

# Four steps towards the words of silence in cinema

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#### ABSTRACT

On exploring silence, we discover that we are being summoned to relate it, univocally, to a lack or absence of speech, sound or writing. This summons concerns a certain worldview that requires thinking about and locating silence within a descriptive statement about lack and absence. If cinematographic theory has considered silence in cinema, this is essentially the narrativity it has pieced together to conceptualize it. This paper intends to take a step forward and revisit previous considerations, packaging silence in a new way. If we accept that everything that people do is set in contexts and that cinematography takes place within “listen-visible” action, we are faced with a disturbing question: is silence heard in cinema? This article shows how cinema has represented silence with its words, the words that silence is commonly deemed to lack. In cinematographic essays, the representation of silence has found its speech through the words that are uttered. The filmmakers’ essayistic procedure has staged the representation of the words about silence and imbued their thoughts and ideas with a listenable body through their voice.

#### RESUMEN

Cuando se indaga sobre el silencio, se descubre que se está emplazado a relacionarlo, de manera unívoca, con una falta o una ausencia de habla, de sonido o de escritura. Dicho emplazamiento concierne a un determinado imaginario que impone pensarlo y alojarlo en una enunciación descriptiva de carencia y de ausencia. Si la teoría cinematográfica ha pensado el silencio en el cine, ha recogido, primordialmente, dicha narratividad para conceptualizarlo. Aquí se determina dar un paso y reconsiderar lo pensado, proporcionando al silencio una envoltura desemejante a la practicada hasta ahora. Si partimos de que todo lo que las personas hacemos se edifica en contextos y de que el cinematográfico transcurre en su acción “escuchavisible”, es entonces cuando una pregunta inquietante se propone: ¿Se escucha el silencio en el cine? Este artículo pone de manifiesto como el cine ha representado el silencio con sus palabras, aquellas que comúnmente se afirma que el silencio carece. Es en el ensayo cinematográfico donde la representación del silencio ha hallado su habla a través de las palabras que transcurren. El proceder ensayístico de los cineastas ha puesto en escena la representación de las palabras que pertenecen al silencio, dando cuerpo escuchable a sus pensamientos, a su idear, mediante su voz.

### Step One: Misgivings

The tangled web of assumptions we inhabit responds to the differences that characterize relationships. In relationships, we exaggerate some things so greatly that, to survive such lofty heights, we necessarily set up adversaries and discredit them to the point of trying to strip them of the context within which they operate.

We know that voice as heard in cinema has been stigmatized. There was skepticism when cinema incorporated the ability to listen to the words spoken by its characters. Filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein, Vsévolod Pudovkin, René Clair, Charles Chaplin, and Erich von Stroheim and theorists like Arnheim and Balázs expressed the first misgivings. The main problem they presented was the spoken word's ability to act as the carrier of meaning instead of imagery. They understood that cinema seemed to be becoming more like theater and that image-cinema could turn into filmed theater; that reality would be played out alongside the words being heard and that creative freedom would be enslaved when dialogue and its synchronization became the main adversaries to montage.

Soon, the distrusted use of sound (and especially of music and noise) began to enjoy some protection. Béla Balázs was one of the first to propose that the use of noise and music was not going to become complementary to image, but rather that it would revitalize the action taking place within imagery (Balázs, 1978). The use of voices, and the act of listening to them, took longer to shed the misgivings, and these misgivings still exist today.

The misgivings surrounding sound made it clear that image reigned supreme. Its sovereignty looked likely to be overthrown, and thus sound came to be regarded as an intruder. In *Four and a Half Film Fallacies* (1992), Rick Altman presented four-and-a-half fallacies about sound's incorporation into film. Sound has been understood as a supplement, an accessory to image, and Altman's approach revolves around the idea of the visual essentiality of cinema and inattention to sound. His main considerations focus on the discriminatory idea that visuals came first, that images are the main carriers of meaning, and that, in film, sound is a reproduction of reality, not its representation.

