Presenting Absence

Constitutive silences in music and sound art since the 1950s

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Preface

A blank compact disc arrives in the post in an unmarked jewelcase.

A score instructs the solo performer to remain '*tacet*'
through the first, second and third of its three movements.

On a compact disc of 36 tracks, 18 of them contain no audio.

A score indicates every note with a new dynamic – mainly between *pppp* and *mp* –
and asks the players to sing fragments of poetry silently.

A deep rumble reminds me of the CD I forgot I put on half an hour ago.

Musicians freeze on stage and an audience freezes too,
listening and watching for the continuation or the end of the piece.

I shift my headphones on and off one ear, to decide
whether what I hear is a plane passing overhead or part of a piece of sound art.

This thesis explores musical and aesthetic issues concerning silence in an empirical field that covers music and sound art of the past 50 years – specifically, works of notated concert music from the mid- and late-20th century, and digital sound art[1] created for compact disc at the turn of the millennium. The study focuses on western artworks that I regard as centrally constituted by the presentation of some type of absent sound, working at the extremes of the listener's perception or powers of aesthetic conception, sometimes both.

My general aim is to analyse and conceptualise notions of silence in music and sound art, where silence is both a term under interrogation, and a collective abbreviation for a broad and disparate range of musical absences: lack of sound, lack of 'authored' sounds, sounds too quiet to be heard, sounds delayed or postponed indefinitely.

My work both interrogates and confirms the continuity, status and meaning of the term 'silence', through detailed discussions of, say, the extended *fermata*, the empty musical work, or the absence of audio input on compact disc.

Silence is conventionally a background against which the figure of music is perceived. By reversing polarities and treating silence as the figure to be examined against the background of music, my project – like its research objects – may seem antagonistic towards music, musicology, and all that is commonly understood by musicianship, musical expression and musical experience. There are few concessions here to general music-making. However, many

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1 Writing on sound art uses an array of terms such as digital audio or experimental electronica. I have decided to use 'sound art' (or, 'sound-art' where adjective) to indicate the contemporary digital pendant to instrumental art music. I am aware that the label 'sound art' normally embraces installation work, public art and other transdisciplinary genres outside my usage of the term in this thesis, but it nevertheless seems a suitable general term for my purposes here. 'Electronica' seems to imply a broader and more commercial listener base, closer to dance music. 'Digital audio' lends an emphasis to the technical and technological aspects of software used in working with sound; I use the term occasionally to refer specifically to the technological discourse.

apparent attacks on central paradigms of music reveal themselves in action to be integral to the constant reactualisation of the artform, and it is in this vein that I regard the possibly anti-musical appearance of my research subject as hopefully constructive to the ongoing practices of both music and musicology.

The kernel of this thesis is formed by discussions of silences and quietings from three traditions or repertoires that share areas of overlap but are not continuous in any simple way. These are: (i) mid-20th century 'empty' artworks (e.g. John Cage's *4'33"*); (ii) late-20th century scored silences (e.g. in Luigi Nono's *Fragmente-Stille*, and Salvatore Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso*); (iii) new-millennium digital silences on compact disc (e.g. Christof Migone's album *Quieting*). These discussions of individual works and historical moments are framed and perforated by theoretical, historical and philosophical considerations, which aim to relate the peripheral nature of the works and of this thesis to larger intellectual and musical contexts.

Different works prompt different theoretical considerations, and there is not one overriding theoretical approach in this thesis. Therefore, I have chosen to address theoretical aspects alongside the presentation and analysis of the individual works, instead of collecting all my theoretical reflections in one chapter.

If I seem to claim occasionally that the peripheries I discuss 'exemplify' more broad-ranging intellectual and artistic trends, it is not that I am evangelising for a recognition of the hitherto-neglected importance of these works in a larger framework, rather that I hope to join the apparent obscurity of my research interest to other dialogues within and outside the academic and artistic spheres.

My central interest is in the fascination and provocation provided by music and sound art within the western tradition that seems, intuitively, obtuse to almost any kind of analysis. Aesthetic and academic problems seem to reach a state of emergency when these artworks meet conventional tools of understanding. In this sense, 'silence' as a formulation of this difficulty is like the equally slippery subject of, say, musical time (as opposed to, say, tempo, metre or rhythm). Conceptions of silence are so integral to the fabric of music and sound art that it seems useless to try to isolate them.

Although the inability of traditional academic tools (such as structural and harmonic analysis) to close in on these elusive concepts may indicate a futility of engaging with them at all, a compelling intensity of experience comes from these apparently obscure aspects of music. It is important for the humanities to engage with issues that are founded in such recalcitrant experiences of intensity, despite all the issues that escape an academic approach.

I have narrowed the period and range of my discussion to the half-century between the genesis of Cagean silence and the recent reappearance of a kind of aesthetics of silence within digital sound art.

The Cagean premise to the chronology of this thesis reflects an everyday truism that arises at the very mention of the word 'silence' within musical circles. Just as Cage once famously said that 'sounds are not sounds, they're Beethoven'[2], many feel that 'silence is not silence, it's Cage'. But at the same time, I feel that silence is as little exhausted or completed by Cage as sounds were by Beethoven; the projection of the discussion of silence onto subsequent repertoires and very different aesthetic standpoints is designed to show this.

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2 "…sounds are not sounds at all but are Beethoven". John Cage (1952): 'Juilliard lecture'. *A Year from Monday*. Middletown, CT, p. 97

This study is not *the*, or even *an* aesthetics of silence. Nevertheless, readers will rightfully expect an attempt at definitions of silence, particularly as the instances I discuss may not seem to be bound by any acoustic or stylistic self-evidence. The use of the common label 'silence' to cover relatively disparate phenomena is a rhetoric produced by various prejudices (of both negative and positive nature) within the ways we discuss music and sound art. One of my main tenets is that not all radical or constitutive silences can be reduced to a common aesthetic strategy – neither in their production nor experience – and that they therefore demand separate discursive contexts. The question is how each of these silences appears to the senses, and what paradigms they work within and against.

Introduction

The term 'silence' is used about music at a number of levels, most of which are superficially descriptive, often metaphorical. In popular music, silent titles abound, usually announcing a kind of 'cool' style. In mainstream pop, there is Paul Simon's song 'The sound of silence' from the album *Wednesday morning 3 A.M.* (1964); in progressive rock, Einstürzende Neubauten released a whole album under the title *Silence is sexy* (2000), and in jazz there is Miles Davis' 'In a silent way' (1969), Chick Corea's 'Crystal silence' (1972) and Charlie Haden's 'Silence' on the album *Folk songs* (1979) by Haden, Garbarek and Gismonti, not to mention John Wideman's short story 'The silence of Thelonius Monk' (1997). Somewhere in between, there's Brian Eno's 'global silence'[1], and ambient titles from Steve Roach, Pete Namlock & Dr. Atmo. Many classical music critics, journalists and even composers themselves have described the scored music of, say, Sciarrino, Takemitsu, Pärt and Kurtàg as characterised by a poetics of silence. In sound art, silence is associated with the work of Rolf Julius, Christina Kubisch and Christian Marclay, and crops up in the titles of whole collective exhibition-installations, anthologies and albums – for instance, the group audio exhibition 'Unsilently' (Contemporary Artists Center, 2005)[2], and the multi-media exhibition 'Disquiet' curated by Christof Migone (Modern Fuel Gallery, 2005).[3]

Is there something in common between these uses of the term 'silence'? Is it a purely descriptive term, or is it also a compositional parameter? How do various instances of 'silence' manifest themselves to the listener in music and sound art?

In a German musical lexicon entry on 'Stille' at the end of the 20th century, Wilhelm Seidel claimed that silence had become a 'Modewort' in late 20th-century scored music (Seidel 1998, p. 1760). Further, he felt that silence as such had become a compositional parameter with an entirely different status than previous the previous use of pauses and rests in western art music, and that this change had produced a corresponding shift in the listener's mode of reception.

Seidel's authoritative stance emanates from the position of central European scored art music and reception aesthetics, and needs perspectivising. This I do partly by looking back to historical precedents within western art music (including a detailed re-evaluation of the Cagean silence paradigm), and also by looking laterally to sound art at the turn of the millennium, where both composition and the aesthetics of reception play entirely different roles than in scored music. Underlying all the discussions in this thesis is a desire to illuminate my intuitive feeling that the works I focus on are constituted by some form of interesting or provocative silence. The absence of sound seems to be a core factor in how the works are made and what effects they produce.

Within the field of soundworks fixed in notation or digital audio between the mid-20th century and the turn of the millennium, my three specific areas of research are: (i) mid-20th century Cagean silence, (ii) scored chamber music by Luigi Nono and Salvatore Sciarrino from the 1980s, and (iii) digital sound art by Christof Migone and Francisco López from around the turn of the millennium. These three areas share some similarities (for example, they are all highly specialised practices). They are also separated by some differences (most

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1 A metaphor to describe pioneering ambient music that – like Cage's *4'33"* – intends a ubiquitous listening experience that is distinct from elevator music or Muzak.

2 Contemporary Artists Center, North Adams, Massachusetts, 2005.

3 Curated by Christof Migone, at the Modern Fuel Gallery, Kingston, Ontario, 2005.

centrally, the role of writing vs. audio processing as methods of inscription). They demonstrate what very different forms constitutive silences can have and ditto what disparate effects they can produce.

I am not suggesting there is a thing called silence that exists as an inherent property of artworks. Conceptualisations provide cognitive frames for our perceptions; we listen within categorical forms, which in turn influence what we hear (and what we don't hear). Silence is not a self-evident term, but is culturally and historically specific; in summary, it is a context-dependent, or social idea.

I point to a series of highly differentiated phenomena in disparate artworks, and examine the term 'silence' as a trope under which these qualities are sometimes grouped – by convention, or through influential patterns of reception. The status and meaning of the term 'silence' therefore varies somewhat throughout the thesis, and my work consists in a push-pull of linking and separating the different qualities that I find salient for the continuity of the catch-all term.

All the works I discuss here involve a considerable element of abstraction, achieved at least partly through an economical approach to sound. They uphold some kind of stringency, within metaphysically or conceptually oriented approaches to art-making. A certain authorial distance towards some of the material aspects of sound can be observed, alongside a voluntary opening towards the questioning of fundamental prerequisites of art, aesthetic thought and perceptual experience.

All the chosen works operate within largely non-referential genres. By non-referential, I mean that there is no spoken or sung text (except at a step well removed, in the case of Nono's *Fragmente – Stille*), no visual image (except what one might glean from a CD-cover or score) nor dramatic form; no representation in any straightforward sense. Whether string quartet or sound art CD, all the works discussed here arise on the basis of an assumption of some level of acoustic autonomy that is independent of language, dramatic narrative and visual image. Nevertheless, as I will show, referentiality is still a possible parameter at other levels.

At one end of the historical spectrum of my main research there is John Cage. Commentators continue to discuss whether his embrace of unplanned sounds was a move toward the literal, or an embrace of the abstract, with discussion often taking the form of a re-positioning of midcentury artists such as Cage, Barnett Newman, and Robert Rauschenberg around terms such as 'modernism', 'abstract expressionism', etc. At the other end, there are present sound artists such as Christof Migone and Francisco López, who seem to represent a return to indulgence in form for form's sake and a revival of restraint and reduction, as well as a post-Cagean focus on the perceptual act itself.

The kinds of silence discussed, and thus the artworks that I consider to be constituted by them, may be characterised as either tediously banal, self-indulgent and farcical, or as interestingly intransparent, inorganic, and obscure. There seems to be an obstruction in these works that places aesthetic difficulty in conflict with the extravagant simplicity of the material aspects that constitute them (in as far as the reader will agree with me from artwork to artwork that the silences I study are indeed constitutive of the works they are involved in). This spasm of perceived difficulty in simplicity is interesting in itself, to me, as a dynamic in our aesthetic sensing.

The very idea of dedicating a PhD project to musical silence aims surely to elicit dense communication from an apparently simple surface (blank notation, long pauses in perform-

ance, CDs with audio lacunae, whatever). It is not an examination of individual pauses, rests, and empty moments within otherwise fluent musical contexts. Rather, it is a study of how pauses, rests and empty moments conspire, by accumulation, to stop musical fluency. Thus this is primarily a study in aesthetic paradigms and concepts.

A word or two needs to be said, then, about the seemingly total irrelevancy of a thesis on basically modernist aesthetics in relation to obscure and little-known artworks, at a time when the very position of the arts within public culture seems in need of re-legitimisation or at least renewed relevancy. The term 'modernism' and the artworks historically associated with it are notorious for representing exactly the kind of elite culture that has marginalised itself and allowed itself to become first polarised and then eclipsed by popular culture. Many will see this thesis as closing in a set of relatively parochial – even, stigmatised – artistic concerns.

There is some disagreement as to whether artforms that are perceived to be minor, parochial and autonomous (in the sense of 'irrelevant') occupy a more, or less, conservative and reactionary position than engaging with music that many more people have a relationship to (for example, canonic music of older historical periods, music recent popular cultural forms, or music of cultures in other ways far removed from the western classical academy and its influences).

At the same time, it is also possible to detect a current rise of general interest in the modernist paradigm at several levels. One popular instance of this was a major exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, in spring 2006: 'Modernism: – designing a new world, 1914-1939'. The V&A's Modernism exhibition attracted large audiences (160, 000 visitors) and also triggered a wider media debate on modernism's historical dimension. Aside from inevitable differences in opinion about what should have been included or omitted from the exhibition, the controversy turned mainly on the extent to which it is possible today to separate the modernist aesthetic from its historical associations with totalitarian regimes of one persuasion or another. In other words, can we use the term modernism today in anything other than a historical sense? Can we say that there is a quasi-timeless modernist aesthetic?

A consideration of the use of the term 'modernism' within style and design today would leave no doubt as to aesthetic modernism's ability to thrive within a culture of pluralistic individualism. The Apple company's iPod and iMac designs (released first in white, then in black) sum it all up neatly. Similarly, there seems to be a revival underway of quasi-modernist aesthetic strategies within the arts. And within art theory, advocates of high modernism such as the philosopher Theodor Adorno are coming back into parlance, rinsed of many of the historical idiosyncrasies that made them unpalatable for several decades.[4]

Modernism has given western musical culture a vocabulary for accepting all kinds of organised sound as music. The main legacy of extreme artistic abstraction is that more or less any sonic articulation can be appreciated for its inherent aesthetic qualities: a field recording, the whine of amplifier feedback or the crackle of electric static, audience coughs and shufflings, the urban or rural sounds floating in through an open window, or … a duration of time framed as apparent silence. Although this situation often makes it hard to discern what is music and what is not, it has nurtured our ability to contemplate all the sounds we hear.

4 Some of the most 'rhythmic' music written for classical musicians today is advanced by a composer who has no difficulty acknowledging a weighty influence from the Frankfurter School (Heiner Goebbels), despite the fact that his music would presumably fall under many of Adorno's prejudices against the mechanical politics of pulsed music. See Hodkinson 2005.

Equally notorious terms such as 'avantgarde' and 'postmodernism' turn on one's under-standing of modernism, and on one's perception of the necessity (or irrelevancy) of chalking up such positions at the present time. Discussion on these terms has been vital, contentious, and virtually ubiquitous across the humanities and social sciences for several decades. Now that the disagreement is complete, it would seem that the energy has run out of the debate and become 'academic' in the purely pejorative sense. However, here too I sense the returned relevancy of these terms for both artists and critics today. Visual-art critics talk of one or several neo-avantgardes, and within sound art the term neo-modernism has recently been coined, specifically in relation to 'silent' sound art. I will therefore be taking up these terms repeatedly throughout this thesis. For my project, it is not so much a matter of deciding whether certain artworks are, or are not, modernist, avantgarde, postmodernist, or whatever. Rather, I propose that the choice of radical silence is one among many characteristic and ap-propriate responses to artistic challenges since the mid-20th century.

Naturally, the traditions and research interests of colleagues at the University of Copen-hagen's Department of Musicology have influenced me. Foremost among them is my su-pervisor Søren Møller Sørensen, whose thesis on the principle of autonomy and the work concept in musical aesthetics in the 19th and 20th centuries has of course been paradigmatic for many of our discussions (Sørensen, 1992), as well as his current research interests in per-formativity. A course on 'Hermeneutik og genstridig kunst' (hermeneutics and difficult art) also made a deep impression on my research project.[5]

I came to the subject of silence in aesthetic listening first as practitioner (composer), and my research project was motivated partly by a desire to step back from artistic production in order to explore some aesthetic pre-conceptions that were at play in my own practice. It may seem obtuse, then, to choose deliberately not to include in this thesis the realm of silence that is my main passion and prime motivator: namely, my own artistic contact with quiet and absent sounds. The reason for this is partly psychotherapeutic (!) but also professional, arising from a desire to keep my own artistic activities separated from the cross-fire of criti-cal interrogation that artists are so famously ill-equipped to exercise upon their own work. I say this despite the normative tradition in my country of origin (the UK) and in American-Australian music faculties and academies for composers to take professional doctorates. My PhD project is conducted in Denmark, where there are as yet no independent precedents for the English model (i.e. the professional doctorate). This thesis stands or falls on purely academic grounds, and the process through which it is produced is one of training to be a researcher, including all the many roles that make up the life of an academic working within the humanities today.

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the academic humanities are under in-creasing internal and external pressure to interact reciprocally with the fields that they study. At the same time, artistic practitioners are continually challenged to actualise their activities in relation to a range of contexts beyond the inherited art-institutional frameworks. This is not

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5 The course 'Hermeneutik og genstridig kunst' (Hermeneutics and Difficult Art) was held by Georg Brandes Skolen in Copenhagen, spring 2003, with lectures given by Karlheinz Stierle, Erik Svendsen, Rune Gade, Jo-chen Hörisch, and Ulf Olsson. Above all, Stierle's lecture 'Hermeneutics, art and the limits of obscurity', and Rune Gade's lecture on problems of analysis and method in relation to contemporary conceptual art from Young British Artists in the 1990s overlapped significantly with my considerations on theory and method in this research project.

only a passing political situation, but also an ongoing transformation of the role of educational and cultural institutions within the public sphere. Despite the abstraction of the academic enterprise, the academic humanities are not a disembodied set of ideas but a force inextricably bound up in these institutions and a discursive practice between readers and writers situated in them. It now feels entirely natural for many academics and artists to participate in this development by pursuing career strands across these communities of production and reception.

This creates situations that can be regarded as problematic for those of a purist persuasion within either academia or artistic practice, who may object that artists are not required to unpack the environments and frameworks within which they work. The intellectualisation of the avantgarde, it may be argued, is precisely what has brought much art into its present crisis of total marginalisation and alienation towards its own audiences.

One line of defence here lies in a requirement for artistic practitioners to be aesthetically well grounded – precisely in order to maintain the specialness of their own way of producing events and objects within the world. I have expanded this point elsewhere[6], so I will not go into it here. However, the specific instance of the 21st-century artist's immersion in what can be grouped under the umbrella term 'post-structuralist theory' seems to be a major paradigm within the visual arts and within sound art, and I will return to this in my discussion of subliminal sound art.[7]

What concerns us here more pressingly is the academic objection to a personal investment in both practice and research fields: namely, that by researching a field that one participates in oneself, the researcher loses epistemological neutrality, remaining blind to her own prejudices, with the risk – probability, even – of projecting these prejudices onto her research objects. Against this, I would posit the theoretical paradigm of situated or perspectival knowledge, which has been ubiquitous in the humanities for several decades already, growing out of post-colonial and gender studies. According to this way of looking at things, crucially significant values attach to the very choices writers make about what to write about (however they do it), and thus there is no non-subjective, über-personal stance when engaging in even the most rigorously systematic academic work.

There are great gains to be made from artists and scholars' getting involved in one another's environments, even to the point of some players having 'double identities'. This cross-fertilisation contributes to the vitality of both fields. So I acknowledge with no apology the fact that my participation in some of the fields discussed here entails a personal investment in many of the key paradigms: musical artworks, the performing arts, the paradigm of the composer, the usefulness of notation as a tool in live performance, and the potential of the digital medium, to take just a few examples.

Another – more general – admission of the perspectival nature of my position in relation to this project concerns history and history-writing. The chronological movement within the period discussed here is not only a movement between the mid-20th century and the turn of the millennium, but also from the past to the present. The discussion of the mid-20th century involves works, commentaries and issues that are considerably more stable than the discussion of the most recent sound art, where consensus and shared vocabularies are rare exceptions. It is easier to talk authoritatively about the past than the present. The present has

6 See Hodkinson 2006.
7 See Chapter 7.

a special status over the past, however, because of our personal involvement in it. Therefore there is a sense in which the reader can regard all my historical discussions concerning the past as background for the proposal that some (though not all) aspects of previous silences are reanimated in the age of digital audio.

The dynamics of the historical and contemporary dimensions in researching both the present and the past are a major theoretical issue for the humanities, and one that I cannot possibly honour here. However, I hope that a presentation of some of the deeper historical precedents for my chosen period of musical silence phenomena may go some way towards providing the reader with a context for my ensuing discussions.

PART I – Pretexts

CHAPTER 1

Literary, historical and theoretical pretexts

1.1 Literature review

The following literature review serves to synthesise and contextualise the background against which my own thesis has grown up. In summarising the following publications, I necessarily introduce an element of interpretation; the publications that I treat so briefly here participate – collectively – in establishing a kind of status report of musicological 'silence studies'. My understanding of their achievements contributes to my motivation for pursuing my own line of enquiry.

Most of these texts were encountered in the preliminary stages of my research. Some of them have been useful in the subsequent stages also (and therefore crop up again in the main body of this thesis). The fact that I pass over the rest of them summarily reflects the fact that they concern aspects of musical silence that I have considered less relevant for my own research interests. Nevertheless, the process of familiarising myself with different historical and theoretical perspectives and parallel developments has been both stimulating and informative for my final project, and I believe that passing on this basic outline, in order that the reader can familiarise herself with the background context for this thesis, is vital to understanding my thesis as it is. It goes without saying that the handful of scholars who have had most direct relevance for my thinking will re-occur later in this thesis.

There have been a small number of publications offering theoretical approaches to musical silence that either span repertoire from several historical periods and genres, or work at a theoretical level above period and genre altogether. I summarise them here in chronological order (according to publication-date), offering a brief critique of those that are relevant for my project. The relevance of the publications to my research is evaluated, with the purpose of orientating the reader in how my onward project is positioned in relation to the existing literature.

All discussion of publications concerning works from the mid-20th century onward will be taken within the main body of this thesis, as far as the texts are relevant to my research. I provide therefore no comprehensive overview of publications on Cagean silence (which would be entirely beyond the scope of this project) or of publications on the other works of music or sound art constituted by silence and produced after c. 1950, but proceed directly to draw on the texts relevant for my discussions.

Edward Cone's *Musical form and musical performance* contains a chapter that compares framing in music and painting ('The picture and the frame'). Cone implicates silence as a framing device in classical musical form (Cone, 1966, pp. 11-31).

> [I]n order for a composition – i.e. a piece composed as a work of art – to behave as one, its extremes must be respected in performance. A proper musical performance must thus be a dramatic, even a theatrical event, presenting as it does an action with a beginning, a middle, and an end. (Cone, 1966, p. 13)

Cone's approach is valuable to my thesis, because he links the framing of the musical work with its self-definition as artwork (Cone 1966, p. 14), and points to the silence of the begin-

ning and end of contemporary concert works as sometimes the only delimitation of the question "is it music?"

> Music that is intrinsically formless, in the sense of having no apparent musical reason for beginning and ending when and as it does, may sound like an arbitrarily framed segment of an indefinitely extending sound-continuum. This is indeed the effect of much "totally organized" serial music, and equally of much music composed by methods of pure chance.
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> Music stands in great need of a frame to separate it from its external environment – to mark off musical time from the ordinary time before and after it. Without such a frame, the chaotic, undifferentiated flow of ordinary time will encroach on each extreme of the composition. It will prevent us at the beginning from being aware of the measure of temporal control exerted by the music, and at the end from appreciating the full discharge of its energy. At this point you have undoubtedly guessed what the frame is. It is silence. (Cone, 1966, pp. 15-16)

So integral is this role (of establishing the work through before- and after-silence), that it can even be considered as being a part of a work:

> Perhaps some of the silence immediately before and after a composition is actually a part, not of the frame, but of the work itself. (Cone 1966, pp. 17-18)

Edward Cone's salient chapter dedicates only a few pages to the application of frame analysis to music (with the purpose of appealing for more decorum from audiences), but this is enough for Richard Littlefield to draw out a more emphatic framing function for silence in relation to music.[1] The Cone/Littlefield discussion of silence as frame is helpful to me in my discussions of silent pieces with no internal differentiation of content, such as Cage's *4'33"* and Francisco López' *Untitled #118*. Although I will not be attempting a formal frame analysis as such, it will be interesting to compare the ways in which such silent pieces assert themselves within the classical work-paradigm and on compact disc.

Zofia Lissa's *Aufsätze zur Musikästhetik* contains a chapter on musical silence and pauses (Lissa 1969). Lissa seeks a largely functional explanation of pauses in the classical-romantic repertoire, although few examples are given to pinpoint her systematisation of the topic. Lissa claims that her attention is drawn to musical silence partly through its prevalence in contemporary music (like Seidel), although she mentions only two postwar works: Lutoslawski's *Musique Funèbre* and *Concerto for Orchestra*, both from the mid-1950s. (Lissa mentions electronic music and *musique concrète*, but names no examples.) Another impulse behind Lissa's approach is her observation of the dramatic function of silence in film music, which has parallels with opera in this respect. With such a high level of generalisation, her approach can safely be described as normative, in line with her evaluation of the "problem" of silence as somewhat less than constitutive.

In 'The poetics of musical silence' (Clifton 1976), Thomas Clifton offers an applied phenomenology of silence in instrumental music from the Baroque to the late 20th century, realised through relatively conventional score analysis of notated pauses and rests. Clifton's

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1   Frame analysis aims to identify the cognitive schemata (i.e. mental frames) of experience, particularly those rooted in implicit assumptions.

article is one of the first academic texts to attempt a historical overview of musical silences, and despite its brevity deserves a fuller critique.

Clifton's publication is roughly contemporaneous with George Steiner's commentary on the postulated literary retreat from the word (Steiner, 1976), and the difference between the two writers is telling. Steiner offers a historical contextualisation for contemporary literature on socio-historical grounds, whereas Clifton's approach to the topicalisation of silence is to re-inscribe the historical music canon using a marriage of new methodology (applied phenomenology) and conventional music-analytical tools. Clifton aims to establish some theoretical categories for musical silences, to which end he uses examples from Bach, through the classical-romantic repertoire to the music of Elliott Carter. I feel that the contrast between Steiner and Clifton's approaches may be found in many comparisons of literary theory and musicology.

Clifton's overriding point is that where silence, by breaking into classical melodic structures, exerts a halting effect on the musical process, "it is precisely this confrontation which enhances the experience of continuity". Thus, silence is at first encounter an inhibiting factor, but in the long run is musically enabling.

Inspired by phenomenology, Clifton offers three categories of musical silence: temporal, spatial and gestural.

The first of these categories, 'temporal silence', is the most straightforward, which he summarises under the phenomena *caesura* (attached either to the end of a phrase or its beginning), 'ridged silence' (for instance, silent (down)beats initiating compositions, syncopated openings), and the 'dissolution of pulse' prompted by Generalpausen during endings. That is to say, temporal silence occurs at the beginnings and ends of compositions phrases.

Clifton's second theoretical category rests on a spatial metaphor, but seems synonymous with what is more typically called registral silence within modern psychoacoustics, performing the functions of isolating entries in particular registers, emphasising long-span connections, and breaking up continuity.

The third category, 'silences in motion', is the least tangible, theoretically speaking. Here, Clifton is concerned with gesture, specifically with instances of dynamic movement to and from the threshold of audibility. He is interested in fade-outs in which the melodic character is preserved through moments of nigh-disappearance into inaudibility, resulting in a perceived effect of music 'retreating' physically into the distance.

It is striking and interesting that Thomas Clifton's paper restricts itself to rests and pauses as entities in a normative, functional account of music, and that it is mainly restricted to the German classical-romantic tradition, with no acknowledgement of any changes in musical paradigms that might have been the cause or effect of events such as Cagean silence. Clifton's interest in silence recaptures the disruptive element of silence firmly into a rational project:

> Silence is experienced both as meaningful and as adhering to the sounding portion of the musical object. Silence is experienced as embodied substance or activity. This suggests that silence participates in the presentation of musical time, space, and gesture. (Clifton 1976, p. 163)

Clifton's analysis of how rests and pauses act within the music discussed run parallel to the main thrust of linguistic theory's interest in silence phenomena. What Clifton describes as

"the task of an adequate description of musical silence" is met within linguistics by the recuperation of negative moments of verbal communication (hesitations, stuttering, blank silences) into the constructive bodice of language (Saville-Troike 1985). This points to a limitation in the project of addressing musical silences through structural analysis (musical or linguistic): silences are only viable for analysis so long as they are not constitutive for the essence of the enterprise (the musical work, or the communicative effort) in any fundamental way. This may help to orientate the reader in relation to my proposal of the category 'constitutive silences', in contrast to the rich history of rests and pauses in western classical music.

Richard Littlefield draws on Edward Cone's abovementioned frame analysis in an article entitled 'The silence of the frames'. Littlefield extends the application more explicitly to musical form, although without actually discussing any individual artworks (Littlefield, 1996). I shall return to Cone and Littlefield's texts in my discussion of Cagean silence.[2]

Adam Jaworski's article 'Aesthetic, communicative and political silences in Laurie Anderson's performance art' in *Silence: interdisciplinary perspectives* (Jaworksi (ed.), 1997: pp. 15-35) arises from within linguistics, and offers a multi-disciplinary approach drawing on theory from several extremely disparate traditions of researching communication such as frame analysis, literary metaphor, rhetorics and politics.

A chapter in Dennis Kurzon's *Discourse of silence* proposes the use of *Sprechgesang* in Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* as a representation of the virtually mute shepherd's performance of silent speech acts (Kurzon, 1997, pp. 105-112). Significantly, both Jaworski and Kurzon choose vocal music as the application field for influences from literary and linguistic studies.

Anna Danielewicz-Betz's unpublished doctoral thesis, *Silence and pauses in discourse and music* (Danielewicz-Betz, 1998), is a discussion of applications of pausology from linguistics and pragmatics to classical music. Although Danielewicz-Betz' publication is the largest and most ambitious, in terms of both range and volume, my critique of it will be brief, mainly due to its variable academic quality. However, it is worth mentioning because it is written within the paradigm of discourse analysis (one of the main fields to generate literature on silence), and also because the majority of her musical examples (as mine) are instrumental, thus avoiding some of the conflations of text and musical signifiance that occur in other applications of discourse-analysis methodology to music. Danielewicz-Betz' thesis is indebted to the Jaworskian multi-disciplinary approach, although it is considerably more focussed in it methodology. Danielewicz-Betz seeks to apply the fruits of linguistic 'pausology' to music, regarding (classical) music as a semantically structured framework for communication. In the original pausological model, pauses and rests in speech are ranked at different levels or syntax according to their duration (in ascending order, from respiratory, through stylistic, to emotional). Danielewicz-Betz' final application of this model to music is of very limited success.

The thesis contains a chapter that discusses the symphonic concert from what Danielewicz-Betz calls the "socio-pausological perspective" (!). Here we meet, again, a piece of frame analysis applied to music – this time, to account for the integration of silence into the essence of the symphonic concert as communicative event. By drawing on frame analysis to assert silence as framing device in performance, Danielewicz-Betz' project confirms the

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2 See Chapter 2.

persistence of phenomenological methodology as a research interest in silence studies concerning non-vocal music.

Other publications involving peripheral discussions of the term 'silence' and related terms that can be subsumed under that dominant concept are cited in the following historical overview.

1.2 Conclusions from the literature review

As we have seen, some of the central theoretical approaches used in the study of musical and other silences between the 1960s and 1990s come from formal and applied phenomenology, frame analysis, discourse analysis, and linguistic pragmatics.

One obvious difference between my project and research such as that of Cone, Clifton, Littlefield, and Danielewicz-Betz, is the attitude towards the relationship between language and music. Whether explicitly or implicitly advanced, the view of the latter four authors is that language and music are comparable kinds of communication, or at least that the affinities between them legitimate an inter-disciplinary approach to pausology, whereby the tools of prosodic, semiotic, cognitive, syntactic and other forms of linguistic analysis can be transferred more or less straightforwardly onto music. Musicological precedents for this move can be found in Schenker and Lehrdahl & Jackendoff's respective quests for a generative grammar in tonal music, or in Sundberg & Lindblom's application of Chomskian generative grammatic techniques to an 8-bar Swedish nursery melody.

To what extent music of the classical period (including those aspects of the baroque and romantic periods that anticipate or retain classical parameters) can be fruitfully studied in this way, is a matter that I leave to musicologists experienced within that field.

Three things seem clear to me, however. Firstly, such accounts are strikingly one-way (from linguistics to music, and not vice versa) – thus, I would call this approach multi-disiplinary rather than truly inter-disciplinary. Secondly, such an approach is not only limited to classical music, but also to a normative view of classical music – reinforcing the trope that classical music was a set of codes, and that there is little slippage between what goes on in the score and what goes on in the structural cognition of the listener. Thirdly (and most relevant for my thesis), my research interests have little overlap with normative aspects of the most normative period in western art music. Although I have narrowed my research field to a period and set of genres that could conceivably overlap, say, Clifton's approach, I am not so interested in 'taming' silences by rationalising the effects of notated rests and pauses. My purpose is rather to address the complexity and provocation of their effects when they are most antagonistic towards musical continuity.

1.3 Some historical pretexts

A consideration of silence in the past half-century necessitates a glance back over the more distant musical past. I do this by offering a brief chronological overview of some key developments in the musical understanding of silences. A historical overview of musical silence phenomena involves both their conceptual and notational history. In as far as notation is a technology that drives forward historical developments in music, the notation of rests and pauses can also be seen to push forward articulations of musical silence. Some of the following relates directly to musical pieces and practices, some relates to abstract conceptions of silence external to music (from philosophy and rhetorics, for example).

My subject matter in this historical overview is almost entirely restricted to notated, western art music.[3] This is firstly a result of the fact that western notation is one of the most easily summarised techniques by which we can point to silences in music. Secondly, that the literature which springs up most readily contains this internal cultural limitation. And thirdly, that the majority (although not all) of the artworks discussed in the main body of this thesis also fall within this framework. As far as the discussion of silence in sound art requires a different terminology, I will take that issue up in Part IV of this thesis.

Many colleagues have spontaneously supplied me with scores, articles, recordings – all candidates for a history of musical hesitations, embracing anything from Gregorian chant, through Schütz and Mozart, to Schumann and Lachenmann. And that is just within European musical traditions. Studies in silence are one of those fields that could potentially link many traditionally separate subpractices of musicology, spanning all historical periods and genres. Indeed, this exciting history could make up an entire PhD project in itself. That is not my present purpose.

