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'I am recording the sound of my speaking voice …'

Enunciation in Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room*

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Abstract

'I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in', states the American sound artist and composer Alvin Lucier (1931-) in his canonical piece I am Sitting in a Room (1970), thereby emphasising the very act of enunciation in which someone is addressing someone else in an individual speech act. Though the question of enunciation has been touched upon in several analyses of this piece, none of them have connected it to the strong and vast theoretical field established by the French linguist Émile Benveniste (1902-1976) and further developed by numerous phenomenologically-oriented analytical approaches, particularly in relation to literary and film studies.

By shifting our attention from the statement to the very act in which it is produced, the article aims not only to shed light on an essential part of Lucier's artwork, but also to show how the theory of enunciation can prove fruitful in relation to sound studies as such. In conclusion, the article suggests that in addition to the text, the vocal performance and the recording can also be seen as communicative acts.

Although the linguistic theory of enunciation, as introduced by the French linguist Èmile Benveniste (1902-1972), has been of immense importance to the study of many art forms – such as literature, film, visual art and theatre – it has not yet been discussed in relation to sound art. This article demonstrates and discusses how the theory of enunciation can be used to analyse the canonical piece *I am Sitting in a Room* (1970) by the American sound artist Alvin Lucier. The article argues that the three different acts of this piece – the textual act, the vocal performance act and the act of technological reproduction – can be seen as acts of enunciation, or meaning-producing 'speech' acts, rather than as mere vehicles for a given meaning. The article furthermore discusses how recording is used to establish subjectivity, while at the same time containing a de-subjectivating gesture. Finally, on the basis of a short analysis of *4 Rooms* by the Danish sound artist Jacob Kirkegaard, the article debates if and how the theory of enunciation can be used in relation to the study of sound art as such.

'I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now', the American sound artist and composer Alvin Lucier (1931-) states at the beginning of his canonical piece *I am Sitting in a Room* (1970)[1] for voice on tape. This sentence directly emphasises the very act of addressing someone in an individual speech act – what the French linguist Émile Benveniste (1902-1976) called the 'act of enunciation'. Though the question of enunciation has been touched upon in several analyses of this piece (Labelle, 2007; Voegelin, 2010), none of them have connected it to the strong and vast theoretical field established by Benveniste and developed it further by numerous, phenomenologically-oriented analytical approaches in narratology, reception

aesthetics and semiotics. The main claim of this article is that it is not just the state-ment made that is essential to *I am Sitting in a Room*, but rather the act by which the statement is made. The article furthermore claims that this communicative act can be analysed and described formally, using the theory of enunciation, thereby call-ing attention to an often overlooked aspect of sound art: namely that the sound artwork is not just sounds – voices, words etc. – but rather a communicative act that addresses, engages and appeals to its recipient in certain ways.

The article begins with an introduction to the theory of enunciation through an analysis of Lucier's piece that includes the text, the performance and the record-ing. As part of this analysis, the article comments on the two typical descriptions of this piece as either a cool, literal investigation of the acoustic properties of a room (Wishardt 1998; Nyman, 1999) or a phenomenological statement, revealing the presence of the subject (Labelle, 2007; Voegelin, 2010). This leads to a discussion of the subjectivating and desubjectivating gestures in the piece. Finally, the article presents more general conclusions with regard to how the theory of enunciation can be used as a general tool in relation to sound art.

I. I am Sitting in a Room

Lucier was originally trained as a classical composer, but lost confidence in contem-porary musical language quite early in his career. He began experimenting with new ways of working with sound, abandoning the formal language of music alto-gether and using physics and scientific methods instead, as a way to investigate the world through sounds (Lucier, 1979, p. 287). Lucier made his debut as a sound artist, rather than a traditional composer, in 1965 with the piece *Music for Solo Performer* for 'enormously amplified brain waves and percussion' (Lucier, n.d.) in which EEG electrodes attached to the performer's scalp register brainwaves that are amplified and used to vibrate percussion instruments. *I am Sitting in a Room* has the quality of an almost scientific setup, similar to *Music for Solo Performer*, in which both the process and the product are essential. Lucier did his first version – a version he calls 'preliminary' (Lucier, 1995, p. 98) – in 1969 in the Electronic Music Studio at Brandeis University in the USA, published by Source Magazine (1970), and since then he has made other recordings of the piece. The most well-known one was made in 1980 in his home in Middleton and published at Lovely Music (1990).[2] Lucier also made an instructive score, so that anyone can perform the piece (see Lucier, 1995, p. 322).[3] In this manner, *I am Sitting in a Room* differs from most sound art, which is normally not defined as performance art.

