing or someone breathing. A trumpet far away. Sighs. The trumpet melody fades. Static dense noise.*

This is the end of the recording. The final moments of static noise come to a standstill, and it becomes clear that there will be no sounds to come. Recorded silence (static) gives way to habitual silence. From now on, there will be the sounds of cars in the streets outside, or the murmuring of the washing machine on a gentle cycle – all that is called silence for the mere lack of an identifiable signal. It is called silence because it doesn't want anything from us.<sup>4</sup> The time to attend to a selection of someone else's time is over. Whose silence were we listening to, and who was listening to and recording the silence performed somewhere else still, even further away in time and space?

This is how one might start considering the piece by Anton Sarokin which, together with another five audio files and abstract black and white photographic prints, were exhibited in Gallery Nova in Minsk in 2012. The installation comprised still images, photographs by Alexey Naumchik, and headphones to be used by the listener. In what follows, the visual part of the installation – abstract black and white analogue prints – will not be discussed, although it is important to note that it is precisely because it was a collaborative work with a photographer that the installation found its way into a public space. Nova Gallery, where «Postfilmia» was exhibited, has a history of engaging with photography, and therefore the works were a good fit for the space. Yet, it is unlikely that an exhibition of photographs with an audio file had been seen in either Nova or, in Minsk in general, before. The full installation, containing six photographs and six audio tracks, has since then moved to the virtual public space of the internet, first at the multimedia magazine 34mag.net and then on the artist's website. The individual pieces are titled in the format of consecutive numbers (one to six), followed by a country (Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, USA and USSR), year (period between 1959 and 2001), and duration in minutes. The duration does not correlate to that of the actual pieces, but rather suggests the duration of a feature film. These titles thus present information about a film which, we are made to believe, formed the basis of the photographs and the audio. Hypothetically, the work itself could be read as an archive from a future moment in time, when films from our time are watched in a time span of under five minutes. The exhibition is titled with the invented word «Postfilmia», which might refer to the time after having just watched a film or else a future condition when there are no more films.

---

of the film's production does not match the year in the title of the artwork, which is 2001.

<sup>4</sup> Silence is not absence of sound, is not «nothingness», it is a being that recedes, does not demand consideration. Utilising the concepts of Martin Heidegger (2010), in order to get our bearings in our daily lives, we need the objects around us to recede into non-being, i.e. not demand consideration of their nature.

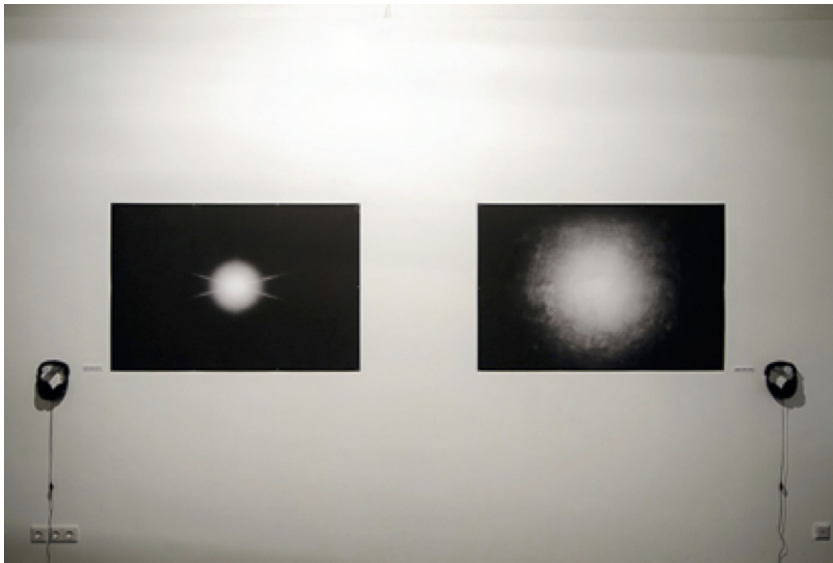


Image 1. Installation view. Source: Alexey Naumchik.