Here, I wish merely to acknowledge the historical depth of the topic of musical silences, indicating that the silences that I discuss as 'constitutive' do not arise totally out of the blue, but occur against the background of a long list of (arguably, increasingly radical) silences in art music. I have noted that the status and meaning of the term 'silence' will vary throughout this study. One way of considering the term's status is to trace the concept back to the various historical points at which it has entered musical understanding. This I do by looking at how western art music notation has incorporated and administrated silence in the form of rests, pauses, and verbal indications.

One of my intentions here is to show that there is a development in the way in which scribes and composers specified the deployment of silence as a musical tool. This development is of course parallel to the general increase in notational precision, from early neumatic notations and the development of the staff system to self-reflectively ideological developments in notation in the 20th century. This aim involves sketching a historical progression that seems to be characterised – at least retrospectively – by continuity, possibly even a continuous emancipation of the empty musical moment within the framework of music.

However, there is no really coherent tradition of silence in music, and instead we face an odd assortment of isolated moments, some of which are pure musicological marginalia. Despite my best efforts to organise these notational phenomena (see Figure 1), there is still a sense that very different musical ends are at stake with all these signs, making the catalogue appear somewhat discontinuous.

A significant mode in the humanities of recent years is the development of historically oriented cultural criticisms involving objects not previously thought of as having a history (such as, for example, time, creativity, masculinity, or the family). This approach has had great success in collecting marginalia into preliminary narratives. The verbality of terms is often investigated through extensive punning and wordplay, drawing out all the resonances of derouted words and concepts. This approach is represented in the sonic arts by path-breaking books, such as Douglas Kahn's historical criticism *Noise Water Meat: a history of*

3   Other interesting lines of research could be silent durations within Indian Tala, Persian 'maqam', or the representations of 'ma' (empty space/time) in Japanese musical notation: a small inroad into the latter topic is begun in my M.A. dissertation (Hodkinson, 1997).

sound in the arts (Kahn, 2001), which has rapidly become a major text in sound art studies. *Noise Water Meat* traces the social and aesthetic history of sound up to the mid-20th century, according to interdisciplinary parameters such as recording, noise, silence, water, meat and viruses. Another example is Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible past: cultural origins of sound reproduction* (Sterne, 2003), which links the technological and cultural precursors of telephony, phonography, and radio to a history of sound.

These projects are generated within a paradigm of cultural studies that rests on a multi-disciplinary approach to culture, drawing not merely on orthodox approaches derived from individual social sciences, but also deeply informed by newer, more radical approaches (such as gender and race studies, socio-biology or ethnography) – quite often, a miscellany of them. This approach facilitates the asking of new questions, and thus also interesting reorientations of preconceptions about culture found in traditional critical disciplines, such as aesthetics and musicology. On such an approach, there might for example be room within the historical study of silence to embrace topics such as the link between the clavichord, virginal and virgil.[4] It would be interesting to see a history of silence presented in this mode, but it is beyond the scope of my present aesthetic project.

Silence is not a notational term, so examining the way that it is captured in notation entails breaking it down into component terms: pause, *fermata, tacet, caesura*, etc. Some of these are helpful in discussing the constitutive silences that are my interest in the rest of this thesis, although few of them are central for my thesis, as my research is not primarily aimed at advancing a technical understanding of notation phenomena. The silences I inquire after go beyond functions of notation. Thus, much of my thesis rests on the development of a conceptual apparatus derived mainly from interdisciplinary aesthetics. However, it will help to cement the musicological home of this thesis, to use historical articulations of silence within music as a foundation from which to build.

1.4 Historical overview

The term 'silence' occurs explicitly in many dictionary and lexicon entries, from Diderot to Grove. In listing some of these here, I begin to break up the dominant term into more specific technical musical terms.

The *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert* (compiled 1751-77) has an extensive entry on 'silence', whilst Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique* (1798) contains entries on 'baton', 'pause', 'silences' and 'tacet'. In the twentieth century, Riemann's *Musik Lexikon*[5] has entries on 'Fermate', and 'Pause', whilst the German compendium *Musik der Geschichte und Gegenwart*[6] contains an extensive article on 'Stille' by Wilhelm Seidel (introduced above). *The New Grove*

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4   The virgil was a silent practice clavier developed by inventor Almon Kincaid Virgil and his music-educator wife Antha Minerva Virgil (née Patchen) at the turn of the 19th/20th centuries. Starting in the 1880s with the invention of the Techniphone (a toneless keyboard with click-sound mechanism), the principle was improved with direct-striker action and a touch-responsive feature in the 1890s. The 'virgil' was eventually marketed in New York by Antha and Almon, through separate music schools after their divorce. One historical precedent for the Virgils' invention was the clavichord, a keyboard instrument used from the 15th century to the 18th for practice and composition (above all, by organists such as Bach). A purely coincidental play on words creates associations with the Elizabethan 'virginal', with which the clavichord was in some situations interchangeable.

5   Wilibald Gurlitt (ed.) (1959): *Riemann Musik Lexikon*. Schott: Mainz.

6   Ludwig Finscher (ed.) (1994): *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*. 2. Ausgabe. Bärenreiter: Kassel, et al.

Dictionary of Music and Musicians[7] carries entries on '*caesura*', '*fermata*' (David Fuller), 'Luft-pause' (David Fallows), '*Pausa*' (Klaus Aringer), and '*Pause*' (David Fuller).

Clearly, in selecting these entries as subcategories of the central term 'silence', I have already undertaken some implicit activity of definition. Terms such as '*fermata*' and '*pause*' are obviously central to a definition of musical silence, and I will return to them later. Less central phenomena, such as 'Luftpause', are included here for orientational interest, but I have chosen not to let discussions about the omission or inclusion of relatively minor phenomena hamper my present purpose of providing an overview for the reader's orientation.

The dictionary entries named above are major sources for this section. Also, Eric de Visscher's essay 'There is no such thing as silence' (de Visscher, 2001) and, for the early 20th century, Douglas Kahn's *Noise Water Meat* (Kahn, 2001). In order to ease the reading of this historical overview, I have chosen to limit my source references to direct quotes or publications that I enter into some level of discussion with. For all minor references, the reader is referred to the bibliography, where all the sources for this section can be found.

See Fig. 1 (pp. 26-27) A table of terms and notational signs indicating rests and silences in western scored music

Figure 1 gives an overview of different ways of notating rests and pauses. The point of this table is to distill some basic aspects of a history of notated silences, parallel to the following historical overview. Clearly, the very ambition of providing an overview breaks down in the presentation of 20th-century notation, parallel to the high degree of individual experimentation and resulting lack of concensus. Many more examples from graphic scores of the 1960s and 1970s could underline this point, but my focus here is on the historical progression of terms and notations prior to the 20th century.

The music of the Ancient Greeks apparently involved silence as a rhythmic and temporal element, labelled '*kenos chronos*' (in Latin, '*tempora inania*'): empty time. In Ancient Greek musical metre, irregular verses could be accounted for as special forms within a longer, regular verse-measurement, through the assumption of pauses. Two theorists who suggest this – Aristeides Quintilianus and an anonymous author – recognise the *limma* sign as representative of *kenos chronos*. Poetry and music were closely related forms, and ancient metricians had a repertoire of terms for *caesuræ* in poetry: '*tome*', '*diairesis*', '*cesura*', '*incio*' – all meaning 'cut'. Also, there were the terms '*vacans tempus*' (vacant time), '*distinctionis mora*' (separating time-span), '*siope*' (silence), and '*intervallum*' (interval).

In the middle ages, neumatic notation and early chorale notation had as yet no technical sign for the pause, but later chorale notation makes small section lines to mark main sections off within the melody, and these might be regarded as the first notated *caesurae*, or at least as precursors to the *caesura*. In ligature notation around the thirteenth century, a short vertical stroke indicated a rest (i.e. the stroke would indicate a break between groups of notes to be sung to one syllable).

In Augustine of Hippo's theoretical writings *De musica*[8], silence gains an assertive role, receiving a relatively thorough treatment. Augustine describes silence as a space of time (not

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7   Stanley Sadie (ed.) (2001): *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2nd edition. Macmillan: London.
8   R.C. Taliaferro, ed.: 'De musica', *Writings of Saint Augustine*, Fathers of the Church, ii (New York, 1947)

Term	Notation	Historical appearance	Description	Comments
kenos chronos/tempora inania		Ancient Greek music	Rhythmic and temporal element	
silentia voluntaria		Augustine's theoretical writings	Pauses outside metrical notation	
suspirium		Early polyphony	Short pause of undetermined length	
1. *pausa perfecta* 2. *pausa imperfecta* 3. *pausa brevis (= recta brevis)* 4. *pausa maior semibrevis* (two thirds of a *brevis*) 5. *pausa minor semibrevis* (one third of a *brevis*) 6. *finis punctorum*	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6.	13th century mensural notation, described by Franco Colonis		
tacet	'tacet' or other verbal instruction		Silence of one part (up to a whole movement), in a polyphonic context	
1. *semibrevis* 2. *minima* 3. *seminimina/fusa* 4. *semifusa*	1. 2. 3. 4.	14th century		Origin of the hanging semibreve and sitting minim rest
1. *semibrevis* 2. *minima* 3. *fusa* 4. *semifusa*	1. 2.	15th century		By this time, the term 'fusa' was used of a note half the value of a 14th-century semiminima
1. *semibreve* 2. *minim* 3. *crotchet* 4. *quaver* 5. *semiquaver* 6. *demisemiquaver* 7. *hemidemisemiquaver*	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7.	17th century		Stabilisation of rest notation into today's form. Main changes since then: (i) convention of semibreve = whole bar; (ii) use of breve = 2 bars; (iii) long rest = 4 bars; (iv) longer rests, horizontal bar with number
1. *aposiopesis* 2. *synkope* 3. *abruptio* 4. *ellipsis* 5. *homioteleuton* 6. *suspiratio* 7. *tmesis*		Codified by Joachim Burmeister in *Musica poetica* (1606)	Figures of musical rhetoric pertaining to silence	1. sudden silence, without formal cadence 2. omission of a middle consonant 3. unexpected interruption of musical context with a pause 4. replacement of a consonance by a pause 5. as aposiopesis 6. interruption of the melody by a pause 7. interruption of a musical context by a pause (as suspiratio and abruptio)
Fermata, or corona	⌒ or ⌣	From the Classical period onwards	Originally, extension of sound; more recently, an indication of indefinite duration, over note, rest or barline	'fermata' as a term came into Engl. usage during the 19th century (before that, this sign was in use from the 13th century, indicating flexible or indefinite duration)

Term	Notation	Historical appearance	Description	Comments
	⌢	Baroque-Classical concerto	Prompt for solo extemporisation (e.g. in concerti)	
Caesura	∨ or ’	From the Classical period onwards	"Interruption of metre by silence" (Grove)	
Atempause		Viennese waltz – whole ensemble		No notation – aspect of performance practice
Luftpause	∨ or ’	Through-composed waltz style (e.g. Mahler), or individual wind-part		
	𝄩 (horizontal bar with number above)	From the early Classical period onwards	Horizontal bar with number of bars written above, indicates a silence of several bars in one part in an ensemble context	Replaced Rousseau's indication of staff lines crossed through vertically showing up to 4 bars' silence, sometimes repeated or supplemented with a number
	>	Boulez: *Troesième sonate pour piano* (1961)	a saesura	
	∨		an initial caesura	
	∨		a final caesura	
	∿∨		a longer caesura (this sign refers to both initial and final caesura)	
	⌢	Kurtág: *Játékok* (1973–)	1. very long prolongation (of note, or rest) 2. long prolongation 3. shortened	
	⌢ ( )		4. very long/fermata 5. long 6. short	
	’ (; ⅄)		7. rest, of caesura value (longer; shorter; uneven)	
	⸼		8. rest, of appoggiatura value	
	Più longo → *più breve*	Nono: *Fragmente – Stille: an Diotima* (1980)	Graduations of fermata: *più longo* = longest; *più breve* = shortest	
	⌢ ⌢ ⌐	Takemitsu: *Rain Tree Sketch* (1982)	Three kinds of fermata: 1. very long 2. medium 3. short	

just an empty beat) and describes the mode of '*silentia voluntaria*' (voluntary or wilful silence), which can be used for purely musical effects, in contrast to '*silentia necessaria*' (i.e. involuntarily imposed silence). *Silentia voluntaria* is the term for pauses that are not indicated through metre – i.e. pauses that are 'free' of the metrical notation – and it might be expected that the 'voluntary' nature of these pauses was a mark of something akin to musical expression or phrasing.

Polyphonic notation adopted at first the '*suspirium*' as sign for a short pause of undetermined duration, but the development of mensural notation quickly created a number of new demands on notational specification. The principle of measuring duration was transferred to pauses as well, and the ability to notate pauses announced the evolution of precise divisions and closure within music as more than just a matter of universal convention.

Franco Colonis (Francis of Cologne) contributed to the stabilisation of 13th century mensural notation around his descriptions of notation[9], which includ six proportional signs for rests, where the size of a rest is directly related to its absolute duration and the longest one, the *finis punctorum*, covering the complete staff vertically, is synonymous with the ending sign used to end a piece or section. This mandate to preserve silence at the end of a musical performance must be the first explicit notation of the demand for musical 'decorum'. At this time it was a mandate to the performers (who were also the listeners). I will later discuss the notation of silencing mandates on both performers and concert audiences in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Another practice described by Franco Colonis links the role of silence to the listener-performer: namely, the observation of '*vox amissa*'. When a certain voice is silent (*vox amissa*), the singer is to listen to the sounding voices ('*vox prolata*'). Silence here is an active mode of listening, not merely a kind of passive emptiness.

A new consciousness about the writing of silent parts and a special case of the awareness of the silence of the *vox amissa* led to scribes using the term '*tacet*'. The *tacet* term has survived up into the 20th century both as an abbreviation in orchestral part-writing and, in extension of this, as an integral indication of non-metrical rests in space-time notation and other non-metrical durations from the mid-20th century on. The further motivation of silent parts within a polyphonic context is expanded in tandem with these *tacet* instructions (and simple blank spaces) through an intricate play on various moral, religious, philosophical, literary and comical inscriptions in Flemish manuscripts of the early 1500s.[10]

New demands on notational precision were also accompanied by new opportunities for original and idiosyncratic manipulation through writing. In the decades around the year 1400, learned musicians excelled in using extremely complicated notation in polyphonic notation. The subtle use of pauses, hocquetus effects and exaggerated syncopation were characteristic of the period. Although subsequent generations' rhythmic expression is more restrained, the advances made in the refinement of rests, fermata and rhythmic syncopations remained in the technical arsenal of composers such as Du Fay, Ockeghem and Busnoys.

In the high renaissance, exegetical and rhetorical influences began to impact on music, forming newly expressive styles of vocal phrasing. In the madrigal *Ahi, misera mia vita* (1609) by Johann Grabbe, for example, each mention of 'death' in the text extinguishes the vocal parts one

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9 Ars cantus mensurabilis (c. 1260), edited and translated by O. Strunk: *Source Readings in Music History from Classical Antiquity through the Romantic Era* (New York, 1950), pp. 139–59
10 I return to this specific historical tradition in Chapter 4.

by one (Schwab, 1999, pp. 10-11). Additionally, the ending is characterised by a registral silence (the final note in the soprano voice is notated above her singing range, thus presumably was performed silently). And the end of the entire madrigal comprises a notated semibreve silence; this is not so unusual in music of the subsequent centuries, but at that time was highly novel. Heinrich Schwab calls this "musical exegesis at the highest level", due to the omission of the final cadence, and judges that it can be considered an absolute one-off in the history of madrigals.

In the Baroque, this kind of mimetic style was developed through staged and semi-staged forms combining text, drama and music. In this context, rests were used as a medium of added suspense. In the prologue to Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), the allegory Musica asks for silence for the duration of her song (Hansen, 2001, p. 36). This is an early example of the imposition of decorum on audiences from within musical works themselves. Musica demonstrates what she demands, by falling silent herself when asking the birds and the river to do so; her final strophe contains a number of rests in both the vocal part and in the continuo part. Hansen identifies these as the rhetorical figure *abruptio* (or *aposiopesis* and *homoiteleuton*) according to the German '*Figurenlehre*'. Thus, semantically significant pauses deployed with precision of timing within a musical context made extra-musical silence into a musical event. The German study of musical rhetoric identifies as many as 7 figures of silence: *aposiopesis, spolkope, abruptio, ellipsis, homioteleuton, suspiratio,* and *tmesis*. The *aposiopesis* and *homoiteleuton* are both forms of 'Generalpause', grand or total silence, frequently characerised by being unexpected. The *tmesis* and *suspiratio* occur when the continuity of a melody is interrupted by small pauses, to illustrate text. The Renaissance and Baroque's rhetorical figures of silence thus fulfil quite distinct and well-defined functions within speech.

Lengthened pauses and dramatic silences were also integral to liturgical music in the Baroque period, and treatments similar to the Grabbe example above are found numerously in liturgical music by Schütz and Bach. Oversized rests are used to arrest the musical motion, usually in illustration of religious texts; for example, to give musical portrayal to the silence of Christ in 'Mein Jesus schweigt zu falschen Lügen stille' from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (1727).

The role of pauses as dramatic and exegetical device, originally developed within vocal music of the Renaissance and Baroque, produced a style of idiomatic phrasing and articulation that naturally spilled over into instrumental music. This is copiously accounted for in publications about Baroque vocal and instrumental style, so I will not go into the matter further here.

At this point, I would like to turn to two reference tomes of the 18th century: Diderot & d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* and Rousseau's *Dictionnaire de musique.*

Here is the beginning of Diderot & d'Alembert's entry on silence:

> **SILENCE**, s.m. *terme relatif*, c'est l'opposé du bruit. Tout ce qui frappe l'organe de l'ouïe, rompt le *silence*. On dit le *silence* des temples est auguste, le *silence* de la nuit est doux, le *silence* des forêts inspire une espece d'horruer, le *silence* de la nature est grand, le *silence* des cloîtres est trompeur. *Encyclopédie de Diderot et d'Alembert* (1751-72).

Note the succinct linking of thematisations of the perceiving human subject, the spiritual dimension, nature's benign and awesome aspects, and religion. This opening to the dictionary entry neatly sums up the key elements in the philosophical subject of aesthetics, which was on the rise in the mid-18th century. Thinkers of Diderot & d'Alembert's day were in great

awe of nature, the object of both religious contemplation and scientific observation, and an important motor in Enlightenment throught was the meeting of scientific advances with the power of the church. The aesthetic aspect of this issue hung on observations from nature, its purposiveness (to mankind) or otherwise, and the religious question of man's position within the universe and the natural world.

This is reflected in Edward Burke's seminal *Essay on the sublime and beautiful* (1756), which initiated considerable debate on the sublime, and was developed in Kant's *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* (1764).[11] In its 1764 version, Kant's category of the sublime concerns not so much nature as social and ethical judgements regarding people's inherent virtue and their corresponding disposition to feelings of the sublime.

Diderot & d'Alembert's encyclopedia entry on silence continues with a description of the power evoked in the ancients' practice of oration, which also has a moral association. Diderot & d'Alembert refer to Ajax' silence towards Hades in the Odyssey, where he evades replying to Ulysses' ingratiations. This sense of not deigning to speak of a matter whose very mention might make one appear mean-spirited is presented as a moral behavioural rule that proposes silence as a desirably elevated response to perceived difficulty or awkwardness. Again, the association of elevation belies the paradigmatic influence of the sublime in the mid-18th century.

Three modes of silence in scriptural writings are also listed in this entry: (i) patience, repose, and tranquillity, (ii) retreat and separation from the world, and (iii) ruin (as in, "The Lord has ruined us" (Jeremiah)). Finally, there is mythological silence in the form of the ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman divinities of silence, conventionally represented by the gesture of putting a finger to one's mouth.

Passing on to a more directly musical account of silence from the end of the 18th century, Rousseau's own *Dictionnaire de musique* (1768) identifies musical silences with notated rests:

> **SILENCES**, s. m. *en Musique*, sont différens signes répondans à toutes les différentes valeurs des notes: & qui, mis à la place de ces notes, marquent que tout le tems de leur valuer doit être passé en *silence*.

By the end of the 18th century, the term 'tacet' had stabilised sufficiently for Rousseau to note that:

> when, in the course of a piece of music, one wishes to mark the silence of a particular part, it is written with batons or rests. But when some part is to keep silent for an entire piece, it is expressed by the word 'tacet' written into this part underneath the name of the air or the first notes of the song.[12]

Rousseau notes that even though there are 10 signs of note-value, there are only 9 signs for silences; no rest corresponds to the maximum note value. Instead, that duration of silence can be written out by doubling the longest rest. Interestingly, the rest corresponding to the value of a whole note (breve), is written with a 2-bar measure, whilst the half-note (semibreve) is called a 'pause', a minim-rest 'demi-pause', crotchet = 'soupir' (sigh), and so on in decreasing denominations of 'sighs' until the "seizième de soupir".

11 See my detailed discussion of the Kantian sublime in Part IV.
12 My translation.

Additional to the entries on 'silences' and 'tacet', Rousseau has a separate entry for 'baton':

> the black opaque bars traversing the stave perpendicular to it – expressing, according to the number of lines that they cover, the number of bars to be passed in silence. These are not to be confused with the pauses favoured in ancient music to announce Mode (meaning Measure); these are 'Pauses initials', placed after the clef, not expressing silence, but determining the mode.

An interesting and slightly comical appendage to Rousseau's entry on silences in his music dictionary is his remark on the instability of notating dotted rests. Rousseau states that there is no correct and proper system of dotting silences as there is with notes: they should be written out in full. "Cependant, comme quelques-uns pointent aussi les silences, il faut que l'Exécutant soit prêt a tout": Nevertheless, as some people also dot silences, the performer is advised to be prepared for all eventualities.

Rousseau is responsible for documenting the techniques and practices of performing musical rests, at the same time as acknowledging and commentating the variations and instabilities within these practices.

This brings us to a slightly more work-based consideration of silences in the Classical style. I will adopt a more conservative teleological style here, appropriate to the role that this overview provides in setting the scene for more complex debates later on in this study. I have already made clear my position on the normative tendencies in commentating on the classical-romantic repertoire; however, my attempts to identify with less normative approaches will be concentrated around the period that is the prime concern of my thesis.

As instrumental music gained more autonomy from dramatic and liturgical forms in the late 18th century, a new and less codified use of silence produced a correspondingly more idiosyncratic use of rests and pauses by composers, beyond the finesse of mere style. An ambiguous, multivalent use of humourous silence has been picked up on by several commentators in Haydn's String Quartets, op. 33, in particular the final one, "Der Witz". Charles Rosen has pointed to the incorporation of silent durations into motivic working, in Haydn's Quartet in C major op. 33, no. 3 (1781), where the temporal values of rests are developed on an equal footing with other compositional parameters, asserting their own kind of 'dissonance' within melodic and rhythmic developments. In the finale of Mozart's string Quartet in G major, KV 387 (1782), silence manifests itself in the form of an interruption in the middle of a period, between a thematic cell and its cadence.

In the classical style, then, silence works somewhat like harmonic dissonance; no matter how surprising or extreme it may be, the listener is never in doubt as to the fact that the deployment of silence is part of a game with well-established rules. In fact, it may be the case even today with music of the classical period, that those best acquainted with the musical syntax will be those most likely to be most surprised by the rhythmic dissonance of a sudden silent moment, whereas less well-schooled listeners might find its profile less striking. A further special feature of pause notation in the 18th century was the use of a *fermata* in instrumental concerti, to indicate the insertion of an improvised solo – typically, just before the end of the final solo passage, and thus called a 'cadenza'.

With the music of Beethoven, silences begin to move into the foreground, with rests emphasising, for example, suspense or (by contrast) a freer character, or – between the two – a

discharge of tension. Beethoven's use of silence is highly varied: from framing device to rests that are constitutive of motivic work; from gradual changes in extreme dynamics, to abrupt contrasts; from silence as integrated thematic material to the continuation or extension of material. Silence here is to some extent an active compositional element in interplay with sound.

It will be useful to remember here the picture of silence as framing device, studied by Cone and Littlefield (Cone, 1966) (Littlefield, 1996). A painting, of course, conventionally has four sides, whereas temporal artworks have two: the beginning and the end. The silent downbeat at the beginning of Beethoven's 5th Symphony (1808) is one example; the 9th Symphony's (1824) gradual emergence from silence is another.

Taking beginnings first, there is a historical aspect to the fact that the symphonic silent downbeat takes its rise at the same time as the gradual silencing of the audience and the establishment of concert-hall decorum more or less as we know it today. The silent downbeat at the start of Beethoven's 5th Symphony may not seem particularly strong now, but it has to be remembered that 200 years ago, audiences still walked around and talked during public concerts. Seen from this perspective, the Beethovenian symphonic silent downbeat has an entirely different significance than, say, the silent downbeat at the start of Sibelius' 2nd Symphony (1902), almost a hundred years later (when the concert decorum that we know today had been established). In the first half of the 19th century, the concert convention ritualised and internalised the mandate for decorum (the demand for audience to be silent). Musicians and listener developed the habit of joining in a prayer-like moment of contemplative and respectful – almost supra-religious – silence, until all are silent, before the music – the 'work' – begins.

Thus, silence became the aura of live music – of its identifiable works (bordered off from the not-work in this way) and of its live performances. Some works began to draw compositional consequences from this. The Beethovenian silent downbeat is a motivic device that, through its appearance in the content of the piece, forms a relationship with all the interior silences to follow in the piece. The symbolic 'call-to-attention' that seems at first to belong to mere convention and protocol turns out to be inherent in the symphony itself, and thus the symphony could be considered to incorporate an awareness of the conventions that frame it as work.

This referencing of the context and situation within which art is institutionalised, within which the artwork acquires, asserts and retains its status, is also a characteristic of early romantic modernity – an awareness that there is not only beauty in the world, but that we also participate in capturing it, framing it, observing it and thus defining and to some extent creating it.

However, the symphonic silent downbeat is part of the work, not of the frame. The conductor performs it as part of the composed score; the work/score is already happening, even though we do not hear anything yet. This is a frame that participates in the work itself – metrically, gesturally, structurally and motivically – and cannot be separated from the work. The silence of decorum, on the other hand, is a convention that might change over time, can be overridden, and is external to the identity of the work itself. Thus, it is still possible to draw clear distinctions between inner and outer, internal and external, frame and framed.

So much for beginnings; let us now turn to the end, the moment before applause, where there is a retrospective imposition of frame. Here, Beethoven rarely uses silence to mark the frame of the ending. (In the symphonic repertoire, the classical-romantic paradigm of the affirmative symphonic ending had already been surprised by works such as Haydn's much-cited *Abschiedssinfonie* (1772) – a subversion that had a specifically illustrative and quasi-comical ef-

fect. We have to wait to much later in the romantic period for later instances of 'silent symphonic endings', where they take on the character of annihilating themselves through various forms of disappearances into silence: Brahms' 3rd Symphony, for example, or Tchaikovsky's 6th (1893).)

With regard to my talk of 'constitutive silences', we can see here that in Beethoven's symphonies, the framing silence is on its way to becoming an internal part of the musical work itself, working inward from the edges. A part of the external context has infiltrated what was formerly self-sufficient, autonomous, unique. This is a step that works in two directions. Contextual awareness enters the structural language of the artwork, but is simultaneously autonomised, neutralised as being 'external': it's domesticated, emasculated, the interventional potential is tamed. This period could be seen as a moment when silences begin to gain greater power within instrumental works, without yet being exactly constitutive – heading towards the so-called 'Pausensymphonie', Bruckner's 2nd (1872).

In the Romantic style, rests played yet stronger roles: delay, arrest, silent harmonic 'resolution', climactic effects, enhancing expressiveness, dynamic rest, tension, suspsense, interruption, shortening and the heightening of expectancy.

The early romantic song-cycle was an engine of expressive phrasing that produced exegetical mannerisms that then entered the romantic musical vocabulary and trickled into purely instrumental music at a removed level of abstraction. This development could be regarded as similar to the transfer of dramatic silences from vocal to instrumental music in the baroque period that I have sketched above. However, I am aware that it is somewhat more controversial to make this observation of vocal and textual influence in respect of instrumental music of the 19th century.

Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique (*1830) exemplifies the incursion of a programmatic-dramatic use of silence into instrumental symphonic music. In the third movement (*Scène aux champs*), for example, a pastoral, quasi-gendered dialogue is set up between the cor anglais and oboe. At the opening of the movement they exchange a pattern of call and reply. When the cor anglais returns alone at the end of the movement, its call is disappointed finally by an absent reply – indicating, presumably, the death of the shepherdess (oboe).

Charles Rosen locates a paradox at the heart of the burgeoning romantic sensibility, in the notion of the absent melody. In his early *Humoresk* (1839) for piano, Schumann notates a third, 'inner-part' stave between the treble and bass staves, containing an unplayed melody.

> The melody is no more to be imagined as a specific sound than it is to be played: nothing tells us that the melody is to be heard as vocal or instrumental. This melody, however, is embodied in the upper and lower parts as a kind of after-resonance – out of phase, delicate, and shadowy. What one hears is the echo of an unperformed melody, the accompaniment of a song. The middle part is marked innere Stimme, and it is both interior and inward, a double sense calculated by the composer: a voice between soprano and bassi, it is also an inner voice that is never exteriorized. It has its being wihin the mind and its existence only through its echo. (Rosen 1996, pp. 8-9)

There follows a detailed commentary on the fate of this inner voice, including momentary disappearances of the absent melody, and Rosen's considerations of how this visual dialogue with a silent part might influence a performer's interpretation.

The early romantic period is an important historical moment for my research, because of some 'returns' in the material that I take up later. Philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, with

whose writings I engage in Part II and Part IV, dates the birth of the avantgarde from the early romantic period. Also, as I note in Part III, there was a move among European composers in Darmstadt and related circles to adopt the romantic poet Hölderlin as a point of historical orientation in their formulations of the musical fragment. There is an interesting double-cross in this return to Hölderlin, as silence was used by poets from romanticism to symbolism as a factor in the musicalisation of the word (and thus as a force working against logical syntax). In music as in poetry, then, silence became the paradigm (and the ideal) as opposed to sound or word. I regard both these attitudes towards the romantic period (Lyotard's rooting of the avantgarde, and musical modernism's return to Hölderlin) as motivated not so much by nostalgia as by a perceived need to recruit the past into the legitimation of new aesthetic projects. Nevertheless, the early 1800s are a major force in many of the 20th-century silence types that I will discuss.

At this point, I will expand a little on the concept of constitutive silences that is beginning to emerge as I progress through this roughly chronological account of historical silences in European art music. I must stress that I am talking about a concept here – not a definition. Thus, I am working towards a guiding conception of what I refer to within the interests of this project by the term 'constitutive' silence, as part of the delimitation of my subject area. It is not a matter of setting a historical wall between the pre-constitutive and constitutive eras of silence's musical maturity, nor of deciding whether particular types or instances of silence within musical works are definitively constitutive or not. At the level of conceptual description, however, I offer a short discussion here, by which the reader can orientate herself in the perspective from which I am writing.

Let us say, as a guide, that musical rests in notation are partial and plural, resting within a work composed of other, contrasting material, while silence as a constitutive element of an artwork is more like a totality, an indivisible whole.

At a perceptual level, one might describe the experience of such a 'totality' of silence as follows: where silence is most constitutive of artworks in this way, sounds may appear as islands, or isolated moments within an underlying continuum of silence, producing a queasy overlap of form and formlessness, or of form and its inversion.

Continuing at this general, descriptive level, it seems to me that silences in score and in perception begin to part company in the romantic period, with silence becoming an ideal space for the imagination (and thus the irrational, or subconscious). Scores begin to describe this silent bedrock with technical and allusive ascriptions such as '*e silentio*', '*ad silentium*', '*per silentium*' and '*tönend gewordene Leere*'. Thus, silence may be associated with a kind of imaginative conceptualisation that is often hard to pin down, but which was nevertheless paradigmatic for the romantic artwork. Thus idealised, the status of silence was considerably elevated, due to a perceived purity unattainable through 'corrupted' music or verbal language.

In the twentieth century, a kind of emancipation of silence from classical-romantic syntax took place, with silence ceasing to signal merely the anti-image of music, and becoming a key component of music itself. This tended towards what I would call constitutive silence in the stronger sense. Silence became the framing event-space of whole pieces, works and concerts, asserting its existential character not patch-wise but in blocks. (Not parts but a whole.) This is where silence becomes indivisible – a block that sets questions of perception, reception and interpretation in motion.

At the start of the 20ᵗʰ century, gestures towards the topicalisation of silence within literature met music through vocal and dramatic forms (similar to the transfer that I described in the Baroque period), first later gaining the level of abstraction that has been called modernist. The language of poets such as Rilke and Georg reached out towards the borders of language, giving up description in favour of evocation, and offering series of symbols that remained vague, complex and open in relation to meaning. Silence was indiscutably a tool in this development.

Through his work in setting the Maeterlinck play in the opera *Pelleas et Mélisande* (1902), Debussy came into contact with a writer who had developed relatively specific views on silence. Maeterlinck had written an important essay on mystical communication called 'Le Silence'. Also, in 'Trésor des Humbles' (1886), he discussed a distinction between negative and positive silence. After *Pelleas et Mélisande*, Debussy integrated silences into his piano music through a very specific use of rests and pauses, for example in the prelude *Des pas sur la neige* (1910), and in *Etude pour les sonorities opposèes* (1915).

Schoenberg is another composer from the same era who explored a muted expression. This he did partly through the musical setting of literary texts that operated in a threshold region between language and rationality (such as Stefan Georg's poetry), and partly through the development of the stylised speaking style *Sprechgesang*. It could be argued that in the transitional (expressive) moment between the dissolution of tonality and the development of serialism, silence was the composer's provisional response to the state of musical expression. *Die Glückliche Hand*, (1908), a dramatic work, opens with the words, "Still, o schweige; Ruheloser!" In the later *opera Moses and Aron*, as I have already noted, a form of relative quieting is performed by the use of Sprechstimme instead of the normal singing voice for the part of Moses, the quiet (almost mute) shepherd.

In his essay 'Several silences', to which I will return in Chapter 3, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard writes:

> Aron, the weak one, is an adorable tenor, to whom has been parcelled out melody and the *espressivo*. As for Moses, he speaks on the near side of song without singing, speaks in modulations, as though Schoenberg had invented Sprechgesang just for him. (Lyotard, 1984 [1972]: p. 103)

The very first presentation of a musical work emptied entirely of music was probably that authored by Alphonse Allais – a Parisian satirical writer, editor and humorist, whom Satie briefly worked with in 1890. Allais' *Marche Funèbre composée pour les funérailles d'un grand homme sourd*[13] (1883) consists of 24 bars of empty music staves, with the tempo indication '*lento rigolando*'[14]. A prefatory note states that, "the author of this composition was inspired, during the composing of it, by the commonly accepted principle that great pains are always borne in muteness. The performers of these great, mute, pains are required to count bars instead of delivering themselves unto this indecency which degrades all august characters to obsequious voyeurs." The piece came from an entirely different artistic tradition than the compositional interests of Debussy or Schoenberg and was a kind of salon number. It was designed to be appreciated by members of the extravagantly self-staged artists' groups in the Pa-

13 Transl.: funeral march composed for the funeral of a big, deaf man.
14 Transl.: very slowly, almost like a joke.

risian explosion of self-consicously absurdist creativity between the 1880's and 1910's. Allais'
move was satirical – a satire of the 'serious' avantgarde. (Allais also curated the first series
of black and white paintings, exhibited in Paris in 1883 at an exhibition called 'Incohèrents'.
Allais called his all-black painting 'Two negroes fighting in a cave at night'.) The Incohérents'
satirical criticism of the avantgarde aimed not so much for the revival of old ideas; their criti-
cism was intended rather as an opening towards a more radical future-oriented critique of
art and its status.