I am Sitting in a Room is a self-explanatory piece, in that it begins with an unac-companied voice – in Lucier's recordings we hear his own voice – reading a text out loud that refers to the process by which the piece is made:

> I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have. (Lucier, 1990)

When the recording of the text that is being read out loud is played back through a loudspeaker and then recorded again, the acoustic properties of the room act as a filter, enhancing certain frequencies and dimming others. As the process is performed several times, the speech is gradually transformed into an abstract, pulsating, broad-spectred sound texture. In *I am Sitting in a Room* we hear several repetitions that have been spliced together into one continuous sound event. The number of repetitions and the length of the piece depend on the individual performance. In the first version from 1969 the piece lasts about 15 minutes, while the version from 1980 (Lovely Records, 1990) lasts 40 minutes and has 32 repetitions.

Through the course of the piece the text is read out loud several times, each time with a new layer of distortion, until the semantic content of the speech is lost in a complex, abstract pattern of sounds. Even Lucier's characteristic stutter – the 'irregularities' of his speech referred to in the text – cannot be identified at the end of the piece.

As noted above, the question of enunciation has been mentioned in earlier analyses, such as in those of Brandon Labelle (2007, p. 126) and Salomé Voegelin (2010, p. 128). But this article further investigates the theoretical distinctions that appear if we consider Lucier's piece through the lens of enunciation.

II. The act of enunciation

One of the defining characteristics of *I am Sitting in a Room* is that we hear a person speaking directly to us. In this way, the piece addresses what the French linguist Émile Benveniste (1966, 1974) calls 'the act of enunciation'. According to Benveniste, the enunciation is not the utterance, the text itself, the statement or the sound, but 'cette mise en fonctionnement de la langue par un acte individuel d'utilisation' (Benveniste, 1974, p. 80). In other words, it is the individual speech act in which language is put to use. Enunciation is the very structure of mediation in which the language system is transformed into a specific discourse (Greimas & Courtés, 1988, p. 278). Since the act of enunciation is a unique occurrence that disappears as soon as it has happened, it is very difficult to study. One can, however, point towards certain characteristics of an act of enunciation: it always requires an enunciator who

appropriates the language system in order to communicate; it always indicates a recipient; and it always happens at a specific time and place (Benveniste, 1974, p. 82).

According to this theory, the enunciation is not a vehicle or a transparent media for the stated or the uttered (the 'énoncé'). Rather, the statement is *produced* in and by the act of enunciation. What we call 'meaning' – that is, the whole semantic dimension of language – is therefore rooted in specific actions. Consequently, Benveniste's theory offers a radical break with Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of meaning as a semiotic structure of signs. Benveniste nevertheless does not deny the existence of a semiotic system of signs, but he claims that there are two different kinds of meaning in language: 'la signifiance des signes' and 'la signifiance de l'énonciation' (the meaning of signs and the meaning of the enunciation) (Benveniste, 1974, p. 65). The meaning of signs can be looked up in a dictionary, but the semantic meaning can only be experienced in specific contexts in which language is put to use. For instance, a sentence such as 'will you pass me the salt' often gains an insistent quality, when it is repeated, so even though the semiotic meaning of the words in the sentence is exactly the same, the semantic meaning can vary depending on the situation and the context. As one of his main arguments, Benveniste asserts that the words we use the most are actually not defined until they are put to use. They simply cannot be understood without taking into consideration the act of enunciation. This applies, for instance, to the so-called deictic shifters, words such as 'I', 'you', 'here' and 'now'. These words gain a new referent every time they are put to use: when I speak, the word 'I' points towards me, but when you say 'I', the word points towards you. Deixis means 'pointing', and the deixis or pointing of these words changes or shifts every time they are put to use, hence the label 'deictic shifter' that is often used for this type of word. Even though the act of enunciation is a singular occurrence and therefore difficult to study, we can study these deictic markers that point towards the acts in which they are used.