The audio work, as we come to know from the title, is a part of a filmic reality made in a particular country (USA), in 2001, and it once belonged in a film. Only now it is orphaned, without the visual manifestation of characters that breathe and doors that slam, corridors in which steps resonate, and materials can be ripped apart – without all the objects that once neatly fitted to their sounds. These sounds now float on their own – uncanny and free. They are termed «acousmatic» – from the Greek, «indicating noise without the causes from which it originates being seen».<sup>5</sup>

As a result, emotions fill the body, somewhere on the edge of terror and fascination. Emotions are real and felt, even though no terror can be seen and, in fact, we are not aware of what, if anything, has happened. Michel Chion (1999) argues that sound in film is the primary mechanism that structures the visual field and produces the possibility of one's emotional involvement in a film. Chion theorises that not only is cinema a voco-centric media (it pays primary attention to speech), but also that the voice is a specifically cinematic object which, either explicitly or discreetly, serves as the primary vehicle of narrative development (Chion, 1999). Time realism, as well as the continuity and directionality of film edits are dependent primarily on sound, which sews the images together through a sustained soundscape. Sound operates multidimensionally, overwhelming the viewer unawares, providing just enough veracity and mood-instillers to make the illusion work.

<sup>5</sup> The situation of hearing sounds without perceiving their visible cause was termed «acousmatics» by Pierre Schaeffer in the middle of the 20th century, and has been taken up by theorists such as Mladen Dolar (2006) and Michel Chion (1999, 2014).

Anton Sarokin's artistic method is the purposeful scrambling of carefully orchestrated filmic sounds and the deletion of the visual part of filmic reality, so that the listener is left with nothing but a trace and a selective soundscape. Without the visual narrative, our mind hesitates between rebuilding the missing visual part (retrieving it from memory, guessing, inventing, producing), or just going along with the purposelessness and meaninglessness of the sound. Our body absorbs what the ear hears but the mind struggles to find the terms to think the heard through, troubled by the constant, nagging question: «What is going on?».

In 2012 when the installation was first exhibited, its attention to sound and sound in film in particular was something new for contemporary art in Minsk. The medium of sound itself, in its autonomous form, without a relation to moving images, has hardly been utilised in Belarusian art. Back then, as in the preceding decades, the contemporary electronic music scene was a far more fertile ground for avant-garde experiments of this kind. The artist himself, with his involvement in the mid-2000s in the ambient experimental collective AIV and his explicit interest and attention to both popular and obscure underground music, which is evident in his audio-mixes and DIY productions, appears to build on methods used in that field. Sarokin closely followed collectives such as *Electrokids*, *Euthanasia* and others, and was a dedicated follower and participant in a scene which was subcultural and distant from, or at best on the margins of, art discourse. However, when it comes to investigations into the nature of listening, memory, and the relation between sound and the self, the confined, quiet, lonely space of a gallery facilitates an engagement with an audience at another level. At the time of writing, Sarokin has become a more established figure on the art scene, having participated in various group exhibitions (such as «XXY» (2016) and «Measurements of Emptiness» (2016)) and having produced an ambitious solo show «The Past is Still Not Over, the Future has Already Not Come» at Y Gallery in 2017. He belongs to what could be considered a new wave of Belarusian art of the 2010s.<sup>6</sup> The audio work that is the subject of this essay has a particular importance as it marked the start of an approach and a method that has since developed through the various projects and exhibitions mentioned. In the work that followed «Post-filmia», the artist's first gallery based work, Sarokin referred to a similar set of media and concerns – memory and the collective, the technological and the social, with a focus on questions of time perception.

I return now to the work itself and the question of why operating with acousmatic sound is not only a novel, but a philosophically intriguing move: not knowing what the sound refers to, but being troubled by it, we find it comforting to name the object that sounds and, by so doing, to assign it into a structure, a story that explains the presence of something we confront. Acousmatic (bodiless) presence is a strange, uneasy encounter – firstly, we need to know who it is, and secondly, we ask

---

<sup>6</sup> On the subject of a new wave of the Belarusian art see pARTizan No 28, 2015.

what does it want from us? We identify ourselves as the addressee of this sound. We search for meaning in the encountered object. What kind of meaning and knowing can be produced, on the basis of listening? The ambivalent, mysterious quality of unlocalisable sound leads us somewhere unknown.

«From the beginning», says Steven Connor, «hearing is a diffusely kinetic sense, producing states of arousal, attentiveness, or questioning anxiety, while seeing is an interpretive sense; where the ear stirs, the eye stills» (Connor, 2000, p. 21). The ontological deficit of hearing, according to Connor (2000), is a consequence of both the under-development of human hearing in comparison to other species (as to the distance and position of sound stimulus), but also the cultural, rather than the biological, transformation of the sensorium that took place with the transition of society from an oral tradition to a society based on the written word.