At the same time, Sarah Kozloff highlights that "The prescriptive advocacy of showing over telling is entangled with several endlessly asserted presuppositions about authors, stories, and receivers (literary or cinematic, nonfiction or fiction)" (2013, p. 40). The intrinsic prevalence of image-cinema's visuality has led to the understanding that showing is more vivid, more subtle and more democratic, and that it allows greater ambiguity than telling (focusing on the use of the voice) as a provocateur of transparency or centrality before listening and of producing an unwanted immediacy. Telling through voice is more autocratic (Kozloff, 2013). An "ideology of the visible" (Altman, 1980, p. 76) clearly urges the primacy of the visual and relegates sound to a mere companion.

When sound gained the chance of a cinematic role, in its fledgling context it became clear that assuming the new assemblage induced fear. We know that rethinking a new way of measuring cinematography presupposes a new way of thinking altogether. This

question is also endless, and we can never close the door on it. The insertion of sound alongside cinematographic image modified the cinematic context, recasting a new creative space.

We know that everything that individuals do takes place in context. Everything we do is contextual(ized). What we undertake must be activated, and must occur in mapped territories, each one configured with its own particularities. The territoriality of the cinema, its context, began its journey with image alone. It then *detrterritorialized* itself for a moment and *reterritorialized* itself again, accompanied by sound. Cinema metamorphosed, changed its nature, and was conquered by a novel way of thinking about cinematography. The remodeling of this new composition can, of course, be hindered, concealed, and interrupted, but also propelled, streamlined and augmented within the new cinematic terrain.

Today we recognize how the voice and the words we hear acquire a new mood and a new aesthetic impulse in documentary cinema, through their axial use in the essay film. In 1958, André Bazin (2000) wrote an article in the *France-Observateur* on Chris Marker's film *Letter from Siberia* (Dauman and Marker, 1958). In the article, he proposed that the director's editing did not follow convention. In other words, it was not constructed on a relationship between one shot and the next (and between one image and another). Instead, its construction was horizontal: a montage from ear to eye. Bazin presented a new relationship between text and image, and compared Marker's film to an essay, stating that the film *Letter from Siberia* was a documented essay, a brand-new way of making cinema. Marker, with his way of operating the cinematic context, shook off the bad press associated with voice and showcased its reflective, meditative ability, presenting it as an open discussion of ideas along with the images.

To quote Michel Chion, the voice's ability and power as developed in the essay film can be questioned by assigning cinema its "vococentric" tendency; by favoring the human voice as a carrier of meaning, and its irremediable "guarantee of an effortless intelligibility of the spoken words" (Chion, 1993, p. 17). In other words, its "verbocentrism". Indeed, listening to voices in the cinema is unnerving. However, thanks to directors and their ability to ennoble the audible voice alongside image, a new constructive geography of conceiving a cinematic idea has been born through technology. To think of hierarchizing the new components is to avoid immersion in the concomitant action of sound and image, the one linked to the other.

### **Step Two: The Search for Territory**

In the new context, cinema's ability to reinvent itself was immense. The territory increased its faculties to such an extent that, as Altman affirms, "Far from being emarginalized by the visible, (...) sound now appears to be a far more clever Jacques than he at first seemed, for it is now apparent that sound uses the visible to further its own cause" (1980, pp. 75-76). Listening to noises, music and words implied the incorporation of a new technique that, in in-

teraction with image, could even improve equanimity, using sound's characteristics to seemingly benefit image. The asymmetric relationship unraveled, and a recognized equity allowed a mutually beneficial nascent relationship .

If we do not identify the context, nothing can be understood. If we want to notice what happens in the process of creating contexts, of any kind, we will do well to recognize that these are an inescapable human invention. In fact, indwelling humanness is a representational invention, a way of organizing living based on what is consubstantially imaginatory. Ortega y Gasset (2004-2010, p. 816) calls it being "children of fantasy". We are imagination and we activate it to live life and *ipso facto* we "images". In other words, we "metaphorize", creating contexts, "categories of the mind" (Bateson, 2006, p. 120) where we establish a system of relationships.