In *I am Sitting in a Room* the act of enunciation is explicitly what the text is about. It describes the very act by which the artwork is made. However, this is not just a face-to-face speech act, but a technologically remediated act, which means that the speaker and the listener do not share the same time and space, as stated in the opening line: 'I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now'. The act of technological reproduction and production is not a 'speech act', since language is not its medium, but it is still a meaning-producing act, done by someone for someone at a specific time and place, and therefore it can also be regarded as an act of enunciation. We literally hear a change in the semiotic register during the time span of the piece: in the beginning, the piece is dominated by the linguistic system establishing normal English sentences, but as the piece continues, the linguistic system is gradually eradicated and turned into a more abstract sound texture, and here the piece mainly operates through the recording and playback. In this manner, the piece

reveals an extra layer of enunciation and exposes the recording act as more than a means of transmitting speech. The piece thus allows us to experience a 'diversification' of the recorded speech act; what is at first perceived as one unified act – someone speaking – is later revealed as a complex mediated speech act consisting of several acts: that of someone speaking, recording, doing a playback and of us listening.

In the following, I wish to develop the claim that this piece makes explicit the notion that a recorded speech act includes several different layers of enunciation: the textual, the performative and the technological act as well as the actual listening act. In other examples of recorded speech we may not perceive these layers as *different* layers. In, say, an audio book, we are often so engaged in the story that we do not pay attention to the textual act, the performance act, the recording act, the playback act or our own active listening act. The specific aesthetic characteristic of *I am Sitting in a Room* is that it reveals that all recorded utterances consist of several different meaning-producing acts. In order to understand the complex communicative act of this piece, it is therefore imperative to understand how aspects of enunciation – such as the deictic pointing, the modes of doing – function in each separate layer. I will pursue this argument by analysing each aspect (the text, the speech, the recording and the listening) as an act of enunciation.

By performing such an analysis, I also imply that the theory of enunciation can be transferred beyond linguistics and beyond a narrow focus on verbal language and used as a tool in relation to all acts of meaning, regardless of their medium. This is not a radical idea. Since the 1960s the theory of enunciation has been applied to many different medial expressions. Michel de Certeau (2006) even describes walking in the city as an act of enunciation by which the pedestrian creates the city. Furthermore, the general idea that 'meaning' has to be understood as an 'act' is not solely found in Benveniste's linguistics, but is a general notion put forward by many contemporary thinkers. Cases in point are Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1984) concept of the 'language game' and J.L. Austin's (1992) description of performative utterances.

III. The textual 'enunciated enunciation'

A written text contains, but is not an actual act of enunciation. In the text Lucier reads out loud there is, for instance, an explicit textual 'I' speaking to a 'you', and the text indicates a time – the present, as shown in the phrase 'I am recording' – and finally it refers to a specific place, 'the room', which is characterised as different from the room that the listener is in. Even without the performance, without the actual act of enunciation, a text contains what can be described as a fixed or already enunciated act of enunciation (Greimas & Courtés, 1988, p. 278).[4]

Even an academic text like this article implies a communicative act. It has no explicit 'you', but when we read it, we still know that it is addressing a reader. For instance,

the whole argumentation is developed to prove a point or explain something to the addressee, and the specific composition of the textual progression in the words, the phrases and the paragraphs depicts the reading act that the text prescribes. Sensitivity to a text's communicative aspect is essential to our reading process. If we did not recognise the implicit act of enunciation in a text, it would not 'speak to us', but just be a random pile of words. The textual act of enunciation is therefore often a double act, consisting of both the explicit 'I' and 'you' and the implicit doing of the text.

Furthermore, we can then differentiate between the actual and implicit writers and readers. The former is an actual person, reading or writing in an actual time and space, while the latter is a textual function. The implicit writer or sender therefore does not refer to the author as an actual, psychological person, but is a function in the text – the constant doing or presenting done by the text. As explained in Roland Barthes' (1994, p. 495) proclamation of the 'the death of the author', the textual act of enunciation and the author's singular act of writing are two distinct and different matters. Consequently, the concept of an implicit sender and reader is not a way to address the intention of the author or the meaning embedded in the text. On the contrary, in this theoretical framework the meaning of texts always happens as a unique action in the reading process, and consequently it does not make sense to try to reveal or understand one true meaning of a text. However, it is possible to say something about the reading process made possible by the text, and by this means address certain *potential* experiences or meaning formations (Eco, 1984, pp. 3-9).