Connor (2000) goes on to argue, referring to art practices and contemporary technological ambitions, that hearing, having had a subservient position to the mighty visual, still has a chance of claiming a domain of its own. He says: «... it is also possible for the ear to borrow and internalise some of the substantiating powers of the eye, and to mould from them a kind of sonorous depth, a space sustained by and enacted through the experience of sound and hearing alone» (ibid.).

If Sarokin's work invites us to reclaim the potency of hearing, we should consider what is at stake in this invitation. The function of the eye «that stills», according to Connor, is echoed by Salomé Voegelin, herself a sound artist and theoretician of sound art. Voegelin says that suspending the rigid connection of the seen/heard undermines the very ideology of visibility: «The ideology of pragmatic visibility is the desire for the whole: to achieve the convenience of comprehension and knowledge through distance and stability of the object. Such a visibility provides us with maps, traces, borders and certainties, whose consequence are communication and a sense of objectivity» (Voegelin, 2010, p. 4). «The traces, borders, and certainties» that hearing skips implies a departure from pre-existing knowledge and the established position of the subject with a set of formed opinions and values. Voegelin (2010) proposes that listening is a generative practice that directs the subject to its production anew.

## Sonic Subject

In her book «Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art», Voegelin suggests that because the sound object does not precede our listening, we co-produce ourselves and the object at the same time. To listen, for the author, is to be in doubt about the listened and to produce the heard, that is – not to receive the «meaning» contained in the message but instead to create a moment of coincidence with the sound object: «The sounds are not about the listened to but are what I hear in the contours of silence» (ibid., p. 97). Silence takes on a particularly spatial characteristic – it is a space, with its contours, and

inside the space of silence all sound dwells. Silence, being a condition, is also a mirror, a reflection: «[...] silence is a mirror that shows this formless subject to himself» (ibid., p.93).

While listening to «Postfilmia», we don't just invent what the work represents, what films or events it refers to, we also invent ourselves. The reciprocal relation with the object is grounded in the ability of the perceiving body to become active and receptive together with the thing that is being perceived. Such ideas of the body-object relation originate from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's «Phenomenology of Perception» (2002). Merleau-Ponty proposes the idea that the physical, sensual involvement with the object in its immediacy renders both the object of perception and the perceiving object movable. As Voegelin (2010), following Merleau-Ponty, suggests, the particular capability of sound is to set things on the move: «Sound renders the object dynamic. It makes it “tremble with life” and gives it a sense of process rather than a mute stability».<sup>7</sup> The sonic subject belongs to this temporal flow, in which sonic life-worlds emerge on the uneven boundaries between consciousness and an object. According to Voegelin, in the middle of this co-production, propelled forward by silence as a necessary condition, is an «I» in doubt of its position, imbued with an agency of perception in the world. This «I» is capable of «fleeting understanding» – a temporary understanding with a profoundly social character, because it allows the *materiality of sounds* to produce speech and a participation that shatters established habits of perception, but instead extracts symbolic tendencies from the sounds heard: «Silence is the suspension of language and the condition of its production urged on by noise. This language does not work on the habitual, but utters out of shock and sensorial isolation the words afresh by stepping tentatively over the wobbly bridge between the phenomenological experience and its semiotic articulation. It emerges from anticipation out of silence and draws on the symbolic tendency to come to achieve the tendency of speech that marks us as social beings» (ibid., p.108).

Voegelin distinguishes phenomenological experience and its semiotic articulation, which is the translation of felt experience into meaningful (grammatical, lexical) comprehension. Somewhere between the two – on a «wobbly bridge» – the symbolic aspect of hearing erupts and shatters the habitual subject. It is propelled forward by the agency of consciousness and builds on the tendency of materials to symbolise. The response to such an eruption is speech, as a generation of form from formless experience.

<sup>7</sup> Voegelin 2010, p.11. Philosophically, Voegelin describes the constitution of object and subject in sonic subjectivity as follows: «It is neither the thing that dominates the being nor the being that dominates the thing. They are reciprocal and equivalent, but in their momentary meeting they are also distinct. [...] The subject in sound is an empirical not a transcendental subject and so is its object. It is the lived and concrete experience that constitutes the world as a sonic life-world and the subject reciprocally generated within it» (ibid, p.15).