Living as human beings is invented by activating our intrinsic ability to use our imaginations by "metaphorizing", and in doing so we create contexts of action through relating. The relationships that are established within the contexts are akin to chores, tasks relating to becoming, to imagining, in a persistent way. Another issue is the type of contexts we invent and with which relationships.

The new construct of the cinematic context fostered the directors' ingenuity to apprehend it and develop an idea into film within it. Here we find a parental ceremony that was created within the cinematic territory, and the previously thought gap between image and sound ran its course. Now:

Neither track accompanies the other, neither track is redundant; the two are locked in a dialectic where each is alternately master and slave to the other; this arrangement so suits both tracks that they studiously perpetuate the myth of cinema's unity—and thus that of the spectator—as if (and they are right) their very lives depended on it (Altman, 1980, p. 79).

In cinema, space is the enclave where an imagined metaphor will be formed, and what is persistent is its visibility (for example, of a black screen or a general field shot) and its "listenability" (such as the noise of a horn or characters chattering vociferously). We identify how the *profilmic* space (known as *real*) is transformed into *filmic* space (known as *dramatized*) by using technological devices to turn an idea into film. Cinema is thought to be mediated through technology, and the emerging images and sounds will be imagined territories that will spark off ideas. In that intentional transmutation of *real* space, it will be transformed into *represented* space, and it will shape scenes and sequences, imagined spaces that will be built using vectors (planes)—action cuts—which will representationally construct time (duration, the change that occurs between them). Space is where cinematographic territory is established, and where movement, time, dramaturgy, silence, and more will unfold in their listenable and visible action. Cinema is essentially "listen-visible".

Cinema offers what Deleuze formulates as an image-thought, developing alongside the ideas that image-cinema proposes on its journey: “Cinema has always tried to construct an image of thought, of the mechanisms of thought. And that is not why it is abstract, but quite the opposite” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 56). And not only will images make the world (Goodman, 1990), sounds will also shape it. The visuality and listenability of cinema is its primordial and initiatory world.

If silence is part of cinema’s *listen-visible* nature, can it be made up of sound? And, in among the cinematic sounds (words, noises, and music), will words be able to configure images in silence? These questions come face to face with the concept of silence we are exploring, defined as a lack, an absence, or a want of words and sounds by most dictionaries. This description has been caused by a confrontation, advocating that silence’s existence is shaped by an unspeakable flaw. The word police may not agree with this interpretation, but they invite us to establish and maintain a sovereign relationship between word and silence, and in a disciplined way we have placed word on a podium and silence, with its eternal lack, at its feet. This is how we have legitimized it and turned it into law. Indeed, silence is one of the most neglected words. Its semiotic category is based on a negativity, an indefiniteness, a prohibition, when defining it by opposition, as Bachelard affirms: “In all cases, silence is presented and defined as something opposite to an activity and therefore, it is constructed as the object of a poetics of No” (Bachelard cited in Boves, 1992, p. 110). The problem with such a definition, or attribution, is that it comes from an ideation that responds to binary ways of thinking, typical of Western thought. This generates irreconcilable limits: “Binary logic and biunivocal relationships continue to dominate psychoanalysis, linguistics and structuralism, and even computer science” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1997, p. 11). The same happens in cinema.

We know that binary logic is based on a cosmogonic narrative that has shaped our lives and that:

When you are silent, you are what God was before nature and creation, and that is the matter he used to shape them. And then you see and hear what He saw and heard in you before your own wanting, seeing, and hearing had begun (Jacobus Boehme in Le Breton, 1997, p. 136).

Thus, silence is God's habitat and, similarly, silence was the matter from which He created the world as we know it. In this monotheism, silence and God live bound together —attached and without possible disunity. If we also pay attention to the fact that we are led to relate silence to the words nothing (“absolute lack of all being”) and emptiness (“lack of physical or mental content”), the outlook is devastating: silence is carefully confiscated and entirely absorbed by a celestial ruler.