Since the 1960s, we have seen a veritable explosion of new terms regarding the enunciation as part of a general orientation towards the role of the reader. According to Umberto Eco, terms such as 'implicit sender/receiver', 'enunciator', 'enunciated enunciation' and so on suddenly appear simultaneously in very different academic traditions such as hermeneutics, semiotics and narratology, with a common in:

> [N]ot the empirical results of given personal or collective acts of reading (studied by a sociology of reception) but rather in the very function of construction – or deconstruction – of a text performed by its interpreter – insofar as such a function is implemented, encouraged, prescribed, or permitted by the textual linear manifestation. (Eco, 1994, pp. 44-50)

In reception aesthetics, the focus is on the 'implied reader', which is the way the text implies or prescribes a reading process. This reader is described in the writings of Wolfgang Iser (1972), who introduced the term, as well as in the semiotics of Eco (1984) in his concept of a 'model reader'. Narratology is instead concerned with the implied sender function – the question of 'who' (understood as a textual function) is speaking, from where, with what kind of knowledge (see Genette, 1972) – for example the 'implicit sender' of the text. These theoretical understandings have been applied to film (Chatman, 1990), to painting (Kemp, 1985) and to theatre (Thy-

gesen, 2010). Despite the widespread use of this theoretical approach, it has not as yet been related to sound art.[5] To some extent, the vocabulary has been applied to music in musical semiotics, for instance by Eero Taresti (2002), but this tradition is strongly based on Saussure's semiotics and tends to exclude Benveniste's revisions, therefore differing radically from the theoretical optic presented in this article.[6] In the sociologist Simon Frith's (2002) analysis of the performing voice, he does not use the term 'enunciation', but he does discuss what happens when the double act of the textual enunciation is presented in a vocal act, which is very much in line with the thinking I present in this article.

Lucier's text emphasises the communicative act of enunciation in which the artwork is produced. We are not given additional information about the speaker's emotional state or his life in general. The 'I' is only defined as the person speaking. In the text, the 'I' has no gender, but the quality of the performing voice and the knowledge gained from the paratexts contribute to constituting the male gender. Even though a text is capable of many differentiations according to time, the text Lucier reads out loud has only the present tense. It contains no flashbacks, no past sense, and the speaker does not give us access to an additional stream of events besides the very 'becoming' of the text and the artwork as such: the subject speaking, recording, playing back and listening. This text exposes the reality of all texts. They are on one level always stuck or fixed in the present tense, since they address their reader directly every time they are read. Even an academic article like the one you are reading right now unfolds its argument in the present tense of the reading process, and it has this present tense every time it is read. Accordingly, the speaking or the 'doing' of the text is disconnected and different from the doing of the text production (the author writing) as well as from its reception (the reader reading). It is an implicit or fixed doing.

I am Sitting in a Room is an artefact, a sound file, but also a communicative act fixed in a sound file. What we encounter when we listen to the sound file is therefore not just sound, not just words, a voice or 'a message', but a communicative act that invites us to engage in the act. Consequently, the very same agents that occur in an actual communicative act are also 'in' the sound file, only as implicit functions. The sound itself can be made an object of analysis, if we, for instance, use a spectrogram (for example Broening's analysis of *I am Sitting in a Room* [Broening, 2006]), but the communicative act embedded in the sound file can also be the focus of an analysis using the theory of enunciation.

IV. The vocal enunciation

The defining characteristic of Lucier's piece is, as mentioned above, that rather than emphasising the 'textual' act of enunciation, it establishes its fascinating effects through the interplay of the text, the performance and the recording. The effects

of this piece are thus not established primarily by the text; on the contrary, the 'I' addressing us is not, as already mentioned, described in an extended way by the text, but rather defined through the performance by which the textual 'I' is connected to a vocal 'I'. By this means, we can for instance hear that the 'I' is a man. And our general knowledge of the piece, provided by information on the cover of the published CD, connects the vocal 'I' to the social 'I', that is, Alvin Lucier himself. Nor is the 'you' defined by an unfolded, textually established, fictional universe, but rather by the actual listener's social situation in the act of reception of the artwork. The deictic markers then point towards the actual, social acts of enunciation involved in the making of this piece: that of someone speaking, of someone recording and of someone listening.

