

„Я [не] могу говорить”:
The affirmative aphasia of Tarkovsky's Mirror

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Mine is not a pleasant story, it does not possess the gentle harmony of invented tales; like the lives of all men who have given up trying to deceive themselves, it is a mixture of nonsense, madness and dreams...

Taken from the opening of Hermann Hesse's novel *Demian: The Story of Emil Sinclair's Youth* (1919), Andrei Tarkovsky encounters this passage in 1982¹ and retroactively calls it the epigraph to his 1975 film *Зеркало* (*Mirror*). Hesse's 'mixture' is only too relevant to the content of *Mirror*. Tarkovsky's own return to the past refuses 'gentle harmony' as it unfolds in a non-linear assemblage of dreamlike mise-en-scène, stark historical documentary footage, lyrical readings of poetry by the filmmaker's father Arseny Tarkovsky and a disorienting casting of actors and the filmmaker's family members in multiple roles. However, neither the Hesse passage nor the Tarkovsky film are only interested in content. They both also share a sensitivity to form, to their language—the nonsense through which they make sense. In text this may be the nonsense of written language standing in for the sensations of the tactile, the aural and the visual that define the events of the past. Offering no more than paper and pen for these sensory experiences, text becomes 'non-sense' indeed. Tarkovsky, however, is not limited to text. He has access to the senses, his camera can directly record sound and vision. If Tarkovsky has access to the *senses*, though, does he also have access to *sense*?

Tarkovsky offers a response: "In general, I view words as noise made by man"². Viewed and heard, language's translation from text to film maintains nonsense – it is the 'noise', rather than the sense of words, that occupies Tarkovsky's attention to language. This perspective is as relevant to Tarkovsky's affinity with the Hesse passage as it is to the filmmaker's own, original epigraph to *Mirror*: a filmed sequence of a stutterer being 'cured' of his aphasia.

The use of quotation marks may seem strange as the session between Yuri Zhary and the speech therapist does end with the stutterer clearly pronouncing "I can speak" ("Я могу говорить!"). To and for whom, though, can and does he speak? This is, after all, a strange example of the private practice of speech therapy: it has a public audience. Recorded and televised, Yuri's 'curing' episode first enters *Mirror* as the transmission from a television set that Ignat switches on in the film's opening frame at the countryside home.

¹ Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (2012), p. 102.

² Citation from a 1985 interview reproduced by Robert Bird in *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (2008), p. 92.

The screen remains blank and the speech therapist is heard asking the patient's name. As Yuri responds to the question, fumbling over the 'Zh' of his last name, the color frame of the home interior shifts to the clinical interior of the nurse and patient shot in black and white. On the one hand, this shift effaces the artificial performativity of the episode: the close-up angle of the camera omits any sign of the surrounding television frame; the proximity of the camera's close angle places the viewer in the room of the session as it unfolds. On the other hand, this re-framing heightens the performativity: the conspicuous silhouette of a microphone behind Yuri reminds viewers that this act is being recorded; the constant use of zoom-in and zoom-out lens on the nurse and Yuri reiterate that the scene is orchestrated from the perspective of a cameraman³. "I can speak" may then be a line of performance: perhaps it is a staged 'cure' that is possible only in front of the camera; perhaps it is even an act performed by actors and is only disguised as documentary material— this is, after all, television in the Soviet Union.

Besides questioning the legitimacy of the cure on this basis, though, one might also question the validity of its formulation. This 'cure' is achieved when the nurse asks Yuri to repeat the line of "I can speak" and goes as far as to accompany him in uttering the second word of the statement ('mory'). Yuri does not actively produce language, it is produced for him; he does not learn to speak, he learns to repeat and to be fed language. His statement and even the 'I can' of 'I can speak' are dependent upon responses to and repetitions of the nurse's own speech. This dependency confirms more a symptom than a cure of aphasia.

As Roman Jakobson writes:

Presented with the scraps of words or sentences, such a patient readily completes them. His speech is merely reactive: he easily carries on conversation but has difficulties in starting a dialogue ; he is able to reply to an imaginary addresser when he is, or imagines himself to be, the addressee of the message. It is particularly hard for him to perform, or even to understand, such a closed discourse as the monologue. The more his utterances are dependent on the context, the better he copes with his verbal task

("Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," 1956; *On Language*, 1990, 121)

³ There is also, perhaps, a pronounced reminder of the sequence's performativity. At 42-43 sec. the nurse quickly interjects with a barely audible phrase. Though she speaks while Yuri continues to answer her question and her line is left un-subtitled, it would seem that her phrase ends in the command of 'смотри'. It is at this moment that Yuri stops looking at the nurse and directs his face towards the camera – while this shift of attention may be simply a procedure of the therapeutic practice, the presence of the camera renders the image of Yuri taking cue to re-direct his gaze a sort of screen-test or play rehearsal scenario.

From the beginning to the end of his session, Yuri embodies this condition of selection deficiency. Every word he produces is reactive, dependent upon the nurse's question or statement. As Yuri finishes reciting 'I can speak', the frame abruptly cuts to a black screen bearing the film's title: with no recording of the nurse's reaction to Yuri's 'statement', the session is left open and the cure is unresolved. Once the addressing nurse and camera leave, Yuri is, most likely, to return to his wordlessness, unable to produce language without a guiding lead. "I can speak"—but only, perhaps, for a moment.

"The boy's new-found fluency is at once confirmed and suspended,"⁴ Robert Bird argues of this sudden shift from the stutterer's statement to the title frame accompanied by the Bach prelude *Das Orgelbüchlein no. 16*. Rather than place the emphasis on the suspension of the cure, I would propose placing it on the stutter. "The stutterer cured is a cipher of the film's struggle to master its own discourse," Bird suggests⁵. What discourse does the film try to master if it is, rather, the *uncured* stutterer who is the cipher? Given the film's heterogeneity of material and editing, it would seem that Tarkovsky suspends discourse not in the clarity of pronouncement but, rather, in the maintained struggle of articulation, the stuttering of words that become 'noise made by men'.

Noise, like that made by music, too. The Bach prelude, through the wordless music of its organ, introduces another discourse into the film. Without words, how might its message be understood? As Bálint András Kovács and Akos Szilágyi write of Tarkovsky's use of music: "En général, la musique n'est qu'une mélodie diffuse et déformée, qui ressemble à la pâle lueur qui transperce l'obscurité, et à l'infini, qui surgit dans l'espace clos" (*Les mondes d'Andreï Tarkovski*, 1987, p. 172)⁶. Music becomes both a fragment and full figure of sense: a glimmer of light in the darkness ; a noise that, whether through an aural crescendo or as an accompaniment to image, both opens and overfills the closed frame. In *Mirror's* opening, music floods sense. Against the simple frame of white text over a black background, it is the intricacies of Bach's wordless melody, rather than the words and the names of the film's titles and cast, that draw one's attention.

⁴ *Andrei Tarkovsky : Elements of Cinema* (2008), p. 103

⁵ *Andrei Tarkovsky : Elements of Cinema* (2008), pp. 102-103

The opening credits introduce the film by complicating and turning the attention of the words to the non-sense of the wordless melody.