Indeed, the engagement with «Postfilmia» demands that something be said, vocalised. The work overwhelms with its multiplicity of tones and micro-sounds, as it reengineers the proximity of some(one) breathing and producing bodily sounds. It is thus, if we agree with Voegelin, the listener's body that co-inhabits the space with some other body. This dwelling in a space of sound shared with *someone* (or *something*) brings about the «invention» of the subject anew. The speechless voices (laughs, gasps, singing), as utilised by the artist, are key to producing the space of the encounter. Steven Connor (2000, p. 6) proposes, that: «In moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and the environments in which they have their being. The voice goes out into space, but also always, in its calling for a hearing, or in the necessity of being heard, opens a space for itself to go out into, resound in, and return from».

The presence that we hear in «Postfilmia» vibrates with this description of the very function of voice: it marks the outgoing and the incoming of voice. The space marked out by the voice exhibits a similarity to Voegelin's conception of the space of silence. It delineates a co-operation of bodies in space, a social situation, an intersubjective event. Connor suggests, also building on Merleau-Ponty, that voice is not at all an attribute, but rather is an event. The spoken word is a gesture, the meaning of which – a world (ibid., p. 4). The co-implication of the *inside* and the *outside* that the voice in its very production has as its basis sheds light on the ideas of sociality that hearing implies. The voice has to be directed at something, to be heard by others, but importantly, it also only appears as simultaneously heard by oneself. It thus announces the division of oneself into an imaginary «in here» and «out there». While continually producing ourselves as vocal agents we «stage in our voice the very distinction between speaking and hearing which provides the setting in which the voice can resound» (ibid., p. 6). In voicing, even before any word is uttered, a space of social relation is already implied.

### In Between Words/Split Subject

*Only humans can laugh, we seem to think, because only humans have the capacity of being ambushed by the animal they dream they no longer are.*

Steven Connor<sup>8</sup>

*Who, then, is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my ascent to my own identity it is still he who agitates me?*

Jacques Lacan<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Connor, S. (2014) *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations*. London: Reaktion Books, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Lacan J. (1997) *Ecrits: A selection*. London: Routledge, p.172.

In his account of the history of the treatment of voice in philosophy and science, Mladen Dolar points to another side to the operation of voices, one that stems from the psychoanalytic observation that at the very depth of our inner worlds, we might be directed by voices that we ourselves have no control over. The directions issued by these voices appear to come from the outside: they function as the internalised voices of someone else and cannot be expelled by will. Dolar complicates the notion of presence through voice and the production of subjectivity that it engenders: «The voice may well be the key to the presence of the present and to an unalloyed interiority, but it conceals in its bosom *that inaudible object voice which disrupts both*» (Dolar, 2006, p. 40, emphasis added).

Voice in psychoanalysis has a peculiar status of *object voice*, a meaningless object that is left hanging in the air after the meaning of what was said becomes settled.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, the functioning of voice as immediate and intimate and as such as a guarantee of presence is questioned, seeing that it appears to lose such a role once the meaning that it carries has been deciphered. But voice also functions in excess of meaning, with certain powers that go beyond the speech that it carries, or the intention of the speaker, and becomes inexplicably potent when, and precisely if, it is an absent, silent voice (*ibid.*).

Psychoanalytic accounts of the voice take a specific interest in the signifiers (sound-images of language) that the voice carries, rather than in an originary presence. This is for the specific reason that language in Lacanian theory precedes and makes possible a human subject. To return our attention to «Postfilmia», *Piece 3* has at its focus something which is rather at the margins of speech as language and speech as an a-signifying element. The moments of hesitation, pause, laughter, hiccup and grunt are there in speech, they belong to a distinctly human world of language, but are only able to signify in the unfolding chains of signifiers in vicinity with other signifiers. Yet, these moments are of utmost importance because they contain that which it is impossible to symbolise. In the words of the Lacanian theorist Bruce Fink, the spaces in between words are those that are most attended to: «The child latches onto what is indecipherable in what its parent says. It is interested in that certain something which lies in the interval between parents' words. [...] They [children] are concerned to secure (themselves) a place, to try to be the object of their parents' desire – to occupy between-the-lines «space» where desire shows its face, words being used in the attempt to express desire, and yet ever failing to do so adequately» (Fink, 1995, p. 54).