Also composed in this vein was Satie and Milhaud's furniture music, *Musique d'ameuble-
ment* (1920), first presented as an interlude in the performance of a play at an art gallery,
and introduced with the words, "we beg you to take no notice of it and to behave during the
entr'actes as if the music did not exist." This was, then, a way of filling out the space between
artistic manifestations (the acts of a play), whilst signalling the gap between art and non-art
– using unobtrusive music to sketch an auditive field which was not really intended to be
listened to. The double-crossing in this piece is unending (e.g. calling attention to a plea to be
ignored, etc.) and very characteristic of the positioning of art in this time and place between
satire, seriousness, art, not-art, anti-art and of course artistic self-exhibition.

These silent moves from the early 20th century are important to bear in mind as part
of ongoing musical revolutions and repercussions relating to romanticism from extremely
different perspectives. Whether they worked in a relationship of extension or antagonism
towards romanticism, dodecaphony, Neue Sachlichkeit, serialism and other musical move-
ments turned out in retrospect to have much in common, at least in so far as they were the
consequences of a (beloved or despised) romanticism.

In Chapter 3, I draw attention to the impact of the Second World War as a seminal event
producing profound changes in the subsequent history of the arts (above all, changes that
mark the mid-20th century with a number of expressive retreats in the direction of silence.
But it is important to bear the above tradition in mind as a precursor to what might be re-
garded as an 'affirmative' (and in any case playful) approach towards silence.

While we still have the first half of the 20th century in mind, it is necessary to consider
the role of silence in the music of Anton Webern, where inorganic rests and pauses are a com-
positional tool joining quiet sounds within short forms. Silent downbeats, *pensato* markings,
pauses housing tempo-changes, and extreme quietness are key characteristics of Webern's
music. Silence and sound are developed with parallel importance, from the theme in *Pas-
sacaglia*, opus 1, through the brevity of his atonal work, and right up to his last work, the
Kantate, opus 31, where Webern uses a Hildegarde Jone text that explicitly refers to silence
(the poem "Schweigt auch die Welt" is the text for the first movement).

Webern took the ambiguity of silent downbeats a step further, by placing them across
tempo-changes. His music is also marked by the prevalence of rests at the ends of move-
ments, producing an avoidance of closure. In fact, the short form could itself be seen as an
expression of emptiness through brevity.

Adorno called Webern's music "*dem Verstummen nahe*" (Seidel 1998). Adorno re-
garded the total desubjectification of the composer's treatment of material to have been
completed in Webern's music, with the composer's only remaining option for self-expres-
sion being to confirm precisely his lack of self-expression through silence. The question of
subjectification and objectification through composition or through silence is an issue to
which I will later.

The end of Webern's output was, as is well known, a direct outcome of the Second World War, and this fact brings us fittingly to a point on which to close this historical overview. In Chapter 2, my thesis embarks on a more thorough consideration of silence in the mid-20th century.

Through this historical overview, I hope to have introduced the majority of notational, conceptional and technical terms by which silence has manifested itself within western art music up to the middle of the 20th century.

This brief overview of existing historical and theoretical literature on musical silences is relatively rich, but readers with a background in musicology will immediately notice that – with the possible exception of Edward Cone – there are no names central to their discipline here, who have contributed major theoretical or historical work on silence. Thus, the result of this historical overview is the observation of a 'gap' between musicology and considerations of silence in music.

1.5 Comments on the use of terms and theory

The preceding historical section generated some technical and more general musical terms for silence, amongst which I have signalled those that are of specific use in the following chapters: I will expand on terms such as '*tacet*', '*fermata*', or the concept of silence as framing device, within the context of the works that I discuss from now on.

In the broader aesthetic sphere, I have signalled the importance of terms such as 'modernism' and 'abstraction' for the present work, without moving closer to an actual discussion of them. I will consider these and other such generalised historical and aesthetic terms from a number of angles throughout this thesis, and I hope that the way in which I handle these terms will show that I acknowledge a range of different levels at which they can operate from context to context.

One of the terms central to this project, arising from the previous section, is the notion of 'constitutive' silence'. I have not attempted a definition of constitutive silences, as I do not intend to reduce them to a common aesthetic strategy or suggest that they produce common effects. But I have indicated tentatively that there may be a historical progression in the way that silences become increasingly constitutive of composed works. Further, I have discussed that constitutive silences are not particularly transparent to technical analysis, and that this may be due to the way they assert themselves block-wise within works (even to the extent of filling out all or most of the work), rather than patch-wise. This is the difference between the way that silence manifests itself in the works that I discuss from here onward, as opposed to the way that rests and pauses function in, for example, tonal music.

In summary, there is an indivisible quality to what I call 'constitutive silence'. I hope to have stabilised this term sufficiently here for the reader to have an idea as to what interests me about the way that silence occupies the works that I discuss in the following chapters. As a further and more discursive point, I will be linking descriptions of constitutive silences to more polemical adjectives such as 'radical', 'difficult', and 'intransparent' that in many readers' minds will immediately raise associations with modernism and its disrepute. Thus, 'constitutive' is the somewhat stiffer, yet neutral summariser of adjectives that spring to mind more intuitively, such as radical, obtuse, difficult and opaque.

After 'silence', one of the most basic terms in this study is 'music'. Whilst I have found it easy to separate my use of the terms 'music' and 'sound art' in my close discussions of, respectively, scored concert works, and sound art on CD, I often fall back on the former term

as a kind of catch-all umbrella term, in general aesthetic discussions that cover both genres. This is mainly for reasons of stylistic economy. Thus, the subtitle of my thesis specifies 'radical silences in musical listening'. However, I acknowledge that this choice undermines my eagerness to integrate discussion of scored music and sound art within one paradigm of reception. Extending the discussion across both artforms gives useful friction to considerations of intention, interpretation, reception, composition, the author/composer/artist, work concept, and so on.

The term 'music' has heavy implications – within both everyday and academic language – that the term 'sound art' is entirely free of. If 'music' requires definition, it is because of the richness of its history – because it is so much and so many things to so many people. If 'sound art' requires definition – and it does – it is because most people have no idea what it could mean, and those who do may not yet have reached any kind of consensus.[15]

I will nevertheless take this opportunity to say something about the broader, aesthetic aspects of musical listening that enable me to bring notated and digitally-inscribed works under common considerations.

My focus on 'listening' diverts us, to some extent, away from the form of artworks and their production, to the perceptual effects that they produce. But the emphasis in this thesis on the aesthetic dimension reminds us to consider not only perception but also a range of art-specific and cultural factors. The reader may also associate aesthetic listening with issues such as 'contemplation' or 'decorum'.

I am also concerned with acknowledging the phases within listening that lend the aesthetic experience of music and sound art a certain auditive autonomy. What are the perceptual and aesthetic qualities that are unique to listening, as opposed to seeing or reading?

This question may be partly answered by reference to the uniquely temporal bind on aural perception. Visiting a gallery or reading a book, the visitor or reader can pause, slow down, speed up – in short, interest and concentration steer the perceptual tempo. With listening, however, the temporal unfolding is already determined, and the listener can only choose to interrupt, or – given the chance – to listen again from the beginning.[16]

The difference between successive listening encounters with the same artwork may be coupled with discussions of the ways that different theories address different levels of aesthetic appreciation.

There is a first encounter (the surprise of the first listening) that is well suited to being described within phenomenological and performative discourses. This encounter is full of

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15 Sound art is much more than this, and can embrace one or several of the following aspects: installation, public art, sculpture, performance, field recording, architecture, social project, documentary, computer programming, studio processing, and more. In addition, it is important to add that much sound art is produced by visual artists, and that the visual arts are an important paradigm in the production and reception of sound art. I spend some time in Part IV establishing a network of terms regarding the style, genre, labelling, subcultural aspects and other categorisations of the sound art that I discuss. It would be pedestrian to do the same for the scored concert music that I discuss in Part III, as – despite some inevitable variables – there is a much larger knowledge and consensus about descriptive categories surrounding this heavily institutionalised genre, particularly within the musicological community within which this thesis is written.

16 Clearly, the recording industry has largely undermined this premise, and iPod/laptop culture is a provisional highpoint in the opportunity for listeners to control the duration and frequency of their own listening experiences. However, I would argue that even the most recent of the sound art CDs discussed in this thesis is intended to be heard, from beginning to end, in one sitting.

the particularity of the individual work's characteristics. But our previous experiences as individual listeners position us already to include and exclude certain aspects of what meets our ears (we do not listen to all that we hear), and to make aesthetic judgments while listening.

The first encounter with a specific work of art is both anticipated and followed by other encounters. Historical resonances issue from the work itself (bestowed both within and outside the work's work-like framework by its composer or sound artist), setting interpretive modes in motion.

In the case of works fixed in scores and compact discs, we often meet the work in its material object form prior to listening: a mode that lends itself well to analytical description.

There is, then, the first listening. There are possibly repeated listenings. And there are the many reflections by which we rationalise our listening experience subsequently – usually in relation to more listening experiences, of the same or other works.

In this thesis, I hope to honour the fact that our academic understanding of artworks is shaped both by perceptual first-encounters, and also by prejudices and retrospective judgments of both conventional and individual nature.

This leads me on to discuss the status of theory in relation to the ways that my work is influenced by different theroretical and academic traditions. As the reader has probably already guess, there is not one sole methodological approach that I will be employing throughout this thesis. One reason for this seems to me to be prompted by the objects of my research; I use various theoretical approaches because I think that both the artworks and the successive nature of aesthetic encounters with them require it. Radical changes in the content and form of artworks have been accompanied in the late 20th century mental landscape by shifts in the kinds of aesthetic inquiry that may prove successful for recognising these works' actual demands on the perceiving subject.

However, the adoption of multiple theoretical approaches also arises from the state of the generalised aesthetic discourse itself. The study of the humanities today is characterised by a plurality of approaches, and it seems reasonable to employ these as appropriate to the varying nature of the task in hand, rather than signing up to a dominant theoretical approach such as characterised previous decades' generation of 'schools' of thought in individual academies.

From the preceding cursory glance at silences within historical western art music, and the literature that already exists about them, we can conclude that non-constitutive silences are quite accessible to structural analysis, and that such a technical approach may in some cases be combined with comparable analytical approaches from other disciplines such as linguistic or phenomenological frame analysis. Undoubtedly, there is interesting research to be done in applying these linguistic-metaphysical discussions to music. This might, for example, take the form of an expansion of the approach that Clifton takes (Clifton 1976).

However – and this is part of my very definition of what constitutive silences are – some silences present themselves as blocks that are hard to divide by any means of analysis (where analysis is understood as separating something into its constituent parts and examining these individual parts within an overall, systematised structure).

But I am interested in how silence – this most reductive of gestures – manifests itself at its most irreducible. No one methodical approach would be able to illuminate all constitutive silences; all would miss being able to say something crucial about many of the silences in question here, even though certain approaches might be able to say something (non-comprehensive) about individual instances. Thus, my thesis draws on an unformalised network of

hermeneutic, historical, performative, phenomenological, rhetorical and other approaches, where I draw more on certain approaches in different chapters, allowing particular works to suggest to me the theoretical angles that can best illuminate them.

There is a dual influence from Anglo-American and central European aesthetics in my thesis. As I write in English and rely primarily on English texts or the availability of translations into English from other languages, my work inherits some of the tropes of Anglo-American musicology and aesthetics in general. Also, my previous university experience includes a dose of analytical philosophy in England. Yet the department within which my project has been carried out is committed to a continental history of ideas and intellectual values pertaining to music (and, amongst those, the German tradition has had more influence than the French). At the risk of repetition, I would point out that the humanities today have moved beyond narrow professional distinctions of the kind that would associate Anglo-American aesthetics solely with an analytical and logical rigour that sidelines historical considerations, and European continental philosophy primarily with the critique of intellectual systems, and moral and social practices. However, any attempt to evaluate the extent to which individual academics' work is a result of situational influences will always reveal, through emphases and lacunae, that it still makes sense to acknowledge cultural distinctions (though not necessarily conflicts, rifts or abysses) between the two traditions.

There has been a movement away from dogmatic readings of emblematic thinkers of the 20th century (such as Derrida, Habermas, Deleuze, and so on), and my thesis is much indebted to this climate. To push the point a little further, and to join it with my earlier comment about the smallness and strangeness of recent art that is pedantically resistant to generalisation (or reductive interpretation), I would point to the new paradigm within both artistic production and humanistic research that critiques the very ambition of universal, top-down narratives. In that light it would seem that the only defensible approach to aesthetic discussions about such artworks would be one based on particularities, local tendencies and fragmentary, shifting perspectives.

There is, for example, an awareness throughout my thesis of the uneasy dialogue between negative critical theory[17] descended from the Frankfurt School, and the affirmative, poststructuralist methods of interpretation that have become so influential in the humanities as they are practised today. The most obvious symptom of this dual interest is my choice of Lyotard as a recurring point of orientation in the thesis' conceptual framework. Underlying many of the premises for my line of research, the reader will also sense an influence from Adorno. This may seem strange, considering that Lyotard and Adorno have for many decades been regarded as opposites in respect of many central paradigms of art, theory and history.

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17 Initially, the term 'critical theory' comes from the Frankfurter School's Marxist critique of capitalist culture, and was first formulated in Max Horkheimer's 1937 essay *Tradition and critical theory*. Beyond central Europe the term is however less influenced by the history of the social sciences and was launched in the 1960s and 1970s in Anglo-Saxon universities' humanities departments as a form of literary theory based on text-analysis. As such textual analysis began to come increasingly under the sway of central European theories aimed at rupturing the critical tradition – i.e. as analysis became increasingly qualified by relativising theories – the term 'critical theory' has become a widespread term within humanities departments indicating an awareness for the theoretical premises of textual and cultural analysis, including those premises articulated by social science. Thus, the two traditions of cultural critique and aesthetic theory have begun to merge again. As this PhD thesis is written at a Department still greatly influenced by German theoretical traditions, I have chosen to avoid talking about 'critical theory' when not directly referring to the original Frankfurter School sense of the term. By using the hybrid 'critical aesthetic theory' I hope to honour the double heritage of the present state of cultural studies.

What kept many of the key thinkers of the 20th century apart, however, is no longer more significant than their ability to be subsumed under common interests.

Obviously, a review of the positions of Lyotard and Adorno is utterly outside the realm of this thesis. Suffice it to say that my reason for focussing on Lyotard to the virtual exclusion of many other post-structuralists is, firstly, that his analysis of the Kantian concept of 'negative presentation' offers me an advanced account of non-representation, and secondly, that he engaged with John Cage's early work through his affirmative aesthetics. Whilst critiquing the intentional subject from all angles, Adorno remained committed to its fundamental identity and thus also to a chain of aesthetic entities following on from the advocation of a subject (the autonomy of the artist and of the work of art – albeit under constant relativisation – and the special role of advanced art in relation to bourgeois society). The French post-structuralist mindset attacked the subject more radically, dissolving its primacy and with it all the results of its endeavours, transforming the individuality of strong identities into networks of relations and positions under the sway of changing cultural logics. To what extent Lyotard was and was not a part of this I will discuss at the relevant junctures in the following work. The reader is also referred to Christoph Menke-Eggers' *Die Souveränität der Kunst: ästhetische Erfahrung nach Adorno und Derrida* (Menke-Eggers 1988) for an alignment of the two traditions.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the original polarisation between these two positions has further weakened, with some consensus arising around the recognition that most aesthetic theories about the humanities aim to defend art as a special dynamic sphere within surrounding social systems, without defining art as a realm of timeless truths. Obviously, works and acts of art display some element of objecthood in as far as they seek to be received as individual entities, if only for a moment, and equally obviously they resist being levelled entirely by the logic of the commodity. Although the direct discussions following on from the writings of Lyotard are a major focus of this thesis, my work owes much to the Adornian branch of theory at a more internal level, as is apparent from the interest in negativity, negation and 'negative sound'.

I spend less time on Adorno in this thesis than on Lyotard. There is already a sizeable and growing body of critique of Adorno's work within musicology (Paddison 1993, Paddison 1996, Subotnik 1991) as compared to Lyotard's fragmentary reception within musicology (Danuser 1993, Bacht 2003). The obvious reason for this situation is that Adorno was one of the most prolific writers on music of his time, leaving several volumes of dense prose engaging with music at both an analytical, social and conceptual level; Lyotard's writings on music are mainly limited to passing playful speculation around Cage in one single early text (Lyotard 1976).

However, in a comparison of Adorno's and Lyotard's positions concerning the half-century that produced some of the most demonstratively resistant and material-sceptical works in the history of western art, there is much to tease out of Lyotard's aesthetic discussions that is both directly relevant to my interest in musical silences and relatively untouched by musicology. In addition, Lyotard's own aesthetic position underwent a change, from an originally affirmative, 'postmodern' euphoria over the opportunities arising after the dissolution of a previous social order, to a more modernist project, and to a Kant-inspired analysis of the limits of human experience.

Both Adorno and Lyotard's writings in each their ways famously contain an inbuilt resistance to theoretical summary – in Adorno's case because of the complexity of both the prose

itself and its conceptual background, in Lyotard's case because both his style and project changed considerably between the 1970s and 1990s, bridging the period of his engagement with the concept of 'negative presentation' as central to his understanding of both the avant-garde and the postmodern within the arts.

I have said a little (in the introduction) about the relations between academic and artistic professional environments. It remains for me to specify some relations between theory and artworks, as they vary between the following parts of this thesis.

Part II deals with Cagean silence, about which there exists an overwhelming quantity of texts ranging across historiography, philology, aesthetics, phenomenology and much more. These existing approaches chart an inherently interdisciplinary field, where music studies in no way have the high ground on producing the central texts in Cage appreciation. Indeed, the literature on Cage by non-musicologists and non-musicians far outweighs that from within the musical sphere. Being expected to treat 'the music itself', musicologists relying on the traditional methodologies of their discipline have rightly found it meaningless to engage with the most conceptual aspects of Cage's work, such as *4'33"*. Within this body of writings are also texts and transcripts by Cage himself at various stages of his life, from which many theories have been extracted in the course of the intervening decades. Whilst drawing on some of these (in as far as I can do so without obviously repeating what has already been established in the literature), I have also taken the opportunity to engage in some detail with two essays of a thoroughly idiosyncratic, non-systematic nature: Susan Sontag's essay 'The aesthetics of silence', and Jean-François Lyotard's 'Several silences' (Sontag, 1966 [1965] and Lyotard, 1984 [1972]). Neither journalistic, anecdotal nor academic, both these high-level texts demonstrate qualities in writing about the arts that are often marginalised in academic work.

Part III deals with works from the 1980s by Luigi Nono and Salvatore Sciarrino. All the texts I use about Nono's work come from within music studies, with virtually no interdisciplinary or theoretical aesthetic considerations. There is a solid base of analyses and historical documents on which to draw, but as my interest is more discursive than analytical, I draw more on considerations from hermeneutic discourses, which proves to be a very fruitful path for discussing this work. In the case of Sciarrino's music, the existing literature is of a decidedly more journalistic nature. The fact that Sciarrino is one generation younger than Nono is reflected in the lack of general maturity and depth in writing about his music – most of it is still at the level of promotional literature of one kind or another. It is no accident, however, that Nono's music has generated so much interpretive literature whilst Sciarrino's music seems to stop interpretation in its tracks; this observation is the point of departure for my discussion of a perceptually-based response to Sciarrino's music and its use of silence. Placed opposite hermeneutic discussions, a perceptual approach seems obviously influenced by phenomenology and performativity theories.

Part IV deals with digital silences in sound art on compact disc. Here, it becomes apparent that a large majority of sound artists working within this field are familiar with various aesthetic and philosophical theories; in fact, new forms of cultural studies and critical aesthetic theory forever seem to be on the cusp of overtaking the premises of art itself. It is safe to say that from the 1950s onwards, the arts have been undergoing a kind of academisation, in respect of education, with frameworks for the learning, development and dissemination of artistic techniques and aesthetics shifting from master-guru patterns to broader university and university-like structures. Thus, artists today are generally acquainted with a broad range

of aesthetic approaches and responses, and they form their individual professional positions through ongoing comparative work between different environments. Although many artists have written about their professional reflections in the past, the situation from the 1950s onwards is different in that many artists (in all media) have university degrees and often go on to work within universities. Thus their writings have progressed from letters and highly personal essays to more analytical considerations – either at the level of internal structures within works, or at the level of how the works relate to historical and cultural phenomena.

From the 1950s on, composed musical works were almost necessarily equipped – in the work of, say, Cage, Boulez and Stockhausen – from their outset with their composers' philosophical and structural argumentations for the aesthetic assumptions on which they rest. From an academic point of view, this is both fascinating and problematic, as the influence of composers on the reception of their own works can sometimes overshadow the works' presumed autonomy. This relates to the fruits and challenges of the cross-fertilisation between artistic and academic environments that I described in my introduction. Compared with, say, the visual arts, however, musical works of the past couple of decades can still appear to lack a theoretical body of writing, either from their composers or from their commentators. This state of affairs becomes apparent also when compared with contemporary sound artists, whose close contacts with the visual arts (sharing software, audiences, etc.) have infused their work with a theoretical self-awareness that is not matched among composers of scored music today. Thus, if the past fifty years seem to offer a unique formalisation of musical knowledge – not least, through the advance of musicology as a discipline – then with present-day sound art we are more or less at a provisional high-point of theoretical formality issuing directly from the artists themselves.

PART II – Midcentury Cagean silence

2.0 Introduction to Part II

Part II is dedicated to the discussion of empty artworks in the mid-20th century. The fact that the key work discussed – Cage's concert piece *4'33"* – famously comprises a near-blank score, means that these two chapters are low on analysis and high on rhetoric. This property is also to be seen in the light of the fact that Cagean silence is a trope that was formulated by the composer through a series of writings and lectures that, themselves, are – famously and notoriously – rich in rhetoric. The reception of Cagean silence, then, has been characterised by alternating tendencies, either to inflate the rhetoric, formalise it or 'debunk' it. In either case, it tends to come down to a battle of words.

It is reasonable to ask how interesting it still can be, to keep returning to Cage, whether to celebrate or debunk his work. Compared with any other artist discussed in this thesis, Cage is the only one who has had any enduring influence across the arts, and the reception of his work in music and writing has therefore been, comparatively, huge. It goes without saying that Cage's are the two founding texts of silence in music: the mythical and elusive *4'33"* (1952) and; the group of lectures and writings published in 1961 as the book *Silence*. Offering an account of the genesis of Cagean silence, I draw on research that shows that Cage made compositional and rhetorical moves towards silence from the 1940s (Emmerik 2002, Kahn 2001).

I have no ambition to contribute more polemic to Cagean reception as such, but for the purposes of this thesis, it is imperative to look at the possible causes and effects of Cagean silence. Specifically, there is the question of whether the Cagean silence trope is a move towards the kind of constitutive silence that I have sketched, or whether the rhetoric inherent in the trope actually took Cage away from musical and artistic silence.

My work has no ambition of providing a comprehensive overview of Cage's works, writings, lectures or reception; for this, I would refer the reader to *The Cambridge companion to John Cage* (Nicholls 2002) or *The Music of John Cage* (Pritchett 1993). For other commentaries on Cage and his work, see also Daniel Charles *Gloses sur John Cage* (1978)[1], or the German Edition text + kritik volume *John Cage II* (Metzger, 1990).

Instead, I wish to perspectivise Cagean silence from the grounds of my silence project, drawing primarily on Douglas Kahn's critique (Kahn 2001), Susan Sontag's description of the midcentury view from New York – characterised as a 'new sensibility' (Sontag 1966 [1965], Sontag 1969 [1967[); Jean-François Lyotard's performative writing on an affirmative aesthetics (Lyotard 1984 [1972]); and Sabine Sanio's discussion of Cage in relation to the European classical work-paradigm (Sanio 1999).

The topic of silence is both explicit and implicit in so much of Cage's musical and theoretical output that it is hard to isolate the phenomenon in his work, as distinct from the range of other topics he and others subsume(d) under his use and demonstration of the word: indeterminacy, chance, non-intentionality, disinterestedness, and more. Moreover, Cage's own rhetorical figure looms so large over the reception of all his work that the entanglement of artist and reception are almost total, right from the start of Cagean silence. This well-known effect of Cage's own writings on the reception of his work is given much counter-weight by, for instance, Douglas Kahn, who takes issue with Cage's ambitions for 'panaurality' by

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1 Charles' book has had a more extensive influence through its German translation: *John Cage oder Die Musik ist los Merve Verlag* (Charles, 1979)

reading a difference into the gap between Cage's instructions on how to listen to the world, and his hopes for how his music would be heard. I make no attempt to consider Cage's own rhetoric on Cagean silence here; it would only bring me into the same riddles that so many others have discussed, and reinforce yet again the influence of the artist on the production of his own reception.

It shall be no secret that I feel strongly that the most interesting of recent silencing moves within new sound art are not to be seen as merely neo-Cagean repetitions, but as a set of new aesthetic directions. I would like to emphasise differences between the most original of these current artists and Cage, and this chapter is one of the prerequisites for that move. The necessity of this fight is underlined by the opening lines from sound-artist Francisco López' critique of Cagean philosophy:

> Much more than his music, [Cage's] ideas have been so influential that it would not be exaggerated to think of most present avantgarde/experimental/contemporary music scenes as being Cagean to a bigger or lesser extent. … This influence has been – and indeed still is – heavily pernicious for music and […] Cagean philosophy, in its essence, is an exacerbated version of a classical paradigm in traditional Western music. (López 1996)

To some extent, then, my discussion of Cagean silence amounts to a re-evaluation of Cage's project as a modernist one (utopian, autonomous, tied to the bourgeois sphere of cultural consumption – the concert-hall – and assuming universal validity through its ambition to hear all sounds). Douglas Kahn has summarised Cage's project under the points: emancipation, discovery, and totality. (The emancipation of musical listening from the repressive constraints of musical tone; the discovery of new areas of sound, in the spirit of his inventor father; and, the totality of the panaural promise of listening to all sounds.)

I have been greatly refreshed by Douglas Kahn's recent critique of Cagean silence. In Part III of the book *Noise water meat: a history of sound in the arts*, Kahn proposes an answer to the question: how was Cagean silence generated?, and takes issue with Cage's ambitions for panaurality. More recently, in an essay entitled 'Empty plenitudes and specialized spaces: the legacy of John Cage's silences', Kahn has discussed Cage's anechoic-chamber experience in terms of the subject listening to itself within a 'closed world'; namely, the confines of a cold-war military research laboratory.

In Chapter 2, I draw on recent research, for an update on the present state of historical details surrounding the compositional and aesthetic genesis of the Cagean silence trope. In addition, I compare the view – represented here by German musicologist Sabine Sanio – that Cage exploded classical work-paradigms, with the opposing tenet – summed up more colloquially by sound artist Francisco López – that Cage's distance to traditionally European artistic paradigms has been overrated.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the mid-20th century as the beginning of the historical period with which this thesis is concerned, within the context of what Susan Sontag heralded as a 'new sensibility'. I characterise this new sensibility as basically affirmative in respect of the possibility of articulating artistic visions through a retreat from content (in our case, musical sound). Sontag discusses how the negation of conventional materials and internal forms was articulated within external formal conditions that affirmed the power of art to transcend its

own historical (material) limitations. Further historical perspectives are provided by brief discussions of European art music at this time, and of the New York arts scene within which Cage worked. Paving the way for my later discussion of Jean-François Lyotard's articulation of negative presentation, I also refer to Lyotard's early performative writing on Cagean and other silences.

I

TACET

II

TACET

III

TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

FOR IRWIN KREMEN   JOHN CAGE

C.F.Peters Frankfurt·London·New York

Fig. 2 Score page of John Cage, 4'33"
Edition Peters No.6777 ©1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York

CHAPTER 2

Cagean silence

2.1 Presentation of *4'33"*

This chapter is devoted to considering John Cage's piece *4'33"* (1952) and the Cagean silence trope in relation to the idea of a musical work constituted by silence. I will draw attention to distinctions between Cage's intentions for that piece and his intentions for 'silence' as such, issues that have consequences for how to consider the empty artwork as a work at all.

Much has been said and written about Cage and Cagean silence, and Cage's work is still the site of enormous differences of opinion within and between artistic and musical communities. However, to claim that the piece *4'33"* is a prior example of what I mean by constitutive or radical silence can hardly cause much disagreement:

See Fig. 2 (p. 48)

So far, so good.

2.2 Polyphonic 'tacet'

Silence is notated here with the conventional Italian imperative '*tacet*' ('remain silent'). As I have shown, *tacet* was a term first employed by scribes of medieval polyphony, to indicate the silence of one voice within a polyphonic context. I shall have more to say about the *tacet* mandate (as site of extra-musical scriptural play and even of authenticity) in Chapter 4. The most likely reason Cage chose this notation was the survival of the *tacet* convention as an abbreviation for weary part-writers in 19th-century orchestral music. The term was rejuvenated during the mid-20th century as a blanket alternative to metrical rests, particularly within graphic or other non-metrical notation styles. In summary, *tacet* is a notational convention that has preserved more or less the same function throughout several centuries, and that has also become a standard tool of 20th-century ensemble writing.

As a notational mandate to be silent, *tacet* is preceded historically by the '*finis punctorum*', which indicated the end of a musical piece in mensural notation. Both *tacet* and *finis punctorum* were originally codified by Franco Colonis in the 13th century. A vertical line crossing the entire staff, the *finis punctorum* was the maximum-duration rest, and was used to signal the end of a piece or section of music. This rest was an indication directed to the performers, of course, but in the context of 13th-century notated music the performers would also have been the listeners. Another key intended listener was presumably God, so the point of observing a moment of silence at the end of musical performance might have had an element of collective contemplation and communion with God, similar to prayer.

My reason for making this comparison between the two 13th-century notational terms is to distinguish the polyphonic root of *tacet* (the silence of one voice within a continuing polyphonic sound) from the finis punctorum's appeal for total silence from all performers. This latter demand was also rejuvenated more recently, as a key framing device for instrumental musical works from the mid-19th century onward, carving out a space for musical autonomy from the social noise of the early 19th-century concert context. The assertion of a space of

communion between performers and listeners even became a mannerism in 20th-century music through the frequent notation of a *fermata* over the final double bar-line, or an additional bar's grand pause with or without *fermata*. Thus, performers were instructed to assert the isolation of the musical work within the concert format, preserving silence beyond the temporal frame of the sounding music. The authority with which they could do this was extended by the actions of the conductor, who was to a large extent able to visualise – embody, even – what was written but not played. The consolidation of the classical concert form as we know it today is largely a staging of the score's insistence on authority beyond the merely sounding music.

I am not suggesting that Cage's use of the very common indication *tacet* involved any awareness of medieval music notation, but he certainly was aware of the symphonic and other traditions of the 19th century. We know from copious anecdotes that he was occupied by the status of the musical work as it interacted with social noise. There is definitely a dynamic between Cage's direction to the performer to be silent and the increasing insistence with which the musical concert-work demanded autonomous space in the 19th and 20th centuries. Any communion between performers and listeners in Cage's piece would seem idealistic to the point of naivety, given the fact that both Cage and David Tudor must have been able to anticipate that the presentation of an empty musical work would create anything but sacred decorum in practice. But if we disregard the potential for contemplative communion between performer and listener, then we are still left with a polyphonic remainder in the *tacet* instruction. If one cannot anticipate that listeners will observe a bourgeois decorum for the length of an empty piece, then the *tacet* indication would seem to limit the mandate to be silent to the performer alone, implying that the audience may sound, and that the pianist is to remain silent while the audience goes on sounding.

One of the major reappraisals of Cagean silence of recent years is contained in Chapter 6 of Douglas Kahn's partial history of aurality, *Noise Water Meat* (Kahn 2001, pp. 158-99), to which the reader is referred for a whole host of historical details and discursive realignments. Kahn has much to say about the silencing mandate in the musical work *4'33"*.

> An unsuspecting audience (if one still exists) might attempt to reconcile the silence [of *4'33"*] with its expectation before discovering, perhaps, what the piece might be. The initial absence of music might be taken as an expressive or theatrical device preceding a sound. When that sound is not forthcoming, it might become evident that listening can still go on if one's attention (and this is Cage's desire) is shifted to the surrounding sounds, including the sound of the growing agitation of certain audience members. Ostensibly, even an audience comprised entirely of reverential listeners would have plenty to hear, but in every performance I've attended the silence has been broken by the audience and become ironically noisy.
>
> It should be noted that each performance was held in a concert setting where any muttering or clearing one's throat, let along heckling, was a breach of decorum. Thus, there was already in place in these settings, as in other settings for Western art music, a culturally specific mandate to be silent, a mandate regulating the behavior that precedes, accompanies, and exceeds musical performance. […] *4'33"*, by tacitly instructing the performer to remain quiet in *all* respects, muted the site of centralized and privileged utterance, disrupted the unspoken audience code to remain unspoken, transposed the performance onto the audience members both in their utterances and in the acts of shifting perception toward other sounds, and legitimated bad behavior that in any number of other settings including many musical ones) would have been perfectly

acceptable. *4'33"* achieved this involution through the act of silencing the performer. That is, Cagean silence followed and was dependent on a silencing. Indeed, it can also be understood that he extended the decorum of silencing by extending the silence imposed on the audience to the performer, asking the audience to continue to be obedient listeners and not to engage in the utterances that would distract them from shifting their perception toward other sounds. (Kahn 2001, pp. 165-66)

It is relevant to note that Kahn acknowledges a difference between the effects of the piece on a virgin, "unsuspecting audience", and on an audience of listeners who know what to expect from the possible content of Cage's silent piece. My concept of aesthetic listening turns partly on the fact that musical experiences change over repeated listenings; perception is influenced by intellectual understanding (such as knowledge about what one is expecting to hear). The speculative phenomenology of listening to *4'33"* that Kahn offers first here ("what the piece might be…") is immediately tangled up in clauses about whether or not the listener is acquainted with the piece's principle, and with Cage's intentions, and whether or not the listener is "reverential". Thus, the piece highlights the role of prejudices within aesthetic listening at a particularly literal level, in that the sounds available for an audience to hear at a performance of *4'33"* will actually vary depending on their prejudices and expectations, in accordance with the extent to which listeners exercise contemplative decorum in the concert hall.

2.3 Silence and decorum

I will now relate the discussion of the communion of decorum between work, performer and audience to a discussion of the framing of *4'33"* as a piece. Talking of Beethoven's symphonic openings earlier, I noted that the silent downbeat could be regarded as a strategy to enforce decorum upon an ill-disciplined crowd, articulating demands on listening that the work itself placed on the social situation in which it was performed.