This attention is sustained. As Nariman Skakov writes, the film, in its narrative return to the past, “tries to utter the unutterable” (*The Cinema of Tarkovsky : Labyrinths of Space and Time*, 2012, p. 132). The film expresses an attempt to speak of and respond to a lost and irretrievable past haunted by an absent father. Furthermore, *Mirror* must also address a loss in the present. (or a loss impending in the future?). In addition to its autobiographical project, the film bears an elegiac timbre as it is told from the perspective of a narrator approaching his own death.

To respond to loss, the film must then speak its language. How might a language built from, through and of loss figure? Bird eloquently suggests that Tarkovsky’s “filmic narratives *incinerate* in order to *form* an original world out of their ashes ; moreover, this world is never entirely present” (*Andrei Tarkovsky : Elements of Cinema*, 2008, 92). In *Mirror*, these ‘incinerated ashes’ of the language of a ‘never entirely present’ world are placed in the foreground. ‘Incinerated’ language as in the debris of Yuri’s stuttered syllables ; ‘never entirely present’ as in the case of the un-translated discourse of the film’s Spaniards, exiled to Russia as socialists during Franco’s dictatorship. In dialogue together and as separate sequences dealing with language disruption, the stutterer and the Spaniards are at the core of *Mirror*’s language of loss. As I will describe, these sequences, both through spoken language and visual articulation, set up a structure for Tarkovsky’s syntax of nonsense and enable a communicative function for non-communicative articulations. In providing a grammar for the film, they enable a ‘mastery’ of the language of loss that is confirmed in the film’s final sequence as a young boy howls into an expansive, empty field of grass.

In this final mastery of a language of loss, *Mirror* is then to be read as a film in the hindsight of its belated Hesse epigraph. The film echoes the text: “It is a mixture of nonsense”. The film also revises the text, adding an alternative ending to the sentence: “*It is a mixture of nonsense ... that makes sense on the basis that it has no sense : I can speak only by not speaking.*”

That said, I propose to re-read the aphasia of *Mirror*’s opening in the affirmative—to re-read ‘words’ in the ‘noise made by man’ and in the images created by Tarkovsky.

The stutter: the re-splicing of *Mirror's* sense

The film begins with a slash: not one of a syllable stuttered but, rather, that of a television. Turned on, the screen stumbles in its projection. While Yuri and the nurse are heard beginning their session, it is not their faces that bear these voices: instead, they are accompanied by a black horizontal line that flickers and jumps from the bottom to the top of a white T.V. screen. This disembodiment endures as the televised session is never seen in the actual television. It is only once the frame shifts from the color of the country home to the black and white of the therapy room that the voices of Yuri and the nurse unite with their bodies. Whether divided from their bodies or from their original television frame, Yuri and the nurse are separate from their original context. Before this cycle of slashing and re-splicing sound and vision, there is another distortion to consider in the television frame. Before its screen projects, it reflects; before it is a television, it is a mirror. In the center are reflected fragments of furniture from the room ; in the top right there is a distorted image of Ignat who hunches over the set.

In these distortions and fragmentations of the television as a mirror and as a dividing boundary between vision and sound, body and voice, there is both a meta-prelude to the stutterer sequence and an introduction to the film's frame of articulation to come. As Andrea Truppin describes *Mirror's* protagonist:

A voice-off is used to create the character of Aleksei, who remains invisible throughout the film. Present only through his voice, he is visible, and by implication fully alive, only in representations of his memories and dreams of himself as a child. In the film's second scene, Aleksei speaks to his mother on the telephone. Their disembodied voices float through space as the camera tracks through the empty apartment. The spatial signature of Aleksei's voice suggests at first that he occupies the depicted space, as opposed to his mother's voice which bears the small and filtered frequency range of the intervening telephone line. But because the quality of Aleksei's voice never changes and we cannot place him visually as the camera successively reveals the empty rooms we do not sense that he truly occupies his large apartment. We cannot place his voice anymore than hers, as if the nowhereness of a voice the telephone corresponded to the nowhereness of his own voice. ("And then There Was Sound: The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky," 1992 ; *Sound Theory/Sound Practice*, 242)

This nowhereness⁷ is that, too, of a mirror and of *Mirror* as an entire film. The film is cast, as described by Kovács and Szilágyi, in an abstract contact zone of mirroring relations and interactions. It is on a de-situated

⁷ This disembodiment of the film's voiced narration is carried further still, should one consider Tarkovsky's inclusion of four voice-over poetry readings in the film. Four poems by Tarkovsky's father, Arseny Tarkovsky, are read at different points in the film (in order): "Первые свидания," "Жизнь, жизнь," "С утра я тебя дожидался вчера..." and "Евридика". It is not only the written voice [what is a written voice?] of Arseny Tarkovsky that enters the film – these poems are also read by their original author. Unlike Tarkovsky's mother, Maria Vishnyakova, who makes several cameo appearances in the film in various roles, Tarkovsky's father makes no visual appearance in *Mirror* – he, instead, remains yet another disembodied voice in *Mirror*.

ground of associative reflections, resemblances and refractions that its characters, its narratives and its images are developed:

Tout devient miroir : la caméra, les poèmes récités, le regard du héros, l'écran de la télévision, les extraits de films d'actualité les objets, les personnages, et surtout les relations humaines. Pour cette raison, Tarkovski fait jouer la mère et la femme du héros (seuls la coiffure et le style du jeu signalent qu'il s'agit de deux personnes différentes) ; le personnage de l'auteur dans son enfance, et le personnage d'Ignate, le fils du héros, se ressemblent aussi et se reflètent. Le héros voit sa mère lorsqu'il regarde sa femme, son fils reflète sa propre image de l'enfance, comme il reconnaît son père en lui-même. La crise du présent devient le miroir du passé qui semble se répéter. Dans son divorce, le héros voit le divorce de ses parents, dans le destin de sa mère, celui de sa femme ; il se prépare à quitter sa famille, il est donc le reflet de son père qui avait quitté la sienne.
(*Les mondes d'Andreï Tarkovski*, 1987, pp. 107-108)

This trajectory is as relevant to the film's inter-subjectivity as it is to its autobiographical one from which a very particular visual vocabulary of self-representation emerges.

In order to pinpoint this abstract perspective from which Tarkovsky articulates that self-representation, it is productive to consider the mirror stage so as to situate the visual stage of *Mirror*. "We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*," Jacques Lacan states of this phase in early childhood during which we learn to recognize our mirror image, "the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" ("The mirror stage as formative of the function of the 'I' as revealed in psychoanalytic experience," 1949; *Écrits*, 1977, p. 2). The emphasis is to be placed on 'assumes'. The subject can only *claim* this projected image as an object – they cannot internalize or subjectively experience what is accessible and presented only on the surface of glass. "The fact is," Lacan further explains, "that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent that the subject feels are animating him" (*Écrits*, 1977, 2). The subject is suspended not, then, as a figure in front of a mirror but, rather, as an actor caught in the space and the exchange *between* the original body and the reflected copy. Looking towards the *figuration* of the mirror, the subject returns to his or her own image through *fragmentation*: the external *reflection* bounces back as an internal *refraction*. As Lacan writes:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of

phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to the analysis encounters a certain level of aggressive disintegration in the individual. It then appears in the form of disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions – the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch has fixed, for all time, in painting, in their ascent from the fifteenth century to the imaginary zenith of modern man. [...] Correlatively, the formation of the *I* is symbolized in dreams by a fortress, or a stadium – its inner arena and enclosure, surrounded by marshes and rubbish-tis, dividing it into two opposed fields of contest where the subject flounders in quest of the lofty, remote inner castle. (*Écrits*, 1977, pp. 4-5)

Mirror gives up on this formation of ‘the I’ as it accepts the inaccessibility of the fortress’s *figuration*. The disembodied voices that bear no image and the actors of the film that refract from, rather than fuse smoothly into, one another’s image, set up a *Mirror* for fragmented bodies.