The unsayable lodges in the gaps between the words, because desire is not known to the subject herself. Desire – «a relation of being to

<sup>10</sup> As Slavoj Žižek puts it in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (p. 104, original emphasis): «Voice in a strictly Lacanian sense [is] a meaningless object, [...] an objectal remnant, leftover, of the signifying operation, of the capitonage [point of anchoring]: the voice is what is left over after we subtract from the signifier the retroactive operation of «quilting» which produces meaning».



lack»<sup>11</sup> – whispers in a low voice, and comes out as an uncertain, unheard, indeterminate voice, as a hole in the flow of meaning. The a-signifying moments of language add to the ambiguity of speech, which in itself entails multiple levels of signification. («She says this and this, but what exactly is she trying to say?») As Lacan (1988, p. 244) puts it, language «founds us in the Other and is there to drastically prevent us from understanding him». In acceding to language the subject is caught up in what Lacan calls the *symbolic order* – the interrelation of meanings that precede and outlive the subject. *The symbolic order*, in order words, is made up of the historically and socially constructed norms of everyday life, an external «law» that is imposed on the human infant with the discourse of the society she is born into. Obtaining language is in itself a condition of the advent of the subject, because only in exchanging her undifferentiated unity with the mother for a place in the symbolic order (the place of an «I») is an infant able to express her needs. With language, another construction comes into existence – an image of the «I», or the ego (the English rendering of Sigmund Freud's «Ich»). The ego is an ideal image of the self. It is a fictional construction, a false sense of the self that is filled by beliefs about how one wants to be, built up as an image that one finds satisfactory. The ego is fuelled by imaginary identifications, such that «I am like this and like that», and always proceeds through projections of one's image onto Others and is found reflected in certain ideas. Lacan would call this register *the imaginary*. Speech as conscious thinking is nothing more than a post-factum rationalisation, a pure ego talk, a comfortable cocoon that allows the ego to maintain the image of the self. «The subject doesn't know what he is saying, and for the best of reasons, because he doesn't know what he is. But he sees himself. He sees himself from the other side, in an imperfect manner, [...] as a consequence of the fundamentally incomplete nature of the specular Urbild [German: archetype, prototype]» (ibid., p. 244).

An anticipatory identification with an idealised image of the stable self is at once necessary to achieve a sense of the self, and at the same time it is a moment of exclusion and division, whereby the elements deemed inappropriate are rejected and hidden.<sup>12</sup> If conscious thinking takes place in the realm of constructing and fulfilling this idealised ego image, the rejected and hidden parts sink under into the parallel world of the unconscious.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Lacan gives the following definition in «The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis» from Seminar II, p.223: «Desire is a relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn't the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists. This lack is beyond anything which can represent it».

<sup>12</sup> In his theorisation of the «mirror phase», Lacan refers to a baby who is unable to coordinate her body but who is able to anticipate her future capacity, by perceiving an image of a unified body either in a mirror reflection or in other children. This is the process of an anticipatory identification. Drives and impulses that are there before the imaginary order is established, and before the symbolic law of the prohibitions and traditions is put in place, are consequently narrativised, tamed, taken control of, which is a requisite for the infant to become a subject of and in language.

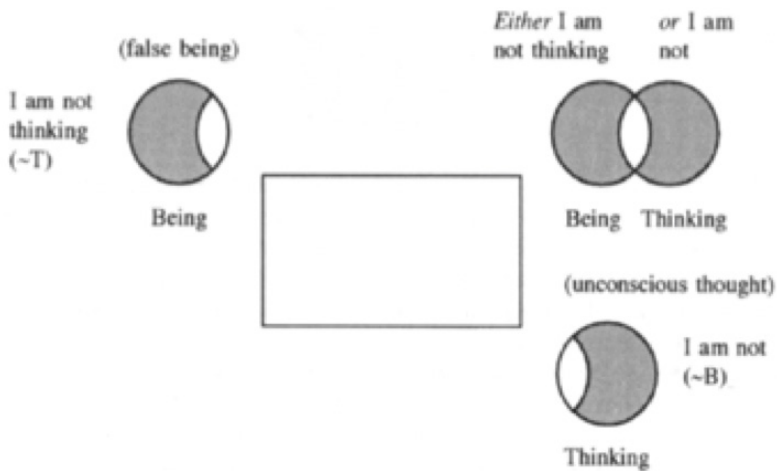


Diagram 1. Lacan's schema of the subject, Seminars XIV and XIV, as quoted in Fink, p.44.