In the relationship between silence and decorum, an inversion seemingly takes place between the classical-romantic symphonic silent downbeat and Cagean silence. In the former, the silence was a framing device, but in the case of Cage, the frame pervades the work. The formal gesture of imposing decorum on performer – and through performer to audience – is the entire content of the piece (at one level).

This is an interesting line of query for phenomenological frame analysis: what are the major cognitive schemata, through which listeners interpret *4'33"* and communicate about it?

By origin, frame analysis is a sociological discipline, studying the basic unconscious cognitive structures that guide representations and perceptions. Edward Cone's application of frame analysis to music was achieved by way of the two-dimensional picture frame, but we could also replace the term 'frame' with 'filter'. In this thesis, as in the past three decades' tradition of frame analysis, I am concerned with the way in which social, cultural, historical, aesthetic and other knowledge causes us to filter the perceptual field. This observation is part of what I explore under the term 'aesthetic listening'. In listening, what we hear is structured according to a cognitive background. In as far as this background is unconscious, the knowledge that filters is composed not so much of intellectual principles, but rather of a multitude of small implicit presuppositions – derived, for example, from cultural convention. The aesthetic frame/filter is a not a static rule, but a dynamic process for selecting among the actual sounds that occur, and for emphasising what goes on between them and us, and for presenting what matters about them.

2.4 What is 4'33"?

An analysis of *4'33"* in terms of the fixed elements that constitute its identity from performance to performance (i.e. the fixed elements that make it a musical work) is quickly completed by a look at the score page (see figure 2 again).

On the basis of what is written in the 'NOTE', the publisher provided the following cover-sheet:

EDITION PETERS

JOHN CAGE

Printed in U. S. A.
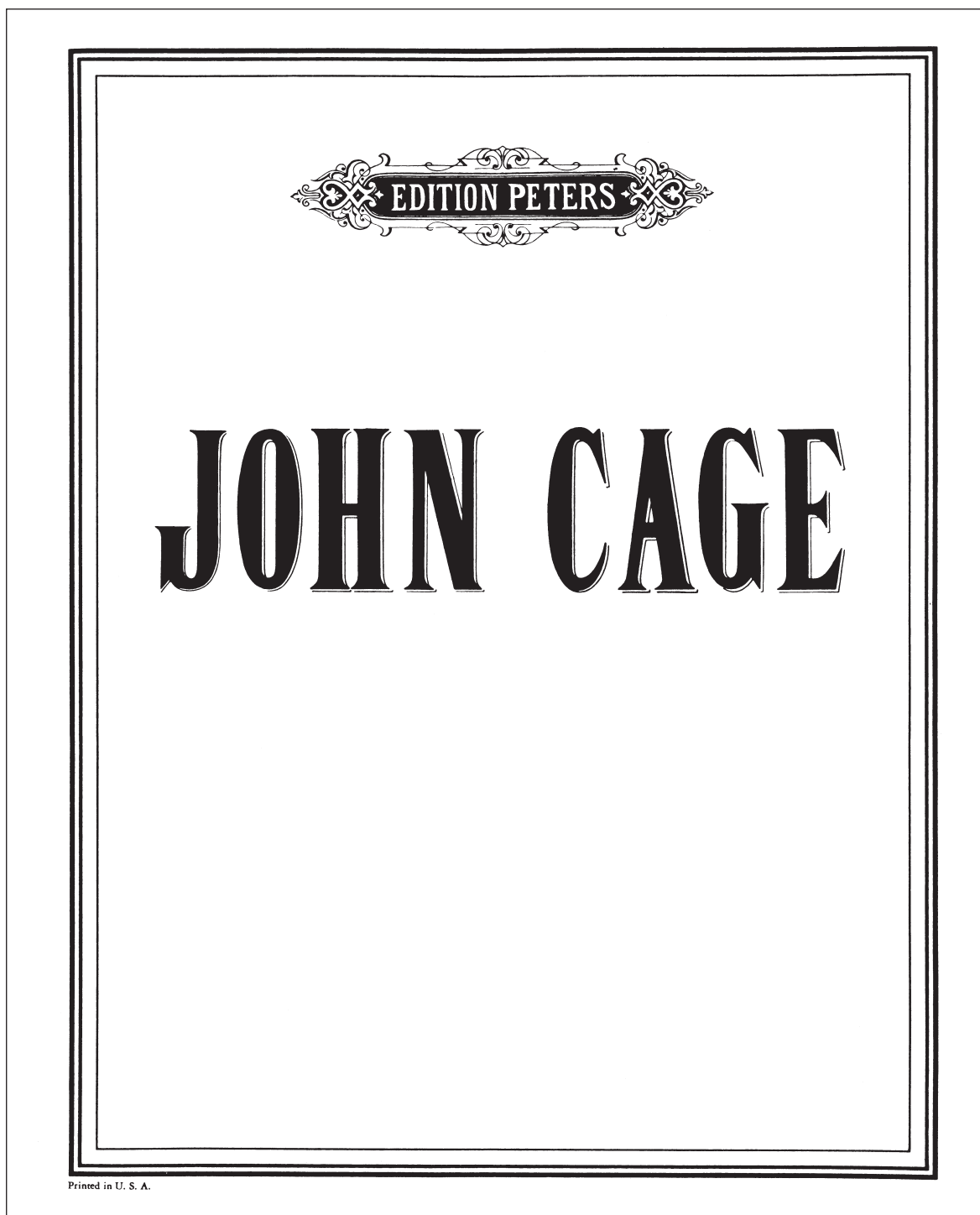
Fig. 3. Publisher's cover page of John Cage, 4'33". Edition Peters No.6777 ©1960 by Henmar Press Inc., New York. Reproduced by permission of Peters Edition Limited, London

The work's cover, as re-published by Peters Edition, shows only the words 'John Cage'. Inside the cover, a reproduction of the 'score' or instructions, as published by Henmar Press in 1960, gives only three movement-designations: I – tacet; II – tacet; III – tacet, with a note identifying the piece as follows, "The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance", followed by a descriptive documentation of the first performance from 1952, realised as 33", 2'40", and 1'20". Thus there is no mandate to adhere to either the overall or the subdivided durations.[2]

The fact that the performances of the piece are almost always referred to as *4'33"* would seem to be a commitment more to David Tudor's first performance than to what is written in the score. In fact, the lack of a final published title would seem to support the explicit invitation in the 'note' to rename the piece according to varying performances, which may "last any length of time".

However, on the inside cover, *4'33"* heads the publisher's catalogue of Cage's works. The following catalogue description acknowledges the piece's flexibility of instrumentation but not of duration: "(1952) (tacet, any instrument or combination of instruments)". The distinction between this and a new version – catalogued as: "*4'33"* (No. 2) (1962) (0'00") Solo to be performed in any way by anyone" – does little to decisively dismantle the influence of the first Tudor performance.

The dates and status of publication have added some confusion over the decades. This is not only a philological point, but ultimately leads us to changes in the way that Cage chose to notate his silent piece, ending up with *tacet* only after two previous alternative notations.

The piece is generally dated to 1952, because of the incontrovertible event of the first performance. Douglas Kahn has shown that Cage worked on the piece from at least 1948 – a process that I will discuss in more detail shortly (Kahn 2001, pp. 167-199). About the status of the publications, Charles Hamm has noted that:

> "published" is a somewhat misleading term for what happened; Cage furnished fair copies of his compositions in his own distinctive hand to Peters, which then advertised and sold photocopies of these pieces through a subsidiary, Henmar Press" (Patterson 2002, p. 2)

In a footnote to his article on rhythmic structure in Cage's early music, Paul van Emmerik notes that:

> the second version of *4'33"* was published by Henmar in 1960[3], and the first version of the piece (fair copy) is in the possession of Irwin Kremen, Durham, North Carolina. It was published in facsimilar in Source 1, no. 2 (July 1967): 46-54, reprinted New York: Henmar Press of C. F. Peters, 1993 (Emmerik 2002, p. 229*n*)

From what Emmerik reveals next, we can conclude that there is yet another version prior to the one reproduced in this thesis, so that what Peters Edition lists as the 1952 version is actually the third version.

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2   The identity of the piece with the first performance's duration proved similarly hard to escape for La Monte Young's *X for Henry Flynt*, (1960), in which a loud sound is repeated steadily every one to two seconds, "a great number of times." Douglas Kahn writes that "566 has been a popular choice since the premier of the score version by Toshi Ichiyanagi on May 1961".

3   i.e. The version reproduced here, the first work in the Peters Edition catalogue.

> During a seminar that Cage gave when he held the 1988-89 Charles Eliot Norton chair
> of poetry at Harvard Unviersity, he told his audience that the rhythmic structure of
> *4'33"* was originally conceived and written in metric notation, as had been the case in
> *Music of Changes* (1951). "I actually used the same method of working, and I built up
> the silence of each movement – and the three movements add up to 4'33" – I built up
> each movement by means of short silences put together. It seems idiotic, but that's what
> I did."[4] The pianist who gave the work its first peformance, David Tudor, in conversa-
> tion with William Fetterman was able to remember a manuscript – now apparently
> lost – in which the work indeed is written in metric notation. Unlike *Music of Changes*,
> however, the groups of measure in *4'33"* only know a single tempo, sixty beats per
> minute. This structure is not only inaudible but it is also invisible, since in the fair copy
> now published in facsimile, Cage indicated only the resulting durations of each move-
> ment, 30, 143, and 100 seconds respectively, through the use of proportional notation.
> In a subsequent version of the work, Cage notated the silences in a way that cannot but
> be called conventional, namely by using the word "tacet", while a footnote states that
> the movements of the first version lasted 33, 160 and 80 seconds respectively. Presum-
> ably, Cage's memory was letting him down while writing this footnote; it cannot be
> considered a serious error, since – while preserving the three-movment structure – the
> determination of the duration of the performance in the second version is left to the
> performer. (Emmerik 2002, pp. 229-31)

Given the above confusion, it is not surprising that Cage himself referred to the piece vari-
ously as *4'33"* (see above) and "my silent piece":

> The music that I don't have to turn off is precisely the music with us when we don't
> have any music … and that is the 'Mind' with the capital 'm'. That is what I meant by my
> silent piece in 1952, and it is still that piece which is my favorite music. (John Cage and
> Roger Reynolds, 'A conversation' (1977), p. 577. Quoted in Kahn 2001, p. 188)

In summary, the first version used metrical notation, the second version used proportional
notation, and the third version used simply *tacet*.

As for the 1962 version with the durational appellations 4'33" and 0'00", this seems to be
a totally different piece:

> [It] is nothing but the continuation of one's daily work, whatever it is, providing it's not
> selfish, but is the fulfilment of an obligation to other people, done with contact micro-
> phones, without any notion of concert or theatre or the public, but simply continuing
> one's daily work, now coming out through loudspeakers. (*Conversing with Cage*, p. 69-
> 70. Quoted in Kahn 2001, p. 194)

So, what is *4'33"*? One has to bear in mind that in the literature on Cage, writers refer various-
ly to the first version, the final version, or the most commonly performed version, without
necessarily being clear to distinguish between them. Further, one has to observe that Cagean
silence is not exhausted by the piece *4'33"*, as the empty work is significantly not merely a

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4 Quoted from *I-VI: MethodStructureIntentionDisciplineNotationIndeterminacyInterpenetrationImitationDe-
   votionCircumstancesVariableSTructureNonunderstandingContingencyInconsistencyPerformance* (Cambridge,
   MA: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 20-21)

thought experiment, but also a material realisation of that thought, whereas much of Cagean silence remains unactualised and unactualisable – rhetoric, in other words.

2.5 The compositional genesis of *4'33"*

A thorough account of the rhetorical genesis of 4'33" is given by Douglas Kahn (Kahn 2001). I supplement this here with a consideration of the musical, compositional dimension. For this, I draw on the work of David W. Bernstein and Paul Emmerik, both collected in David W. Patterson's book *John Cage: Music, philosophy, and intention, 1933-1950* (Bernstein 2002b, Emmerik 2002, Patterson 2002). The aim of the essays in Patterson's book is to present a pragmatic yet scholarly account of Cage's early years as a composer, charting the musical development that led to his strong position within postwar musical avantgarde modernism.

I observe a move in Cage's artistic development, from an early, music-based position to a later, rhetorical bent. In the 1940's, Cage was still working with empty durations of structured time that were modelled in a kind of pre-compositional phase, separate from the 'actual' compositional phase of filling in the duration with whatever sounds entered the piece through whatever method. Around 1950, Cage moved towards a focus on the staging of aesthetic experience through rhetorical practices, the 'neutrality' of the pre-compositional design process (towards the sounds that would later fill out the frame) was replaced by a set of rhetorical demands (on how to listen, how not to listen) which were just as decisive for the listening experience as anything that went on in the 'actual-composition' phase.

An interesting question arising from the move towards rhetorical strategies is the extent to which Cage's works actually achieved the aesthetic advances that he proclaimed. It is this question of the aesthetic reality that has polarised critics and followers of Cage. Does the negation of the western musical work-concept and of the composerly subject's intentionality actually take place? This question is taken up later in this chapter, in my discussion of Sabine Sanio's support for the view that Cage produced an alternative to the Hegelian hierarchically organised artwork.

Going back to the beginning, then, it is worth remembering that Cage was Schoenberg's pupil around the time that Schoenberg consolidated his understanding of the musical idea as not only a theme, phrase or motive, but as the totality of a piece. Thus, a musical composition was to be perceived as a unified whole, the expression of a single idea (Schoenberg 1950, Carpenter & Nerp 1997). There could hardly be a piece in the history of music more supportive of this twin notion than Cage's *4'33"*.

Seeking to align the two composers' projects in terms of a common focus on pre-determination of material as a partial flight from the self-expressive act of composition, David Bernstein points out that rejecting compositional choice was a landmark strategy that the two composers came to share, despite huge stylistic differences. Schoenberg's sought escape from his so-called 'expressive' period through the stringency of dodecaphony. Cage's own response was to seek a similar liberation from composerly self-expression through chance.

Despite the similarity that Bernstein points out, it is important to note the differences between the formal methods by which each composer sought to avoid the whims of personal expression. For Schoenberg, the construction of the preliminary tone-row which was to generate compositional material was still a musical process, taking account of motivic and structural potential. Whereas for Cage, the determination of durations of empty time had absolutely no hierarchical relation to the ensuing sound content.

The complex relations of similarity and difference between Schoenberg and Cage are worth exploring, although it lies beyond my present project. As we shall see in the following chapter, philosopher Jean-François Lyotard staged Cage as Schoenberg's opposite (in much the same style as Adorno had placed Stravinsky and Schoenberg opposite one another). A complex polemic seems to be at work in Cage's attitude toward Schoenberg.

The problematisation of literal repetition was another structural element on which Cage must have found solace in the work of his teacher. This opened up new patterns for how musical works could sound, and for how their internal structures could negotiate inherited listening forms of the concert hall. However, the issue of compositional choice and repetition again relates to the question of hierarchical levels of decision-making. At first glance, there may seem to be a convergence between Schoenberg's 12-tone seriality and Cage's employment of 12-tone charts, but it is equally important not to confuse the two composers' aesthetic ground rules.

Apart from Schoenberg, Cage himself and his commentators have often listed Satie amongst his prime musical inspirers. Cage was also familiar with Webern's use of quiet and sparse sounds within short forms, not least through their common teacher (Schoenberg). Nevertheless, it is striking that Cage discussed serial music at length without mentioning Webern's production very much. Cage's rejection of serial music included the complaint that "the twelve-tone system has no zero in it"[5], while in the same lecture he finds that "Satie appears at unpredictable points springing always from zero"[6]. Cage's search for quiet in the music generated by serial techniques might perhaps have been more fruitful had he considered Webern's near-void as attentively as Schoenberg's principle of incessant fluency. The possible chronological, personal or artistic reasons for this omission – both on the part of Cage and in the Cage literature – are not taken up here; Webern's output ended in 1940, and as no footprints lead directly from him to Cage, he will not be a part of our discussion of Cagean silence.

When Cage finished studying with Schoenberg and gained a post as percussion teacher (at Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle), he performed an almost Schoenbergian annihilation of historical difference. Cage sought to erase the distinction between noise and 'musical' sounds, just as Schoenberg had arguably sought to erase the distinction between consonance and dissonance. This move of Cage's came about partly by talented pragmatism. Finding that a stage space at Cornish was too small for the large percussion ensemble he had envisaged, Cage apparently modified the hall's piano to accommodate a range of percussive sounds, creating the first piece for prepared piano. The original preoccupation with percussion noise thus began to invade the keyboard of 'musical' piano sounds, and reinforced an equation of music and noise that was to gain rhetorical and conceptual value for Cage over the coming years.[7]

In the 1930s and 1940s, then, silence was still the frame (akin to its function in the Cone/Littlefield discussion of framing silence), while noise was the content, replacing musical tone.

From 1951, Cage went further in equating sounds and silences. *Music of Changes* is based, compositionally, on relations between 32 sounds and 32 silences. This was also the

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5   *Erik Satie,* 1958.

6   Ibid.

7   An interesting extension of this idea just prior to the composition of *4'33"* occurred in the piece *Flower* (1950), for voice (humming) and closed piano. The piano part is full of redundancy (rests) and – in contrast to the principle of the prepared piano, which extended sound considerably – consists of only 3 sounds: the sound of two parts of the lid being played with the musician's fingers, one of them also briefly with knuckles.

piece where Cage first tested chance techniques, using charts to distribute tones from the chromatic scale, according to the principle that all twelve tones were to be present in any four elements of a given chart. (Compositional choice at a higher and *a priori* level, then.)

> Charts were […] used for the *Music of Changes*, but in contrast to the method which involved chance operations, these charts were subjected to a rational control. [Cage describes the arrangement of the charts.] Whether the charts were mobile or immobile, all twelve tones were present in any four elements of a given chart, where a line of the chart was read horizontally or vertically. Once this dodecaphonic requirement was satisfied, noises and repetitions of tones were used with freedom. One may conclude from this that in the *Music of Changes* the effect of the chance operations on the structure (making very apparent its anachronistic character) was balanced by a control of the materials. (Virgil Thomson, quoted in Cage 1961, pp. 25-6)

Cage was very aware of the element of control in *Music of Changes*, and this may be what caused composer-critic Virgil Thompson to describe the piece as an extension of Schoenberg's project:

> Mr Cage has carried Schoenberg's 12-tone manoeuvres to their logical conclusion. (Virgil Thomson, New York Herald Tribune, 1938, quoted in Bernstein 2002)

The rise of chance procedures and the use of percussion noise as replacer of musical tone between the late 1930s and early 1950s reveals that Cage understood silence as 'absence of musical sound' at least until his anechoic chamber experience in 1951/2.[8] The use of silence and of noise were at first ways of emancipating sound from musical tone (pitch), and they came in under a general withdrawal of compositional control from the arena of pitch-choice.

> This is a composed talk, for I am making it just as I make a piece of music. It is like a glass of milk. We need the glass and we need the milk. Or again it is like an empty glass into which at any moment anything may be poured. (Cage 1961, p. 110)[9]

This brings us to a consideration of silence under the concepts of duration and rhythm. Paul van Emmerik sketches a growth in the duration of rests in Cage's music – specifically, in proportion to sounding motifs (Emmerik, 2002). On the basis of Emmerik's argument, one could say that the musical 'composition' of silence (i.e. composing with rests) becomes more and more constitutive for the development of Cage's music. Over time, the reflective space opened up compositionally by silence is coupled with other extra-musical parameters such as noise (first instrumentalised in percussion, then imposed on the piano to oust musical tone, before being finally totally de-instrumentalised and dispersed through the environs of a silent piano for the defined duration of a period of musical listening).[10]

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8 Some time in 1951 or 1952, Cage's visit to an echoless or soundproof room some time in 1951 or 1952 made a great impression on him, and the anecdote of this visit figures in most of his anecdotes about silence thereafter. Hearing the sound of his own body (his blood circulation and nervous-system), Cage concluded that there is no such thing as silence – or, at least, that we would never be able to hear silence. See Kahn 2005.

9 *Lecture on Nothing*, a lecture composed (but not delivered) on Cage's principles of 'rhythmic structure'.

10 "As a key to his developing work, silence (an absence of sound) was aplace nicely between the odd materiality of sound and the organizational concerns of Western art music composition and theory. Organizationally,

Emmerik notes that in the mid-1930s, rests in Cage's music are integrated components of motifs[11]. Rest-and-motif in sum are treated as a unified durational length, which in turn is the structural component of what Cage variously called "rhythmic structure", "structural rhythm" or "a division of actual time by conventional metrical means, meter taken as simply the measurement of quantity".

Taken thus as a combined duration, these durational lengths were, according to Cage, "conceived, in fact, so that [they] could be as well expressed by the absence of […] materials as by their presence".[12] It is important to note that Cage said this retrospectively in 1958, after the seminal anechoic chamber experience that gave 'silence' new auditive qualities. Moreover, in works from the 1930s, composed and notated rests were not necessarily coupled to an audible experience of silence, as they occurred mainly within polyphonic contexts, and thus were closer to the original historical *tacet*: the silence of one part, withholding from utterance within a continuous musical form.

Here, then, silence is the frame, while sound is the content.

From the late 1930s to early 1950s, the lengths of the silences grew to equal those of rhythmic motifs (rather than just being integrated into them). This made it more likely that longer rests in several parts would overlap, producing grand pauses. This development can be traced through *Music for Wind Instruments* (1938), *A Book of Music* (1944), *Experiences No. 1 and 2* (1945, 1948), *Two pieces for piano* (1946), *Flower* (1950) and *Sixteen Dances* (1950/51); and in *Music of Changes* (1951) the tendency towards lengthening rests can be observed within the progression from Book I to Book IV. Further expansion occurs with the length of silences growing to equal the length of groups of measure and period (*Four Walls* (1944)), then equalling the length of whole sections, until in *4'33"* the silent units equal the length of each of the three movements of the piece. This durational growth of rests, from the role of participating in motifs to filling out a whole piece, is a particularly literal way of observing the passage of silence from subsidiary to constitutive importance in Cage's work.

In contrast to all the studies of rhetorical developments in Cage's thinking – from the composition of *4'33"* to the evolution of the Cagean silence trope – Emmerik's article thus evidences an often overlooked musical-compositional path. However, having surveyed all this, Emmerik goes on to add that:

> Beginning with *4'33"* Cage's idiosyncratic interpretation of the aesthetic function of silence made its entry into his music, an interpretation expressed in his description of the work as "a piece in three movements during all three of which no sounds are intentionally produced." This proclaimed non-intentionality was caused by an experience that proved to the composer that:
>
> "… silence becomes something else – not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. […] These sounds (which are called silence only because they do not form part

silence offset musical sound within duration and thereby established the basis by which rhythm and structure could accept all sounds indiscriminately, raising them over and above the specific attributes of musical sound – harmony, pitch, and timbre – that he considered to be outside duration. Sielnce shared duration with musical sound and would not contradict the extramusical sounds that Cage had already incorporated in his music (in early percussion work). In this respect, silence took over where percussion, or rather the auspices of percussion, left off." (Kahn 2001, p. 163.

11 E.g. In the 4th movement of the Quartet (1935).

12 Cage, John: 'Composition as process' in *Silence*, pp. 19-20

of a musical intention) may be depended upon to exist. The world teems with them, and is, in fact, at no point free of them. He who has entered an anechoic chamber, a room made as silent as technologically possible, has heard there two sounds, one high, one low – the high the listener's nervous system in operation, the low his blood in circulation." (Emmerik 2002)[13]

It might seem, then, as if after the composition of *4'33"* Cage cleansed his rhetoric of all musical-compositional logic regarding how he arrived at his mature version of 'silence', such that the aspect of intention could come into focus.

Cage scholar James Pritchett notes that:

"[Structured silence] is exactly the aspect of the piece that Cage removed in his 1960 revision. In the score of the piece as published in 1960 he indicates that the duration of the three parts is free, and thus negates the composed structure altogether. Later he even rejected the idea of dividing the piece into three parts … Both of these actions reflect the decline in his interest in structure in the late 1950s." (Pritchett 1993)

2.6 Sound and intention

Intentionality has been linked to the fundamental bodily existence of being human by phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Briefly, the body does not merely perceive the world around us (and the artworks in it), but is a key player in our exploration of the world. It is a dynamic horizon that conditions and is conditioned by the way in which we are involved in particular situations.

Listening in an expanded auditive field of the kind that Cage suggested seems to be a good example of the kind of perception that understands the body not only as a mechanical object (with various functional potentials in our appreciation of an *a priori* world that lies before and outside us – such as our ears), but also an actor and co-creator in the way that the world appears to us. Phenomenologically-based understanding relies on a description of the way in which phenomena appear and gain meaning for us, when we have set aside the knowledge we may already have derived about these phenomena from, say, cultural convention. Cagean rhetoric constantly calls for knowledge to be set aside in an ongoing project of liberation and emancipation of the listening ear.

The issue of intention – or, more particularly, of non-intention – has caused a good deal of confusion in the Cage literature. The category of 'non-intended sounds' is sometimes taken to signal all sounds that arise 'naturally', untouched by human will – and at other times, it is taken to be simply sounds that are not notationally specified (in terms of, say, timing or pitch) by the composer.

Some of this confusion arises from the fact that in his missives regarding a more open kindof listening, Cage did not often distinguish between listening within a musical work and listening in general. This is somewhat parallel to the thinking that produced two published versions of the same titled piece (*4'33"*) where, as we have seen, one is based on a concert performance situation, and the other can be performed in any way by anyone and is "nothing but the continuation of one's daily work … without any notion of concert or theatre or the public, but simply continuing one's daily work". After all, there is a great difference between

13 First Cage quote, from '(Untitled)', 1962, p. 25; second quote, 'Composition as process', pp. 22-23

listening to birdsong in a forest, or even the urban screech of tyres, and hearing the sounds of an audience leaving a concert-hall in protest.

Cage's description of his composition as "a piece in three movements during all three of which no sounds are intentionally produced" displays a (surely constructed) complete naivety towards the notion that intention is not just something had by composers towards musical notes. The fact that he had composed with noise and volatile timbres (for example, using experimental percussion and the prepared piano) for over a decade would lead one to expect that he acknowledged the arena of sound that can arise in musical situations without being under the direct control of the composer. Moreover, one might expect that some audience members, faced with a demonstrative non-performance, would self-consciously (intentionally) fill it with their own soundful reactions. In any case, we know that the first performance did not pass in reverential decorum, so – unless, of course, he was not listening – that experience would surely have tainted Cage's further development of (and reflections on) the piece after 1952.

Moreover, Cage was keen to place an element of musical ownership on the listener:

> The performance ought to make clear to the listener that the hearing of the piece is his own action – that the music, so to speak, is his rather than the composer's. (Cobussen 2003, p. 284n)[14]

Returning to my equation of listening frames with phenomenological filters, one can say that the composer's mandate (his intention, as expressed in the score, for the performer to be quiet in a listening situation) more or less ensured that there would be sounds to hear that were self-consciously produced.

Confusion regarding the term 'intention' in the Cage literature could be cleared up by drawing a line between intended sounds as compositionally determined sounds, and non-intended sounds as all that is not determined through notation. That is to say, between organisation and sounding material.

> Were one to name the most essential characteristic of composition in rhythmic structure, it would be Cage's insistence that structure and sound material can be composed separately. He phrased this idea in its most radical way in 1958 when he wrote that "nothing about the structure was determined by the materials which were to occur in it." ('Composition as Process', p. 19) (Emmerik, pp. 234-5)

Emmerik mentions a study by Deborah Campana that distinguishes between "precomposition" and "the actual compositional act", in the way that we have discussed earlier. This formal separation of the materiality of sound from the organisational work of composition has the potential to legitimise the characterisation of Cagean silence as 'sounds without intention'. Namely, when precomposition and actual composition are distinguished from one another, then in the two-step process of organising structure and materialising sound, sounds are indeed not the result of compositional intention. Cage is no special case here; surely all composers evolve aesthetic and technical commitments away from the particulars of working in notation on a specific piece. If one regards certain decisions as belonging to precomposition, then

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14 Gena, P. and J. Brent (eds.) (1932): A John Cage Reader: in celebration of his 70th birthday. New York: Peters Edition, p. 22

it is true that one can sit down and compose whilst relinquishing a number of one's authorial investments in the piece. But if precomposition is regarded as a part of composition (where the work's characteristics, its particulars, take form), then that is surely a false delusion.

The answer to the question of where 'composition proper' begins and ends, and of the extent to which there is compositional control over sound (material), resides in categorising certain artistic decisions as *a priori* and *a posteriori* in relation to one another. Also, if (the composer's) intention is to be admitted into the factors controlling musical significance, then there will be the further question of whether musical significance comes before composition, and thus leaves composition to the job of working with components only.

In any eventuality, there is a staging of relational tensions in Cage's work that seems to represent the composer's expressive-subjective will. For Cage, form came first, and sounds were an *a posteriori* content to be filled in … by chance.

Looking back at Cage's compositional genesis of silence, and at Douglas Kahn's observation that "organizationally, silence offset sound within duration", it seems clear that silence initially entered Cage's work as a kind of compositional parameter (empty duration). Seen this way, it is hard to empty the notated rests of compositional intention.

Moreover, as the Cagean rests become more radical from the late 1930s towards 1952, it becomes increasingly farcical to posit a distinction between 'precomposition' and 'actual composition', and thus between organisation and material.

> [S]ilence becomes something else – not silence at all, but sounds, the ambient sounds. […] These sounds (which are called silence only because they do not form part of a musical intention) may be depended upon to exist. The world teems with them, and is in fact at no point free of them. (Cage, 1958)

Here, silence is formulated not just as sound that is not determined by musical, composerly intention. The claim that "the world teems with them" seems to indicate sounds that are entirely beyond human agency. But the continuation of the quote (a reference to Cage's 'discovery' of the constant biological sounds of his own body in the anechoic chamber) returns the perceptual act to the composerly self. It is this kind of conflation of self and world that can be regarded as having contributed the majority of the confusion to Cagean talk of intended and non-intended sounds.

It seems anachronistic to apply the narrow 'desktop' view of composition to Cage or in fact to almost any composer of his time, given the amount of time and energy that went into breaking with inherited forms and inventing new ones, and to staging the self-conscious *intention* to do so. Emmerik and Campana's point is that Cage himself supported this view by dividing structure from content (i.e. organisation from sound). This would be typical of more or less any composer of Cage's generation you could name, with Xenakis offering a perfect example of compositional structure dictating all kinds of sound that were instrumentally unrealisable.

In summary, then, there is a clear difference between composerly intention and notational specification. To say that a sound is not specified still leaves the gate open for it to be intended at a non-specific level. After Cage had established to himself that there is always some sound going on, even when one keeps silent, he premised the empty aspects of his works with the presumption that there would be sound to listen to. He intended that there would be sound, not no-sound.

2.7 The ethics of (sm)all sounds

A further discrepancy between an unlimited, non-intentional notion of sound and the mark of compositional choice is uncovered by Douglas Kahn. He extensively labours the point that within the category of silence as all-sounds-that-do-not-represent-a-specifically-musical-intention, Cage had a clear preference for some sounds – namely, "small and barely audible" ones – over others (Kahn 2001, pp. 162, 192-5).

Kahn's point is that on the basis of, firstly, the social concerns that Cage claimed to be a motivation behind the silent piece and the new kind of listening that he proposed, and secondly, Cage's numerous rhetorical invitations to be buddhistically accepting of whatever 'comes along', it is still striking how specific Cage's preference among sounds was. The Cagean rhetoric points in the direction of listening to All Sounds (as witnessed by the development of the silent piece from 1952 – a concert hall – to 1960 – anywhere, doing anything). Listening to the world sounds good, but in fact Cage wanted to silence large tracts of it.

This is essentially an ethical point, which can be illustrated by referring to Mark Cobussen's article 'Ethics and/in/as silence' (Cobussen, 2003). Cobussen invites the reader first to consider the cultural genre 'music' as a kind of 'home', to which *4'33"* is a kind of ethical challenge, posing as 'other'. Cobussen's analogy of the ethical relation between home and others builds on Derrida's discussion of hospitality in his 1996 speech 'On cosmopolitanism'. A Derridean irresoluble double-imperative arises from a tension between the unconditional and yet simultaneously conditional nature of the power of, in this case, forgiveness. Briefly: if forgiveness consists only of forgiving what we can accept, then it's not true forgiveness – ethically kosher forgiveness consists of forgiving also the absolutely unforgivable. But unconditional forgiveness has no ethical value, as it requires no proportionate reciprocation on the part of the forgiven (no repentance or recognition of fault). The only possibility for ethical progress in relation to forgiveness is to attempt the difficult negotiation of conditioned and unconditioned forgiveness/hospitality. Derrida's speech was directed towards specific political-historical issues such as urban immigration in Europe (particularly Algerian immigration in France), post-apartheid reconciliation in South Africa, and Japanese war crimes in Korea. But Cobussen draws a theoretical analogy between the attitudes of welcoming necessary for forgiveness and hospitality and the attitudes of welcoming necessary for admitting 'other' sounds onto the terrain of the musical work. At one level, Cobussen seems to be trying to stimulate a challenge as to how far the home of 'music' will stretch in respect of welcoming Cage's work (an outsider, an 'other') at all.

This level of formal application (is *4'33"* to be 'welcomed' as a musical work?) is by way of introduction to the more specific discussion of silence within music that Cobussen then proceeds to, and which is more relevant for our present discussion. Namely, he sets up *4'33"* as itself a home offering hospitality to the 'other' of silence.

> What if in *4'33"* silence would be a trace of 'the other' of music? […] *4'33"*, music, as the host, offering hospitality to 'the other' of music, silence, that is, all sounds that are not intended or not able to be musical. Let's say that this composition allows random, non-musical sounds to (re)enter the domain of music (in the form of silence). […] How to assess this form of hospitality? (Cobussen 2003, pp. 279-80)

Cobussen's discussion follows up on Derrida's pursuit of the question of whether welcoming an 'other' is characterised by identifying with the alien (as 'same') or maintaining a perception of the alien as 'other' (as 'different'). That is to say, welcoming faces a choice between

assimilating or domesticating the newcomer into what is familiar, or respecting the other's incontrovertible parallelity.

> Is Cage, by integrating silence within music or the musical, reducing the other to the same? … This is the precarious balance between recognition and appropriation of otherness … Silence, while escaping the musical, can only be experienced through the musical. (Cobussen, pp. 280-81)

Something in Cobussen's reading of Cagean listening as total acceptance clashes with Douglas Kahn's observation that Cage wanted some sounds rather than others in his canon of silence. It might indeed be very fitting to follow Derrida in acknowledging a dynamic between – in our case – Cage's ethical desire to open up to 'all sounds' under the banner of silence, and his compositional limitation of identifying with quiet sounds more easily than with loud ones.