In other words: although Tarkovsky may more clearly reference the 16th century work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder⁸, his formal technique resonates more with that of 15th century innovations of Bosch. The accumulative canvases of Bosch that span over, build from and saturate in a dizzying array of fragmented figures bears a certain resemblance to the filmmaker’s own mode of composition. In Tarkovsky’s own words: “Cinema in general is a way of gathering some sort of shattered fragments into a unified whole.”⁹ *Gathering*, rather than linking, fragments as to build a dynamic, multipart ‘whole’: this is no longer the construction of the single mirror figure but, rather, the assemblage of a prismatic surface that complicates the screen’s single, ‘unified’ whole. Between the media of painting and that of film, there is also the resonance of the medium of text—Hesse’s that “does not possess the gentle harmony of invented tales; like the lives of all men who have given up trying to deceive themselves”. Having ‘given up’ the deceiving ‘gentle harmony’ of an un-shattered whole, how is a visual vocabulary to be understood through the lines of its shattered debris? How is Tarkovsky’s own gathering of fragmentations to be understood as a visual language built from the loss of a cohesive figuration? What sort of structure does the disorderly operation of fragmentation follow? What sort of communication does this operation build as it slashes and re-splices information?

⁸ Tarkovsky’s re-creates the Flemish master’s *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565) in *Mirror* during the military instruction sequence that re-creates the aerial angle and the stark contrast of the painting in a frame of the young Asafiev standing, in Skakov’s words, on a “hilly winter scene with carefully dispersed moving figures” (*The Cinema of Tarkovsky : Labyrinths of Space and Time*, 2012, p. 126). Furthermore, the same Bruegel work is directly referenced in Tarkovsky’s earlier *Солярис* (1972) as the film’s famous levitation sequence features shots of the actual painting.

⁹ As cited by Skakov (*Cinema of Tarkovsky : Labyrinths of Space and Time*, 2012, p. 103) in translation from Tarkovsky, “Встать на путь. Беседу с Андреем Тарковским вели Ежи Иллг и Леонард Нойгер.” As published in 1989 in *Искусство кино*, no. 2, p. 109.

The prologue sets up an interjectional model that is to be carried further in the film's treatment of visual material. On the one hand, the shift from color to black-and-white and from filmed to "found documentary" footage sets up a legible surface: the transition blends together these divergent cinematic registers into the unified whole of the prelude-as-sequence. On the other hand, this smooth transitional syntax belies a subtle fragmentation that takes place within the session footage. In terms of informational fragmentation, the salient image of the microphone behind Yuri paired with shaky camerawork renders ambiguous the genre of 'documentary' that is being watched. The jittery camera makes one wonder as to what the sub-categorization of this 'documentary' is: a clumsy, professionally-shot documentary for television or a non-professionally shot piece for clinical documentation that has, for whatever reason, ended up on television? The microphone's shadow makes one question the footage further as it places it, in Skakov's words, "somewhere between reality and its artistic impression [...] the borderline between fiction and documentary" (*Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time*, 2012, 101). This ambiguous articulation – between reality and a recording of reality -- renders almost impossible an informational reading of the sequence.

Despite its smoothly edited transitions, the prelude remains diffracted at its core. In this central sequence of the speech therapy session, the screen projects in order to refract: each image is open to questioning; each frame is subject to an interjection. In this re-articulation of the image, the screen finds its visual articulation through ambiguous and varying degrees of legibility and illegibility. The film confirms as much in its continued splicing between filmed and documentary footage.

Central to the film's re-splicing that cuts and collages from found and shot footage is a scene in Aleksei's Moscow apartment where a Spanish family reflects on fleeing from the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 and assimilating as citizens in the Soviet Union¹⁰. Before this interjection of Spanish history in the Russian interior space, there is another interjection: the poignant recollection of the family's lost homeland is

¹⁰ The significance of choosing to focus on the Spanish Civil War cannot be underestimated. It is an event of utmost importance in both Spanish history and Soviet history as a very particular episode in Soviet-International relations. As Bird writes: "The Spanish Civil War seemed to many Soviets an unusually noble and idealistic passage in their history, a return to the pure ideals of the revolution before Stalinism, and a rare case when the USSR was on the 'right' side in international conflicts [...]. In short, the protagonist's encounter with the aging Spanish immigrants in Moscow is both an echo and a verification of the memories he was fed in childhood" (*Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema*, 2008, 137)

preceded by a lively imitation of famed Spanish matador Palomo Linares. This playful imitation is also an interjection as it cuts off filmed footage of the actual Linares. In its turn, this clip of found footage has just disrupted another frame as it abruptly comes to the screen after Aleksei's wife, Natalya, asks if Ignat may stay with him while she regards her reflection in the mirror and blows on the glass. This chain of endless interruptions continues throughout the sequence. After expressing to Natalya her inability to ever return to Spain ("я не могу. У меня муж русский. И дети тоже русские"), the elderly Luisa leaves the apartment and somberly leans against the doorway. At this moment, her own farewell to Spain is interrupted by that of others as the screen shifts to newsreel footage of bombings and mass fleeing during the Civil War. The initial insertion and interjection of Spain in Russia – and vice-versa, should one consider that most of this Spanish newsreel footage was shot on location by visiting Soviet cameraman, Roman Karmen¹¹ – leads into an interjection of Spain against itself as a historical farewell disrupts Luisa's own, personal one. Between filmed and found footage, the personal and the historical, the sequence builds an exchange through a breaking of communication as its visual discourse becomes a mode of sustaining interruption.

The interjectional structure between scripted and archival film functions even when Tarkovsky works solely from found footage. As the Spanish newsreels transition to footage of Soviet stratosphere balloons being prepared, these discursive interruptions both reach a resolution and open themselves to further inquiry. On the one hand, this shift re-situates the screen in the film's land of origin as the images of Russia repatriate the frame after its migration to Spain. On the other hand, this same shift displaces the screen: placed in a sequential order, an associative link is both suggested and rendered obscure between the Spanish and Russian footage. While a temporal frame – that of World War II – links the two clips, the relation between their respective formal articulations is far more abstract. From Spanish street warfare the screen has suddenly shifted to the preparation of balloons that may be for the Soviet battlefield or for a parade; from the frantic tempo of mass fleeing the screen enters the meditative tempo of balloons and soldiers suspended in the sky. Accompanied by Pergolesi's string interpretation of a sacred Catholic hymn on the sorrows of Mother Mary, *Stabat Mater Dolorosa*, this sequence of a Soviet military preparation is transfigured as a

¹¹ Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema*, 2008, p. 137

lyrical exploration of an otherworldly presence. As the camera lingers on the stratosphere balloons' draped fabrics in the sky, these concrete objects of the army become materials of a tactile and abstract surface. This fabric of the balloons stretched and folded is that, too, of the found footage sequence. Between Spain and Russia, horror and lyricism, the realism of the newsreel and the melody of the sacred paired with abstract textures, the sequence speaks through an elasticizing and folding of meaning. In both their link to and contradiction from one another, these images open the screen to questioning as the gaps and the links between them entices the viewer to wonder about the associations, the connotations, the logic and the motives that guide the sequence.