According to Lacan, thinking takes place unconsciously through automatic connections in the signifying chain hidden from consciousness.<sup>13</sup> The unconscious is in itself filled with the other's discourse, the other's thoughts and desires, or the remains thereof, structured grammatically through phonemes and words. According to Fink (1995), the Lacanian subject is split between the ego (upper left corner in *Diagram 1* above) and the unconscious (lower right corner), between an unescapable false sense of self and the automatic functioning of language (the signifying chain) in the unconscious. Inversely to the Cartesian formula in which the foundation of being stems from the moment of coincidence between being and thinking – when one is able to say «I am thinking» he is aware of his being – Lacan describes how one is only ever able to choose between not being and not thinking (The top right corner of the diagram shows how the coincidence of being/thinking is inverted and excludes the very moment of overlap). Descartes' subject is put on its head because, as is already apparent, the «I» of the «I think» is the ego, i.e. a false sense of self that presumes mastery over himself, his thoughts, and his grasp of external reality. In Fink's formulation, the Lacanian subject is nothing but this very split, as if it were a surface that has two sides in any localised point, a visible part and an invisible hidden part, are made of the same (linguistic) material, and can flip around. As Fink (1995, p.41) suggests: «temporarily speaking, the subject appears only as a pulsation, an occasional impulse or interruption that immediately dies away or is extinguished», as a breach in discourse, a set of jumbled, confused actions and words. «But while it is just as evanescent or short-lived a subject as was that of the interruptions known as slips of the

<sup>13</sup> Structuralism offers an understanding of language as a formal system of differential elements. Each linguistic sign consists of a signifier and a signified that are separate from referents in the real world.

tongue and bungled actions, this specifically Lacanian subject is not so much an interruption as the assumption thereof, [...] *that is, an acceptance of responsibility for that which interrupts, a taking it upon oneself*» (Fink, 1995, p. 47, emphasis added).

### The Split Subject of «Postfilmia»

In its attention to the unsaid, to the possible but absent word, a word on the brink of arrival, *Piece 3* brings the complexities of subject formation into view. Staying with the promising proposition made by Voegelin that sound artwork necessitates the production of the subject anew, we need to note that this empirical and situated subject that Voegelin presupposes is undermined by the primordial structuring of the subject through language. According to James Phillips (1996, p. 88), Lacanian theory questions the very idea of a unity of experience, and therefore of uninterrupted bodily presence, that underpins phenomenological analysis. The mirroring of the perceptual consciousness in the object (sound work) that Voegelin favours in fact takes place under conditions of subject suppression because the ego, a fictional construction of an «I», comes to the fore. From a Lacanian perspective, seeing oneself in the mirror of the sound work is only seeing the imperfect mirror, a lure. It is never a reflection of a true self, because, strictly speaking, there is no self to reflect, and there is no effect of truth in the reflection. The reflection in the mirror of sound is an imaginary identification, an immovable and stagnant position of the subject. As with the very refusal of the image and the mechanisms of identification of the cinema, Sarokin's work attends to the fragmentation of the subject, as much as to the fragmentation of his chosen medium (filmic sound).

At another level, Voegelin's phenomenological analysis rests on the moments of the *understanding* of experience (albeit a temporary understanding at the time of the coincidence with the sound object), which somewhat simplifies the complexity of the human position divided between two forms of otherness – that of the imaginary ego construction for the Other and the Other's discourse as it operates in the unconscious. Understanding in the Lacanian schema rests on the assimilation of new signs into an existing signifying chain, i.e. *to understand* is to locate or embed a configuration within another configuration, which yields no change in the structure. Understanding does not create a new order: it is rather an imaginary acceptance. A fundamental change in the symbolic structure would require the creation of a metaphor, a new order at the level of language. Why would a listener be required to become a silent witness to things that are not meant to be understood? This, potentially, is the question that might arise in a listener who gives weight to this sound discourse by being its witness. It could be said that the importance of the work is in its capacity to agitate and at the same time to be misunderstood, as this is the route to elucidate the problematics of intersubjective encounter and to pose a question to the expectation of comprehensibility in an artwork.

As previously touched upon, «Postfilmia» works with the ambiguity of the voice, at the same time both a particular everyday object and an uncanny phenomenon that functions in excess of meaning. Voice by its very functioning creates a space within an imaginary self divided between the speaker and the hearer, but voice directed at us also offers a place in the symbolic structure and this implies a question. Having been provided this place, a listener struggles to name sources of sound, to cohere himself, to recognise himself as the one to whom sound is directed. But in the artwork we experience sounds as objects, and voice as an object in a Lacanian sense, and this makes us uncertain, confused, even uneasy. Purported referents but with no resolution as to the origins of noise, shouts, bangs, breathing, etc. generate affective responses symptomatic of incursions into the Lacanian *real*, that is into the pre-symbolic. This is also what is promising in Voegelin's position. As she puts it, in tune with Lacanian thinking, the subject appears (to be talking to us) «unknown to himself».<sup>14</sup> This, however, is not because he hears himself better in the reflective surface of silence, but because of the semiotic *materiality of sound*. If we consider Voegelin's proposition about the tendency of materials to symbolise – her use of the term *semiotic* is understood here in terms of the materiality of sound and language, its tonal and rhythmic qualities – this ought to be located prior to Lacan's *imaginary*, at the register of the *real*, of unstructured and messy reality before it is organised. This attention to a pre-symbolic space of aural insistence helps elucidate the affective response instigated by «Postfilmia».