In addition, among those who share this belief, it is common to establish contiguity between death and silence. A deceased body is said “to be in silence,” in such a way that an action, that of inhabiting the silence, is made to cohabit in a face, a torso and some already-



dead limbs. An experiential world is bestowed upon a human being who no longer imagines, does not represent and cannot activate the ability to symbolize. It is a cadaverous body embedded with a belief that does not belong to it. The person is dead, cannot live and cannot represent silence.

Individuals live in a continuous ideation, but there are ways of conceiving imagining, and our body “is that in which thought immerses itself or must immerse itself in order to achieve the unthinkable, that is, life” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2010, p. 251). It is understood that reality is an invention that humans formulate to organize their existence, and it cannot aspire to be a presentation of the reality called “the world”; rather, it is a way of dealing with the world, a representation.

We have been urged to imagine that the mind and the body are two distinct entities. We have very quickly reconsidered this way of thinking and deemed it to be a calamitous idea, though it was successful and arose from dualistic logic. This way of dealing with the world disconnects the ideas that are imagined within the minds of the bodies that actually put them into practice. In other words, it is akin to separating life from the act of living. We are the founders of our existence, but how and what we invent in order to exist is a matter of choice, and we know there are better and worse paths to take.

At this point, it is necessary to get used to “thinking about being directly, without taking a detour, without first addressing the ghost of nothing that stands between him and us” (Bergson, 2012, p. 38). We, as individuals, are the ones who captained our invention through the body of those who live and act as human beings. In such a way, silence aims to present itself as what it is: an idea invented by humans that belongs to their actions, to the world of the living. We know that the three words (nothing, emptiness, and silence) have been tainted, that we have processed them in an adjacent way, and the action and effects that individuals have rolled into these words are based on the same modal unraveling. We have snatched them from their doing.

The problem is accentuated when we accept the possibility that, in the cinematographic image, silence does not develop into a lack of image or sound; rather, when it is presented in its triggering *listen-visible* context, it is possible to think that silence in cinema is heard and made visible. Here we intend to explore the sound that makes up silence in the visible image and, to enter into its *listenability*, it will be necessary to equip it.

### **Step Three: The Invention of Silence**

In reality, when it comes to talking about silence, many foundations must be removed in order to be able to confront it and its action directly. Before tackling silence in the cinematic context, we must distinguish how, for example, cultural studies have produced works on silence and the different forms of cultural development (Nwoye, 1985; Saunders, 1985; Lehtonen and Sajavaara, 1985; Samarin, 1962). All of them present different ways of using and making sense of silence. When it comes to providing content, there

are dissimilar strategies created by different social organizations, and each one generates proposals on how to give meaningful action and use silence in different areas and moments of life.

In the field of communication, an axiom presented by the Palo Alto College in the sixties affirmed that “there is no way not to communicate” (Winkin, 1990, p. 93). This principle understands that the social actor emits messages continuously, thus choosing silence as a way of exchange will never be devoid or absent of significance. In order to configure silence, it must not be activated and expressed as “negativity—the non-sign, which is of course both verbal and extraverbal— but said negativity has, in its turn, a semiotic category” (Castilla del Pino, 1992, p. 80). Therefore, it is truly active and effable ideation in silence. In silence, the words will not be heard by the interlocutor but they will be interpretable.

In *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1994), Dan Sperber (an anthropologist, linguist and researcher in cognitive sciences) and Deirdre Wilson (who is also a linguist and researcher in cognitive sciences) state that communication implies that the information being transmitted is relevant and that the context is an enclave where the assumptions that are being formed modify and renew the information: “Interpreting a statement (...) implies a decisive way of extracting the consequences that add that assumption to a set of assumptions that, in turn, have already been processed” (1994, p. 151). The researchers suggest that relevance is just as important and necessary for the understanding of statements used in communication as the contextual effects that are processed when putting them into practice.