The viewer's puzzlement is intended to remain. As the filmmaker himself stated on *Mirror*: "I had the greatest difficulty in explaining to people that there is no hidden, coded meaning in the film, nothing beyond the desire to tell the truth" (*Sculpting in Time*, 1989, 133). At the core of the sequence, too, is not a secret code but, rather, Tarkovsky's own inquisitive relation to this found footage. The filmmaker's perspective is confirmed at the end of the Spanish newsreel segment when a young girl turns to the camera. Caught unawares, this little girl's smile turns to an expression of bewilderment, fear and confusion. In her confused glance, there are those, too, of the viewer and of the filmmaker who, in his turn, questions the source of and the circumstances surrounding the filming of history. As Bird recounts of the sequence's process of construction and revision:

In the original edit there was another shot of a child bidding his father farewell, which stuck out conspicuously wherever it was placed; Tarkovsky traced it to its origin and saw that it was one of three identical takes, meaning that 'at the very moment that the child was flowing with tears the cameraman had asked him to repeat what he had just done : to bid farewell once more, to embrace and kiss [his father] once more'. As a result, this shot 'had been invaded by the devil and he [i.e. the devil], could not reconcile himself to the atmosphere of sincerity' [...] Tarkovsky does not so much represent the war as he does investigate the ways in which it has been presented and has consequently shaped his vision, without necessarily having been understood. (*Elements of Cinema*, 2008, 138, 139)

This questioning of representation and truth is one directed both towards historical documentation and visual language. That is to say: the syntax of interjections and the abstract associative links of Tarkovsky's assemblage stem from a relation to a language that "shapes vision" and, at the same time, is "not necessarily understood". In beginning from a visual language that remains suspect and continuing in a visual grammar

that chops and bends the context of this language's material, how might one make sense from Tarkovsky's debris of historical documents?

Emerging from an inquisitive, if not suspicious, approach to historical documentary footage, the sequence may be considered as the illustration of a language that possesses no fixed referents or indexical terms. It is a dictionary-less language, so to speak, that builds its own dictionary as it begins to re-assemble and re-contextualize terms, meanings and definitions. If each image of the sequence is considered as a visualized word and the assemblage of these visuals is considered as a sentence of associations, Tarkovsky's editing pattern begins to resemble the slashed roots, the re-assembled phonemes and the re-mapped metaphorical associations produced from the aphasic condition of contingency disorder. As Jakobson describes, an aphasic with this disorder is unable to attach to a fixed meaning of an indexical term and thus bends, elasticizes and stretches semantic associations across roots and words:

The patients under discussion are inclined to drop either the derivative words or the combination of a root with a derivational suffix, and even a compound of two words becomes irresolvable for them. Patients who understood and uttered such compounds as *Thanksgiving* or *Battersea*, but were unable to grasp or say *thanks* and *giving* or *batter* and *sea*, have often been cited. As long as the sense of derivation is still alive, so that this process is still used for creating innovations in the code, one can observe a tendency toward oversimplification and automatism: if the derivative word constitutes a semantic unit which cannot be entirely inferred from the meaning of its components, the Gestalt is misunderstood. Thus the Russian word *mokr-ica* signifies 'wood-house' but a Russian aphasic interpreted it as 'something humid' especially 'humid weather' since the root *mokr-* means 'humid' and the suffix *-ica* designates a carrier of the given property, as in *nelepica* (something absurd) *svelica* (light room), *temnica* (dungeon, lit. dark room) ("Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," 1956; *On Language*, 1990, 127)

This disorder of meaning is the order of Tarkovsky's image. In slashing the historical image, he re-orders it. Again, as in the case of the aforementioned loss of figuration in the favor of fragmentation, sense is made through nonsense. Instead of seeking to cure, to make the image 'speak clearly,' Tarkovsky systematically refracts it through a re-formulation of a historical visual vocabulary that follows a grammar of interruption and is contextualized through abstract associative thought.

In this collaged footage, the film's disembodied voices, flickering screens and stuttering voices find a structure for their debris. While the Spanish sequence's disorder confuses viewers due to its vast possibilities of context and its heterogeneity of tonal registers, a later segment using the formulae of found and filmed footage assemblage renders legible this distorted discourse. So one reads the frame of Asafiev, a

young boy orphaned by the Leningrad blockade who figures in Aleksei's youth as a colleague in youth military training during World War II. Tarkovsky incinerates this visual and gives form to a language built from found footage as the screen is displaced and interrupted for a minute by documentary footage that jumps through an array of material including V-day parades, Hiroshima bombings and Hitler's corpse. This visual rubble becomes legible as the apparition of a future which, in its own right, is yet another senseless hodgepodge of war and peace. The slash of the single image thus becomes an open slit that expands into trajectories of meaning and inquiry. By refusing to retain the original image, the film practices and masters this order of disorder and affirmatively lingers in the impossibility of assigning a single vision to its frame.

This re-splicing of sense is accompanied by another slice into language that, rather than open meaning, withholds it. As the Spaniard's mostly un-translated foreign speech comes into contact with the refracted visual language of *Mirror*, how might Tarkovsky's language of loss be further developed and understood as the filmmaker finds communicative functions for exchanges of non-communication?

From the un-translated to the untranslatable: the withholding of sense in *Mirror*

While Tarkovsky's visual language *self-reflexively* uses film to highlight the camera's presence and its role in capturing and projecting images, the use of the foreign speech in *Mirror* renders language *self-reflexive* in the sense that it does not transmit meaning outwards but, instead, inwardly withholds information. As the Spanish scene unfolds, their discourse remains un-translated: speaking amongst themselves in their native tongue, Natalya remains foreign to the discussion as she sits in the corner, unable to engage directly with her environment. Her incomprehension resembles that of Tarkovsky's own during the shooting the scene. The filmmaker's own incomprehension, however, is not only by circumstance of linguistic limitations: it is also a choice. According to Tarkovsky, the content of the discussion was and

purposefully remained a puzzle to him as he rendered the family's discussion further unintelligible by adding three layers of soundtrack noise over their speech in the editing room¹².

How might Tarkovsky's intentional muffling of sense be understood? How might the scene's sustained division between speaker and audience be viewed as an articulation of the film's own perspectival alterity? Finally, how might this loss of a common language be understood as the construction of another language built through a loss of the reciprocal address?