Through immersion via headphones into a world of micro-sounds, of the sorts we would not normally perceive, and in the pressing insistence of this aural plenitude, we are made to remember our originary dwelling in sound. It is known that the first sense that an unborn infant develops is the auditory one, hearing the gentle throbbing of the mother's heart and the liquid that flows through her vessels. After birth, an infant continues to be encompassed by its parents' voices, in the gentle murmurs of their endearment and love. Such a sonorous plenitude comes to haunt an individual throughout her life, and reappears in the voice of others, of sounds in the environment and in musical experience (LaBelle, 2006, p.130). According to LaBelle (ibid.), French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu coined the term *sonorous envelope* to denote this uncontaminated relation to presence and completeness that can never be found again.

«Postfilmia» is set up to interrogate the relationship between listening and response, an enunciation («It's *Stalker!*») which would first and foremost dissipate the tension, and focus on remembering the film,

<sup>14</sup> Which is similar to what could be the key aim of the psychoanalytic experience, that is «to introduce him [the subject] into the language of his desire, that is to say, into the primary language in which, beyond what he tells us of himself, he is already talking to us unknown to himself, and, in the first place, in the symbols of the symptom» Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge, 2001., p. 81

albeit in recomposed form. But a discord is possible if recognition fails, is delayed or refused. «There is no response except *my* desire» says Lacan (1997, p. 86), so the listener has to endure the stupidity of engagement with the artwork, endure its confused unresolvable moments, to stare into a void – «a void which is not simply a lack, an empty space, it is a void in which voice comes to resonate» (Dolar, 2006, p. 40).

## Of Memory

The work is amenable to a psychoanalytic reading not only because «Postfilmia» works with fragmentation as opposed to unity, and is itself a result of a selective mechanism by which some instances persist and others disappear, like a metaphor of the unconscious. The work also deals with the technological dimension, such as that of the recording and production of sound in the film, the recording of the soundtrack of the film by the artist, and the reproduction of sound in multiple contexts. The technology here facilitates the detachment of sound from its source, the voice from the meaningfulness of its utterance (as the context is always in flux), and the voice itself from its phonic substance, from its sound, because it captures the pause, the absence of sound as much as the sound itself.

Technological transformation and its social consequences has been the focus of attention in other of Sarokin's works, for example in his solo exhibition in 2017 «The Past is Still Not Over, the Future has Already Not Come», where outdated computer monitors were a major part of the installation («Probably Absent User»). One aspect of «Postfilmia» that is potent in this respect unfolds around the question of memory, its representation, and its externalisation through technology.

The audio works seem to follow a logic of memory: particular things from the original film resonate, get retained, while some other things are lost and some are never registered in the first place. Sarokin is making a registration, an inscription of the memory, so that it is retained, with the possibility of being reproduced at will, innumerable times. From a Lacanian perspective, the logic of memory is tied up with the history of the subject, of its position in the *symbolic* order and its *imaginary* identifications. A future event gives meaning to the past, and an articulation in itself serves as an integration of an event into the history of the subject, finding resonance in the world of shadows lurking in the unconscious.

Turning to «Postfilmia. Piece 1. Germany, 1975, 103 Mins» brings forth an insight into the questions the artist poses to the substance of memory. Through this soundscape, not accidentally the first in the series of pieces, the listeners are attuned to hear the rest of the pieces in a particular mode. In *Piece 1* we hear a cacophony of voices coming from different moments of the film and spoken by different actors, both in the original German and with over-layered dubbing into Russian, floating like a chorus, with a meaning that can be grasped seemingly accidentally, and yet powerfully. The signifiers that catch us, strike us:

*Мальчик не должен бояться, говорили мне родители. [...] [...] [...] [...]... Наконец, Антон решил сказать матери, что он её любит. [...] [...]... Сначала [...] прочти свое стихотворение. Ласково. [...] [...]»<sup>15</sup>*