For optimal communication, “the cooperative principle” (Grice, 2005, p. 516) is undoubtedly essential. But when the voluntary, intentional decision is to avoid something by communicating in silence, communication with the other will be triggered, and this “is no longer not saying”. It is being silent, silencing what is not wanting to be said, or that should not or cannot be said (...) With silence, I communicate that I do not want to communicate, or that I must not or cannot communicate” (Castilla del Pino, 1992, p. 80).

A neighborhood in Caracas was baptized as El Silencio (The Silence). The name dates from 1658 and came about due to an epidemic that affected the entire city, but its effect on that neighborhood was particularly brutal. This baptism expressed a desire to reclaim the lives before those deaths, since it is obvious that silence only pertains to the world of the living. After that baptism, the neighborhood was incidentally occupied by poor and marginalized individuals. The State neglected to afford any dignity to the lives of those new settlers, and that was when the name El Silencio became the perfect fit. The new inhabitants were poor, and they were forced to hide and marginalize their insolvency and prostitution to silence their activities. All that reality was compelled to live silently within the walls of El Silencio without dispersing. So the verb derived from silence, to silence, will in this case form



part of what one does not want to see or hear. It was decided that the area should be “modernized” in 1942 and, within two years, it was totally demolished.

This stilling, silencing, shutting up—and the consequence of causing a silencing, a quietening—is produced by taxation on bodies.

It would be necessary to try to determine the different ways of keeping silent, how those who can and cannot speak are distributed, what type of speech is authorized or what form of discretion is required for both. There is not one silence but several silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and cut across the discourses (Foucault, 1978, p. 19).

Through norms and laws, with legal status, sometimes silences are used for what individuals should or should not silence, quieten and shut up. Through their actions, none of silence’s domains are devoid, empty, or lacking. They are all full of inferable meaning .

In the 18th century, in his book *The Art of Silence* (2011), the Abbé Joseph Antoine Toussaint Dinouart described ten different types of silence: prudent silence, artificial silence, complacent silence, mocking silence, intelligent silence, stupid silence, approving silence, contemptuous silence, humorous silence, and political silence. All of them correspond to different ways of using silence and to attitudes that can accompany them. There can be numerous strategies by which one is silenced, and also numerous silencing attitudes agreed upon and approved within each culture.

All of these are deeds done in silence, actions executed in specific silences with a performative function within themselves. The philosopher John L. Austin (1982) presented this function, stating that words have the power to influence the world by giving rise to actions. When one person exclaims to another, “It’s very cold in here !”, one possibility is that they may be communicating that the air conditioning is too low. The act of speaking leads to the action of increasing the air temperature or opening the window so that the heat from the street enters the room. It is what is done by speaking. By emitting a statement, the speaker is performing actions, effects, on the listener such as giving an order, offering a suggestion or advice, and so forth. These actions transform the relationships between the interlocutors and trigger behavior that entails meaningful action .

Those things that are spoken and learned involve “*performing*” reality by creating it, obeying an intention and producing effects. Similarly, silences have the power to affect the world, prompting actions in what are here described as silent acts, deeds carried out in silence, which involve *performing* reality through their implementation.

An individual who is alone engages in intrapersonal communication that generates a discourse between the same sender and receiver. This is made up of remnants or totalities of experiences constructed in thought. That speech will not be audible or visible to the observer, and, indeed, should the observer be asked to describe what the other individual is doing, they would say: “That person is silent”. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes:

What deceives us here, what makes us believe in a thought that would exist for itself prior to expression, are the already constructed and already expressed thoughts that we can silently invoke, and by means of which we give ourselves the illusion of inner life. But, in reality, this supposed silence is a murmur of speech, this inner sight is an inner language (Merleau-Ponty, 1975, p. 200).

We identify language as a preferential symbolic code that structures ideas into thought. In solo communication, the series of words do not occur in the same way as when we dialogue with others or when we write. In silence, the words will flow, sometimes set free from syntactic rules, at others forming completely meaningful sentences .