For Cobussen falls into the all-sounds/small-sounds trap identified by Kahn (namely, the equation of totally open listening with what is 'quiet and simple') when he states that

> "even though it no longer has the same provocative effect it had back in 1952, 4'33" still demands a willingness by the listener, and prompts her/him to think and reflect. Additionally, it also has the virtue of installing a way of listening that does not allow for jumping to conclusions, but that demands a quiet and simple listening to sounds. This way of listening could be described as a susceptibility to the other, passive in its dedication to the sounds that present themselves, and active in its alertness to and preparedness for a diversity of (acoustic) events." (Cobussen, p. 285)

Why did Cage call his listening project 'silence', in other words? The anechoic chamber could just as well have convinced him that silence was in fact a binary composition of 'high' and 'low'[15], not 'all'. Given that 'silence' was as much a product of Cage's experience with extended/experimental percussion as it was of expanding rests, he could maybe just as well have called it 'noise'. (Although the term 'noise' had already been spoken for, within the arts, by the Italian Futurists, who attached more brutal aesthetic preferences to it than Cage's.) Going back to Kahn: "when [Cage] hears … reduction, it is just as easy to hear … complexity."

A gap begins to open up between Cage's rhetoric and his compositional, musical preferences. Again, this is surely the case with any composer; the production of individual, material works with each their characteristic particularities is necessarily the idiosyncratic answer of a given artist to a matrix of general opportunities. The problem is not whether it is ethical or not to prefer some sounds to others (less to more, simplicity to complexity), but rather whether one can claim that listening to what Cage *intended* is in fact the total surrender to the alterity of the world (the encounter with whatever comes along) that he claimed it could be.

It is relevant to turn to a discussion of the rhetorical trope of Cagean silence as distinct from the work 4'33". Between these discussions lies the issue of the work-concept as organiser of the listening experience.

> Cage's music gives silence a voice by supplying it with a context. […] His work is ethical because it offers hospitality, hospitality to the stranger … to a hostis called silence or noise. (In Latin, 'hostis' means both stranger and enemy…) But this hospitality cannot

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15 The nervous system and the bloodstream, respectively.

exist without borders, without a certain sovereignty. 4'33" can offer hospitality because (this) music has a house of its own, its own domain, although its borders are undecidable, insecure, shifting. (Cobussen 2003, p. 281)

Note here, by the way, the equation of silence and noise previously discussed.

In so far as everything we listen to is outside ourselves (whether it is framed by the paradigm of the concert-work or not), then we could say that all listening is a meeting with an other that potentially forces the issue of hospitality (i.e. of 'ethical' listening). But Cobussen's point here could be interpreted as being that the production of an artwork that frames this listening is the ultimate act of hospitality.

There would seem to be a difference, then, between Cage's rhetoric of panaurality (a kind of aesthetic – 'zwecklosig' – act of listening to all sounds, everywhere, all the time) and the artistic production of a work that provides (even forces) the opportunity for this. The difference, for Cobussen, is ethical. Be that as it may (ethical or not), I would support the argument that it is worth distinguishing between the mode of listening that one can apply to a kind of extended 'nature' (now encompassing the urban environment, and also its dissemination of canned music over the ether), a nature that retains an independence from the will and craftsmanship of the composer, and the mode of listening that is required of a 'piece of music'. This is a key point distinguishing various positions on Cage, and I will return to it in the following chapter on Susan Sontag's discussion of nihilism and affirmation in empty artworks.

It seems strange to me, however, that there is a strange undermining of 4'33"'s very work-frame through Cobussen's unqualified claim that the "borders are undecidable, insecure and shifting". For if there is one thing that is fixed in this work, it is surely its form (the borders). Admittedly, my earlier discussion of the many versions of 4'33" would seem to place the duration of the piece's three movements anywhere between 4'33" (33" + 2'40" + 1'20", set by stopwatch), 0'00", and any length of time. But the opening of Cobussen's article does nothing to acknowledge the authority of any other version than the David Tudor first performance in 1952. The question of musical borders and frameworks is related to the question of how art is contextualised such that it appears as a 'work' (i.e. an entity that is characterised by some unique combination of elements, and fixed in some form that can survive variables in other parameters).

This leads to a closer consideration of the borders of this piece, and their relation to the work-concept.

2.8 Cage and the work-concept

The whole issue of silence obviously exists in a dialectical relationship to the very concept of a musical work. Art that is constituted by significant sonic holes seems dependent on the work-paradigm for its very survival at the level of presentation (it is the expectation of music/sound art that keeps us quiet enough to register that the silence has begun), and yet by rationing sound-content so radically, such works inversely question the survival of the work-concept itself.

The question is whether Cagean silence disrupts the status of the artwork more than it reinforces it. Parallel to this, the extent of the subjectivity of the composer behind the work touches on a consideration of silence as internal or external to musical artworks. With Cobussen's discussion of 'home' and hospitality, I have been circulating around matters of con-

ventional, more or less fixed identity ('music' or 'the work' as 'home') and experimental challenges to that identity. I have previously discussed the way that Thomas Clifton and others have described how silence works internally within a coherent structure – satisfying relations that are analysable, and where silence phenomena are limited in proportion to sounds within a musical work. At that juncture, I was concerned with distinguishing between constitutive and non-constitutive notions of silence within musical works, with the implicit assumption that a musical work could bear such a high level of silence that it could be constituted by silence, *and still be a musical work.* Now it is time to confront the question of how that assumption can hold. Is there a point at which a radical silence would undermine the work-concept. Or, if the work-concept holds, does that necessarily mean that our perception of the primacy of silence in the work has to be downgraded in some way?

Obviously, the extent to which a given sound or notion (or silence) is seen to pose a challenge to the work-concept, depends on how fixed one's notion of the work is to begin with. Surely no period has been so much at pains to assert the static nature of the 'work' as the latter half of the 20th century, if only to be able to gasp at the shock of that stasis appearing to be undermined by experimental music.

Many musicologists are at work today on the conundrum of the establishment and disestablishment of the work-concept in notated music from the middle ages to the present; one of the most succinct formulations of the issues involved is given in Michael Talbot's 'The work-concept and composer-centredness' (Talbot, 2000). Before I proceed to employ Talbot's minimal definition of the musical work, it is necessary to acknowledge that the discussion of how works are constituted is often extremely complex, involving evaluations of not only notation but also anything from reception and distribution to the position and influence of the composer over his contemporaries: in short, a weave of heterogeneous strands that together form the work's identity status. I consider all these issues in relation to Cage and *4'33"*, but at the present point in this thesis I find it useful to focus on Talbot's minimum requirements of the western classical musical work.

Talbot describes the presumed characteristics of a discrete work that would be generally regarded as such, as:

> (a) a fixed beginning and end, and (b) an identity based on a blueprint for performance (or, if one prefers, silent contemplation) encoded in notation. (Talbot 2000, p. 169)

Further, that:

> The whole point of 'work' as a catch-all term is that it refers indiscriminately to products of any size, specification and purpose. (Talbot 2000, p. 171)

It certainly requires a down-to-earth 'catch-all' definition of this kind for Cage's *4'33"* to come in under it. Through my discussions of the many versions, and the somewhat confused 'normalisation' of the template of David Tudor's 1952 performance as regulative of the characteristics of the work, I have shown some aspects that make the identity of the work seem a little less stable than might be supposed in much of the Cage literature. But let us say that this is all settled, and that the 1960 Henmar Press print offers beginning, end and blueprint for performance, all notated. And let us say that words are a sufficient form of notation to satisfy

Talbot's demand for notational encoding. If we say this, then Cage's work is surely a *model* musical work. Nothing could more squarely fulfil the prerequisites of the work-concept than the silent piece, as it does more or less *nothing but* underline Talbot's minimalistic definition of what a work should do.

I have already noted that frame (border) is also filter. The organisational frame of the composed work is simultaneously the filter for perception of the materiality of sound. But as I have been at pains to point out, there is a great difference between Cagean silence as it is framed in *4'33"*, and Cagean silence as a trope arising from a long list of more personal concerns in Cage's composerly self-understanding. The genesis of the Cagean silence trope is covered amply by Douglas Kahn, so I shall not repeat his work here, but instead refer the reader to Kahn's discussions, guided by this brief summary: the trope of Cagean silence is developed on the basis of encounters with Muzak and midcentury radiophony, with Robert Rauschenberg's all-white paintings, with a military research laboratory's anechoic chamber, with the social implications of mystic philosophy, and with deliberations on a supposed opposition between chance and will. And that is just to take the extra-musical inputs, to which we can add (as I have shown), Cage's compositional development of the principles behind *4'33"*.

Basically, *4'33"* is about opening up the listening subject to sounds not specified by the composer, whilst at the same time limiting the listening environment (the context of a performed work within the concert-hall). The limitation of the listening environment (making this piece as a concert work) is in itself a composerly act of limitation – it limits the non-intentional sounds to which ears can be opened. Douglas Kahn has observed a salient parallel to this limiting framework in the significance that Cage attached to his anechoic chamber experience. For if there is a supreme act of limiting the external frame within which a subject can listen, then it is surely the choice of entering an anechoic chamber (Kahn 2005). Compared with this most radical of frames, the shift of site in Cagean listening, from military laboratory to concert-hall, seems like a huge concession to the external world. Nevertheless, the status of *4'33"* as either maverick musical score or übermusical listening practice still continues to divide Cagean commentators.

I proceed now to a discussion of *4'33"* and the work concept, drawing on a basic opposition between two different reception strands – respectively, from sound art and from musicology (López 1996, Sanio 1999). Briefly, the position represented by Francisco López is that Cage never escaped the work-paradigm, because the sounds to which we listen (when we listen to Cage) are still filtered through the compositional device of a musical work. This is not in itself a criticism of Cage, as López himself has no quarrel with terms such as 'music' or 'work' (a relatively unusual stance among sound artists). German musicologist Sabine Sanio, on the other hand, regards Cage as having exploded the very concept of the musical work, offering an alternative to the work-concept that grounds the avantgarde aesthetic project in a successfully experimental framework that is a true break with traditional artistic conceptions.

López' position is advanced in an essay concerned with positioning López' own artistic work both against and within a paradigmatically Cagean musical world. Sanio's position is argued for in the extended form of a doctoral thesis. López' and Sanio's views are symptomatic for much of the positioning around Cage's work, and they represent larger divisions between schools of thought on this issue. However, it must be noted at the outset that I am of course not suggesting that Sanio's views are paradigmatic of German musicology, nor that all sound artists born after the mid-20th century would share López' view.

Sabine Sanio offers an extensive and thoroughly systematic discussion of Cage's work in relation to the European classical work-concept in the book *Alternativen zur Werkästhetik: John Cage und Helmut Heißenbüttel.* She defines her project as:

[…] an attempt to appreciate the consequences of the most extreme form of a non-work-orientated conception of art – a conception that has abandoned not only the categories of work, form, material and content, but also the necessity of intentional aesthetic objects, thereby questioning the necessity of artistic work at all for the origin of aesthetic experience. (Sanio 1998, p. 20)[16]

There is no actual discussion of the Cagean concept of silence, even though this was the title of his first main collection of published writings. Nevertheless, Sanio's project of systematising Cage's artistic stance during the period when his trope of silence (along with Cagean chance, indeterminacy and more) was generated, contributes to our discussion.

The point of departure for the book is a major rethink on the significance of artistic material and the concept of the work of art. Sanio homes in on a desire to expose "the structure of non-object-related artistic work and the proof of its inner paradox (whereby such work always remains negatively connected to the conditions of the production of aesthetic objects, without commenting on the possibility or success of such a conception)".[17] Her aim is to present a reading of Cage's writings and lectures that can support a claim that Cage offered a genuine alternative to the traditional concept of an artwork.

I read Sanio's approach as offering an appraisal of Cage's rhetoric in view of the desire expressed by many artists in the mid-20th century to de-subjectify their art. Sanio's particular interpretation of Cage's move in this direction is directed towards his dissolution of the work-concept, through his repeated appeals to his audiences to listen to sounds that he had not specifically intended (in the sense of 'composed' in a more traditional sense). It will be instantly clear that against the background of all I have said in respect of the strong frame of *4'33"*, I tend towards the view that the placing of the piece within the concert-hall (with piano, pianist, audience, score, etc.) makes it an artwork grounded in a classical-romantic work-concept; the question is, whether it is silent, and in what ways.

Sanio's position is that Cage successfully problematises the work-concept itself. Thus, he achieves, on her view, not only a de-subjectification of his material, but also a dissolution of art as constituted in works. With this, not only the composer's subjective will and the concept of the western musical work disappear, but also – by implication – my category of 'constitutive silence'. Although I disagree strongly with Sanio – for reasons that I shall make clear – it is worth considering her position, as it is an expansive argumentation for a view held among many of Cage's most ardent advocates. Moreover, her work provides an explanation for the puzzling situation in which the most advanced claims for the successes of various avant-gardes are developed on the lines of theoretical argumentation rather than close reading of encounters with art.

16 My translation.

17 „Die Freilegung der Struktur nicht-objektbezogener künstlerischer Arbeit und den Nachweis ihrer inneren Paradoxie – sie bleibt nämlich immer negativ auf die Bedingungen der Herstellung ästhetischer Objekte bezogen, was aber über die Möglichkeit und das Gelingen einer solchen Konzeption nichts besagt – halte ich für die zentralen Resultate dieser Untersuchung." Sanio 1999, p. 10 (my translation)

It is worth noting some demarcations that Sanio makes – explicitly and implicitly – in her book. Foremost among these is the fact that her research is based almost entirely on readings of Cage's writings, with very little reference to his musical compositions. Sanio is committed to an aesthetic theoretical project centred around the proposal that Cage negated the Hegelian concept of the artwork as constituted by a whole and parts in hierarchical and coherent relations. As an alternative, she develops a theory of contemplation based on the aesthetics of Schopenhauer. I keenly miss the perspective that would arise in her work from considering the aesthetic reality of Cage's scores and their performances, against Cage's rhetorical claims for what he wished his work to achieve. There is no attempt in Sanio's argument at a formal distinction between 'the work', and Cage's 'talking (or writing) about the work'.

The radical position of considering art as totally divorced from the frame of the work risks circularity. By grounding the structure of Cage's non-object-fixed artistic work in the intentions laid out in his writings, Sanio does not address the question of the status of his artistic production of published musical works. Sanio's discussion is therefore an examination of verbalised intentions, which does not consider the success or failure of the artistic production to support these verbal statements.

Sanio's strong position is both totally a-historical and deeply historicising at the same time. In terms of art-/music-history, Cage is lifted entirely out of any context that might construe him as "someone of his time", as Kahn puts it (Kahn 2001, p. 159). But, in seeking to legitimise the high regard in which she holds Cage's work, Sanio situates the writings of Cage within a deeper European aesthetical conundrum by grounding his relational rub with the work-concept within a Hegelian-Schopenhauerian discussion. Rooting Cage in a well-established aesthetic conceptual history gives his project historical and philosophical authority. (Interestingly, though, hardly a word is offered on Cage's actual interaction with Europe through his visits to Darmstadt in either 1958 or 1990.)

Like Patterson, Emmerik and Bernstein, Sanio speaks as an advocate of the mid-20th century musical avantgarde, defending Cage both against radically sceptical criticism (as represented by Francisco López and Douglas Kahn, for example, who find Cage not radical enough) and against the conservatively sceptical position (that finds him too maverick). She does this by playing up the experimental and groundbreaking aspects of the Cagean project, thus providing a more radical standpoint than her British musicological colleagues.

Sanio's main interest is in the period around the 1950s and 1960s, when Cage developed what she views as significant alternatives to the concept of the work and its aesthetics. This is the period from which Cage's rhetorics of silence began to replace his compositional interest in rhythmic structures, as we have seen.

Nominally, Sanio supports a turn from hermeneutic readings towards reception aesthetics – from text as object of interpretive analysis, to sensory or phenomenological experience. However, I feel that the absence of any discussion of the effects of Cage's works omits the phenomenological aspect of reception aesthetics, limiting Sanio's engagement to a discussion of Cage's position as author within a cultural canon. Her point is presumably that 'the work' lies in its reception (not embedded in the score), with Schopenhauer as the historical, legitimising authority of a new contemplative stance that no longer requires a work-concept in order for aesthetic experience to be operative. One of the gains in replacing a reading of scores and performances with a discussion of aesthetic modes of reception is, presumably, to

avoid a struggle with the author's domination of the work by his productional intentions. But because Sanio effectively replaces Das Werk als Partitur with Das Werk als Aussage, she ends up producing an aesthetics of the reception of Cage's intentions.

One of the most widespread characteristics for the art of the 20th century is the crisis of the work-concept, with the consequence that "aesthetic experience gains ever more ground centre-stage alongside the aesthetic object, and often becomes itself the theme of artistic practice".[18] On the 20th-century crisis of work as related to the diminished materiality of art-works, Sanio comments further that it seems as though the unfolding of material – which Adorno interpreted as the generative moment of art history – has simply been completed,[19] with the consequence that the very possibility of a historically reconstructible developmental logic for contemporary art seems questionable.

Sanio is also interested in the tension between differing aesthetic stances required of conventional (historical) and experimental (contemporary) art. In her introductory discussions of Hegel and Schopenhauer's aesthetic theories,[20] Sanio identifies Hegel's traditional work-concept[21] as being dependent on the artist's action under certain well-defined categories, inviting a response that I sense corresponds to what Susan Sontag has called a voluntary look. Whilst Schopenhauer's theory of sensory contemplation[22], however, comes closer to the kind of disinterested stare that Sontag found appropriate to perceiving both nature and experimental art (Sontag 1967a, p. 15-16).[23] Hegel and Schopenhauer provide models for two kinds of aesthetic theory that are at least to some extent separated from theories of the works of art themselves.

Sanio characterises Cage's position in relation to the materiality of art as follows: (i) Cage felt that the purpose of aesthetic objects no longer lay within specifically artistic tropes, but that they were now a means in order to provoke more general aesthetic experiences, and; (ii) the dilution of art's objecthood would enable audiences to dissolve the classical separation of art and life. (This was a long-cherished wish of the historical avantgarde, which critics regarded as its stumbling-block).

Sanio calls Cage's writings "die theoretischen Schriften"[24], and regards Cage as offering a clear and pointed theoretical argumentation for his own work. The dispute from my side as to the status of Cage's writings does not entail a rejection of their worth; on the contrary, it is an attempt to separate their poetic and artistic merits from any need for them to fulfil the demands of logical, theoretical argumentation. This is my primary objection to Sanio's recruitment of Cage's writings as theoretical constructs in a discussion about his break with

18 Sanio 1999, p. 12
19 p. 16. „Zugleich scheint auch die von Adorno als das treibende Moment in der Geschichte der Kunst interpretierte Entfaltung des Materials abgeschlossen zu sein."
20 Respectively, Chapter 1, pp. 25-34 (Hegels Ästhetik als Werkästhetik)[Hegel's aesthetics as an aesthetics of the work-concept] and Chapter 2, pp. 35-51 (Schopenhauers Theorie des ästhetischen Verhaltens) [Schopenhauer's theory of aesthetic attitude] (my translations)
21 Sanio discsuses the Hegelian work-concept in Chapter 1, in the light of considerations about aesthetic judgment as such, artistic production, the relation of art and philosophy, and more specifically the categories: Verständlichkeit (coherence), Abgeschlossenheit (finality), Form, Freiheit (freedom), Wahrheit (truth), Handlung und Pathos (action and pathos)
22 Sanio discusses the Schopenhauerian aesthetic attitude in Chapter 2, from the perspectives of: will and imagination in philosophical knowledge; subject-less knowledge as an aesthetic attitude, and; beauty and art.
23 See Chapter 3 of this thesis, for further discussion of Sontag's essay.
24 Sanio 1999, p. 12

the aesthetic work-concept. The integration of artistic and theoretical practice is presumably Sanio's main legitimisation for looking at Cage's writings and lectures in such detail, but I would argue that by not considering the aesthetic reality of Cage's artistic practice to any significant degree (neither by reference, analysis, nor historiography) she only continues the intentional fallacy.[25] She evaluates what Cage *said* he was doing over what *seemed* to be going on in his musical compositions, thus favouring Cage's prolific verbalisation of his ideas over the sensory experiences through which he hoped to achieve them.

Sanio mentions in her introduction and conclusion the possibilities that the dissolution of classical music's objecthood and materiality[26] were supposed to offer for suspending the classical distinction between art and daily life. Cage and other artists who aimed to deflect traditional aesthetic categories from the *objects* of art to the *experience* of art sought venues, phenomena and events where art and everyday life overlapped. The historical avantgarde (as defined by Peter Bürger) had attempted this and failed (art continued to exist as an institution which couldn't bridge the gap to daily life). So when the same artistic dilemma presented itself midcentury, artists recognised both the necessity of trying to overcome this restrictive autonomy of art as an institution cut off from social function, and also the necessity of showing the difficulties associated with this.

Were it limited only to such radical works as those of Cage (and writer Heissenbüttel, the other artist addressed by Sanio's book), the problem of the apparent gap between the understanding of artists' theoretical and conceptual models on the one hand and their artistic production on the other, might be considered somewhat local. But a more extensive tendency to conflate these two areas may be seen to have had rather more far-reaching consequences in particular for composition-music in the late 20th century, leading to the situation in which composers seem to address themselves as much to the recipients of theoretical ideas as they do to audiences eager for perceptual adventures.

That said, Cagean silence *is* indeed a special case, tantalising us by withholding 'content' from a work's formal motives, thereby challenging and frustrating certain approaches to the study of music. While welcoming this divorce of form and content, Sanio also succumbs to the limitations of a musicological approach that continues to allow verbal representation and text a prime spot in its persuasive appeal. Thus, where Cage's scores offer up content to the circumstances of performance, Sanio turns to Cage's printed and published writings and lectures to provide a text which can more neatly fulfil the promise of intentionality, completeness, thorough intelligibility, and thus systematisation, which the scores lack.

I have noted that Sanio does not address the issue of silence explicitly, but in her analysis of Cage's 1949 lecture *Lecture on nothing*, she comes close to offering an account of how he arrived at the concept which came to hold all the interests developed during the 1950s (chance,

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25 Term launched 1942 and expanded 1954 by American philosophers-critics Wimsatt and Beardsley, to articulate the danger of a critic/commentator attaching undue significance to statements concerning the author's intentions and personal motivations, instead of attending to a more independent analysis of the text in question itself. Wimsatt and Beardsley's observation rested on two main arguments: (i) that one cannot know the author's intentions just from what he or she might have expressed in secondary texts, (ii) that the author's intentions are undesirable as a standard for determining the meaning of an artistic text. The European parallel to this move within American midcentury criticism would be the slightly later impact of reader-response criticism unfolded by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss from the 1970s.

26 Work-aspect as ossified score, etc., offering permanence and potential universality ('object' and 'material' are tropes from the visual arts)

indeterminacy, and non-intentionality). In *Lecture on nothing*[27], Cage listed 5 aspects of music: form, structure, method, material and *time*. The lecture itself is self-reflective, claiming to have nothing to present except the reflection of its own nothingness. This is also the first of Cage's writings in which he employs the sign 'μ' as a kind of zero-sign. 'Nothing' gives the possibility of spontaneity: "I have nothing to say ... as we go along (who knows?) an idea may occur. …"[28] Thus, the speaker apparently gives himself over to chance, indeterminacy, and non-intentionality. Cage's reflections on nothing, which Sanio locates as being specifically based on Laotse' exposition of emptiness in the Taoteking, coupled with his extra category 'time', give him a new musical dimension of emptiness or nothingness, thenceforth subsumed under the term 'silence'. This was how Cage's silence looked before his anechoic chamber experience. Cage apparently assumed that most people resist silence, and he seemed to find it morally necessary to plead a case for its worthiness as an object of aesthetic experience.

Further into Sanio's chronological discussion of the lectures, we find that in the later *Composition as Process*[29] the crucial division of silence from the composer's will takes place, such that from then on it seems as if Cage regards these two as mutually exclusive: "when silence, generally speaking, is not in evidence, the will of the composer is. Inherent silence is equivalent to denial of the will."[30] This came after the first performance of the silent piece, shortly before Cage revised it to further distance his composerly hand from the determination of the duration(s), although not yet from the structuring of the piece into three movements.

All in all, Sanio's book is rather more an elucidation of the development of Cage's understanding of the denial of his own will, than an argument for its aesthetic reality. But her book provides a strong theoretical background for the discussion of the work-paradigm in relation to Cage's intentions. Sanio's main argument is that Cage's attempts at removing his own subjective will from his work resulted in his providing the opportunity for aesthetic listening experiences that were free of the objecthood of an identifiable work with form, parts and characteristics.

I find Sanio's evaluation of Cage's negation of the Hegelian work-concept unrealistic, but this detracts nothing from either Cage's scores or his writings, only alerting us to the importance of not awarding them false status as, respectively, either non-works or theory. It has to be remembered that for large segments of the arts community, Cage's writings are his main achievement – regarded as artworks in their own right. Clearly, my notion of 'constitutive silence' has had to be totally abandoned in my discussion of Sanio's position, as on her view there is no 'work' to be constituted, either by this or that sound or by silence. But it is not only the categories of work (and with it the possibility of the empty artwork) and constitutive silence that have been sacrificed in this discussion. The whole disregard for the question of aesthetic reality leaves out the listening experience as anything other than a spiritual state.

In the following chapter, I hope to align the question of the feasibility of the mid-20th century empty artwork with a consideration of its reception as involving a distinction between material and content that will allow an acknowledgment of the perceptual reality of a work such as Cage's *4'33"*. First, however, I conclude this chapter with a brief orientation in alternative evaluations of Cage's relation to the classical work-paradigm.

27 *Lecture on nothing*, first delivered in 1949 or 1950. Published in *Silence* (Cage 1961).
28 Cage 1961, p. 110
29 Originally given as three lectures in 1958, and collected under the present heading in Cage 1961, pp.18-56.
30 *Composition as Process: III Communication*, ibid.

Sound artist Brandon LaBelle introduces an entirely different approach to lauding the extent to which Cage broke with the classical work-paradigm. I mention LaBelle's position as a contrast to that of Francisco López, introduced earlier. Sound art will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 7. For now, I hope to indicate the link between Cagean silence, and sound art as a kind of aural aesthetic enterprise that sees itself as working beyond the paradigms of classical music.

LaBelle offers a convincing account of one way of positioning Cage "within an experimental music legacy that progressively moves away from an overtly musical framework and toward an increasingly contextual and "extra-musical" one. This movement in general can be thought of as a shift away from music and toward sound" (LaBelle 2006, pp. 8-9). This could explain the huge influence which Cage exerts generally on sound artists today, to the extent that an archetypal Cagean quote is embedded in the base of a Lowercase Sound CD-box – quite literally, at the bottom of it all, as if to illustrate that Cage is behind the development of the entire lowercase listening aesthetic.[31]

It is more surprising to find a sound artist such as Francisco López downplaying the extent of the Cagean formal experiment, at the same time as reviving supposedly outworn musical paradigms. López describes his own work as operating with 'absolute' silence that he is not embarrassed to call transcendental. He has no problems with the term 'music', even though he obviously works within the sound-art trope and not the musical tradition. Surprising, too, because in as far as Douglas Kahn characterises Cage's concerns as arising from a three-fold modernist project (of discovery, emancipation and totality), one might expect López in fact to sympathise with a more conservative evaluation of Cage's reach.

> [John Cage's ideas on sound] matured within the sphere of music, and, until he began to branch out into other artistic forms, most of the ideas he adopted from elsewhere were brought into the fold of music. He was known for stepping outside the usual confines of Western art music to usher noise and worldly sounds into music and for proposing a mode of being within the world based on listening, through hearing the sounds of the world as music. […] The world he wanted for music was a select one, where most of the social and ecological noise was muted along with other more proximal noises. (Kahn 2001, p. 161)

In this chapter I have discussed the way that a work such as *4'33"* can be seen to be constituted by silence, relating the work to historical precedents both in Cage's own work and also in musical notation. I have shown how the unfortunate conflation of *4'33"* with the trope of Cagean silence has affected some ways of regarding Cage's project. However, it must be acknowledged that the trope is incredibly persistent. This leads on to a consideration of the mid-20th century production of empty artworks and the affirmative aspects of such a display of the presentation of absence, as articulated by Susan Sontag and Jean-François Lyotard. Sontag and Lyotard both wrote under the influence of Cage's writings, but my reason for progressing to them is not to prolong the teaming-up of thinkers on the grounds of who appreciates which aspect of Cage's work over and above which other aspects. Rather, I am looking for a more general discussion of the empty artwork as such, separate from musical-compositional or even just composerly perspectives.

31 See Chapter 7 in this thesis for a picture of the box.

CHAPTER 3

Midcentury sensibilities and the empty artwork

3.1 Introduction

> A genuine emptiness, a pure silence is not feasible – either conceptually or in fact. If only because the artwork exists in a world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence. (Sontag 1969a, p. 11)

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the work *4'33"* from the perspective of an implicit assumption that we can unproblematically say it is constituted by silence, and that it is therefore an 'empty artwork'. I acknowledged that this entails accepting the work-concept as robust enough to be satisfied by something as minimal in content as this.

In this chapter I will firstly introduce some early writing by New York critic Susan Sontag (1933-2004), containing important qualitative insights on the subject of empty artworks. Secondly, I consider an essay by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, 'Several silences', that puts both 'silence' as a term and Cage as an artist close to the centre of this philosopher's reflections on music.

Laying to one aside for the moment all positions that might be sceptical of the status of midcentury empty works (as art, or as works), I proceed to consider Sontag and Lyotard's reflections in a historical and art-historical context. With my acceptance of the status and significance of the empty artwork, I move, then, in this chapter from a need to define and locate instances of 'constitutive silence' to a more qualitative discussion of artistic presentations of absence.

This entails looking at how mid-20th century empty artworks thematise the material aspect of art (the way that the 'work'-character of artworks reside in their objecthood) even whilst making demonstrative gestures away from their very materiality. Thus, apparently un- (or even anti-) materialistic notions such as spirituality, mysticism, and extreme simplicity are seen to contribute to the interplay of material and perception.

It could be argued (although this is beyond my present topic) that the play on de-/rematerialisation evidenced in empty artworks of the 1950s provided the upbeat to more technically complex musical and visual minimalisms of the 1960s, which similarly sought to distance artistic material from the artist's subjectivity. Perhaps the differences between the earlier and later variations on these themes of material and desubjectification can be located in Sontag's nostalgic focus on the dialectical richness of the totally and simply empty artwork. I aim to draw out Sontag and Lyotard's specific attachment to the demonstratively empty artwork in terms of their desire to postulate the position of 'silent art' as the extreme consequence of a tradition of serious, autonomous art stretching back to the beginning of the modern period.

The apparently negative move on the part of artists who refrained from putting artistic content into the frames of their empty works may be seen as a gesture of holding one's silence (*schweigen*) – a nihilistic position with a long philosophical tradition. But the artist's negation

was arguably balanced by the opportunity that such artworks as zones of non-articulation provided for the viewer/listener to complete the work with an affirmative sensual act opening onto virgin perceptual fields unsullied by the artist's expressive intentions. I will trace some of the trade-offs between negative and affirmative characterisations of the presentation of silent or empty artworks in this chapter.

The texts by Sontag and Lyotard are essays, and therefore I quote from them at some length; paraphrasing them into academic prose misses many of the insights that the essayistic style allows them to make through liberal association. Nevertheless, I seek to objectivise the texts somewhat, in order to draw out historical and aesthetic themes that are relevant for the present thesis. I read Sontag's engagement with blank canvases, silent authors and unplayed music as supporting her construal of 'serious' or difficult art as being a profitably inadequate object of hermeneutic interpretation. That is to say, silent or contentless artistic manifestations reinforce the supposed autonomy of serious art by being irreducibly 'against interpretation'. I read Lyotard as investigating a set of moves grouped roughly around two positions: (i) a Schoenbergian 'Talmudic' silence that has close links to the hermeneutic tradition, and (ii) a Cage-led celebration of the phenomenological approach to radically silent works. As I will discuss later, Lyotard's aesthetics underwent a number of changes that I will pursue through his unfolding of the centrality of 'negative presentation' as an avantgarde artistic strategy; however, as this shift is formulated in texts from the 1980 and '90s, Lyotard's mature position will not be analysed in this chapter.

Finally, I must point out that the key essays considered in this chapter address much more than Cagean silence (Sontag's concerns the empty artwork as such, Lyotard's is as much about Schoenberg as it is about Cage), but they are both arguably influenced by Cage's own writings and lectures. It is well known that Cage influenced the reception of his own work within musicology, and that he also influenced many artists working within the visual, time-based and/or performance fields. But the extent to which his writings and lectures continued the problems of intentional fallacy and compositional will to which I have already pointed in the previous chapter, is often overlooked. This is an important factor in the issue of the desubjectification that is often proclaimed to take place in empty art.

3.2 Midcentury: a historical period

> The art of our time is noisy with appeals for silence. A coquettish, even cheerful nihilism. One recognizes the imperative of silence, but goes on speaking anyway. Discovering that one has nothing to say, one seeks a way to say that. (Susan Sontag)

> I am here, and there is nothing to say. (John Cage)

Before I embark on my readings of Sontag and Lyotard, I would like to focus on the mid-20th century as a particular historical junction – a situation that was naturally influenced by the aftermath of the Second World War.

Art-historically, the midcentury has been marked off as the beginning of what American art critic Hal Foster has called the 'neo-avantgarde' – an artistic movement characterised not only by well-known 'old' avantgarde strategies of trying to break with all that there is to break with, but also by a problematisation of the final work that paradoxically reconfirms the cen-

trality of the inherited in the new[1]. This double-take of negation and confirmation of the past is one of a series of fruitful conundrums that arise from neo-avantgarde artists' awareness of producing art within a critically self-reflective relationship to their own activities. It is under such a set of relations that emptying a work of its content can come to emphasise the form of the inherited work-concept, as I have shown in the case of *4'33"*.

In the wake of the second world war, a new consciousness surrounded the artist's option of being silent in the face of the choice to speak, to write, to perform: to articulate. Artists entered into a period in which they were highly reflective of their own production, and became engaged in a set of questions about the opportunities to continue or break with artistic traditions as symbolic of the historical past.

The outcome of the Second World War was not only that Germany lost and the Allies won, but also that central Europe was in all senses a ruin, whilst the USA stood in the novel position of having overcome its historical old-world roots in the most physical and literal way thinkable. The difference between European and US paradigms, socially as well as musically, is nicely summed up in the following comment by composer Steve Reich: "Stockhausen, Berio, and Boulez were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces of a bombed-out continent after World War II but for some American in 1948 or 1958 or 1968 – in the real context of tail-fins, Chuck Berry, and millions of burgers sold – to pretend that instead we're really going to have the darkbrown angst of Vienna is a lie, a musical lie."[2]

It may seem banal to point out that artists were affected by the Second World War, and not least by the consequences of its outcome for the cultural balance of power between Europe and America. It seems however impossible to unfold central mid-20th century themes of silence and emptiness in art without making a few distinctions of this general character. For as long as Cage, for example, avoided talking about the Second World War, his retreat from composed sound seemed like an affirmative move. But as soon as empty artworks came to be regarded as a consequence of the post-war ambivalence towards representation, then they began to seem more self-expressive of a demonstrative gesture of negation.