These words, that float about in a cacophony of many others, with their momentary significations, are carried by a voice that will sound uncannily familiar to a listener if she happens to belong to the same generation as the artist. We may or may not happen to recognise that this is Wim Wenders' «Falsche Bewegung» («The Wrong Move») from 1975, a film that was first widely distributed on VHS tapes in Belarus (and perhaps other former Soviet countries) around the early 2000s. The voice that dubs the male characters in «Falsche Bewegung» into Russian would be recognisable and familiar to the generation that came of age in the early 2000s, because the same voice dubbed dozens of other arthouse films. The generation that was the first to have a relatively open access to titles of the cinematic avant-garde had a particularly sensitive, touching relationship with these films, partially as they were symbolic of the culture of the West, but also because of the rarity, limited access, and exclusive networks through which these films were disseminated. The actor's voice that featured in so many of the dubbed films is a definitive sound mark which brings about an important, visceral memory of the past. The past that is brought into the present moment, however, is not nostalgia as such, but an evocation of a relationship to the past that has mutated, that has undergone changes in the conditions of the present. The present, in part, is marked by a disillusionment with the idea of progressive change and an identification as the Other of the so-called West, but also by uncertainties with respect to increasing access to consumer goods. Through the persistence of the tone of the voice, Sarokin pins the collective and the historic – the affective constitution of the event of the film and the cultural conditions of the event of the film: material scarcity, fascination with the European and, importantly, our collective romantic enchantment with the promises that the future seemed to hold. Many years on, by revealing through this layering the conditions in which the film was initially heard, the artist is staring into the past to see what could have been made of it. It is a work of undoing the past, articulating the impossibility of its return in an unchanged form, which is called forth from the future.

The forceful, uncontrollable pulsations that Sarokin captures and seeks to make recognisable in audio form can almost literally be read as the «assumption of responsibility of that which interrupts», as the Lacanian dictum has it. Responsibility is on the record. Through recording and recomposition, the materials are reconfigured to represent the unknowable that Sarokin explores in the film (or was it really a film? And if it was, was it the one that we thought it was?).

<sup>15</sup> «A boy should never be afraid» – my parents told me.... [...] [...] [...] [...] «Finally, Anton resolved to tell his mother that he loves her» [...] «First, read your poem» [...] «Gently».

## References

- Chion, M. (2009) *Guide to Sound Objects*, translated by Dack, J., and North, C. [online] IReMus. Available from: <http://www.iremuscncrs.fr/en/node/16382>. [Accessed 8 May 2018].
- Chion, M. (2014) *Audio-vision: Sound on Screen*. New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 318 p.
- Chion, M. (1999) *The Voice in Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 200 p.
- Connor, S. (2000) *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 449 p.
- Connor, S. (2014) *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations*. London: Reaktion Books, 241 p.
- Dolar, M. (2006) *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT, 225 p.
- Heidegger, M. (2010) *Being and Time*. New York: SUNY Press, 515 p.
- Kane, B. (2014) *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 318 p.
- Lacan, J. (1997) *Écrits: A Selection*. London: Routledge, 338 p.
- Lacan, J. (1992) *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*. Edited by Miller, J.-A. T, D. London: Routledge, 432 p.
- Lacan, J. (1988) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Bk. 2, The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*. New York; London: Norton, 360 p.
- LaBelle, B. (2006) *Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 344 p.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002) *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London: Routledge Classics, 584 p.
- pArtizan (2015) Issue 28. Minsk: Galiyafi, 87 p.
- Phillips, J. (1996) Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology. In: Pettigrew, D., Raffoul F., ed. *Disseminating Lacan*. Albany: State University of New York, pp. 69-106.
- Shepherdson, C. (2008). *Lacan and the Limits of Language*. Ashland, Ohio; London: Fordham University Press; Eurospan distributor, 404 p.
- Schwarz, D. (2014) *An Introduction to Electronic Art through the Teaching of Jacques Lacan: Strangest Thing*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 229 p.
- Silverman, K. (1988) *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 274 p.
- Voegelin, S. (2010) *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art*. New York: Continuum, 251 p.
- Fink, B. (1995) *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton, N.J.; Chichester: Princeton University Press, 339 p.
- Žižek, S. (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 262 p.
- Li, X. (2011) Whispering: the murmur of power in a lo-fi world. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(1), pp. 19-34.