Paradoxically, these non-exchanges of "I cannot speak your language" often enable intimacy between characters in Tarkovsky's films. Such is the example of *Nostalgia* (1987) when the otherwise neutral protagonist, Andrei (who evades speaking with his translator in Russian while conducting research in Italy) is suddenly compelled to speak emotively and in his native tongue when he finds himself alone in a cavernous and subterranean space. His sole listener is a stranger to him and to his language: an Italian toddler, Angela, who walks in on and stays through Andrei's drunken monologue. As the semantic connection of words is lost between the two, a non-semantic one emerges as the exchange of facial expressions, hand gestures and the tones of voice become communicative material. This breakage of a linguistic communication of *content* gives way to a wordless exchange that depends on *form* as it is the voice's emotive timbre, rather than its indexical word, that allows the man and the child to approach an understanding of one another. This is also true for Natalya's communication with the Spanish family. While one member of the family translates a snippet of the discourse when he explains in Russian to Natalya which famous matador is being imitated in the scene's beginning, it would appear that the entirety of the discussion's culmination -- the poignant monologue of a family member who recalls saying farewell to his father and remembers the pain of not being able to say goodbye to his sick mother. Although the *film viewer* hears Aleksei's Russian voice-over summary of this speech, this narration is registered as if from outside the space of the apartment and the time of the discussion. Natalya, it would seem, does not have access to this voice as she experiences the scene not as a film viewer, but as a witness to the event before it has been taken to the editing room and given this soundtrack. As such, the intimacy of this deeply personal testimony is

¹² According to Bird, 2008 : "Tarkovsky layered three distinct soundtracks [on top of the Spaniards' conversation], claiming that he himself could not figure out what they were saying" (*Elements of Cinema*, p. 144)

both suspended and re-constructed: in its form it resonates with Natalia through the somber tone of the man's voice ; in its content it remains inaccessible to Natalya who has neither a cinematic voice-over or subtitles to turn to for translation.

Nor does the viewer have subtitles to rely on: Tarkovsky has purposefully omitted them. While any viewer with a knowledge of Spanish could understand this un-subtitled exchange, the scene also goes to great measures to inhibit comprehension. The discussion – accompanied by dubbed sounds (e.g. the applause for the matador, the flamenco music) and found footage images from the Spanish Civil War that both interrupt and provide illustrative context – seeks to disrupt meaning as to make meaning. The missing subtitles may be understood as they relate specifically to Tarkovsky's use of un-translated foreign speech as a recurrent motif in his films. It is especially in *Andrei Rublëv* (1966) that this non-exchange functions in a manner relevant to *Mirror*. As Bird details:

[*Andrei Rublëv*] reinforces [an] idea of language as at once a barrier and an almost impossible aspiration. [...] In the first instance [of un-translated speech in the film] Tatar-Mongol marauders descend upon Andronikow Monastery during Rublëv's ordeal of silence. He watches mutely as they tease the holy fool with a chunk of horsemeat and then carry her off. Throughout this scene the rough beauty of their Turkic speech is front and centre. To a Russian ear perhaps some of the exclamations are even vaguely comprehensible [...]. The mystery of the [fate of the] holy fool deepens if one understands the Tatars to say, as they carry her off, 'Let's take her with us and abandon her on the road'. Perhaps this statement is not supposed to be understood, but its mystifying effect reflects a significant fact about the film : the more one investigates the evident discontinuities within the plot, the more one uncovers the consistent pursuit of discontinuity as an aesthetic principle. [...] the fragmented narrative, the voice-overs and untranslated speech of the Tatar-Mongols confirm how far the film must be even from understanding itself. (*Elements of Cinema*, 2008, p. 101)

Through Natalya's non-understanding of Spanish, the layering of sound and image and the omission of subtitles, *Mirror* re-articulates this language built from the loss of mutual comprehension.

It is not only through foreign language that Tarkovsky articulates such a semantic alterity. In Yuri's relation to the Russian language, the film begins positing a notion of language as a 'barrier' and an 'almost impossible aspiration.' As he repeats after the nurse, Yuri's parroting brings to mind teacher-dictated phrases that students repeat in a beginning-level language class. The stutterer comes to the clarity of 'я могу говорить' as if approaching a foreign language: Yuri pronounces by suppressing his accent -- the stutter of his own 'native' language -- and by mimicking the accent of a 'foreign' language -- the nurse's clear enunciation. In his adjustment of pronunciation, Yuri experiences his mother tongue of Russian as a 'non-

native' speaker. A native language spoken as if a foreign one: this is an intimate alterity that characterizes both Yuri's own struggle to produce language and the perspective of *Mirror*.

In Yuri's simultaneous approach to clear enunciation and withholding from stuttered articulation, an 'aspiration' and a 'barrier' of language are addressed, set up and maintained throughout the film. To paraphrase Bird's statement on Rublëv, *Mirror* deliberately 'remains incomprehensible to itself' as Yuri's language translates into the work's own articulation. The film is stuck in double-speech: it is both an autobiographical look into the past as well as an elegiac look towards the impending death of the apparently, inexplicably ill narrator. Just as Yuri remains on the threshold between 'stuttering' and 'clear' Russian, *Mirror* both approaches towards and withdraws from a clear articulation of either of these two cinematic 'languages.' How might this model of approximation that never finitely arrives at a clear pronouncement of a *single* language become a comprehensible articulation for the film's perspective?

To answer such questions, one must more closely consider the varying degrees of withheld language as they appear in the film – whether that of the stutterer's struggle or the untranslated speech of the Spaniards. If these instances are not an erasure but, rather, a different way of making sense, how are their operations to be understood? How might the non-communication of a non-common language become communicative? And, alternatively, how might this dynamic of a native language spoken as if a foreign be capable of resonating with an outside addressee while remaining distant from its own, original speaker?

Tarkovsky builds a new grammar in order to achieve these reversals. Whether a complete or partial non-translation, Tarkovsky's deliberate withholding of meaning functions as a way to approach meaning. That is to say: these non-translations and non-exchanges withhold language so as to trigger a language, discourse and inquisition surrounding it – like the previous model of the found and filmed footage splicing, Tarkovsky again elasticizes the possibilities of each frame by obscuring it. If the former inferential model, however, stemmed from an excessive debris of visual information, it is now a deficiency of spoken information that generates this model. In relation to the visual language built from the loss of a single figure, this aural one built from a loss of common language designs its own splicing grammar.

The withholding of language functions parallel to Tarkovsky's operations of fragmentation as it also produces, crosses and meshes among disparate registers. In response to Natalya's utter lack of comprehension, a multi-voiced composition emerges in the scene through the partial translation by her neighbor and the voiceover of Aleksei. These voices not only add narrators to the scene but, also, build a layered temporal perspective within the sequence: Natalya's neighbor speaks from within the real time of the action as it unfolds in the frame; Aleksei's voice-over speaks post-action and is grafted onto this same frame from the editing room. In this re-splicing of the soundtrack, there is one, too, of the proximity and the distance of the screen's sentiment. Alterity becomes intimate as a voice and time beyond the frame are inscribed into the scene; the intimacy of the Spaniard's reflections is rendered an alterity as Aleksei's voice speaks over the original Spanish speech, replacing the first-person reflection with a third-person summary of the man's monologue.

Besides constraining the original speech, Aleksei's voice both intimately brings in a trace of meaning and alienates meaning in the scene. While the voice-over makes present the absent voice of Aleksei and gives context to the screen, the Spanish speech present on the actual screen, un-subtitled and muffled by the Russian voice over, becomes absent. The film cannot 'understand' itself as it loses the voice of the face that it projects onto the screen. The Spaniard is a devoiced body and, like the disembodied voice of Aleksei, remains absent in his presence.