People talk of being silent and we practice being silent, for example, when we look at the stars, lie on the sofa inside our homes, and so on. In all environments where we put it into action on our own, its stay will be built on our thoughts, our thinking, which is found in our imaginary minds, creating and experiencing it as brimming over not only with words but also with images and sounds. In silence there is an intimate hybridization of words, images and sounds. Their blending will combine and shape thought in the same way that words, images and sounds may or may not resemble those that surround us or those that memory calls to mind. We might think of a doorbell that sounds like a goose squawking, or an image of a column in a room with a diameter that fills the whole space it stands in. All this is a matter of imagination, of the ideas that take place in the imaginary realm. Alternatively, individuals may remain silent, giving more weight to words or sounds or images, but, in themselves, all three develop in a miscellaneous way.

The ideas and representations we formulate in our minds are made up of words, images, and sounds, not in their literal sense but rather in an off-center flow. To disambiguate what is constructed in silences is to afford it the presence it already has. The silence reflected from immanence will dwell full, and any ideation of it will keep existing. This is when it is necessary to state that silence inhabits a paradox, since the domains of silence, and what constitutes it, are full of what has been denied.

We know that our thinking process is always in motion, devising worlds, which we inevitably do to activate life. Thinking, devising, mentalizing consists of a constant exercise of imagining, and this action will maintain a kinship with our surroundings and our perceptions, alongside the music already heard, the books already read, and the company already chosen, in short, alongside everything we have inhabited and the way we have experienced it.

The univocal experience of thinking, and its use in silence, is a vivid event that remains ever active in its preliterality. And in that virtual habitat, there is no lack or absence of any kind between images, sounds and words. They coexist boisterously, without omission, belonging to a radically heterogeneous order within an abundant imaginary where there will be no room for the muteness of words, the deafness of sounds and the invisibility of images.

Having presented silence's actions up to this point, it is possible to establish how the sonic is the listenable builder of silence in the cinema, by establishing a concomitance between silence and its foundations and between cinema and its *listen-visible* action. And it does not seem unreasonable to add that, among the sounds that occur in the cinematographic image (words, noises, and music), there are listenable words in the cinema that construct silence in their utterance.

#### **Step Four: The Representation of Silence in Cinema**

When we speak of words in film, we think of characters having a conversation in a scene, a sequence, or voiceovers. In all cases, the words are representational discourses forming the antipodes of silence. It is no longer a question of opposing words and silence and falling back into the binary logic that encloses royals and subjects in droves. The classic idea of silence in the cinema and its distancing from listening to words will have to be circumvented. That is to say, it is necessary to present which words will be part of the silence, relating them to the ability cinema has developed when representing thought thanks to its context.

Regarding the thought that is developed in film, here it is understood to be produced in the images, and that "it is possible to understand a genuinely cinematographic thought, that is, a thought generated by a subject using the cinematographic device of the moving image to reflect it" (Català, 2014a, p. 15), as in the sounds. In *Filmosophy* (2006), the writer and filmmaker Daniel Frampton proposes a surprising rapprochement between cinema and philosophy. His book presents it as "a study of cinema as thinking, and contains a theory of both film-being and film form" (2006, p. 6). He sets out his understanding that film itself not only presents acts of thought but that it thinks for itself, thus distancing its creators from the actual thoughts.

The "*filmind*" is not an empirical description of film, but rather a conceptual understanding of the origins of film's actions and events. [...] "*Filmosophy*" conceptualises film as an organic intelligence: a "film being" thinking about the characters and the subjects in the film (Frampton, 2006, p. 7).

Despite disagreeing with his premise about the film's ability to think for itself, the plot terms he uses to present his thesis are interesting: on the one hand, he cites the triggering origin of cinematographic events and, on the other hand, its endowment with organic parts that make up the whole. This study has proposed that people do everything in contexts, and these contexts must be triggered in order to exist. In addition, we suggest that cinema is activated within its audible and visible discourse, and this forms its organicity, not viewed as separate parts but as a relational system that, apprehended and empowered by filmmakers, builds a decidedly cinematic idea into a film's action sequences.