The feeling of the presence of the subject plays an enhanced role in the analyses made by Brandon Labelle (2007, p. 126) and Salomé Voegelin (2010, p. 128). Whereas the typical description of this piece sees it as an objective, 'cool', literal investigation of the acoustic properties of a room, as described by Lucier himself (1977), Michael Nyman (1999) and Trevor Wishardt (1998, p. 52), Labelle states that the most important element of the piece is not the space itself, but the subject in the space. He claims that 'speech unsettles the pure phenomenology of acoustical physics by always supplying or introducing the social and cultural tracings individuality intrinsically enacts' (Labelle, 2007, p. 126). And he continues, 'While Lucier pursues physical and sonic phenomena, he does so in such a way as to *implicate* subjectivity' (Labelle, 2007, p. 127). Labelle particularly emphasises Lucier's characteristic stuttering as a sign of this subjectivity.

This sense of realism and presence of the phenomenological subject speaking is established partly by the self-referential metadiscourse that constantly emphasises the actual communicative act of production and reception, and partly by the realism of the recording. Recording has often been described as an act of representation that is uncoded and untouched by human, symbolic grammatology, as for instance seen in the thinking of media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1984). Kittler sees recording as a milestone with regard to sound reproduction, because the reproduced sound no longer needs to fit into the conventional notational system, but can be reproduced without using a symbolic grammar. Others have asserted that recording is still inscribed in the human symbolic realm, because it is presented and listened to by human beings (Kim-Cohen, 2009; Vandsø, 2011). Still, the *effect* of realism is strong in recording: in everyday language we would say that we hear 'Lucier' and not a recording of his vocal performance. Furthermore, the recording presents an image of the person that is partly out of his or her control. This aspect is particularly present in *I am Sitting in a Room* due to Lucier's stuttering.

This almost hypnotic realism[7] is similar to the transparency of the photo, which has also been described as an uncoded message, for instance by Roland Barthes (Bertelsen, 1997).

As the piece progresses, this sense of realism is, however, disturbed, as our access to the speaking voice is hindered. The transparency of the recording is interrupted, blurred and made opaque. It is made obvious that in fact we were not listening to Lucier, but rather to a recording of his voice, as the referent – the social person – is forced away from the sonic sign, the technologically reproduced sound of the person. One could also say that the 'monologic grip' (Middleton, 2000, p. 81) that forces the subject positions of voice, text, performance and recording together with the actual social person is cracked open. Furthermore, the sound is dissociated from the 'eventness' of the recorded situation, revealing the 'now' as nothing but an effect of the recording, as a represented or fixed 'now'.

By the end of the piece there is no represented 'now', no represented 'person', just an abstract sonic texture: the actual listening now and the actual listening subject in what one might call an 1:1 representation that seems to represent the impossibility of an actual, immediate act of representation by means of recording. *I am Sitting in a Room* thus reveals that the technological reproduction of recording is not just a transparent media, and that the meaning effects of the recording do not exist outside the recording, but in it, which means that the recording in itself is a performative 'meaning-producing act', instead of just a transparent media reproducing an already existing meaning formation.

V. Recording as an act of enunciation

Like writing, recording can be considered an actual act of enunciation that – once it is done – remains a communicative artefact that keeps on communicating every time it is heard and long after its creator is gone. The recording can therefore be described as a fixed communicative act or an already enunciated enunciation, though it functions in a radically different way from a text.

To regard the recorded sound as an implicit act of enunciation may sound strange or counterintuitive, but if we consider the analysis of film, aspects such as camera angles are in fact described as a part of the implicit enunciation of films. Seymour Chatman (1990, p. 113), for instance, introduces the notion of an 'implicit narrator' in films. However, he states that the implicit act in a film differs from that in a written novel, and therefore he suggests that the agent choosing exactly what limited part of the fictional universe the viewer can see should be called an implicit 'presenter' or 'organiser', rather than a 'narrator'. Accordingly, one can also refer to an implicit presenter or organiser in a sound recording. 'The implicit presenter' does not refer to the artist as a person or to his intention. Rather the term indicates that a recording does not transmit its content in an unmediated, direct way, but reflects a number of choices – for instance, the choice of microphone characteristics, the choice of the length of the recording, the mixing of the recorded material.