It lies far from the optimistic and smiling image we have of Cage – his transcendence of worldly matters by way of mystical posturing, mushroom-picking and the pursuit of the emptiness of a beginner's mind – to see him as having been silenced by war. But even he did directly acknowledge the relevance of the outbreak of war for the fate of his own artistic expression, saying (two decades after the event): "half intellectually and half sentimentally, when the war came along, I decided to use only quiet sounds. There seemed to be no truth, no good, in anything big in society."[3] Douglas Kahn reminds us, in his recent article associat-

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1 An update of the concept of the avantgarde, pertaining to artworks from the midcentury onwards, and seen from the perspective of 21st-century art-theory, forms the introductory chapter of Ørum, Tania & Marianne Ping Huang (ed.) (2005): *En tradition af opbrud: avantgrdernes tradition og politik.* I have discussed my position in relation to the issues raised in this introduction, from a music-historical perspective, in my essay 'No tears for chamber music' (Hodkinson 2006).

2 K. Robert Schwarz: *Minimalists,* Phaidon Press Limited, London 1996, p. 56 ff.

3 *Lecture on Nothing*, 1959, Seen in the light of John Cage's criticisms of Beethoven, and of the classical-romantic symphonic repertoire, this remark brings Cage's motivations into line with the grand-scale rejection of universal truths (and historical narratives) proposd within French left-leaning post-structuralist aesthetics. Given the proximity of this continental trend to e.g. deconstruction – critique defined internally and externally – in negativising terms, this provides already the first strike against the affirmative aspect of Cagean aesthetics.

ing Cage's seminal visit to the anechoic chamber with cold-war military-scientific research, that "Cage pitched his silence between a taciturn mourning and a refusal to condone what he understood as the Big and Loud forces that had ushered in the war in the first place" (Kahn 2005, p. 1).

Music, like all the arts, had experienced its own succession of revolutions against romanticism (dodecaphony, Neue Sachlichkeit, musique concrète and chance operations, to name just a few), and Cage's *4'33"* is obviously in dialogue with these music-historical developments. Whilst acknowledging this deeper historical background, my focus on midcentury silence in the arts builds partly on a specific crisis of material and content in the turbulent wake of the Second World War and the Jewish holocaust.

While attempting to wipe the slate clean and escape the past, many artists encountered a newly-urgent ethical dimension to stylistic choices between representation and abstraction. Artists had been intensely interrogating inherited conventions of representation and content since the early Romantic era, but from the mid-20th century they had a new, collective and more concrete experience on which to base these moves. Within European aesthetics (and in particular within musicology), Adorno has long been synonymous with this historical issue. But Adorno was not the only one to see things more or less this way. Susan Sontag, George Steiner and Jean-François Lyotard all pondered these themes directly. Susan Sontag has since based a whole theory of the moral ambiguity of representation on her first experience of seeing photos from Bergen-Belsen and Dachau (Sontag, 1973).

The intractably interwoven fates of German and Jewish culture in the aftermath of the Holocaust prompted many artists and critics in Europe to re-examine the possibilities and limits of, for example, painting and writing (the forms of artistic articulation that lie closest to representation – through depiction or description).

Referencing the Japanese wartime holocaust, composer Krzysztof Penderecki wrote a *Threnody for the victims of Hiroshima* (1960). The expressive nature of this work is unmistakable (and is anything but an 'empty' musical work), but the issue of referentiality and representation is more dubious: the work was originally given the anti-programmatic and highly Cagean title *8'37"*, but after the first performance Penderecki changed it (apparently on a suggestion from either his publisher or the Polish radio). Since its first performance at the 1961 ISCM Festival in Amsterdam (under the new title), *Threnody* has become emblematic of musical representations of holocaust and collective trauma.

Poly-national European Jew George Steiner examined more specifically the crisis of literary articulation after the Second World War. Steiner claimed for literature that the "election of silence by the most articulate" (i.e. writers) is "historically recent", and that "the revaluation of silence… is one of the most original, characteristic acts of the modern spirit, grounded in historical circumstance" (Steiner 1976, pp. 46-9). Steiner argued that the elevated status of silence was the culmination of a crisis of language (in poetry). A literary retreat from the word had been going on for some time, but its culmination at this point was, according to Steiner, directly attributable to the political 'inhumanity' of the Second World War.

Jean-François Lyotard, who wrote repeatedly of post-war Jewish questions, coupled the holocaust with artists' ambivalence towards representational traditions when he stated that what distinguishes "this twentieth century and a half that begins after Auschwitz and that is not yet the twenty-first […], is that painting has little to do with the visible and much to do with the past and future, memory and the possible, acknowledgement and estrangement".

Auschwitz appears in the reflections of many writers as symbol of an ultimate act of silencing (in the political sense) imposed upon Jewish victims. Thus Adorno famously called Auschwitz "the negative absolute" (Adorno 1980, p. 135). Adorno's eight-word dictum "nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch" has been popularly interpreted as seeking to impose a taboo – literally, a silencing – on all artistic creation after the Nazi concentration camps. In fact, Adorno's reflections concerned specifically the moral dangers involved in the direct artistic representation of horrific crimes – more particularly, the rendering of these crimes in (German) language (Martin, 2006).

The term 'post-war' became the working paradigm for a generation of European and American intellectual thought with roots in the war experience. Without going into theoretical links between, say, Adorno's views on post-Auschwitz art and a chain of famous late 20th century aesthetic-theory fatalities such as Roland Barthes' proclaimed death of the author, Arthur C. Danto's postulated end of art, or Jean Baudrillard's death of meaning, I propose that the historical climate that produced these intellectual ruptures is paralleled by a penchant for patterns of chosen silence among artists from the mid-20th century onwards.

The zero-hour years[4] in which *4'33"* was generated, then, are remarkable for a sudden midcentury quiet that may in part be attributed to a collective trauma in the wake of the Second World War. Without going into the psychology of social history, it seems nevertheless intuitively obvious that many artists explored interwoven aesthetic and ethical dilemmas of representing (or simply presenting) the unrepresentable, as a way of probing the deeply traumatic historical catastrophe out of which postwar art was born.

New York, however, was not only grieving after the Jewish Holocaust but also storming ahead in a new emancipation from old-world Europe. It might be argued that the vitality of the American arts in the immediate postwar years emphasised a tension between an affirmative and a negative thrust in artistic uses of silence.

In the immediate postwar years, the USA wrested from Europe the experimental initiative in serious art.[5] In particular, new visual art forms forged vigorously ahead, and by the time of Susan Sontag's writing debut in the late 1960s, not only happenings and performance art, but also video art was beginning to take off, with photography also entering into a new phase of artistic maturity. Europe was still doing battle with old traditional art institutions – opera-houses, concert-halls, museums, etc. – whilst New York was busy establishing new ones (the National Endowment for the Arts was created in 1965).

Artists such as Cage and Rauschenberg also went to some lengths to distinguish their work from that of the so-called abstract expressionists, who were enjoying great popularity in the 1950s. The heavy nocturnal self-indulgence of abstract expressionism lay far from Rauschenberg's and Cage's lighter touch. Cage and Rauschenberg were linked, historically, personally, and aesthetically. Historically, we know that one event that was crucial in prompting Cage to actually go ahead with his realisation of *4'33"* was Rauschenberg's articulation of radical emptiness in his monochrome paintings – a perfect example of the 'empty artwork' (Solomon 1998, Kahn 2001). Cage's response to the new way of seeing that the paintings

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4   Discussions of serialism in the immediate post-war years have also given rise to comparisons of the extreme scientisation of the serial project as representing a kind of 'tabula rasa' in respect of aesthetics' relation to cultural history.

5   Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu has related how the USA promoted scored music in occupied Japan, through the libraries that were set up as a form of influence of western ideas on the 'conquered' Orient.

provoked in him was to produce immediately his musical counterpart to them, based on the considerations that he had been accumulating over the previous four to five years[6].

Rauschenberg made monochromes in white, black and red around this time. He was somewhat irritated at the reception of his black monochromes as being essentially a metaphor for a kind of artistic depression: "They couldn't see black as a pigment. They moved immediately into association with 'burned out', 'tearing', 'nihilism' and 'destruction'."[7] Rauschenberg focused on the materiality of the artwork as providing an occasion for sensing – in Sontag's view, always an essentially positive (affirmative) act, as we shall see. It was the white monochromes that Cage celebrated, and they were also hung at the Black Mountain Event that Cage organised in the summer of 1952. This must have been just days or weeks before the first performance of *4'33"*.

> The monochromes Rauschenberg began there took him in two opposed directions: the black paintings toward a saturated repleteness (he said that he began them by painting over a ground of newspapers so that the field would already be full of marks); the white paintings toward a barely touched emptiness and vulnerability to every event in their vicinity. It was the latter that provoked Cage's enthusiastic approval: the composer would one day recall – in a frequently quoted remark – that the canvases seemed like "airports for lights, shadows, and particles. (Crow 1997)

The white paintings were structured in three panels, a fact which Larry J. Solomon has proposed as an influence on Cage to choose the three-movement form for *4'33"* (Solomon, 1998). It is worth keeping in mind the light and white, that is welcoming of 'lights, shadows and particles' in a way that seems not only affirmative of sensory perception *per se*, but also exemplary of the kind of empty plenitude that Susan Sontag articulates. Later (in Chapter 4), I will hold it up against a darker, problematising side of the general musical silence issue that is more directly negative.

More extreme, perhaps, than the monochromes, is the act behind Rauschenberg's picture *Erased de Kooning* (1953), in which he spent many weeks literally rubbing out a drawing by the painter Willem de Kooning. This act shows a deliberate hiding of the figurative – a gesture of erasure and increased abstraction that is significant in that it's precisely a non-figurative, abstract painter's work that is erased. In Rauschenberg's view, the abstraction that de Kooning represented was still a part of historical expressionism, and thus was an extension of 18th and 19th century painterly conventions. It is worth remembering that abstract expressionism had more in common with figurative painting than might at first be supposed. Acknowledging this continued role of the artist's self-expression shows the distance between abstract expressionism and the kind of abstract perceptualism that Rauschenberg and Cage preferred to invoke.

3.3 New York: the new sensibility

In her essay 'The aesthetics of silence', Susan Sontag observed a trend within midcentury artworks in the direction of shedding content (Sontag, 1969 [1967], p. 12). One effect of this was to open the way for a renewed focus on form as a space for perception relatively unburdened

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6 See Chapter 1.
7 Rosalind Krauss: "Perpetual inventory", in *Robert Rauschenberg: a retrospective* (1998), p. 209

by historical considerations. But this emancipatory effect was balanced by a simultaneously antagonistic attitude towards the very idea of indulging in art: absence of content was presented as an end in itself. The presentation of absent content was variously proposed and received as being an act of either the ultimate (most sublime) and lowliest (most degenerate) possibility open to an artist working (or merely existing) in the modern world.

I regard Sontag's thematisation of the 'silent' artwork as both illustrating an extreme case of the historical distinction between functional crafts and autonomous art, and confirming her more general project of offering aesthetic attitudes other than interpretation. Thus, she places works such as Rauschenberg's monochromes and Cage's silent piece within a history of the most difficult of artistic enterprises by drawing on the example of writers such as Rimbaud and Wittgenstein whose problematisation of content led them to stop writing altogether.

The salient point that I would like to draw from Sontag's writing is a nuanced description of the way that some midcentury artworks were materially and perceptually manifest while seeming to radically negate the importance of the artist's expressive contribution through content. This leads Sontag into an investigation of a series of moves in empty art between, on the one hand, nihilistic retreat from artistic content and, on the other, affirmative opportunities for perception. In such works, artistic material is emphatically placed in the world of objects, to be perceived, thus potentially offering occasion for aesthetic contemplation. Distanced from more traditional artistic concerns such as representation or authorial stylistic characteristics, the aesthetic activity may more readily take on a spiritual or transcendental character. This examination of the spiritual dimension of contentless works is the focus of Sontag's self-proclaimed aesthetics of silence, and is fulfilled through a 'serious' but emphatically sensual perceptual exercise.

There is a tension between silence as a formal ideal, and silence as a perceptual exercise: a spasm between thought and perception that is the site in which aesthetic listening takes place when confronted with a lack of audible content. Theoretically, there is potentially both a polarisation and reconciliation of hermeneutics and phenomenology and their respective traditions of focusing, respectively, on the author or recipient of artistic content. Sontag clearly advocates the phenomenological view.

'One culture and the new sensibility' and 'The aesthetics of silence' are, respectively, the final essay of Sontag's collection *Against interpretation,* and the opening essay of her next collection, *Styles of radical will.* Together, the two essays articulate the key opportunities and dilemmas of serious and difficult art at that time, where lack of content opens up for indulgence in pure form and in sensual perception.

In these two essays, Sontag characterises the revival of an avantgarde project in the first two post-war decades as heralding a new sensibility. She describes this new sensibility as having gathered force since the industrial revolution, but was reactivated in the post-war years. The new sensibility re-channels artistic creation and reception through the senses without becoming hedonistically self-indulgent; it remains part of 'difficult', modernist', 'high' art.

The identification of postwar modernist art as a radical consequence of the development of autonomous western art is not unique to Sontag and Lyotard. But there is a striking similarity in their respective pinpointing of some kind of retreat from the fluency of artistic articulation. Sontag's label for this is 'silence'; Lyotard's is (as we shall see later) 'negative presentation'.

In 'One culture and the new sensibility', Sontag treats European and American musical experiments with the under- and over-determination of compositional choices (random effects, and so on) as challenges to the scored-music artwork's traditional expressivity of the composer's subject. Whatever technical means were used to achieve it, the breach to common musical understanding is concerned as springing from a concern with a new perceptually-based sensibility.

Certainly, there are aesthetic and historical parallels between what went on in, say, Darmstadt and New York, but the critical framework that enables Sontag to evaluate the artistic mini-revolutions as she does is decidedly American. Admittedly, in these decades, 'serious' art was still regarded as a European tradition, and one might venture that in order to assert her authority as critic, Sontag did well to refer to this heritage. However, Sontag's concern with pointing to an aesthetic, spiritual, inter-arts framework for the new sensibility – rather than, say, a technical, analytical approach – was arguably the move of a new-world thinker releasing herself from age-old European problematics. The New York inter-arts scene was concerned with rejuvenating art with a new perceptually-based sensuality. Sontag prioritises the senses over our "furniture of ideas" as the main mark of the midcentury aesthetic that caused Cage to invest so much of his artistic project in listening.

It is important to note that indulgence in the senses does not preclude the art that is Sontag's subject from being part of difficult, modernist art – 'serious' art, as she would call it. Perception is cast as an equally powerful tool for aesthetic access as intellectual knowledge.

> The new sensibility understands art as the extension of life, for we are what we are able to see (hear, taste, smell, feel) even more powerfully and profoundly than we are what furniture of ideas we have stocked in our heads. (Sontag 1966, p. 300)

Through those six words, "art as the extension of life", Sontag embeds this new sensibility in a linear extension of previous avantgardes' ambitions to narrow the gap between everyday life and non-mass-produced art. (As we have seen through the discussion of Cage's proposal for the anti-Muzak piece 'Silent prayer', it would be easy enough to infiltrate everyday life with art disseminated through new technologies designed for mass communication, but this was for a long time something that the neo-avantgarde shied away from).

In Sontag's broadest use of the term, the 'new sensibility' goes back to Nietzsche, and is continued by Wittgenstein, Artaud, Marshall McLuhan, Roland Barthes, and Lévi-Strauss, amongst others. In music, Sontag lists composers as different as Babbitt, Feldman, Stockhausen, Nono, Boulez, the Beatles, and yes, Cage, focusing in particular on the aspects of post-war scored music that "invite collaboration from performers by leaving opportunities for random effect, switching around the order of the score, and improvisations – they are changing the ground rules which most of us employ to recognize a work of art" (Sontag, 1961, p. 298). Although it may seem strange to group these musicians under one sensibility today, we can intuitively understand how the shock of listening to each of these radically new musical projects in the 1960s might have presented a uniform challenge to the senses. Above all, it is the interplay of recognition and familiarity with an alienation effect that would provide "adventures in sensation", keeping the listener's attention instead of allowing perception merely to confirm the unfolding of familiar artistic models.

Sontag is keen that the emphasis on the sensory and sensual aspects of art is not to be understood as a capitulation of 'thinking' art towards unreflected pleasure. On the contrary,

"in one sense, the new art and the new sensibility take a rather dim view of pleasure", and following Pierre Boulez, Sontag calls the new art "anti-hedonistic".

> Having one's sensorium challenged or stretched hurts. The new serious music hurts one's ears, the new painting does not graciously reward one's sight, the new films and the few interesting new prose works do not go down easily. (Sontag 1966, p. 303)

3.4 Sontag's aesthetics of silence

In the essay 'The aesthetics of silence', Sontag moves closer to Cage. Although his work is mentioned only five times, it is clear that the Cagean silence trope – well-established, by now – is the focus of her reflections on the affirmative possibilities of the empty artwork. The centrality of Cagean thought for Sontag's essay can be seen by isolating her references to Cage within the text.

Sontag's first two comments on Cage concern the ontological status of silence within the artwork. Here, Sontag comes close to relegating silence to a pre-compositional strategy, in order to satisfy Cage's dictum that 'there is no such thing as silence'.

> Silence exists as a *decision*. […] Silence also exists as a *punishment*. […] Silence doesn't exist in a literal sense, however, as the *experience* of an audience. […] Nor can silence, in its literal state, exist as the *property* of an artwork – even of works like Duchamp's readymades or Cage's *4'33"*, in which the artist has ostentatiously done no more to satisfy any established criteria of art than set the object in a gallery or situate the performance on a concert stage. (Sontag 1969a, p. 9)

> As Cage has insisted, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound. (ibid., p. 10)

The next time we meet Cage in this text, the above premise is examined for its implications for the ideal mode. Interestingly, the undermining of content in the artwork is cast not as an opportunity for the audience's perceptual encounter with pure material, but is described as a plenitude that is somehow inaccessible to the audience.

> Toward such an ideal plenitude to which the audience can add nothing, analogous to the aesthetic relation to nature, a great deal of contemporary art aspires – through various strategies of blandness, of reduction, of deindividuation, of alogicality. […] All objects, rightly perceived, are already full. This is what Cage must mean when, after explaining that there is no such thing as silence because sometimes is always happening that makes a sound, he adds, "No one can have an idea once he starts really listening". (ibid., p. 16)

This leads Sontag to expand on her own view on the distinction between interpretive and perceptual approaches to art. (Remember that the essay 'One culture and the new sensibility' concluded an essay collection entitled *Against interpretation*.) Here, she presents the role of perception in resisting hermeneutic intepretation.

> The alternative view denies the traditional hierarchies of interest and meaning, in which some things have more "significance" than others. The distinction between true and false experience, true and false consciousness is also denied: in principle, one should desire to

pay attention to everything. It's this view, most elegantly formulated by Cage though its practice is found everywhere, that leads to the art of the inventory, the catalogue, surfaces: also "chance." The function of art isn't to sanction any specific experience, except the state of being open to the multiplicity of experience – which ends in practice by a decided stress on things usually considered trivial or unimportant. (ibid., p. 25)

Much of this discussion turns on differences in the perceived priority of idea and listening, but this should not lead us to forget the integral link between them. It has been up to phenomenology to point out that fundamental human physical existence is already linked to intentionality, and this is also something that Sontag appeals for in her resistance to interpretation. We hear sounds according to where we meet them. The body is not a pre-existing mechanical object with given functional potential, but a dynamic entity, constantly conditioned by the way in which we are involved in certain situations. In the description of aesthetic objects the phenomenological aspect is double. There are a number of links between the phenomenological distancing of the intellect, and the intimate relationship between work and audience that has been a major project of art since the mid-20th century. Thus, the apparent "stress on things usually considered trivial or unimportant" might be seen as a necessary step in dismantling the listener's subordination to the composer, so that the audience can enter into play with the work.

Finally, Sontag positions Cage within a characterisation of the new sensibility. Her use of the term 'silence' has become so metaphorical that silence risks being identified primarily with more demonstrative artistic modes than the view she holds of Cage's 'subdued' articulations.

Contemporary artists advocate silence in two styles: loud and soft. The loud style is a function of the unstable antithesis of "plenum" and "void". … The other way of talking about silence is more cautious. Basically, it presents itself as an extension of a main feature of traditional classicism: the concern with modes of propriety, stepped up to the nth degree. … But while the clamorous style of proclaiming the rhetoric of silence may seem more passionate, its more subdued advocates (like Cage, Johns) are saying something equally drastic. (ibid., p. 32)

3.5 Mysticism

A discussion of the role of mysticism lies at the heart of understanding midcentury art (in both Europe and the US). Sontag's essay on the aesthetics of silence opens with an acknowledgement of the importance of the spiritual dimension:

Every era has to reinvent the project of "spirituality" for itself. […] In the modern era, one of the most active metaphors for the spiritual project is "art." (ibid., p. 3)

Denying that art is mere expression […] installs within the activity of art many of the paradoxes involved in attaining an absolute state of being described by the great religious mystics. As the activity of the mystic must end in a *via negativa*, a theology of God's absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech, so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the "subject" (the "object," the "image"), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence. (ibid., pp. 4-5)

In her broader account of artistic motivations for silence, Sontag draws parallels between the difficulties of artistic activity in the post-autonomy, post-expressive age, and the sensuous theology of radical religious myths. She sees a similarity between the "positive nihilism" of the mystics' "craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech", and the tendency of art "toward anti-art, the elimination of the "subject" (the "object", the "image"), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence."

There was a significant 'mystic turn' in the American arts from the 1950s onwards. The adoption of Asian philosophy by American artists since World War II has been such a hallmark of American art's turning away from European perspectives, that it can seem as though Taoism and Zen have their own American versions (Gelburd and De Paoli, 1990). The 1950s and 1960s were a period of intense assimilation of Zen and Tao notions. There was inevitably a great deal of instability in the adoption of foreign concepts, and there were also many differences between individual artists' understandings of these ideas.But it was not really a question of whether specific artists' idiosyncratic use of Zen or Tao material was authentic or not: they stood to gain so much from the mere contact with Asian philosophical materials that the relationship was more about letting themselves be influenced by an alternative to dominating European artistic paradigms dialectics than about discovering underlying principles.

This was not an entirely new situation, but rather the revival of an awareness of Asian thought and aesthetics that had been in place already a century earlier, exerting a crucial influence on American intellectuals such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau's project of aligning an internal quest for selfhood with the life practice of living in a small hut in the woods can be interpreted as an example of this influence.

One of the key figures in the midcentury dissemination of specifically American interpretations of the Buddist Tao Te Ching, I-Ching and of Zen was D.T. Suzuki. Suzuki was a prolific and very public presence who happily provided proposals for how to apply Zen principles not only to painting and gardening, but also to more complex and distant fields such as psychotherapy. For many American mid-century artists, playing freely with Asian notions, forms and practices resulted in a fruitful re-examination of fundamental artistic elements and relationships, even if the specifically Asian aspect was more a tool than an object of this development. The encounter with Asian ideas resulted in new ways of seeing, new ways of being, new concepts, and new experiences of space, time, form, void, subject and object. Dualities such as self/other, subject/object, that within European thought were doomed to struggle in angst-ridden dialectical competition and irresoluble difference, turned out to complement one another quite comfortably in an Asian framework, collapsing into harmonious cooperation.

Sontag wants to acknowledge the interplay of mysticism and demystification behind mid-20th century American art:

> Art, itself a form of mystification, endures a succession of crises of demystification; older artistic goals are assailed and, ostensibly, replaced. (ibid., p. 4)

The "leading myth", on which the process of mystification and demystification turns, is that "of the absoluteness of the artist's activity". Thus, we could say, with Sontag, that art's autonomy-claim was bound up from the start with a spiritual or mystical dimension.

Previously, the artist's activity entered the work of art "as an *expression* of human consciousness". A subsequent denial of the identification of art with the artist's expression leads

to a more distanced sensibility, relating art "to the mind's need or capacity for self-estrange-ment." Rimbaud, Wittgenstein and Duchamp provide Sontag's historical points of reference for this retreat from self-expression towards self-estrangement.

The point here is that spiritualism and mysticism were bound up in many artists' attempts at self-estrangement – a mental exercise by which they hoped their works would be experienced as less full of the artist's will and subjectivity.

3.6 The figure of the artist in the empty work

> From the promotion of the arts into "art" comes the leading myth about art, that of the absoluteness of the artist's activity. In its first, more unreflective version, the myth treated art as an expression of human consciousness. [...] The later version of the myth posits a more complex, tragic relation of art to consciousness. Denying that art is mere expression, the later myth rather relates art to the mind's need or capacity for self-es-trangement. Art is no longer understood as consciousness expressing and therefore, implicitly, affirming itself. (ibid., p. 4)

The midcentury 'new sensibility' described by Susan Sontag involved, then, a certain will towards de-subjectification, in the sense of diminishing the artist's investment of personal expression in the artwork. This was sought, firstly through abstraction (in contrast to representation). However, as we have seen, even extreme abstraction was seen to be compatible with self-expression. The next move, then, was to seek not only an abstraction in the forms created by the artist, and a flight from representation, but even a flight from the authorial role and the object of art – a move that had precedents in avantgarde art such as Duchamp's urinal.

> The "spirit" seeking embodiment in art clashes with the "material" character of art itself. (ibid., p. 5)

Cage's version of this can be seen to objectify the characteristics of his work by drawing out its concrete and material presence (within the concert situation) as part of an 'objective reality'. Thus, the frame (of decorum) that normally surrounded works posing as personal sound-fictions within a concert, now became part of the work itself. On the one hand, the concert (the audience) entered the work; on the other hand, the work (the demand to listen over a broader auditive field) spread itself out beyond the borders of *4'33"*.

Cage's deft side-stepping of the composerly tradition within which he was at least partly schooled did nothing to undermine his self-understanding as a composer of autonomous works that squarely fit his European composer-colleagues' sphere of activity. Sontag remarks as follows on this move of recalcitrant artists to increase their authorial validity through an act of disavowal, moving towards emptiness:

> So far as he is serious, the artist is continually tempted to sever the dialogue he has with an audience. Silence is the furthest extension of that reluctance to communicate, the ambivalence about making contact with the audience which is a leading motif of modern art, with its tireless commitment to the "new" and/or the "esoteric." Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work.

Still, one cannot fail to perceive in this renunciation of "society" a highly social ges-
ture. The cues for the artist's eventual liberation from the need to practice his voca-
tion come from observing his fellow artists and measuring himself against them. An
exemplary decision of this sort can be made only after the artist has demonstrated that
he possesses genius and exercised that genius authoritatively. *Once he has surpassed his
peers by the standards which he acknowledges*, his pride has only one place left to go.
For, to be a victim of the craving for silence is to be, in still a further sense, superior
to everyone else. It suggests that the artist has had the wit to ask more questions than
other people, and that he possesses stronger nerves and higher standards of excellence.
(Sontag 1969a, pp. 6-7)[8]

Sontag blames the accumulation of a historical awareness in our consciousness for furnish-
ing us with "second-hand perceptions" which frame the artist's work as a play with mediacy
and materialisation.

Art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it denies him the realization – the transcendence
– he desires. Therefore, art comes to be considered something to be overthrown. A new
element enters the individual artwork and becomes constitutive of it: the appeal (tacit or
overt) for its abolition – and, ultimately, for the abolition of art itself. (ibid., p. 5)

This is a key observation for the central reflection of this thesis: constitutive silence challenges
the work of art that it constitutes by wilfully threatening the existence of the work itself. This
threat is a significant player in the arts of the latter half of the 20th century.

What consequences does this have for the artist's self-expression?

[N]ow the highest good for the artist is to reach the point where those goals of excel-
lence become insignificant to him, emotionally and ethically, and he is more satisfied
by being silent than by finding a voice in art. […] So far as he is serious, the artist is con-
tinually tempted to sever the dialogue he has with an audience. Silence is the furthest
extension of that reluctance to communicate, that ambivalence about making contact
with the audience which is a leading motif of modern art, with its tireless commitment
to the "new" and/or the "esoteric". Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture:
by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron,
client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of this work. (ibid., pp. 5-6)

It is not only the audience from whose claims the artist wishes to free himself, but all social,
commercial, and political bonds. Yet the demonstration of distancing himself from such re-
strictions carries one prerequisite: namely, the unquestioned sovereignty of the artist.

Two important points are made here: firstly, that artistic authority (for which, read:
authenticity and status) moves from the artwork to artist *as proven in his past works*, and
secondly; that the artist is motivated by a pretentious vanity in which his eminence is in com-
petition with both his forebears and his contemporaries.

I have already noted Sontag's account of what she calls the "positive nihilism" shared by
radical religious myths and midcentury art. This led to the elimination of the creative subject
and the material object, prompting the substitution of chance for intention, and the with-

8 My italics.

drawal from fluent artistic expression. Silence is the furthest extension of this disfluency of communication between artist and audience. Committed to the idea that the power of art is located in its power to negate, the ultimate strategy in the artist's inconsistent dialogue with his audience is to verge closer and closer to silence. The sensory or conceptual gap between the artist and his audience, the pace of their missing or ruptured dialogue, can also constitute the grounds for an ascetic affirmation.

It is authorial silence that Sontag addresses in this part of her discussion, drawing on examples of extreme recalcitrance. She acknowledges that the more typical course of action of artists who found themselves in this dilemma was to produce art that appeared hermetic and cabalistic to its conventional audience. Thus, the typical artist "continues speaking, but in a manner that his audience can't hear" (ibid., p. 7).

This obstructive manoeuvre seems the exact opposite of Cage's apparently benevolent retreat from self-expression. Yet his silent piece was greeted with some irritation when it appeared and seems rarely to have been received in the kind of aesthetic stance that Cage had in mind. (Kahn relates that in his experience, most audiences become increasingly restless through the duration of the piece.) A gap opens up between, on the one hand, the intentions well documented in Cage's prolific lecturing and writing, and, on the other, the initial and subsequent reception of piece as an artistic statement as thunderingly loud as any of the 19th century music that Cage so longed to escape.

> The exemplary modern artist's choice of silence is rarely carried to this point of final simplification, so that he becomes literally silent. More typically, he continues speaking, but in a manner that his audience can't hear. Most valuable art in our time has been experienced by audiences as a move into silence (or unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility); a dismantling of the artist's competence, his responsible sense of vocation – and therefore as an aggression against them. Modern art's chronic habit of displeasing, provoking, or frustrating its audience can be regarded as a limited, vicarious participation in the ideal of silence which has been elevated as a major standard of "seriousness" in contemporary aesthetics. But it is also a contradictory form of participation in the ideal of silence. It is contradictory not only because the artist continues making works of art, but also because the isolation of the work from its audience never lasts. With the passage of time and the intervention of newer, more difficult works, the artist's transgression becomes ingratiating, eventually legitimate. (ibid., p. 7)

This brings us to the necessity of considering the work separately from the author's attitudes. As I have noted before, there is a difference between a work's first exposure, its subsequent exposures, and a given listener's repeated exposures to the same piece. Art history intervenes, continually breaking new boundaries and eventually disabling the transgressive power of the individual artwork.

3.7 The empty artwork

I have already considered the question of the constitution of artworks by silence, and the renewed strength of the work-concept in the face of empty content. One of the achievements of Sontag's work on these issues is to point out the separation of content and materiality, such that the latter has a potentially more fruitful career in relation to perceptual sensing than when dominated by the contribution of the artist's subjectivity.

Silence is one among a string of strategies such as blandness, reduction, literalness, alogicality and blank 'difficulty' that aimed at a detachment of the material artwork from its author's subject.

Considering silence and emptiness of content not only as an authorial gesture but also as an aspect of artworks themselves, Sontag found that true silence can never exist "as the *property* of an artwork", because the maker of an artwork has at least satisfied one basic criterion of art by situating the object in a gallery or situating the performance on a concert stage. That is to say, the artist's very production of an artwork excludes the possibility of remaining silent, except insofar as the maker of the work remains silent *with respect to* a specific intention or an expectation, in which case the silence has already been relativised (i.e. is no longer constitutive).

So, since the artist cannot produce a work that refrains from being an artistic manifestation of his choice not to fill it (since he can't be silent and remain an artist), he must be more devious: "literalness", for example, is singled out as a widespread strategy in Sontag's aesthetics of silence, although I would rather say that silence and literalness are two parallel strategies with similar aims. Sontag cites the narratives of Kafka and Beckett as exhibiting this development: "they appear to invite the reader to ascribe high-powered symbolic and allegorical meanings to them, and, at the same time, repel such ascriptions. Yet when the narrative is examined, it discloses no more than what it literally means." Or, by "filling up the periphery of the art space, leaving the central area of usage blank", prompting "new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc. – which either promote a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or confront the artwork in a more conscious, conceptual way". It was precisely this act of Rauschenberg's that Cage responded to and wished to provide in the medium of music. Reductionism was another such strategy, one that despite its apparent modesty both Sontag and Kahn see as expressing a modernist totalism.

Sontag observes that "behind the appeals for silence lies the wish for a perceptual and cultural clean state", and a fivefold "project of total liberation". That is, the liberation: of the artist from himself (e.g. by resorting to chance procedures, or by relegating some responsibilities to the performer); of art from the artwork (in Cage's case, his projection of musical qualities onto events outside the form of his piece); of art from history (which we hear in Cage's constant calls to move on from traditional categories of artistic production); of spirit from matter (the previously mentioned desire for non-materiality and preoccupations with 'nothing'); and finally, the liberation of the mind from its perceptual and intellectual limitations (i.e. the desire to transcend personal likes and dislikes, physical limitations on perception, and the onus on the composer's mental powers imposed by generative theories of musical production) .

Thus, the paradoxical nature of artistic silence – recognised by Sontag as the dilemma of not being able to keep silent and yet remain an artist – is reformulated, according to these liberationist aspirations, as "a prophecy, one which the artist's actions can be understood as attempting both to fulfil and to reverse".

Sontag considers that Cage achieved this liberation, that – unlike Rilke – he refrained from prioritising "rich as opposed to vacuous objects, events with a certain allure", that by denying the hierarchies of interest and meaning, he avoided sanctioning "any specific experience, except the state of being open to the multiplicity of experience – which ends in practice by a decided stress on things usually considered trivial or unimportant".

This judgment of the extent to which Cage succeeded in carrying out the proposed total liberation from hierarchies of interest is taken up by Kahn in his claim that Cage in fact fell short of the mark by (in practice) favouring "small" (Kahn) or "quiet" (Cage) sounds over "loud" (Kahn) or "big" (Cage) ones.

I have discussed silence, then, as one among a number of technical and aesthetic moves on the part of artists towards producing artworks with some degree of desubjectification. The production of empty artworks through a clearly framed contentless unity that re-asserted its own autonomy was different to both total serialism and the later minimalism, which were both attempts at systemised organisation of objectified material. And it was different from chance procedures and notated aleatoric procedures in that the 'blank' surface of the empty artwork asserted a total unity within the artwork without number, proportion, characteristic or repetition. The extent to which this actually represented a degree of desubjectification is however, a famously controversial issue, with later artists still finding the literally blank slates of empty art all too demonstrative. The very consistency of the huge and powerful gesture was easily construed as belying the will of the artist behind it. This is one of the consistent conundrums of silent art, and betrays an element of *schweigen* – of withholding something – in even the most benign of artistic calls to clear an empty space for just listening.