Cinema creates thought in all its filmic modalities, not only through the operations carried out by film directors through the cinematographic device but through the viewer performing the exercise of thinking as the film progresses. However, in the essay film where thought is discovered at the core, we are facing a cinema-thought. The essay film “is a form that thinks about itself. Every essay film reflects on its way of reflecting” (Català, 2019, p. 18), and it does so through sound and image, its visible and listenable activating materials.

Hans Richter was one of the pioneers who clarified the nature of the essay film. In the 1940s, he presented the differences between it and the classic documentary:

In this effort to give body to the invisible world of imagination, thought, and ideas, the essay film can employ an incomparably greater reservoir of expressive means than can the pure documentary film. Freed from recording external phenomena in a simple sequence the film essay must collect its material from everywhere; its space and time must be conditioned only by the need to explain and show the idea (Richter cited in Rascaroli, 2008, p. 27).

In addition, Richter stated that as “it will look for images for mental concepts, it will strive to make the invisible world of concepts visible” (Richter cited in Català, 2019, p. 16). Many authors have tackled the definition of the filmic essay, and there have been many characteristic creases in light of the diversity that its filmmakers have engineered. Important references in the essay film field of study are, among others, Michael Renov (2004), Philip Lopate (1996), José Moure (2004), Christa Blüminger (2004), Timothy Corrigan (2011), Laura Rascaroli (2008, 2009, 2017) and Josep M. Català (2014a, 2014b, 2019). Thanks to their work, the cinematographic essay has gained theoretical substance that allows enormous clarity. The fundamental characteristics with which this type of film have been presented suggest recognizing that its character is heterogeneous, open (far removed from closed and outdated realities, as Nietzsche would say), unpredictable in its course, open to error, personal (with autobiographical connotations) and with a borderline status (of, for example, fiction and non-fiction). However, Laura Rascaroli (2008, 2009) proposes two idiosyncrasies as substantial axes: subjectivity and reflexivity. Undoubtedly, both are mainstays in the unfolding of the filmic essay, but in them the key piece that Josep M. Català sets out, the subject, invariably flies over our heads and lands. He reintroduces it as:

An essential element for the existence of a new subjective structure (...) And this subject who reflects cannot avoid being aware, in the case of the essay film and due to the characteristics of the medium it uses, of the need to make decisions about the way in which it articulates its ideas through images and other complex formations (Català, 2019, p. 19).

This subject is found on the surface of the essay film's constitutive process, and its authorship will become audible and visible. And, while coursing/wending its way through the film, the subject will not only show its thought (and hence the self-reflective characteristic that is attributed to these films) but also the thought process that constitutes it.

The filmmaker's reflection will be free, since "its scope is not known in advance but will be exposed as the essay itself does it" (Català, 2019, p. 35). Furthermore, it will be constructed with images and sounds and, among the sounds, voice will prevail. The thought that takes place in the filmic essay, which consubstantially meanders from idea to idea *rhizomatically* rehearsing itself, captures the surface of the film through voice.

The voice. We must once again recognize the rejection of voice—it being put in check—alongside the word heard in film theory, when we see that it is named *voiceover*, which implies its subordination to the visible image. Christian Metz explained that sound is never *over*. It is either audible or it is not, and:

In a film a sound is considered "off" (literally off the screen) when in fact it is the sound's source that is off the screen, therefore an "off-screen voice" is defined as one which belongs to a character who does not appear (visually) on the screen (Metz, 1980, pp. 28-29).

We have fused the term *voiceover* for an action that does not equate to listening, so we should therefore allude to *bodiesover*, not *voiceover*. Surely it is due to a "screwing ideology," as Chion affirms (2004, p. 136), a clear stubbornness of matching voice to mouth. Technically, the common designation of *voiceover* is useful, and, similarly, so is dividing a film script into scenes, though in reality they are both scenes and sequences. But there are preferable ways of recognizing and naming the voice in cinema.