The deictic markers of the sound recording are usually not explicit, and therefore we do not often experience the recording as 'speaking' to us. Often – in particular in field recordings – the recording appears to us as a neutral remediation or registration of sounds, as though a neutral, technological ear has extended our listening range and allowed us to eavesdrop on an auditive situation.

One could argue that rather than pointing towards the subject or the acoustic properties of the room, this piece explores technological reproduction and its relation to subjectivity – particularly the inhuman and human aspects of recording. In the process in which the semantics of the speech is dissolved into noise, the piece demonstrates the nonhuman quality of the ear and mouth of the recorder. Unlike the human ear, the recording device cannot distinguish between speech and noise, and therefore it is insignificant to the semantic content of speech. It is semantically deaf. But one could also argue that the piece exposes the doing of a subject, as it demonstrates the complex action of the recording, playback and editing process that is explicitly mentioned in the text. In this sense, the questions of subjectivity, representation and technology are dealt with on several levels of the piece.

VI. The constitution and deconstruction of the subject

This formal analysis of the implicit act of enunciation in the piece paves the way for a broader contextual analysis of the main thematic contents of the piece, such as the relation between subject and technology.

I am Sitting in a Room is often referred to in literature on sound art, and, roughly speaking, this piece is regarded in two different ways. On the one hand, Lucier (1995) himself and others describe the piece as an investigation of the acoustic properties of space, and on the other, a number of newer interpretations concentrate on the question of subjectivity, as seen in Labelle's (2007) and Voegelin's (2010) analyses. The former focuses on the almost scientific appeal of the piece, while the latter focuses on the phenomenological presence of the subject.

If we consider the structure of enunciation, it leaves room for both experiences: the piece performs both the constitution of subjectivity through recording and its eradication – the latter giving the piece a more detached, objective and scientific quality. Through the process of this piece, the focus of the representation shifts from the subject of enunciation to the space in which the enunciation is performed. An act of enunciation always requires both aspects, but normally we are concerned with the subject (and in particular the subject's intention), rather than the place of the enunciation. The German avantgarde theorist Peter Bürger (1980) even describes the bourgeois subject as the 'content' of modern art. This content is challenged by the art of the avantgarde movements and especially by their denial of the individual production as a category (Bürger, 1980, pp. 81-83). *I am Sitting in a Room* can be

seen as a piece that performs this transition from the modern focus on the subject to the modernistic deconstruction of the subject; it is thus part of a general movement in the art world in which both artworks and texts concerning art, language, philosophy and so forth criticise the modern notions of subjectivity.

From the 1950s onwards, Émile Benveniste has been a key reference in the radical break with how we have normally perceived subjectivity. Instead of describing language as a tool through which the subject can express him- or herself, language is, according to Benveniste, the place where subjectivity is constituted (1966, p. 259). Accordingly, a subject is solely defined by the language act as the one uttering the word 'I': '*Je* signifie "la personne qui énonce la présente instance de discours contenant *je*"' (1966, p. 253). '*I* signifies "the person who enounces the very phrase containing the word *I*"'.[8] This understanding of subjectivity is essential to Michel Foucault's later description of subjectivity as being constituted through discourse (Foucault, 1972).

Furthermore, one could mention John Cage as one of the main figures in the ongoing investigation of the question of the subject and its relation to the communicative act. This is seen in his writings and compositions and in his general interest in silence. Accordingly, Cage asserts that the composer should 'set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves rather than vehicles for man-made theories or expressions of human sentiments' (Cage, 2004, p. 10).

Lucier's piece should be seen in the light of these theoretical and artistic negotiations of subjectivity. In these negotiations, the subject can no longer be seen as an authentic identity existing unconnected to and before language, and yet these artistic expressions are still concerned with the experience of subjectivity and of the desubjectivating process.[9] *I am Sitting in a Room* is, in that sense, an interesting contribution to the artistic discussions of subjectivity/desubjectivation, because it insists that the subject is constituted (and eradicated) not only by verbal discourse but also by the 'technologically reproductive act'. In the technological reproduction, subjectivity is both constituted and lost as the subject is turned into a (sound) object.