This inaccessible 'beyond' that is built into the frame is central to the film's articulation. This motion towards an unreachable language is depicted, paradoxically, through either a complete or a controlled withholding of words. These gaps of meaning are not empty, however. In the way of a penned scribbling, they are suggestive and draw attention in their illegibility.

Before the withholding of translation in the Spanish sequence and only shortly after Yuri's struggle to suppress a stutter, this double movement of withholding and approaching is established in the film's printing house scene. Shot in black and white, it details an episode – as imagined by Aleksei – of the Mother frantically rushing to check as to whether or not she has made a printing error. All of the sequence's suspense is cast in the unknown and the inaccessible: as the Mother runs into the press, the viewer has no idea what

her purpose of business is and, similarly, it is never explicitly divulged what word she fears to have printed. The drama of the entire episode is based upon a word that remains absent, imagined, concealed and beyond the actual frame.

Already distorted by the fact that it is recounted not by the Mother but, rather, as if through the imagination of Aleksei, the episode is set up in a narrative removal. This distancing is taken further in the episode through degrees of withholding information: the un-divulged word is paired with the un-divulged context of the article that may bear it; the belated revealing of the Mother's reason for rushing to the press is paired with a similarly deferred revealing of the verdict after she checks the journal for the typo. As the Mother, facing the camera, walks down a corridor after her verification, her neutral facial expression is accompanied by an equally ambiguous poem ("С утра я тебя дожидался вчера...") and voiceover by Arseny Tarkovsky. As Skakov describes it, in this elongated pause between the Mother's realization and the unveiling of this conclusion, the screen is displaced in a context inaccessible to itself or to the viewer:

The barely perceptible slow motion of the sequence, together with the voice-over delivering the poetic text, rescues the scene from its everydayness [as a travelling shot of a walk down a corridor] and transfers it into the realm of myth or parable. [...] It should also be noted that the laconic style of the poem, written in Russian in regular amphibrachic trimeter followed by an iamb, organically corresponds to the straightforwardness of the visual sequence accompanying it. The plain images of the sequence absorb every line of the poem, thus making significant every word it contains. [...] The poem appears at a point when it is not clear whether the error has taken place or not. This uncertainty is eliminated and at the same time intensified by the lyric message of Arseny Tarkovsky's text. The dramatic tension of the episode, achieved by the presence/absence of the printing error (everyday reality), is suddenly switched by means of the poem onto another level (the presence/absence of a lover). [...] The interaction of the poetic text with the printing-house episode is an illustrative example of Deleuze's vision of modern cinema as implying the collapse of the sensory-motor schema. Speech ceases to be a connecting point between image and narrative. 'From the morning I was waiting for you yesterday...' belongs neither to the domain of action or reaction; it is situated beyond a web of diegetic interactions. [...] Arseny Tarkovsky's [poem appears] as if from nowhere, and the voice-over is explicitly disembodied.

(The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time, 2012, pp. 117-118)

There are two ways of understanding the voice from beyond. On the one hand, this grafting of the poem onto the shot recalls the voice-over summary of the Spanish segment: it is a voice that, speaking from another time and space, enters the frame as the trace of another world outside of the screen. On the other hand, this voice recalls the nowhere-ness of Aleksei's own voice throughout the film: Arseny Tarkovsky's voice, separated from the orator's face and dubbed onto that of the Mother, is suspended between its aural approach and its visual withholding. "The image may contain the voice, or the voice may contain the image,"

Michel Chion writes of the function of a disembodied voice—the ‘acousmètre’—in film, “Being in the screen and not, wandering the surface of the screen without entering it, the acousmètre brings disequilibrium and tension. He invites the spectator to *go see*, and he can be an invitation to the loss of the self, to desire and fascination” (*The Voice in Cinema*, 1982; Trans. 1999, 23, 24).

This invitation to ‘go’ beyond the screen captures Tarkovsky’s withheld words and untranslated language. These non-articulations, never fully absent or present, incite curiosity through their obscurity. While the speech of the Spaniard is orally constrained by the voice-over, the partial translation, the timbre of his voice and the gestures of his body language trigger connotations and interpretations. Similarly, the word that terrorizes the Mother – a word both orally constrained (it is uttered only in the Mother’s inaudible whisper) and visually withheld (an erasure that is highlighted when the Mother says that, in her moment of greatest fear, she could imagine and “even see the word” as it would appear in the book) – becomes omnipresent through its oscillation between presence and absence. This unnamed word haunts the sequence as all suspense and resolution depends, first, on its possible presence and, finally, on its confirmed absence on the page.

This phantom word also infuses the scene with an ambiance of historical specificity: it recalls a fear of language particular to the times during which the sequence takes place – the Stalinist Great Purge of 1937-1940. Shot between 1973 and 1974, *Mirror* belongs to the post-Thaw times of the Stagnation era. At this moment, public discourse about Stalinism was neither fully embraced nor outlawed -- rather, it was relatively restrained. The sequence follows this constraint as the Stalinist period is neither fully disclosed nor fully veiled as the setting of the episode. The portraits of Stalin in the printing house thus remain visible — but only in the corner of the frame’s background. In this historical light, the withheld word gains a particular connotation. To a Russian audience, perhaps, the reference of the scene is all too clear: a famous, real episode in which an entire journal staff was sent to the gulags after having printed the fatal typo of ‘Sralin’ (rooted in the obscenity of *срать*, ‘to shit’) in place of ‘Stalin.’¹³ The concealment of the word in Tarkovsky’s sequence (whether by official censorship or by personal choice) renders this allusion only one of many possible references -- all of

¹³ As recounted by Kovács, Szilágyi, *Les Mondes d’Andrei Tarkovski*, 1987, 119

which remain unverifiable by the viewer and inaccessible in the film. This balance of an approach to and a withholding from language both precludes the oscillation of the film's later Spanish scene as well as introduces another dimension: whereas the Spanish scene depends on the incomprehension of non-translation, the printing press scene is defined by the unknowable quality of the absent word-- the allure of the untranslatable, as it were.

Through the untranslated and the untranslatable, *Mirror* articulates through a withholding. In gaining a voice of the beyond, these restraints of sense construct a language for a film that must 'remain incomprehensible to itself'. In this language, *Mirror* produces by struggling, in the way of Yuri, to both move towards and to refrain from enunciation. These degrees of constraining sense find another illustration, too, through a purposefully mistranslated text read towards the end of the printing house episode. "Земную жизнь," recites the mother's work colleague, Lisa, walking down a hall with her back turned to the camera, „пройдя до половины, я заблудилась в сумрачном лесу." In this final clause, uttered before Lisa skips and the frame cuts to the Mother in the shower, Tarkovsky reverses the original text. In place of Dante's "I came to myself in a dark wood" ("mi ritrovai per una selva oscura"), the narrator is now 'lost' in the woods. This is no faulty mistranslation: with the exception of changing the verb of *очутиться* ('to appear'), Tarkovsky otherwise follows word-for-word the standard Mikhail Lozinsky translation of the *Divine Comedy*¹⁴.