One approach is to think about voice according to its effect on image. Serge Daney raised this in his text "Back to Voice: on Voices *over, in, out, through*", published in 1977 in the *Cahiers du Cinéma* journal. He proposed four different designations: on the one hand, the invisible voices—the *over* voice (that "runs parallel to the sequence of images and never intersects with it"; p. 19) and the *in* voice (that participates in the image and will provoke a response, since this will challenge the characters in the diegesis); on the other hand, the visible ones—the *out* voice (that arises directly from the mouth) and the *through* voice (that is expressed within the image but outside the mouth, although it makes some part of the speaker's body visible, such as their back) (Daney, 2013). Michel Chion picks up Daney's approach in his famous book *La voz en el cine*, proposing a new and suggestive term: the acousmatic presence. Based on Daney's idea of effect, the "acousmatic" voice maintains a relationship between what is heard and seen:



It is “out-screen” and therefore, for the viewer, outside the image and at the same time “it is in the image” (...), at the same time inside and outside, looking for a place to settle. Especially when they have not yet shown us the body that normally inhabits it (Chion, 2004, p. 35).

Within the *acousmatic* voices, some see everything and others have partial vision, but all will have power until, as sometimes happens, the “decousmatization” —the incarnation of the voice— takes place. He also presents the distinction between the *I-voice* and the *voiceover*, which, as he puts it, being acousmatic, is a voice that occurs behind the image, narrating, presenting and commenting. This is explained through Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960), starting with the final scene specifically. Norman (Anthony Perkins) is alone in a cell and hears his mother's voice. The *I-voice* defines it as involved on the screen, wrapping itself within it, occupying the space in contiguity to the spectator's ear, and causing identification: “it is a close, concrete, insinuating voice, without an echo, it is a voice-ray that so much vampirizes Norman's body as the total image, and even the viewer himself. A voice *with an inner image*” (Chion, 2004, p. 60). In the same film, he distances the *I-voice* from what he calls the inner voice, which is the one that resounds in the head of the character Marion (Janet Leigh) when she flees by car.

Beyond the simple voiceover designation, the origin of its source and its screen presence or absence, both Michel Chion and Serge Daney present the relationship of the voices alongside the action that occurs in the image and the physical specificities within which the sound of the words takes place. However, what happens when listening to the voice belongs to a different order of things, as when it takes place in the essay film? Let us start with the fact that the filmic essay is exploratory. It looks for unknown routes and unexpected relationships presented through voice and image. If we pay attention to the voice and its words in essay film, we can tease out that searching for its source will no longer be relevant. We recognize that it is thought. Whether it coincides with the visible image or not will no longer be important. It will always happen alongside it and whether it has physical characteristics or not will cease to be of consequence, because, without a doubt, it will have them, and they will be unmistakably specific and motivated by the freedom the filmmaker's imagination affords them.

The words heard in the essay film are the audible articulation of thought, the filmmaker's intimate introspection, speaking, thinking and inventing. Moreover, this particular way of representing the imaginary recalls what we do on our own, in silence. If, in silence, in one-person communication, the state of words and images occurs in the imaginary mind in constant interaction, and this, as it has been presented here, is virtual, then the essay film has achieved the unexpected. It has represented silence, has *performed* silence's words and has rendered images visible.

In the visual essay, silence's words and images materialize. It is within the precious hodgepodge that takes place in the essay filmmakers' imagining thinking that silence



takes shape during the *listen-visible* of their essay films. Making silence's words—its voices—enunciative in film creates an epistemological risk. Yet to speak of it in the context of action-cinema is to supply it with its ability to *metaphorize*, to represent itself, in its *listenability*. If silence was ever masked in cinema, the proposition here has been to unmask it and to think about it from the standpoint of its rhetorical action, which takes on an articulable surface.

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