3.8 Negative and affirmative

In an article written after both 'One culture and the new sensibility' and 'The aesthetics of silence', Sontag draws the contrast between the pursuits of intellectual difficulty and of perceptual change. '"Thinking against oneself": reflections on Cioran' offers a bipolar model using Rumanian philosopher Emil Cioran and composer John Cage as representatives of two projects within 'silent art' (Sontag 1969b). Cioran's work is characterised in terms of a difficult style, where aphorism is the product of speculation run wild and where logical argumentation is obstructed by its own complexity. Cage, by contrast, is seen to offer some kind of unified dedication to the bewilderment of what is offered by the senses, and despite parallels with Cioran's work, Cage is regarded more as a kind of optimistic and life-confirming *idiot savant*.

We can see something of the proximity of philosophy and art in Sontag's understanding, as almost everything that she says of philosophy in the opening pages could be equally applicable to the artistic projects that she describes. Talking of the "method of broken argument" that "bears witness of the impasse of the speculative mind, which moves outwards only to be checked and broken off by the complexity of its own stance", she is actually referring to Cioran; but despite the fact that Sontag is keen to characterise Cage as the opposite of Cioran with his "unrelenting elitism" in his vision of the democratised spiritual life, she nevertheless judges him as carrying out a theoretical enterprise. In Sontag's eyes, even the fact that Cage risks accusations of spiritual insensitivity due to the radicality with which he jettisons inherited intellectual traditions does not seem to detract from his intellectual power.

> The only figure in the world of Anglo-American letters embarked on a theoretical enterprise comparable in intellectual power and scope to Cioran's is John Cage. Also a thinker in the post- and anti-philosophical tradition of broken, aphoristic discourse, Cage shares with Cioran a […] commitment to a radical transvaluation of values. […] In contrast to Cioran's unrelenting elitism, Cage envisages a totally democratic world of the spirit, a

world of "natural activity" in which "it is understood that everything is clean: there is no dirt." […] "there is no split between spirit and matter." (Sontag 1969a, p.93)

Sontag does not expand on precisely what this "transvaluation of values" is, but clearly regards it as being at the core of the perceptual magic that Cage himself prophesises as the direct result of emptying one's mind of its habitual intellectual actitivities.

"It is only irritating," [Cage] says,"to think one would like to be somewhere else. Here we are now." […] "Do you only take the position of doing nothing, and things will of themselves become transformed." (ibid., p. 94)

Perhaps, for a unified transvaluation, one must look to those thinkers like Cage who – whether from spiritual strength or from spiritual insensitivity is a secondary issue – are able to jettison far more of the inherited anguish and complexity of this civilization. (ibid., p. 94)

If the human mind can be everywhere at home, it must in the end give up its local "European" pride and something else – that will seem strangely unfeeling and intellectually simplistic – must be allowed in. "All that is necessary," says Cage with his own devastating irony, "is an empty space of time and letting it act in its magnetic way." (ibid., p. 95)

One might compare Cioran with Samuel Beckett and other midcentury writers whose increased use of silence is more naturally associated with a repressive streak, heralding a kind of negative creativity that has been called "the epitome of the art of strangulation" (Kane 1984, p. 104). Cage's silence is not like this: his fertile silence of heightened perceptual awareness within an active and fluent listening environment seems far from any baffled silence of confusion or uneasy impasse. As I have discussed, Sontag is keen to acknowledge an affirmative aspect to many midcentury strategies of apparently nihilistic recalcitrance towards artistic material.

One thread running through this thesis is a connection between the critical or subversive gesture of negation and the affirmative aspect of the creative act involved in such subversions. This playing-off of the negative and affirmative is traced from Cage's identification of his own project with the white (not black) monochromes of painter Rauschenberg in the early 1950s, through the writing of Sontag, and a shift in Lyotard's position from an affirmative aesthetics to an engagement with negative presentation. Another trope to be examined is the common identification of the negation position with modernism, against a perception of the affirmative as essentially postmodern.

Silence is easily defined as a negative phenomenon (characterised by lack of music, an absence of sound, a breakdown in coherence, etc.). This position is symbolically represented in the interest around Hölderlin's late work, the product of an apparently troubled (schizophrenic) mind relinquishing its grip on so-called reality while pursuing the ineffable impossible.

And yet there is also an affirmative tradition in more recent decades. I am interested in Sontag's view that art is essentially positive, producing reactions from audience, etc., and that all experience and perception are essentially positive. Silence she equates with notions of unintelligibility, but not of utter negativity. She states emphatically that silence cannot exist as the property of an artwork – not even in the most 'empty' of canvases or concert-moments:

> [T]here is no neutral surface, no neutral discourse, no neutral theme, no neutral form. … If a work exists at all, its silence is only one element in it. [… O]ne finds various moves in the direction of an ever receding horizon of silence – moves which, by definition, can never be fully consummated. (Sontag 1969a, pp. 9-10)

Silence as unachievable. Whilst partly grounded in Cage's anechoic chamber experience, these moves towards the horizon resemble the unachievability of hermeneutic knowledge, forever broadening its own horizon by introspection.

> A genuine emptiness, a pure silence is not feasible – either conceptually or in fact. (ibid., p. 10)

Being an ideological nihilist doesn't exclude the possibility of working with art in a positive way. The very production of an artistic manifestation is proof of an aesthetic achievement that is essentially positive (Stierle, 2003). By *doing* art (music, whatever), the artist or would-be artist performs an action – necessarily a positive action. By inference, then, making a *4'33"* is not just a declaration, it's an artistic manifestation, attesting to the serious and consistent intentions of the author toward the audience. Although negation is a huge dynamic in art, it apparently cannot suppress art's essential positivity, which in turn cannot be negated by or in an(y) artistic manifestation. That is to say that either a given negative artistic stance is merely an artist's personal declaration which does not make it into the arena of 'artworks' and therefore is inconsistent as an object of aesthetic inquiry; or else, by transcending the form of mere posturing and being articulated through the medium of art, the negative idea asserts itself as an artistic possibility, affirms its artistic legitimacy, and therefore fundamentally demonstrates its own affirmative, positive essence as art. As I have discussed before, then, the act of silence affirms the form that it challenges. As long as there is an *a priori* framework, the form remains essentially the same, no matter what notes are heard (or not).

3.9 Several silences

The Cagean concept of affirmation is something that was also taken up by Jean-François Lyotard in his early career. In this chapter, I discuss Lyotard's so-called affirmative aesthetics.

(I will return to Lyotard later in this thesis to discuss negative presentation as a subcategory of the sublime avantgarde.)

Lyotard's essay 'Several silences' was written in 1972 and is a text that belongs more in a performative practice of experimental theory than among what is customarily called theory in the strictly academic sense.[9] Lyotard works through his own responses to a range of issues, developing his own reaction as he goes along, rather than waiting until his version of events is complete and can be documented through a traditional line of logical argumentation. His style goes to the heart of what he has to say and the essay is a piece of radically performative writing in itself. 'Several silences' was collected the following year in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, which bore the appellation "essays d'esthétique affirmative, si l'on veut"[10]. This sleeve

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9 First published in *Musique en jeu* no. 9, novembre 1972, then collected in *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973.
10 This is the publisher's description.

description stuck as a subtitle in the German translation, such that the term 'affirmative aesthetics' has become a fixed trope within German reception of Lyotard.

In the early 1970s, Lyotard's moved away from considering painting, music, theatre and writing from the perspective of representation. He developed a vocabulary of 'libidinal desire' under which he saw the arts as ruled by varying sensual mechanisms designed to produce an intensity of effect. 'Several silences' contributes to the establishment of an affirmative aesthetics, a championing of desire, considered from the phenomenological point of view (through perception).[11] But where Sontag was at pains to recruit the perceptual emphasis into a non-hedonistic mode, Lyotard's locates aesthetic experience in an emphatically sensual, erotic body, under the influence of Freudian psychoanalytic "death-drives" and suchlike.

'Several silences' is also a comparison of the role of silence in two composers' work: namely, that of Schoenberg and Cage. Schoenberg's silence is viewed – through the influence of Talmudic commentator Levinas – from the Jewish cultural perspective, and Cage's from the sensual (here, not only perceptual, but also 'libidinal' in the tradition of Freudian psychoanalytic theory). Further, the essay is a tentative reappraisal of Adorno's writings on dodecaphony and the 'desensitisation of material' through composition[12], and a step towards appreciating non-representation in 20th-century arts.

I read Lyotard as drawing on Schoenberg and Cage as part of his own posthumous discussion with Adorno, and I interpret the 'several silences' as clustering around a basic contrast between an observation of the rules and rituals of the Talmudic call for silence (a kind of *schweigen*) represented in Schoenberg's music, and the impulsive, irrepressible inner life of Cagean silence.

I will primarily consider what Lyotard has to say about Cage, as that is my concern here. But I do not regard Lyotard as 'siding with' Cage, whilst representing Schoenberg and Adorno simply as an opposite pole. Lyotard was deeply involved in the Jewish literary and theoretical tradition. In fact, his essay discusses Schoenberg in more detail than Cage.

I consider it relevant to quote at some length from this essay, as Lyotard's idiosyncratic style here runs the risk of being totally misrepresented when context and content are separated.

The style of 'Several silences' is emblematic of French intellectual writing at this time, which Terry Eagleton scathingly characterised as follows:

> Reading demands 'erotics' more than 'hermeneutics' [… the] reader luxuriates in a tantalising glide of signs, meanings are glimpsed as they surface and are submerged again […in an] exuberant dance of language, delighting in the textures of words themselves. […] Reading is less like a laboratory than a boudoir" (Eagleton 1996, p. 72)[13]

Eagleton's criticism of the decadence of this style of writing (and its uselessness for his socialist aims) is based on a perception that the jouissance of exploding the self's cultural identity is self-indulgent, like all avantgarde hedonism: anarchic and asocial.

The opening phrase of Lyotard's essay reads:

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11 One of Lyotard's first published texts was *La Phénoménologie* (1954).

12 See the comparison of Cage and Schoenberg's approach to musical materials, discussed in the previous chapter.

13 Eagleton was commenting on Roland Barthes' seminal reception-theory work *The pleasure of the text* (1973).

Desire thought in terms of a lack, of negativity[14] (Lyotard 1984, p. 91).

Despite the negative frame, desire is to be thought of as a fertile force, moreover the force of the best in the arts, as far as Lyotard is concerned. He wishes to consider its value as inverted.

> Desire *of* something, desire period. Desire that models, in the void, the double (the phantasm, the copy, the *replica*, the hologram) *of* what it lacks, desire as work, aimless metamorphosis, play without memory. The two acceptations[15] are in Freud: *Wunsch*, the primary processes. The affirmative properties identified in the latter shelter them from all "thought", from a partitioning that would section their energetics into articuli and set intervals. (ibid., p. 92)

This gives an idea of not only the style of the essay, but also introduces the idea that aesthetic desire is modelled in a void that is a buffer against analytical thought's tendency to break things down into parts. Here we also meet an affirmative aspect of negativity, where negativity is merely the acknowledgement that all desire entails a lack of something: the thing that is desired.

Still within the first paragraph, we see that music and silence are inscribed deeply within Lyotard's presentation of his reading of Freud:

> [E]nergy does not have an ear for unity, for the concert of the organism (of the "psychic apparatus"); it is deaf to the organism's composition, i.e. to the lack, the void in which the organs, the articuli (the notes) would be carved out and arranged to make a cosmos and a *musike*. Eros composes music. The death drive is never heard, it is silent, says Freud. But this because it is libidinal economy's deafness to the rules of composition, to the hierarchy of the organism. (ibid., p. 91)

As also of his reading of Nietzsche:

> To see badly, says Nietzsche, is to see too little; to hear badly, is to hear too much. Too many harmonics. (ibid., p. 92)

But our interest is in Cage, whose position within the Lyotardian sense of an affirmative void is underlined next:

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14 "Le désir pensé sous la catégorie du manqué, du négatif…", Lyotard 1994, p. 92. Generally, I follow Joseph Maier's translation in the edition *Driftworks* collected by Roger McKeon (Lyotard, 1984). All italics are Maier's, following Lyotard's exactly. I have in some places amended Maier's translation with my own suggestions for some individual words, and I have also aligned spelling with British English. As the use of italics here is already spoken for, I have chosen not to mark my own amendments nor to clutter the text by adding my version in brackets; instead I would refer the interested reader to make her own comparisons using the sources used here. I have also cited the original French (in footnotes) for words or phrases that are particularly ambiguous or on which it is important to gain clarity. As far as I am aware, there has been no comprehensive translation of the collection *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*; *Driftworks* is a selection of essays from the early 1970s, many of them not previously collected in French.

15 "acceptions" (Lyotard 1980, p. 270)

> The death drive is not just another drive; it is randomness. … The death drive is marked by surges of tension, what Klossowski calls intensities, Cage events. Dissonances, stridences, positively exaggerated, ugly, silences. (ibid., pp. 92-93)

Lyotard soon moves closer to a description of musical composition as an activity that attempts to desensitise material through 'binding' sound within a systematised context.

> A sound is a noise that is bound, related to an articulation of the sound continuum (the scale), to a production set-up (instrument-builder), to a syntax (counterpoint), to a rhetoric (the sonata form). In the final instance, a sound, insofar as it is bound, has value not for its sonority but for the network of its actual and possible relations, just like the phoneme, a distinctive arbitrary unit. (ibid., p. 93)

It almost seems as though Lyotard is saying that all composition is basically an attempt to desensitise material – although it is not clear whether he's saying this through Adorno or not. Taken on a close reading, the sense of organising sounds as units within network relations seems more reminiscent of Schoenberg's techniques than Cage's, but without further specification it is hard to pin down whether Lyotard is proposing this model as applicable to all music, or to some specific music. (This ambiguity is a characteristic of the text and the way that it weaves its influences and references with jumps and hops: when Adorno, Schoenberg and Cage are brought into the Lyotardian text-spin, one cannot be sure where they end and Lyotard takes over.)

Whatever the compositional moves, it is evident from the following that the process of desensitisation manifests itself as much through the listening act (understood phenomenologically) as through acts of composition. I have previously considered the phenomenological filter as a form-giving element. Here, Lyotard associates this process with that of de-sensitisation:

> A phenomenological schema of the body is at work implicitly in Adorno, *but also in Cage*: uncompleted unity of sense[16], always in the process of constituting itself along with and at the same time as the world. […]: perceptual ante-predicating cogito. Thus, sense, cogito, the conscious.[17] Phenomenology situates the body as a region where *the* sounds transform themselves into music, where the unbound (un-conscious) is bound, where noise becomes sonority. […] The phenomenological body is a body that composes, a body possessed with Eros. But to compose is always to filter out and to bind, to exclude entire regions of the sound world as noise and to produce "music" (that which is "audible") with the input. The noises rejected by the body, be it a body that composes, are not heard[18]. If they are, it is as dissonances, as flows of sound entering a device not prepared to receive them and transform them into music. The phenomenological body is a filter and requires, then, that whole sound regions be desensitised. (ibid., pp. 92-3)

And later:

> The desensitisation of the material cannot be attributed to industrial society and its techniques of mechanical reproduction (which, as we know, can just as well produce the op-

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16 "unite de sens non faite" (ibid., p. 270)
17 "Donc sens, cogito, conscience." (ibid., p. 271)
18 "Les bruits rejetés par le corps, meme composant, ne sont pas entendus." (ibid., p. 271)

posite, i.e., **hypersensitization**; **just listen to the music of** Kagel, **Cage**, Xenakis, Zappa, Hendrix). Neither **can the Benjaminian concept of the destruction of the aura, which also belongs to the negative thinking of the lost chef d'oeuvre, of modern technology as alienation,** be of any use to us here. The desensitization of Schoenberg or Lacan arises from the image of therapeutics, which haunts Schoenberg's work as much as it does Freud's: therapeutics through **a reinforcemenet of discourse, discontinuity, rationality, law, silence-law, negativity, not at all in the spirit of positivism but in that of tragic negativism,** fate, the unconscious, dispossession, Freudian and post-Freudian works teach us what this tragic negativism consists in; the mapping back of the cure apparatus, controlled transference, not the primary process: reconstituting a critical theatre in the doctor's office (after dismissal of the supposedly pre-critical theatre of the parental chambers and the visual phantasy); blocking out the vertiginous discovery of libidinal displaceability of primary work, nomadism (ibid., p. 105: my choice of bold type).

At some level, then, Lyotard's essay is an answer to Adorno's musical aesthetics. Where Adorno saw a musical landscape divided chiefly by paradigmatic differences between Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Lyotard sees Schoenberg and Cage as the paradigmatic alternatives. Lyotard considers Adorno's observations that: (i) all unified artworks are morphed from verbal language, with music descending from speech through the *recitativo* style; and (ii) dodecaphonic music tries to eliminate unification (and thus speech) and desensitise[19] material through composition. Lyotard's main observations on Schoenberg concern two acts of silencing: the dodecaphonic system as 'desensibilisation' of material; and the use of *Sprechgesang* in *Moses und Aron.* Adorno is brought in repeatedly to formulate the reception of Schoenberg. Schoenberg for Lyotard is above all, Schoenberg as Jew, bound by the Hebrew (later, Kantian) censorship of voicing the name of Jehovah.[20]

Lyotard pits Cage and Schoenberg against one another, then, giving Schoenberg a much more detailed critique than Cage. I have said that basically Lyotard interprets Schoenberg from the Talmudic perspective, and Cage from a phenomenological perspective, as "to interpret Cage with Levinas, or even Heidegger, is to persevere within nihilism" (ibid., p. 108). This may seem strange, in as far as Levinas (1905-95) was a philosopher influenced by two traditions: Talmudic studies, and phenomenology. This brings us to the heart of what Lyotard has to say about Cagean silence[21], and so I quote at some length:

When Cage says: there is no silence, he says: no Other holds dominion over sound, there is no God, no Signifier as principle of unification or composition. There is no filtering, no set blank spaces, no exclusions; neither is there a work anymore, no more limits #1 (of the building, the concert-hall) to determine musicality as a region. We

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19 "… la musique dodécaphonique se constitue en protestation. Mais ce n'est pas assez. La composition est un travail de désensibilisation du materiau." Maier gives 'desensitization', but sticking close to the French with 'desensibilise' keeps a proximity to Sontag's "new sensibility".

20 In his discussion of the Straub & Huillet film of Schoenberg's opera Moses und Aron, Barton Byg relates the Jewish topics to the thematisation of representation of the unrepresentable. See Byg 1995, pp. 141-54, especially pp. 144-45)

21 There is, incidently, also a brief description of a Cage concert performance that differs interestingly from many descriptions of Cage's music in that it documents the disruptive sounds of an audience, as opposed to the beauty of the idea: "When Tudor and Cage gave *Mureau+Rainforest* in Basel, a group of protesters near Andrée and myself started to shout, to imitate mooings, whinnyings: no uproar, their doings fit right into the performance. They should have broadcast a Bach Suite at ear-splitting volume, and even then …" (ibid., p. 95)

make music all the time, *no sooner do we finish one than we begin making another just as people keep on washing dishes, brushing their teeth, going to bed and so on:* noise, noise, noise. *The wisest thing to do is to open one's ears immediately, and hear a sound in its suddenness before one's thinking has had a chance to turn into something logical, abstract, or symbolical.* (A year from Monday, 'Juilliard Lecture'). (ibid., p. 108)

Here, we meet the position argued for by Sanio, that the will of the composer has been removed, but so has the frame of the work-concept ("no filtering … neither is there a work anymore"). Lyotard's interest in dissolving the work's objecthood is to avoid its becoming a commodity:

> the question is: isn't the silence heard in noise *immediately, suddenly, still dominated* by the unheard silence of the Komposer-organizer, capital? Isn't kapital the stage director of noises and silences themselves, as staged? Destroy(ing) the work, but also destroy(ing) the work of works *and of non-works …* (ibid., p. 109)

Going back to Sanio again, I would hardly say that her position is motivated by a similar fear of art's commodity-value. But Sanio's advocacy of Cage's proclamations as actual artistic effects rings in our ears as we read Lyotard's desperation to rid musical artworks of their composers.

3.10 The affirmative postmodern

As far as I am aware, there have only been two instances of reception of Lyotard's essay 'Several Silences' within musicology, both of them coming from within German musicology (Danuser 1993, Bacht 2003). This may be partly due to the initiative of the German publisher Merve in translating Lyotard's Cage-related essays in the collections *Intensität*en (1978), *Essays zu einer affirmativen Ästhetik* (1982), and *Philosophie und Malerei im Zeitalter ihres Experimentierens* (1986). To this Danuser adds his response to the essay 'L'Obédience', Lyotard's contribution to a conference initiated partly by Levinas in 1986, where Lyotard shifts the focus of his musical reflections from Cage to Varèse.[22]

Hermann Danuser is positioned in the first wave of German musicological engagement with the term 'postmodern', and wants to challenge a perceived opposition between modern and postmodern that he correctly observes is *not* present in Lyotard (rather, for Lyotard, the postmodern is part of the modern). In doing so, Danuser acknowledges that there is a sense of opposition between different understandings of the postmodern – namely, a traditionalist position as opposed to an avantgarde position. Danuser's identification of Cage with an avantgarde postmodern is a position that we have already met in the earlier commentary on Sabine Sanio's work.

I have said a little about the style of Lyotard's writing in 'Several silences', its impulsiveness providing a demonstration of (rather than argument for) the libidinal desires which he is seeking to motivate. This is a point brought out with great accuracy by Danuser, in extended observations on the fate of what he calls 'commentary' in postmodern art. As Lyotard

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22 'L'Obédience' is collected in *L'Inhumain: Causeries sur le temps.* Galilée: Paris, 1988. In German, 'Der Gehorsam', in Engelmann, Peter (ed.): *Das Inhumane. Plaudereien über die Zeit.* Edition Passagen: Wien, 1989. In English: 'Obedience', in *The Inhuman: Reflections in time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby. Polity Press: Cambridge, 1991, pp. 165-81. This collection includes also 'The Sublime and the Avant Garde'.

says: "aesthetics becomes para-aesthetics, commentary becomes paralogy, just as the work itself is para-poetics."[23] Whereas in musicology, philosophical terms are tools for understanding artworks, here the artworks are the tool for developing Lyotard's philosophy. Lyotard and Cage are joined (through Daniel Charles, a friend of Lyotard's) by a common experimental project, giving Lyotard the opportunity to 'side' with Cage's affirmative aesthetics, in contrast to Adorno's endorsement of Schoenberg in support of his own critical project.

> Cage appears as the motor of a process in the course of which music's textuality – its primary basis in 'figural' notation – is abolished, because it "repressed sound within the note" and obstructed the unbridled aesthetic experience of sound. Thus, in Lyotard's view, the abolition of the opposition between "silence and sound" gains a special relevance through Cage, as this abolition (Lyotard even talks of "destruction") showed that "even silence is a sounding". (Danuser 1993, p. 146, my translation)

The idea of affirmation creates, for Danuser, a necessary connection between Lyotard and Cage. Their work is postmodern because it rejects the canon of taboos that is fundamental to the modern, and which had effected the development of art towards an aesthetic zero. The modern culminates in Schoenberg's insistence on maximal logic, control of material, and unity of musical space. Cage's uncontrolled plurality and surrender to the unpredictable heralds the postmodern, where there is no unity, and where the composerly category of notation, exercising Herrschaft über das Werk, is erased. I need not rehearse here again the reservations that have been raised about the extent to which Cage did or did not continue to exercise Herrschaft über sein Werk.

In his essay, 'Lyotard's adaptation of John Cage's aesthetics', Nickolaus Bacht spots the circularity in Danuser's recruiting of Lyotard to evidence Cage's postmodernism (Bacht 2003). Bacht asserts there is a stylistic influence from Cage's writings of the 1960s on Lyotard's work of the early 1970s, and he attributes the entire appearance of an affirmative aesthetics in Lyotard's work to this Cagean influence[24]. What it is that Cage is seen to affirm is contingency (against the negative critical philosophy of the Frankfurt School). Affirmation of the unpredictable dismantles the European work-concept and its attendant prerequisites of authorial genius, intention and meaning(fulness). Both John Cage's *events* and Barnett Newman's *now* (as I shall discuss in Chapter 7) produce a kind of presence. This production of presence has the power to destroy the linearity of European understanding of artworks as autonomous objects bearing the trace of their makers' intentions in the form of interpretable meaning.

Bacht's attribution of Lyotardian affirmation solely to a Cagean influence may suffer somewhat from a stylistic supposition. He undervalues the strongly experimental drive in

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23 Quoted by Danuser, p. 150

24 Bacht is aiming for a historical relativisation of Lyotard, using an anecdote concerning Lyotard and Cage from 1976 coupled with the appearance of Lyotard's *The postmodern condition* in 1976 to implicate a misunderstood adaptation of Cagean aesthetics at the heart of Lyotard's concepts of the avantgarde, modernism and the romantic. Seen in the light of Cage's criticisms of Beethoven and of the classical-romantic symphonic repertoire, this remark brings Cage's motivations into line with the grandscale rejection of universal truths (and historical narratives) proposed within French left-leaning post-structuralist aesthetics. Given the proximity of this continental trend to e.g. deconstruction – critique defined internally and externally in negativising terms – this provides already the first strike against the affirmative aspect of Cagean aesthetics.

French and US literature in the 1960s to rework structure along non-narrative lines often derived from quasi-mathematical models[25] (including, yes, indeterminacy). The link between experimental French and American literatures in general during this period is not an area that this thesis can address, but it would be interesting to see how the development in Cage's writing fits in terms of his own influences from these spheres. In short, Bacht gets caught up in an attempt to critique the authenticity of Lyotard's text, without making allowances for the stylistic blurring of pastiche, homage, etc. in that school of thought.

I would venture to attribute the fact that Cage disappeared from Lyotard's writing later on to Lyotard's overriding thirst for dissonance and differend that Cage's flat self-understanding could not satiate. Bacht too sees it this way, and sums up Lyotard's ultimate disillusionment with Cage as follows:

> Despite his admiration for Cage, he did not consider his aesthetics radical enough. Cage's thought, Lyotard argues, continues representation. Even his most extreme experiments destroy only the notion of the work, whereas the aesthetics of intensities[26] must "destroy also the work of the work *and of the non-works*".… Lyotard's declaration of death to the modernist avantgarde, and his proclamation of the age of postmodernity and a postmodernist avantgarde only a few years after the publication of the aesthetics of intensities, fit well into such an explanatory pattern. (Bacht 2003, p. 240)

As I have implied above and will underline in my later engagement with Lyotard in this thesis, Lyotard's "declaration of death to the modernist avantgarde" seems confused to us at the start of the new millennium. Many of the artists that Lyotard trumpeted most highly – Cage and Newman – would from a present-day perspective just as easily fall under the category 'modernist avantgarde'. By overlooking entirely the art of the second half of the 20th century, by remaining silent on all the artistic forms and media that sprang up with the artistic take-up of photography, video, film, sound-recording and –production, etc., Lyotard escaped his duties as critic of the ongoing dynamism between modernism, postmodernism, the avantgarde and the aesthetics of the sublime. He may have been, for a short moment, a philosopher of the postmodern, but he was never a critic of postmodern aesthetics.

Bacht's main accusation, then, is that Lyotard allowed the Cagean influence to infiltrate his work, to the extent that the style of writing is Cagean. I have already noted, in the previous chapter, some of the range of the difficulties caused by the reception of the Cagean writings. Although Bacht does not unpack the consequences of his complaint in this way, a larger point lies buried here.

As Danuser noted, reflexivity and complexity are characteristic signs of the artistic modern, one top example of this being the work of James Joyce. We know that Cage identified very strongly with Joyce; his *Roaratorio* (1982) is a monument to the Irish writer's final epic novel *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), and Cage made several mesostics (wordgames) based on the name James Joyce. Thus, it is fair to say that Cage 'commentated' Joyce in an experimental fashion that would fall within Danuser's description of the postmodern commentary.

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25 Here, I am thinking of the influence of Jacques Roubaud, who was actually first a mathematician before becoming a poet.

26 For purposes of reference here, Lyotard's aesthetics of intensities can be considered interchangeable with his affirmative aesthetics.

The issue of homage, quotes and commentaries is interesting, because under any popular definition, quotation is one of the main surviving characteristics of the postmodern, and quotation has a privileged position in relation to the musical postmodern. Lyotard, however, vehemently denied the legitimacy of quotes and collage in the antinomy between the modern and postmodern. Cage also distanced himself from the use of quotation around the midcentury, because he viewed all quotations as being qualitatively historical and therefore too bound up with the pitfalls of subjectivity, expression, intention, pre-existing semantics and meanings.

3.11 Klein and Lucier

It is appropriate at this point to round off our discussion of midcentury musical silences by noting a few other instances of empty musical artworks.

One such midcentury empty musical work was Yves Klein's *Monotone symphony* (1960). Klein (1928-62) was a painter and conceptual artist, and his piece has parallels with Alphonse Allais' *Marche Funèbre* (1883), in as far as it takes the form of a musical comment within a satirical visual-arts environment. Klein's symphony is related to another empty work that Klein made a couple of years previously: *Le Vide Performance (The Void)* (1958). The Void was a situational happening in a Paris gallery space, where Klein installed himself with the intention of painting blue the window-pane through which the space was viewed, with the space itself remaining white. The frustrations of some gallery visitors at being charged admission fees for such an apparently empty exhibition caused, firstly, the arrival of various divisions of policemen (dressed, naturally, in blue), and secondly, the growth of a restless crowd wrestling with discomfort and excitement about the happening. Originally composed in 1949, the *Monotone symphony* consisted of only one note, lasting 20 minutes. In 1960, the artist assembled a 10-piece ensemble in Paris to perform the piece under *musique concrète* pioneer Pierre Henri (1927-), as an accompaniment to a happening involving three naked female models. The models covered themselves in paint and pressed their painted bodies against paper mounted on a wall, for the duration of the 20 minutes. Thereafter, there was a 20-minute silence, which the audience respected with appropriate decorum. Looking back in 1961 on the 15-year period since the conception of the original *Monotone Symphony* – a period in which Klein had been preoccupied with his trademark blue monochromes, had "created pictorial immaterial states", "manipulated the forces of the void", and "presented a theatre of the void, among countless other adventures…", the artist stated:

> Just as I created a "monotone – silence – symphony" in 1947[27], composed in two parts, – one broad continuous sound followed by an equally broad and extended silence, endowed with a limitless dimension – in the same way, I attempt to set before you a written painting of the short history of my art, followed naturally by a pure and effective silence. My account will close with the creation of a compelling a posteriori silence whose existence in our communal space, after all – the space of a single being – is immune to the destructive qualities of physical noise. Much depends upon the success of my written painting in its initial technical and audible phase. Only then will the extraordinary a posteriori silence, in the midst of noise as well as in the cell of

27 There is a considerable amount of variation in accounts of this work, including the date of composition. Most of the information presented here is found on the website http://members.aol.com/mindwebart3/manifesto.htm (accessed 2nd March 2006), where there is also a photograph from the first performance of the symphony.

physical silence, operate in a new and unique zone of pictorial immaterial sensibility. […] Having rejected nothingness, I discovered the void. The meaning of the immaterial pictorial zones, extracted from the depth of the void which by that time was of a very material order. Finding it unacceptable to sell these immaterial zones for money, I insisted in exchange for the highest quality of the immaterial, the highest quality of material payment – a bar of pure gold. Incredible as it may seem, I have actually sold a number of these pictorial immaterial states."

An American composer who was much in contact with Cage, and whose most characteristic work chimes with Cagean pan-aurality, is Alvin Lucier (1931-). Lucier's form of listening in to what is only latently audible typically involves picking up ethereal vibrations through 'mega-ears' (systems of transformers and amplifiers), such as in his early landmark piece *Music for Solo Performer* (1965)[28]. The piece is designed for enormously amplified brain waves and percussion. An 8-12 Hz brain wave is channelled through a transducer (using EEG scalp electrodes). The signal is made audible by being routed through amplifier and mixer to "any number of amplifiers and loudspeakers directly coupled to percussion instruments" […] "and to switches, sensitive to alpha, which activate one or more tape recorders upon which are stored pre-recorded, sped-up alpha." As alpha waves are induced and begin to sound through loudspeakers, the sound waves cause the percussion instruments to vibrate sympathetically. This is a technique that has since had great resonance in American sound-art improvisation. There is scope in the execution of this piece for an assistant to mix signals channelled through different loudspeakers, and Lucier even invites the performer(s) to "use alpha to activate radios, television sets, lights, alarms, and other audio-visual devices." Thus, the solo performer is in fact only one of two that are required to make the piece happen. The solo performer is the 'subject' onto which the electrodes are attached, but in musical terms the outcome is influenced just as highly by a sound-assistant doing live mixing between various channels. This piece represents a similar de-instrumentalisation of the solo performer as already observed in *4'33"*. (Interestingly, in a 1975 version of the piece, Lucier positioned the performer in an adjacent room to the mixer, amplifiers, and percussion instruments.)

28 The verbal score – from which the following quotes come – is reproduced in Gisela Gronemeyer and Reinhard Oehlschlägel (1995): *Alvin Lucier: reflections. Interviews, scores, writings*. MusikTexte: Köln.

PART III – Late 20th- century scored silences

PART III – Late 20th- century scored silences

4.0 Introduction to Part III

The following two chapters are dedicated to a discussion of significant silences in selected scored music from the late 20th century, most specifically two pieces of chamber music from the 1980s: Luigi Nono's string quartet *Fragmente – Stille: an Diotima* (1980) and Salvatore Sciarrino's piece for mixed chamber ensemble *Lo spazio inverso* (1985).

Analogies and principal differences in the production of these works are revealed through a comparative approach that focuses on two models. In Chapter 4, Nono's *Fragmente – Stille* is discussed in relation to a model that is 'romantic' and well suited to hermeneutic interpretation. In Chapter 4, Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso* is discussed in relation to a model that is 'classical' and better suited to a phenomenologically-based analysis. This comparative approach is chosen in order to provide insights into the aesthetic premises of the different silences at work in the two pieces. The intention is not to establish the two works in terms of historical legitimation, nor to suggest that they are locked into the music-historical past. What is described here is a kind of dialectic between recognisable musical vocabularies and a new status of silence and pauses in scored music of the 1980s.

The specifically musical phenomena of silence in this discussion are: grand pauses (*Generalpausen*, total silences); *dal/al niente crescendi* and *diminuendi*; extreme quietness; special timbres which produce immaterial sounds, and; a stylistic preference for composing almost entirely with marginal sonorities – all of which are general stylistic traits of late-20th century notated art-music.

Compared with both Cagean silence and digital silences (discussed in Parts II and IV, respectively), the ways in which silences manifest themselves here are apparently more embedded in conventional musical syntax, and therefore the extent to which silences are constitutive of these works or not is less clear-cut. It has to do with absent sound and leads us into conceptual discussions of silence as a kind of non-presentation of acoustic sound. Nevertheless, there is definitely a challenge to the audibility threshold in the works discussed here. I persist in using the general and arguably vague term 'silence' for phenomena as different as rests, pauses, *fermata*, extreme quietness, conceptual absence, non-presentation, *schweigen*, and so on, in order to draw attention to the way that silence straddles concerns of notation, performance and perception, and also because I seek both a comparison and integration of understandings of music as *written* with understandings of music as *played* and *heard*.