In this dismantling of the original and the insertion of a word expressing loss, the voice of Tarkovsky's beyond is found. Not unlike the *Divine Comedy*, *Mirror* is a trip to a place beyond life. Unlike the canonical work, however, the film is not a voyage into the realms of the afterlife but, rather, to a space between life and the afterlife. Narrated by Aleksei as he approaches death and reflects on life, the film builds from the perspectival alterity of a narrator that looks at his life as if with the eyes of the dead. As Kovács and Szilágyi write, in this recasting between the boundaries of life and death, a perspective of the beyond – the absolute perspective of the eternal as defined by Spinoza's *sub specie aeternitatis* – frames the film:

Tarkovski sait que la mémoire varie selon l'état physique et psychique de celui qui souffre. La maladie place le héros du film dans la proximité de la mort. [...] Dans le film de Tarkovski, la mort est une situation extrême, le monde *sub species mortis* se développe en un monde *sub species aeternitatis*. [...]

¹⁴ The political implications of this manipulation of the Lozinsky translation (which won the Stalin Prize) is further detailed in Skakov, *The Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, 2012, pp. 134-135

L'homme malade souffre, il est hors du rythme habituel de la vie, il est obligé de jeter un regard différent sur la vie et sur lui-même, il perd son identité avec lui-même. [...] La maladie élargit aussi la conscience [...] la sensibilité envers l'autre homme et les choses de ce monde s'accroît. La maladie peut entraîner aussi la perception de l'Absolu.

(*Les mondes d'Andreï Tarkovski*, 1987, pp. 116-117)

Speaking between life and death, the film addresses to and from the *ultimate* beyond. As *Mirror* moves towards this eternal and the narrator loses himself, how Tarkovsky use a worldly language while articulating such an otherworldly state of mind? The film's conclusion, where the threshold between life and death merge into one another, answers this question as the final loss of the narrator is expressed through an absolute loss of language. This loss, however, is to function as an affirmative final statement for Tarkovsky's destructive and reconstructive relation to language throughout the film.

The conclusive sense of nonsense: the birdsong of *Mirror*

“Мы с тобой никогда не могли по-человечески разговаривать”, Natalya says, looking at her reflection in a mirror while talking to Aleksei. The viewer may say the same to Tarkovsky. As I have argued, the filmmaker's operations of fragmentary interjection and withholding speak through the broken connections of a language that is built from the ashes of a former narrative and from a world that is never fully present on the screen. Natalya's address confirms this incineration and distance of *Mirror*. As a mirrored image speaks to a faceless voice, an external projection addresses an external absence on the screen: a mirage copy of a body speaks to a voice without a body. The Gestalt of Tarkovsky's communication is set up as a boundary: the film, like this non-exchange between mirrors and voices remains inaccessible within the screen or by the viewer. So it would seem. In the film's final seven minutes, however, as a depiction of the narrator's death passes into a suggestion of his birth, so, too, is this barrier passed and linked to a communicative call. “I regard words as noise made by men”: the viewer is to understand, at last, the filmmaker's statement as the screen transitions from the outside to the inside of *Mirror's* world.

In the film's penultimate scene, Aleksei lays on his bed behind a tall wooden screen on the other side of which a doctor two elderly women¹⁵ -- discuss the protagonist's death to come. At last, the viewer *sees* Aleksei as a grown man. This apparition, however, is incomplete and disconnected. It is not the character's

¹⁵ Both actresses are also present in the Spanish sequence. One of them is also plays the black haired woman who appears in the film's earlier Pushkin reading episode.

voice-actor, Innokenty Smoktunovsky nor the character's usual stand-in of Oleg Iankovskii but, rather, Andrei Tarkovsky himself who serves as a body-double for the dying narrator. As Smoktunovsky's voice enunciates its final words in the film, a travelling shot both unveils and veils the filmmaker's body: moving from his exposed chest to his forearm, the narrator becomes both corporal and remains faceless. When speaking about *Mirror*, Tarkovsky claimed to have made the film because he could not fathom the idea of his mother ever dying¹⁶. As Tarkovsky's hand clutches and releases a bird, the statement is inscribed and edited in film : the resistance to the representation of his mother's death segues into an acceptance of his own. Through the final words spoken by Smoktunovskiy's voice and Aleksei's final act, Tarkovsky performs, imagines, distorts and ventriloquizes his own death. As in the statement of Tarkovsky, this enactment of death is also linked to a mother's life: Aleksei's final words are a response to a question posed to him as to what his mother is to do after he dies. "Ничего, ничего, всё обойдётся, всё будет --" Smoktunovsky's voice reassures in its last breath. The mother is present not only in speech but also in a vision. It is Tarkovsky's actual mother, Maria Vishnyakova, who is seen smoking a cigarette outside of the countryside home in the frame that immediately precedes this sequence as well as in the sequence that follows the protagonist's death. As the film moves towards its final pronouncement, narrative death and maternal life continue their dialogue.

How, though, is a dead protagonist to serve in a dialogue? What language is to be made once the speaker dies and can no longer produce words? The film's language – from its interjections and its withholding – has lead up to this question and to this absolute loss of language. In Aleksei's death, speech becomes impossible for the original protagonist. The film must now articulate from the position of an aphasic of the highest degree: a patient who, verging on complete loss of language-producing faculties produces, in the words of Jakobson , "the last residues of speech [such as] one-phoneme, one-word, one-sentence utterances : the patient relapses into the initial phases of an infant's linguistic development or even to the prelingual stage : he faces aphasia universalis, the total loss of the power to use or apprehend speech" ("Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," 1956; *On Language*, 1990, 128).

¹⁶ Maya Turovskaya, *Tarkovsky: Cinema as Poetry*, p. 61

Following Aleksei's deathbed, the film is to return to the womb of the childhood home and end in an articulation from this infantile, prelinguistic stage.

The frame cuts to a meditative travelling shot of an expansive and empty field of grass. In Aleksei's death, the film has returned to his beginning: the land of childhood. In this return, the film seeks to retrieve an origin and, as such, performs a central task of Tarkovsky's film. The silent frame visualizes the final stanza of an Arseni Tarkovsky poem that gave the film its original working title, "White Day" ("Белый день")¹⁷: "Вернуться туда невозможно/ И рассказать нельзя,/ Как был переполнен блаженством/ Этот райский сад". This impossible return to the past is followed by an even more impossible one: a return to the womb. The camera continues surveying the environment and stops at a distant angle from the home and zooms out of the grass and then into the ground where Aleksei's young mother and father, played one final time by the actors Margarita Terekhova and Oleg Yankovsky, are seen laying together. "Тебе кого больше хочется, мальчика или девочку?" the father asks the mother. As Aleksei is, possibly, re-introduced as this embryotic male or female subject to-be, the film enters a prelinguistic stage. The father's question contains the last spoken words of the film: the final four minutes of *Mirror* are narrated exclusively through noises.