VII. The use of the theory of enunciation as an analytical tool in the study of sound art in general

Since sound art uses sounds that appear not to be composed, in the sense that they are individually shaped by a purely musical intention, but rather collected through recording (or a sound walk) or produced by various technological means, sound art often conceals its communicative aspects. It is my claim, however, that all sounds in sound art are put forward, presented, produced or 'enunciated', and hence all sound artworks contain or imply a communicative act. Many texts describe music

as communication and oppose it to a sound art, which, for its part, is described as presenting 'just sounds'. Alan Licht, for instance, describes sound art as a genre that is less focused on the subjective expression of the artist and more concerned with 'sound as a phenomenon of nature and/or technology' (Licht, 2007, p. 14). For that reason, much literature on sound art focuses on sound and listening as physical or phenomenological phenomena, whereas the theoretical implications of the communicative aspects are often overlooked. For example, Brandon Labelle begins his book on sound with a description of the characteristics of sound as an artistic media (Labelle, 2010, pp. ix-), and Salomé Voegelin (2010) focuses on the phenomenology of listening and how it differs from seeing.

If we apply the theory of enunciation to sound art, we see that the sounds in sound art differ from sound in general, because they are put forward, presented, produced or 'enunciated'. One could say that the sounds in sound art come with a set of invisible quotation marks. They are 'sounds' or told sounds (Miletus, 2008; Vandsø, 2011). Even in a sound walk, where the sounds are not necessarily crafted, shaped or reproduced, they are still presented to the audience and hence part of an act of enunciation. They are, for instance, presented as something to be listened to with focused, aesthetic attention.

The theory of enunciation can be one way to theoretically address the communicative aspect of sound art, even when the communicative aspects are not exposed by the artwork itself. It is beyond the limits of this article to show how an analytical focus on enunciation can be fruitful in relation to sound art as such; I will nevertheless attempt to illustrate this claim by briefly analysing a second artwork related to *I am Sitting in a Room*, namely *4 Rooms* (2006) by the Danish sound artist Jacob Kirkegaard.

In particular, *4 Rooms* is interesting in comparison to *I am Sitting in a Room*, because Kirkegaard has used the very same method of recording and playback, with a few minor, but significant changes (Kirkegaard, n.d.). First of all, Kirkegaard has emitted the vocal performance, which means that the only sound sources in the recording are the incidental background noises. During the recordings, the artist even left the four rooms where he performed his recordings (Kirkegaard, n.d.). Second, the four recorded rooms are of interest not for their acoustic properties primarily, but rather for their traumatic history, as they are all from the 'Zone of Alienation' surrounding the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl that was closed after the atomic meltdown in 1986. Unlike *I am Sitting in a Room*, *4 Rooms* is a site-specific piece. Kirkegaard chose rooms that used to be full of life, such as a church and a swimming pool. The four parts are named after the former functions of the rooms – 'Church', 'Swimming pool', 'Auditorium' and 'Gymnasium' – causing the collected sounds to seem to emit echoes of the lived lives that gave these rooms their identity. When listening to the abstract sounds, I feel that I can almost hear the faint echo of the sound of children

playing in the swimming pool, and I also sense the nuclear decay that has forever sealed the fate of these sites and robbed them of their identity and function. By these means, Kirkegaard not only investigates the formal acoustic properties of a specific space, but also articulates this traumatic site that is now part of our collective memory.

Whereas *I am Sitting in a Room* exposes the act of enunciation by addressing it directly in the spoken text, *4 Rooms* does not appear to be communicative at all. The four parts form highly abstract sonic textures that seem to pay no attention whatsoever to the listener. To perform an analysis of the construction of enunciation in this piece is therefore not obvious and might even be counterintuitive. Yet Lucier's piece exposes the idea that recording is never only a neutral registration of sound, but also always a communicative act, and consequently *4 Rooms* is not only sounds, but also a communicative act – a fixed act of enunciation. Furthermore, an analysis of the act of enunciation in this piece can prove useful in order to understand, not the content or the listening experience, but *how* the content and the listening experience are constituted.

First of all, an essential aspect of this piece is that the sounds are enunciated as sounds from Chernobyl. We simply cannot *hear* that the sounds stem from this location, but due to the paratexts (Genette, 1972), such as the texts on the cover or homepage, the sounds are presented to us or enunciated as sounds from this traumatic site. Second, the information on the cover presents us with knowledge of the production of the sounds. We are told that the sounds are not composed or crafted by the composer, but collected by the use of technology. They are not presented as something heard, as part of phenomenological human experience, but as something registered or recorded by the nonhuman ear of the microphone. As will be recalled, it is even stated that the artist left the rooms during the recording processes (Kirkegaard, n.d). The sounds are enunciated as sounds normally beyond our perception, derived from technology in the otherwise silent and deserted rooms. This nonhuman or dehumanised act of enunciation is an essential part of this piece.

A further analysis of the act of enunciation in this piece could examine the complexity of the temporal aspect of the enunciation. The listener is offered an immediate, phenomenological experience of the sounds of this traumatic place that is forever shaped by that one past, but forever present event. This experience is, however, established through the recordings and playbacks that accumulate sonic events. Consequently, this piece establishes a meeting between different 'nows': between the 'now' of our real-time listening, the 'now' of the traumatic 'present past' (Huyssen, 2003) and the amassing of recorded, fixed and prolonged 'nows'.

A full analysis of the enunciation in *4 Rooms* is beyond the scope of this article, but I hope to have shown some perspective with regard to an analysis of the enunciation of a piece that does not expose its communicative qualities, but in which the

questions of who is speaking, from where, at what time and in what space are of immense importance.[10]

VIII. Concluding remarks

As opposed to the analytical focus on the specific qualities of sound, the theory of enunciation focuses on other aspects than the sensory mode. According to research in intermedial studies, a media can be described through (at least) four different modalities: the semiotic, the sensory, the material and the tempo-spatial (Elleström, 2010; Brügger, 2002). *I am Sitting in a Room* and *4 Rooms* primarily appeal to our sense of hearing, but if we examine the semiotic modality, *I am Sitting in a Room* contains at least three different artistic media with distinct semiotic qualities: the textual, the vocal and technological. In that sense, it is an intermedial artwork. Due to the importance of the paratexts, one can argue that *4 Rooms* is also mixed media, consisting of sound, text and image. Even though I have not focused on the qualities of sound as an artistic media, the use of the theory of enunciation does not necessarily imply that the sound artwork should be regarded as a 'text', without sensitivity towards its medial characteristics. On the contrary, I hope my analysis has shown that the theory of enunciation requires the specific medial characteristics of the artwork at hand to be taken into consideration.The main quality of the theory of enunciation is that it encourages sensitivity towards the communicative *acts* of the sound artwork, even when the artwork is fixed in a recording or an installation. This sensitivity can be useful, even when the sound artwork does not expose its communicative quality. One might even say that *because* contemporary sound art in general tends to hide its act of enunciation, we should heighten our sensitivity to it by strengthening our tools for analysis. This requires, however, that the theory of enunciation is reapplied and rethought in relation to sound art with its specific medial characteristics. My hope is that this article will inspire others to explore this connection between sound art and enunciation.

Notes

1.   Several sources date *I am Sitting in a Room* to 1969, when Lucier produced his first version of the piece. I have chosen to use the publication date, 1970, which is the date Lucier himself uses (Lucier, 1995)
2.   The first recording from 1969 can be heard via the website UBUWEB.
3.   For a wider discussion on how to perform *I am Sitting in a Room*, see Burns (2002).
4.   Umberto Eco (1994, p. 46) translates 'énonciation énoncé' to 'uttered utterance'. In this article I choose the word 'enunciation', since this is the typical translation of the French word 'énonciation'.
5.   See Aremark (2010) for a short example of an analysis of enunciation in sound art.

6. For instance, the goal of analysis is, from Taresti's (2002) point of view, to reveal the hidden meaning of the music, whereas I wish to establish an analytical lens that focuses on how potential meanings or experiences are established by the artwork. Also, the notion of an implicit narrator or sender is used in a slightly different way in musical semiotics. Here the concept is used to address the image of a 'sender' or a subject established by the musical structures, whereas the theoretical tradition to which I refer uses the concept of an 'implicit sender' to address the mode of 'doing' that is fixed or implicit in all communicative artefacts, no matter how immaterial they are.

7. Here I am paraphrasing the photo-theorist Lars Kiel Bertelsen's notion that photos have a 'hypnonotic effect' (Bertelsen, 1997).

8. My translation.

9. In this part of the analysis I am inspired by the Danish scholar Jacob Lund Pedersen's research of the question of subjectivity (Pedersen, 2005).

10. For further reading on enunciation and *4 Rooms*, the reader can consult my PhD dissertation (Aremark, 2010), which also presents a short analysis of this piece.

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