How might this shift from death to birth and from words to noise re-position the film in its final minutes? How might the preceding perspective of Aleksei translate as the subject transitions from a living to a dead and, finally, to an embryotic state? "Le héros du *Miroir*," Kovács and Szilágyi describe, "assume plutôt le rôle de celui qui écoute. Les événements, la nature, les objets qui apparaissent et disparaissent, parlent – [Aleksei] les écoute. Tarkovski assimile l'art à cette écoute" (*Les mondes d'Andreï Tarkovski*, 1987, 124). Removed from the outside world – first by death and then by the womb—how might this position of the listener be articulated as it shifts from an external to an internal field of reference? In response to this question, it is important to note that hearing is one of the first senses to develop in a human life as it begins when the child is still a fetus. As such, Georg Groddeck offers an embryotic model for aural consideration: "The psychological data from the data preceding birth, in which the infant discovers nothing

¹⁷ According to Bird, *Andreï Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema*, 2008, p. 104

from his own impressions but the regular rhythm of the mother's heart and his own, illuminate the means used by nature to inculcate in man a musical feeling.[...] the child's equilibrium in the mother's body comes into play when the sense of rhythm and measure appear" ("Music and the Unconscious," 1927, 3, 6). Placed in this 'original rhythm,' what might the film articulate as it listens?

"Тебе кого больше хочется, мальчика или девочку": the mother smirks, raises an eyebrow, bites her lip, takes a deep breath and looks away. Her answer is deferred and then permanently suspended as she falls silent. The opening chorus to Bach's *Saint John Passion* that has played quietly underneath the lovers' exchange now bursts into crescendo. This aural shift is as intertextual as it is intra-textual: as in the case of *Mirror's* prologue when it transitions from Yuri to the musically-accompanied opening credits, it is once again a Bach composition that overthrows language. Whereas, however, it is a wordless melody that performs against text in the film's opening, it is now a worded Bach composition – a holy incantation that calls to the heavens ("Herr, unser Herrscher ...") – that rises over the film's silent and wordless characters. These are not, however, the words of clear speech: in the composition's exaltation of emotive expression and through the multiple voices of the chorus that intersect and divide from one another, these words become melodies, *noise* made by men and women. In the noise of these voices, the emotive and the expressive overthrow the semantic value of these words. *Mirror* thus enters a space that is suspended between the formless and the form, the unworded and the word -- the at once embryotic and prelinguistic condition of the Chora (χώρα). "Neither model nor copy," Julia Kristeva writes, "the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1984, 94). Within the chora – a term indicative of both the space of the uterus and a prelinguistic condition in Kristeva's writing – the Bach choral resonates fully. As a prelinguistic state from which linguistic form emerges, the Bach melody serves as a non-semantic re-ordering that preludes and provides grammar for a nonsense that makes sense – it provides the rhythm from which a non-language that performs as a language is to rise in *Mirror's* final noise.

The chorus continues, accompanied by a travelling shot through the surrounding forest. The screen is saturated in the *forms* of trees, the *formlessness* of soil and the *texture* of moss: Tarkovsky's visual poetics

intersect with those of the melody suspended between the unworded and worded, the prelinguistic and the linguistic. Together, these images and chorus forge a poetics of anticipation. “We do not ‘speak’ from speech;” Susan Stewart writes in *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002), “rather, it is already waiting to speak us, both to enunciate our being and to remake and extend ourselves” (89). With musical accompaniment, these images translate the poetic call to language into the medium of film: the screen’s visual and aural dimension vibrate and tremble, call out and present themselves as a language waiting to be taken. From the landscape, subjects emerge and re-emerge over the course of the Bach sequence: two mothers are called into the frame— the fictional, Terekhova-portrayed one and the actual one of Tarkovsky; two young children with shaved heads wander behind the lead of Vishnyakova—Aleksei as a five-year-old (played by Oleg Yankovsky’s own son, Filipp) and his younger sister. Reaching its highest crescendo, the chorale suddenly stops. For two seconds the screen freezes in a near perfect silence. The image, meanwhile, moves. In the vast field, Terekhova is seen alone in the distance smoking while the camera continues moving horizontally to the left. Silence is broken and then it is seen. A loud howling comes forth and the camera reveals the source – the tiny, little Aleksei. The frame crops him in the extreme left corner of the screen in profile facing left: with his hand raised to his mouth he seems to be calling out beyond the screen; with the field now framed as completely empty behind him he seems to be calling out to no one. The boy’s articulation is as ambiguous as his address: the howl could be the imitation of an animal, a playful noise made to hear his own echo or an infantile noise made in the place of producing a word. Either way, this is the film’s final “(little) man-made noise” from a Tarkovskian perspective on language as well as a “relapse to an infant’s linguistic development or even to the prelingual stage” from a Jakobsonian one.

Конец фильма — Конец языка. Aphasia totalis ends all sense and the screen complacently cuts to black. Or so it would seem. The film’s final call both dismantles and re-mantles language: the boy’s noise is a piece of nonsense that makes sense. Since its opening stutter and throughout its withheld speech, *Mirror* has strived towards this unraveling of language in order to build its own. In his howl, the boy announces that this language, this speech that ‘waits to speak us,’ has found its enunciation. Non-language finds language as the boy-made noise both asserts an articulation of the individual and addresses towards others. The noise

becomes a word that both receives and is deprived of a response. While no human calls back, barely audible fragments of birdsong murmur twice in the distance as the film closes. Once released at a man's death, birds now respond to a little boy expressing life through a primal call. *"Я не могу говорить"*: they can only respond in birdsong; they can only attempt communication with humans that reproduce and disguise themselves in animalistic noises. *"Я не могу говорить"*: the original prompt, too, that the boy provides as he foregoes the word in favor of noise; the hesitation or limitation, too, of a toddler attempting speech. *"Я не могу говорить"*: the boy is not a subject, he is a trace – an actor who portrays the five-year-old incarnation of a man who has just died and of a fetus that has just been introduced. The sound is then the assertive call of this no one and this everyone that composes the spectral and temporally discombobulated Aleksei. To call out as no one and to no one while imitating and playing the role of the young Aleksei – this is both the address and the response of Tarkovsky's birdsong. In the field, the boy and the birds reverberate in a circle of mimicked sounds and broken dialogues. In this mimicry, the hoot reflects a mirror back to clinical room where the stutterer repeats after the speech therapist: "Я могу говорить!"

Returning to this session through a boy's chime and a forest's birdsong, the film returns to its opening promise of language. *"Ты будешь говорить чётко, свободно и легко. Ты всю жизнь будешь говорить громко и чётко."* Yes, clearly and freely, but in the way of howl. Yes, for an entire life, he may take Tarkovsky's prescription. *"Words are noise made by men"*: an enunciation of truth that speaks by not speaking, that expresses by not filtrating a personal timbre into a standard word. In this final call and final appeal to a mixture of nonsense, sense is distilled. Just as the film has staged the protagonist's death as to restage his birth, so, too, has it staged language's death as to perform its resurrection. In this resurgence of noise that stands in for language, the film's subjective spectrality unifies and solidifies. As the dynamism of noise overthrows the static of word, the dynamic refractions of Tarkovsky's disembodied voices, fictional and familial overthrow the single, static reflection of a mirror. In the staccato trill of the howl, these fragmented bodies are released into the field. The setting of Aleksei's childhood receives his howl and it absorbs his history. As these subjective and temporal fragments disperse and take form in orderly disorder, *they can* – at last– speak.

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