Musical notation provides special modes for presenting absent sound. In *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (2. Ausgabe, 1998), Wilhelm Seidel writes:

> In recent decades music has discovered silence as an object of composition and musical action. In this context, the word 'silence' has advanced to become a 'Modewort', and has entered the terminology of contemporary music. Here, it signifies more than negative soundfulness. It stands for a new musical character of presence, above all for a new musical temporal Befindlichkeit. The musical actuality of silence also meets with an interest within reception aesthetics for voids, and in moments that through their emptiness or extreme poverty of events, challenge the listener to an exceptional degree. (Seidel 1998, my translation)

Already here we meet the idea that *presence* is an aspect of the new musical infatuation with silence. In the following two chapters I hope to move in on the qualitative play between absence and presence in scored silences.

The popularity of the term 'silence' among composers of scored music in the late 20th century is also evidenced by a whole issue of the German music journal 'Positionen: Beiträge zur neuen Musik' (no. 10, 1992) being dedicated to the dialectical pair "Stille und Lärm", with contributions by and on composers such as Arvo Pärt, Walter Zimmermann, Eric de Visscher, Gerhard Stäbler and Annette Schlünz.

Within scored instrumental music of the late 20th century, a number of fairly central composers have pursued grand pauses, extreme quietness and sound-'filtering' timbres. In Nono's generation there is György Kurtág (1926-), Morton Feldman (1926-87), Toru Takemitsu (1930-96), Arvo Pärt (1935-) and Helmut Lachenmann (1935-). Ulrich Mosch has described Pärt's integral use of silence in the articulation of phrasing, as well as the link between Pärt's understanding of musical silence and the divine (Mosch 1992). In Sciarrino's generation there is Brian Ferneyhough (1943-). Helmut Oehring (1961-) is one of a younger generation who has integrated a silent element into his work since the 1990s (some of it devised together with composer Iris ter Schiphorst) through the use of deaf-mute soloists and sign-language choreography, including works such as *Furcht und Gebierde* (2002), *rumgammeln + warten* (2001, with Iris ter Schiphorst), and *Mischwesen* (1998, with Iris ter Schiphorst).

Rebecca Saunders, Georg Haas, and Annette Schlünz are all composers working within the German music-scene who have variously been associated with some kind of working aesthetics of silence.Eric de Visscher (artistic director of IRCAM) is a composer who has researched and published on the subject of phenomenological approaches to musical silence, primarily Cagean.

Bernhard Lang (1957-) incorporates the recording of notated silences (and the resultant perceptual gap between the empty bar and small, contingent sounds picked up by a microphone) into works such as *DW6a* (2002), for electric violin or viola, with loop generator, from the *Differenz/Wiederholung* series. Extending an aesthetics of productive imperfection, descended from Steve Reich's tape-loops of imprecisions in *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), Lang's use of loop-generator software becomes a way of capturing 'silence' – notated silence that nevertheless in performance contains instrumental 'hiccups'.

There is also a small trend among composers from the scored-music tradition, such as Peter Ablinger (1959-), to cross over into sound/installation art in order to realise works that are constituted by silent moves. Between 1995 and 2001, Peter Ablinger created a series of pieces entitled *Weiss/Weisslich*, "designed for listening". In a kind of inversion of the field recording, or a live version of it, chairs were installed in fields with romantic atmospheres (sunset, snow, etc.) or indoors in auditoria. Peter Ablinger describes the production and reception of the sounds thus:

> Der Verzicht auf "active" Klänge (die Mutation vom Klangstück zum Hörstück) wird ermöglichen, dass das Stück umsomehr durchdrungen wird von den Klängen die um es herum produziert werden von Vögeln, Musikern und Publikum.[1]

In Ablinger's *Listening piece in four parts* (2001), 20 chairs were set up for 90 minutes at a time in four different locations – a beach, a baseball field, a parking lot, and a wind farm, respectively. A Cagean influence is clearly felt in Ablinger's work, here moved to the installation genre instead of the concert hall alone.

1 http://ablinger.mur.at/docu01.html (accessed 4/11/02)

In the following two chapters, my criteria for choosing *Fragmente – Stille* and *Lo spazio inverso* are that the two works produce basically contrasting experiences to the listener. I am interested in exploring the apparent experience that with Nono's *Fragmente – Stille* the listener is faced with pauses that seem to open up space beyond the sounds actually heard, a space which is pervaded by a problematising *absence* (namely, of something present precisely in respect of its not being heard). In Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso*, the listener's attention is constantly directed to the surface of what *is* heard, and in every intervening silence re-directed toward the following sounds, in a binary on-off firing of aural anticipation and gratification rooted in a heightened experience of *presence.*

My angle is that the strongest manifestation of silence in *Fragmente – Stille* is not so much the actual modesty of sound perceived (in decibels or verbal Italian dynamic-markings), but a loud and pregnant composerly gesture of *schweigen* (Nono keeping his silence). And that the kind of silence most strongly experienced in Sciarrino's chamber music is that which is rooted inseparably in Hören, hearing. This basic observation prompts me to offer two contrasting ways of reading the two composers' work, via, respectively, hermeneutics and performativity.

CHAPTER 4

Schweigen

4.1 Introduction

I now turn to a consideration of notated and other silences in the string quartet *Fragmente – Stille: An Diotima* (1980) by Luigi Nono (1924-1990). My main point is that, in addition to the long silences that the listener can perceive in hearing the work, and the stasis induced by extensively sustained musical sounds that are close to silence (marked, for instance, with *pppp* and with timbral instructions that result in the further disintegration of sound), the actual constitution of this work by silence lies in a non-instrumental layer: namely, the way in which the scores gestures towards something not presented. This gesturing occurs at several levels, and can be characterised as a kind of wilful silence that I will call *schweigen*, using the German transitive verb (French, *se taire*; Danish, *tie*, etc.).

I have been at some pains to point out, in my discussion of *4'33"* and Cagean rhetoric, that it is important to be clear about when one is talking about a work (with all the requirements of definition that that entails) as opposed to when one is talking about a composer's designs on that work. In order not to regress in this discussion (to an intentional fallacy), I will need to make clear that the composerly act of Schweigen that I locate in *Fragmente – Stille* is, indeed, a part of the work – a constitutive part of it – and not merely a portrait of Luigi Nono's ideas.

In the case of *4'33"*, the constitution of the work as such, and my perspective on what is inside or outside the work, was clarified in part by reference to the idea of framing. Both social and phenomenological filters (the decorum established between performer and audience, and the adoption of an aesthetic attitude to a structuring principle and to sounding, sensuous events) were seen to contribute to this process. In the case of *Fragmente – Stille*, the frame of the work itself in concert is no more in need of a work-concept discussion than any other string quartet. There is a through-composed score with a clear beginning and fairly clear end; music happens throughout out. But the most constitutive degree of silence – the domineering sense of Schweigen – is not offered to the audience to be framed at all, neither in terms of a social contract nor as structuring principle or perceptual event. It is an element that does not manifest itself at all, except in the score. This observation leads to a discussion of notational surplus – an issue that appears frequently in debate on composed music today, but which, as we shall see, has precedents going right back to the origins of musical notation.

Also by way of introduction, it is worth noting that *Fragmente – Stille* was commissioned by the City of Bonn's 30th Beethoven festival, together with commissions from Iannis Xenakis and Charles Wuorinen. The Beethovenfest in Bonn dates back to 1845, when Franz Liszt unveiled a memorial to his predecessor on the day that Beethoven (1770-1827) would have celebrated his 75th birthday. *Fragmente – Stille* belongs among Nono's late works and is the only score he wrote for string quartet. In all respects, the engagement with an utterly bourgeois musical form, within the framework of such a festival, represents an unusual move for a composer who had spent most of his working life trying to escape the bourgeois background of inherited chamber-music forms, by turning to electronics, music-drama, and other 'less pure' genres. On the one hand, then, *Fragmente – Stille* represents a new proximity between

Nono and the bourgeois concert tradition. On the other hand, the score invokes figures from a romantic past (the lyric poet Friedrich Hölderlin and, not least, Beethoven himself) that in the 20th century had become imbued with connotations of revolution and experiment. As I progress with this discussion of *Fragmente – Stille*, it will be worth keeping in mind this deep ambivalence between regressive and progressive tendencies, in the quartet's engagement with the historical past.

The reader is referred to Figure (i) in the supplementary appendix, which shows the first page of the musical score of *Fragmente – Stille*.

4.2 Formal notation

The quartet has a contribution to make to the history of silences in western musical notation; some new ground is broken on the path of increasing detail and expanded scope regarding the writing of rests. This small technical innovation appears in relation to the relative duration of *fermata* and *caesura*.

The reader is referred to Figure (ii) in the supplementary appendix, which shows the preface to the score of *Fragmente – Stille*.

The preface to the score specifies signs for 6 different degrees of *fermata*. (Why the symbols are listed twice, first in descending order of relative duration, then in ascending order, is not clear).

I would like to say a little about the *fermata* and the *caesura* as formal notational symbols. As notational sign, the *fermata* (or *corona*) dates from the early 14th century, at which point rests had been incorporated into mensural notation with fixed values, as I have already observed. The mensural quantification of silent durations created a complementary need for a corresponding suspension of strict rhythmic measure at certain points: for example, when specific notes were to be held longer than indicated. This would typically be the final note in a section or piece, whose value could be lengthened sometimes quite considerably (e.g. until the other parts reached the final chord). Sometimes, a note might be irregularly lengthened in order to emphasise a particular moment in the words sung. Later, in classical Da Capo arias, the *fermata* was used to indicate the end of the main section, often accompanied by the word '*fine*'. And in classical concerti, the *fermata* signalled an extended improvised cadence of undetermined length on the part of the soloist. Interestingly, the use of the *fermata* to signal these cadenzas was a signal both of the prolongation of a chord (the chord providing a harmonic basis over which the entire cadenza was built) and also a period of extended silence (in that that ensemble would conventionally round off the chord or fade out, once the virtuosic cadence was under way.) Sometimes, the function of the *fermata* could be not so much to extend the value of the rest, but rather simply to make its length undetermined or flexible to some other part's behaviour (or to the will of a conductor or soloist). During the 20th century, a new convention arose in relation to the use of a *fermata* at the end of a movement: namely, that a *fermata* could be set directly over a bar line (a technique also used by Nono in *Fragmente – Stille*).

The *caesura* is also worth considering for a moment, as it will also be relevant in our discussion of Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso*. The *caesura* looks like an apostrophe, the punctuation mark (') used: (i) to show where letters are omitted from a word; (ii) to mark the possessive, and; (iii) to form the plural of numbers, letters, and symbols. The first of these three associations with punctuation – pointing towards an omission – is tangentially interesting for the

discussion in this chapter of the withholding of content. Finally, it is worth noting the rhetorical sense of the apostrophe: a speech, especially in the form of a digression, addressing an absent or imaginary person or a personification of an abstract or inanimate entity. The rhetorical figure of the apostrophe is the trope of addressing what is not an actual listener. The relevancy of this gesture cannot fail to escape the reader as I progress through this chapter.

Returning to *Fragmente – Stille*, the list of *fermata* in the preface to the score is accounted for by the mystical description that:

> Each fermata should always sound different from the others, with free fancy of dreaming space, of sudden ecstasies, of unutterable thoughts, of tranquil breaths and of silences "intemporally" sung.[2]

Now, *fermata*e are of course not only a device for lengthening pauses, but are also applied to sounds. In the present score, most of the *fermata*e are indeed placed over sounding notes (to be sustained); only some of them refer to total silences. Most of the total silences in this score arise actually as a result of rather small breaks, notated as breath-commas, becoming magnified due to extremely slow tempi, such as crotchet/MM 30 or 36. However, the notation of *fermata* does also interact with pauses, and as I have noted above, extremely quiet sounds are further undermined by supplementary timbral indications such as '*flautato*', '*arco dietro al ponte*' (bow behind the bridge), '*alla punta*', '*tasto*', '*sotto voce*', '*sordina*', '*legno sul ponte*', and finally, '*tenere l'arco fermo sulla corda*' ('*tenere a lungo l'arco fermo sulla corda*' in the closing cello part), together with the ever-present '*al niente*'.

The advanced notation vocabulary of having six *fermata* signs might suggest a desire for precision of the kind that has since been increasingly formalised in the scores of composers such as Helmut Lachenmann (1935-), Ferneyhough (1943-), Michael Finnissy (1946-), James Dillon (1950-), Richard Barrett (1959-) and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (1962-). The tendency towards what has been dubbed 'new complexity' in notation shows no signs of letting up. At its most extreme, incremental gradations of pitch (microtones), duration, dynamics, and so forth, are formalised in notation with the help of computer software, resulting in notated scores that seem to call for a level of accuracy in performance that is ideal to all but the handful of performers who have collaborated on the development of these works. Such experiments continue today to develop at several levels, sometimes extremely orthodox in terms of the desired relationship between notation and performed sound, but at times also expressive of a self-reflexive critique of musical notation as an inherited system.

Nono must certainly have influenced this development, naturally most of all through the composers of the generation closest to him. The reproduction of a page of the score in the programme booklet of a performance of *Fragmente – Stille* in Frankfurt in 1981 displays a fetishisation of the score (whether on the part of Nono himself, or an eager concert-manager, we do not know) that is partly at odds with the fact that so much of the score's surplus information is withheld from the listener.

Specifically in relation to my point about complexity in notation, I would like to make the point that in this score the increased determination of duration through the deployment of extended *fermata* signs is undermined totally by extreme inconsistency. The *fermata*e are

2 Publisher's translation.

supplemented in practice by verbal indications and numerical values (in seconds) that are often at odds with the sense of systematically-defined successive graduations.

I can support this observation with a few examples that represent but a fraction of the scale of the problem.

The reader is referred to Figure (iii) in the supplementary appendix, which shows page 2 of the musical score of *Fragmente – Stille*.

A single square-bracket *fermata* over a crotchet can last 3 or 5 seconds (see successive examples in the 2ⁿᵈ bar of rehearsal-figure 3; crochet/MM 72), whilst a triple round-bracket *fermata* over a quaver may be 3-5 seconds (next bar, at crotchet/MM 36), or later (similarly over a quaver, same tempo) 6-9 seconds (rehearsal-figure 4, bar 2).[3] By comparing the use of *fermata* and seconds-notation, numerous durational discrepancies of this kind can be found on every page of the score.

Two German expressions – "*so lang wie möglich*" and "*ENDLOS!?*" – are also deployed in conjunction with *fermata*, with the effect of confusing the picture even more.

Already on the first page, we run into a bar where a crochet (a crescendo in the first violin part and a decrescendo in the cello part, with the inner parts silent) is tied to a semiquaver marked with a triple square-bracket *fermata*, followed by a semiquaver's rest in all parts. The tempo marking is: crotchet/MM 72. In a different, thicker ink (felt-tip, as opposed to the fountain pen used throughout the score) and a slightly larger hand, the composer has written "*so lang wie möglich ca. 9″ – 13‴*" across the entire bar. Judging by the change of ink, this might be an annotation that cropped up during rehearsals, say.[4] But the German "so lang wie möglich" is at odds with such an 'off the cuff', performance-pragmatic motivation. Firstly, the LaSalle quartet for whom Nono wrote *Fragmente – Stille* was American (so no need for them to rehearse in German); secondly, even in the context of the rest of the quartet, 9-13 seconds can hardly be described as 'so lang wie möglich', as there are indications of *fermata* up to 27 seconds long. There is, of course, the very pragmatic, instrumental aspect of the sound being (for both first violin and cello) an up-bow, which of course has its physical constraints; performing either a crescendo or a decrescendo on an up-bow and then pausing for up to 13 seconds without changing bow is indeed a challenge with specifically finite limitations on duration.

"*ENDLOS?!*" is another German annotation that seems more like a literary quote than a pragmatic instruction to the musicians. On page 9, we meet it with the stipulation 15-17 seconds. The expression is deployed together with a double-square bracket over a semibreve note in the violin parts; with no *fermata* at all in the viola part; and in the cello part together with a semiquaver note with double square-bracket *fermata*. The tempo marking is: crotchet/MM 72. The performance of this bar in terms of durations can hardly be anything other than the result of either a long negotiation between the players or a huge amount of give and take! And all this overload of detail and uncertainty is imposed on sounds that are played at

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3   In fact, the triple round-bracket fermata is not included in the prefatory list of fermata at all.
4   Werner Linden offers some information regarding versions of the score, revealing that Nono revised his score and wrote it out again (in a totally different page format) after the first performance (Linden 1988, p. 168). In any case, the present score released by the publisher is written some time after 1981. Already in the first version, there are two inks: Linden deduces that a felt-tip was used for the earlier script and a fountain pen for the newer. In the later version (to which I refer throughout this chapter), it seems precisely the other way round – the fountain pen is the original script, and later additions were made with a felt-tip.

the bridge, *ppp*.[5] "*Endlos?!*" appears again on page 26, this time at crotchet/MM 30, in a 2/4 bar where the second crotchet is marked in all parts with a single square-bracket *fermata*. Eternity has been extended by this stage in the quartet, for the indication of the duration of *ENDLOS?!* here is 23-27 seconds.

Nono's handwriting further conspires with his desire to constantly vary the combination of *fermata*-notation and seconds-notation, to the extent that further discrepancies arise from problems of legibility, and from the fact that the publisher has chosen to keep with Nono's handwritten score instead of producing a clean, proofread copy for publication, which would entail having to resolve durational conflicts in Nono's writing.

I present all this not to scold Nono for inconsistency, but to support the observation that what lies at the heart of the extended and often complicated notation of *fermata*s in this work is surely something other than a desire for mathematical precision. Complexity for complexity's sake, perhaps, but obviously not with the aim of systematising duration. Indeed, it has to be remembered that the very first instruction about the performance of *fermata*, in the preface to the score, states that "each *fermata* should always sound different from the others". So, the element of variation introduced here seems only to be underlined in the score by the friction between Nono's deployment of these 6 purely relative graduations and the durations (measured in seconds) that he suggests in connection with some of them.

It seems that we are confronted here with a notational surplus that is at least partly a (very successful) strategy for ensuring that "each *fermata* should always sound different from the others", at least in terms of duration. Publisher Ricordi's catalogue lists the duration of the first performance of the quartet as 34 minutes and 40 seconds. The Moscow String Quartet's recording, from 1989, however, manages it in 27 minutes and 3 seconds, downplaying the value of the distinctions between *fermata*, and considerably narrowing their durational register.

4.3 Constitutive silence and notational surplus

So much for Nono's expansion of the formal notation of rests: more is at stake here than merely the duration of the sounds and silences. I will attempt to give the reader a sense of what I mean through a couple of subjective descriptions of the element of Schweigen that I have introduced, before proceeding to tackle a more conceptual discussion of the issues at play in my reading of how the quartet might be considered as being constituted by a self-silencing act of this kind.

Sitting with the score and a recording, I get the sense that there are several layers of literary and historical referentiality in the score that open up a cavernous difference between what is latent and what is manifest in the musical aspects of this quartet; yet the fragility of the sounding aspect of the quartet gives the impression of a significant overlap – a grey zone, as it were – between what is audibly manifest and what is not.

Fragmente – Stille was extremely influential within late-20th century central-European scored music, not least for the way it reinforced a composerly belief that notation had come to be about much more than sound. *Fragmente – Stille* was seen to show that composed score music could be the bearer of far more than just what is heard, or evoked through hearing – an idea most attractive to composers themselves, such as his pupil Helmut Lachenmann.

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5 The large majority of the piece lies within the dynamic range *pppp* to *mp*, further pushing the question of how much of all of this is actually heard by a concert audience.

It is not just the composed score of the *Diotima* quartet which puts across this music's message: it is the perception of its reflection in our inner selves, across the space of silence and also remembrance, reflection, self-discovery as opened up by the *fermata* which he piles up in constantly changing, almost artless configurations. Nono's *fermata*, his many *pianopianissimi*, his massive pauses, naked intervals, minute hoverings, unisons, *non-vibrati* passages, his radical reductions and refinements in playing technique which demand of the player a new and often unfamiliar degree of self-denial and self-discovery, […] the ruthless simplicity of their deployment and daring artlessness with which they are handled: all this is aimed at drawing together and expanding the listener's powers of perception. […] The silence into which Nono's late works lead us is a *fortissimo* of agitated perception. It is not the sort of silence in which human searching comes to rest, but rather one in which it is recharged with strength and the sort of restlessness which sharpens our senses and makes us impatient with the contradictions of reality. (Lachenmann 1999, p. 27)

The performers of *Fragmente – Stille* have to rethink duration, tempo, articulation, ensemble coordination and dynamics ahead of more or less every note they play. And while they are doing this (in the pauses) they are to be busy "singing silences" and reading fragments of Hölderlin poetry.

The way in which I propose that silence is constitutive of this works concerns a rather different set of issues than those discussed in connection with Cage's *4'33"*. One of these is a surplus of composely investment in the score, resulting in the fact that a 'poetic' element apparently central to the work's aesthetic is embedded in the notation but withheld from the listener. This observation sets in motion a query as to the real vs. ideal aspects of the musical work, and the extent to which something that is not heard can in any way be constitutive of it. Much has been said and written about the real and ideal aspects of instrumental music, and silence is surely a junction for these discourses. However, to keep alive the sense of contrasting repertoires that handle these issues in different ways, I will foreshorten the discussion as far as possible to what can be related most directly to this individual work.

The score of *Fragmente – Stille* is furnished throughout with fragments of text by the Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin, which are collected in a second prefatory page. There are 44 small fragments in all, of between just one and five words each. (One of the fragments is quoted twice, another four times.) Nono selected them from fourteen poems.[6]

The preface to Nono's score specifies that these fragments from Hölderlin's verses are "never to be spoken aloud during performance", and "under no circumstances to be taken as programmatic performance indications".[7] The preface goes on to indicate a more poetic and ambiguous approach that the performers are to take to the text-fragments, drawing on quotes from Hölderlin's private letters to Suzette Gontard, his muse and very own 'Dio-

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6 *Götter wandelten einst…; An Diotima; Wohl geh ich täglich; Hyperions Schicksalslied; Wenn aus der Ferne; Jüngling an die klugen Ratgeber; Lebenslauf; An einen Baum; An ihren Genius; Der Abschied; Die Eichbäume; Emilie vor ihrem Brauttag; Emilie an Klara; Ihre Genesung.*

7 It is important to balance all that I have to say about the withholding of information from the listener with the observation that in a performance one year after the premiere, a full page from the score was reproduced in the programme booklet, inclusive of the Hölderlin quote …*die seligen Augen*… Interestingly, it was precisely this performance, in Frankfurt, that provoked an angry reaction, with audience members making restless noises throughout and concluding the performance with a round of boos. (Linden 1988, p. 168)

tima'.[8] The distribution of the text-fragments throughout the score does not correspond to simple movement titles (although with the large proportion of pauses in the music, there is almost always some type of *fermata* or section-break associated with Nono's deployment of the text fragments).

The score thus becomes a receptacle of information superfluous to actual performance, although this surplus information seems to be offered in the hope of imbuing the performance with some qualitative mood of durational volatility.

This ambiguity in the relationship between what the performer reads and what he does could be seen as having a precedent in Anton Webern's *Piano Variations*, op. 27 (1937), where some notes are marked to be played '*pensato*'. Presumably, the articulation of notes thus marked is to be so internal that the performance of them consists in merely thinking about them within the framework of a performance of the piece. We know that Nono identified strongly with the serial tradition[9] – an alliance that enabled him to distance his work from a number of (at that time) competing musical directions such as neo-classicism, free atonality and Cagean chance. But Nono was at pains to add to the orderliness of serialism an acknowledgement of its expressive power.

The composer adopts an explanatory tone while further enigmatising the role of the Hölderlin fragments by describing them as:

> many moments, thoughts, silences, "songs", of other spaces, other skies to otherwise rediscover the possible, do not "say farewell to hope": the players should "sing" them inwardly, in their autonomy, in the autonomy of sounds striving for a "delicate harmony of the inner life".

In this 'explanation', further quotes from Hölderlin's personal letters to Suzette Gontard are embedded.

Nono thus presents a range of incomplete gestures towards verbalised intention and meaning for the performer's contemplation, whilst having stipulated that the fragments of quotes from Hölderlin be withheld at all costs from the listener. In this way, attention is focused on an act of *Schweigen* (i.e. of consciously withholding something, or choosing not to speak of it). It is this retention of something expressive from the listener that I regard as the constitutive silent aspect of the work. It is not only a matter of registering that the composer has more designs on the piece than is directly conveyed to the listener – that is surely a premise of the conundrum of intersubjectivity faced by all art. But it is the fact that the score – a site, according to the definition given earlier by Talbot, of the work's identity – contains significantly more than the listener is allowed to know, that is the special characteristic of this surplus (Talbot, 2000).

Before turning to a discussion of the hierarchical assumptions underlying the definition of what is constitutive or surplus to a musical work, I would like to make a comparison; at the risk of appearing to digress, I will turn to a special case from the historical origins of the notation of silence, that demonstrates how notational surplus can lie at the heart of writing

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8 Hölderlin named Suzette Gontard 'Diotima' after the Ancient Greek priestess Diotima of Mantinea who, in Plato's *Symposium*, is said to teach the philosophy of love, and is also associated with concepts of time.

9 In the essay 'Die Entwicklung der Reihentechnik' (1960), Nono analysed Webern's approach to twelve-tone technique (Fox, 1999).

music. I have previously discussed '*tacet*' in connection with John Cage's *4'33"*. Now, I would like to consider 'tacet' in the light of the tradition of musical writers (first scribes, then composers) evoking secret references for performers. I wish to pursue the idea that writers have special relationships with their texts through handwriting.

Bonnie Blackburn has recently located a tradition of *tacet* inscriptions (i.e. instructions to remain silent) in Flemish musical manuscripts of the early sixteenth century that reveals the 'tacet' mandate as site of extra-musical scriptural play and even authenticity (Blackburn, 2005). Composers such as Pierre La Rue, Josquin, Obrecht, Divitis and others apparently inserted sayings from Juvenal, Publilius Syrus and Aristotle, medieval proverbs and biblical quotes into individual voices' parts. For example, the dictum 'Quod tacitum esse velis nemini dixeris' (What you want to be a secret, tell to no one) in the tenor part of Pierre de la Rue's *Missa Ave sanctissima Maria* is superfluous as far as instructions to the musician go, as there is no music to sing. Even so, the injunction to keep one's secrets to oneself casts the tenor part's redundancy in a specific light. Another injunction to keep secrets is found in La Rue's *Missa supra inviolate*, this time a quote from Aristotle, whose writings were in vogue amongst scribes, due to the distribution of new editions around this time: 'digito compesce labellum' (close your lips with your finger). This kind of attribution of different underlying motivations to musical silences seems to be a characteristic of particular scribes' personal styles – i.e. it is something that happens in the *writing* process, where a special relationship between scribe and musician becomes embedded in the written text. Blackburn supplies an extensive list of tacet inscriptions in a given set of manuscripts from the workshop of the scribe Petrus Alamire at the court of Margaret of Austria. The fact that identical inscriptions appear repeatedly in the works of several different composers are an indication of the scribe's hand.[10] Such inscriptions in the 1500's were not only secretive, but also sometimes humorous[11], religious[12], moral[13], illustrative[14] or pragmatic[15]. Biblical, philosophical, and other modish quotations embedded in the inscriptions were not only concerned with silencing, but together with the relative instability of ways of writing silence into these manuscripts (namely, the rise of the plain instruction 'tacet' which has survived as a shorthand in part-writing ever since), it makes for interesting reflection on the possible opportunities for conceptualising silent moments in these early days of musical notation.

Eye music was another historical tradition of notational mannerism to be enjoyed only by performers. Italian and English madrigalists around the turn of the 15th to 16th centuries often adorned their scores with symbolic meanings that were apparent to the eye but not to the ear. Sometimes black notes would be used to suggest darkness and white ones light, for example, or the notation might be laid out in advanced graphic patterns. Eye music even crops up in the work of Bach, who symbolized the Crucifixion with notes in the form of a cross.

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10 This is also an aspect of Nono's (handwritten) score. Nono makes no attempt to depersonalise the style of his handwriting, and despite the longevity of the quartet, his publisher has not taken steps to have the score set, even though the handwriting produces several notational ambiguities.

11 Usually, at the expense of the tenor part ('tenor recessit hospite insalutato', meaning 'the tenor left without saying goodbye to his host', or 'tenor non vult cantare libenter', 'the tenor is unwilling to sing').

12 'Os habent et non loquentur' – 'they have mouths and will not speak', a quote from the biblical Psalms.

13 'De absentibus nil nisi bonum', meaning 'speak no evil of the dead.

14 'Non murmur resonat' – not a murmur resounds.

15 'Nescio quid dicam qui non possum solvere dicam' – 'I who cannot settle the lawsuit, do not know what to say'.

I am not suggesting that Nono would have known about these kinds of traditions, or that he was referring to them in his quartet. This is a merely historical link concerning the surplus of musical notation, not an attempt at interpretations of composerly intentions. It shows us, however, that the surplus of writing in musical notation has a long tradition of 'invading' the silent moments.

4.4 Fragment and absence

The fragments of the quartet's title are clearly the Hölderlin quotes given in the score's preface. I will now discuss the particular salience of the early romantic fragment (of which Hölderlin was a major proponent) for Nono's aesthetics.

In the early romantic period, many European artists and intellectuals seemed to be gripped by an overwhelming sense of anxiety or even crisis. Much of this was due to feelings of heroism and fear clashing in their relationship to the past. Overcoming pre-modern social and mental structures (through, for example, the French revolution, the industrial revolution, and the revolutionary scientific discoveries of electricity and magnetism), as well as breaking with the doctrines of classical art gave a strong sense of empowerment – above all, to the individual. The individual artist enjoyed a new sense of autonomy, and was freed from many traditional forms of patronage and social or religious functions. Modern activities such as publishing and concertising on tour created the freelance careers of the first early romantic composers, such as Robert Schumann and Chopin. But the accomplishments and standards of the past still had a domineering influence. Artistic representations in the early 1800's were strung up in matrix of past-present nostalgia-regret, where partiality and fragmentation often seemed an appropriate response to grappling with forces beyond the scope of the individual artwork or even the individual artist.

Hölderlin could be regarded as critically examining the problematic nature of individual personhood at this time:

> It seems that his was the first lyrical poetry to venture into new domains where the transgression of discourse gave room for verbal configuration of such complexity that understanding failed in obtaining any other experience than that of obscurity. Communication without communicating, an ordered verbal pattern with a density of formal correspondences, yet without any clearly graspable referentiality seemed at first to be the sole effect of Hölderlin's poetry, which seemed unreadable for a long time. In Hölderlin, alienation as a fundamental experience of the modern mind torn between nature and the culture of abstract rationality brought forth poetic configurations that finally broke the coherence of language itself. (Stierle 2003, p. 8)

Both Susan Sontag and George Steiner also root the onset of the tendency of the artist to sever dialogue and encourage the production of experiences of alienation in Hölderlin (and Rimbaud), which would seem to point to a romantic sensibility motivating the development forward to the 20th century's 'literature of silence'.[16]

In this artistic climate at the onset of the romantic period, techniques of fragmentation offered a way of signalling a larger whole (a utopia, for example), whilst acknowledging the

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16 See Hassan, Ihab (1967): *The literature of silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Becket.* Alfred A. Knopf: New York.

individual's inability to represent it in totality. Looking at Nono's *Fragmente – Stille*, we can see a parallel in the very titling of the work, which refers to something beyond what we are presented with; the term 'fragment' conveys not only that what is presented is brief, but also that it is part of a larger whole that is *not* presented. It is possible to regard the early romantic period as seminal in the experimentation of how to allude artistically to something that does not manifest itself within the materiality of the artwork.

Another important observation concerning the fragmental (as opposed to aphoristic) nature of Nono's quartet is that the persistent lack of closure forces the work into an almost epic dimension, far from the modest proportions of the miniature – a romantic short form prevalent in the piano literature and embodied maybe most clearly of all in the romantic song cycle. Again, a comparison with a work such as György Kurtág's *Hommage à Mihály András (12 Microludes for String Quartet)* (1977) should clarify this point. Nono's is a quartet of Beethovenian proportions, in terms of its length, instrumental difficulty, and timbral and registral scope.

Let us look more closely, then, at the characteristics of the fragment as such. It is possible to draw a line between aphorisms and fragments categorically[17], characterising the former – with Schlegel's dictum of the aphorism resembling a curled-up hedgehog in its inaccessibility – as isolated and complete in itself, whilst the latter is characterised by interruption, discontinuity and fracture, being a part of something larger than itself.

The famous circular relation between whole and parts – in which the understanding of parts is necessary for the understanding of a whole, simultaneously with the fact that the understanding of a whole is necessary for the understanding of parts – became the paradigm for German hermeneutics from this time onwards. The recognition of this fruitful paradox lies at the heart of modern hermeneutics, for in the hermeneutic project, the artwork that offers maximally dense communication becomes a privileged object of interpretation. This completes a step away from the idea of interpretation as mere translation or equation of interchangeable meanings from different fields.

In the early romantic period, interpretation became a heroically endless enterprise, a new pinnacle in the tradition of European intellectual life. Interpretation was seen to arise from what Hegel called "*denkende Betrachtung*", a form of reflective perception that joins the particularity and immediacy of artistic experiences with reflection on conceptual frameworks. The 'heroically endless' nature of this process arises from the fact that aesthetic understanding can never relinquish either perception or conception, but continues to mediate between the two modes.

Charles Rosen gives an account of the Romantic fragment as a paradigmatic literary form established at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, and later adopted in music through forms such as the song cycle – Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, for example (Rosen 1996, pp. 48-51). I would still argue for upholding a gap between the fragment and the aphorism, by proposing that the song cycle and other cycles of miniatures are composed of aphorisms rather than fragments.

The idea of a to-and-fro between different forms of knowledge of artworks – perception, analysis and reflection – is a cornerstone of the kind of musical aesthetic listening that I introduced at the beginning of this thesis. The impossibility of 'total perception', as also of 'complete conceptual distinctiveness', is a frustration compensated for by the fact that the

17 See Hodkinson 2004

artwork will always continue to develop in the mind of the beholder – through repeated listenings and repeated reflection (whether of analytical or philosophical nature).

If any doubt should arise concerning the categorisation of Nono's quartet in relation to the terms 'aphorism' and 'fragment', then the quartet's title – *Fragmente* – clears it up. Again, compared to Kurtàg's *Hommage à Mihály András (12 Microludes for String Quartet)* (1977), it is clear that Nono is composing fragments (full of incompletion, dependent on another, further realm) whereas Kurtàg was composing miniatures (complete and self-sufficient). In *Fragmente – Stille* there is a bigger picture than what is presented within the work. The score is determined to point beyond itself, beyond the performance, beyond the listening act. It is hard to say whether this bigger picture is a 'whole', a totality, or not – but it is certainly utopian, it is in the skies, other skies, and it requires the idealistic stance of supreme hope. The 'bigger picture' manifests itself within the particulars of the artwork as an absence, something missing or unattainable.

> When Nono, quoting Hölderlin, mentions … other spaces, other skies… and from this inspiration formulates a music that enters into the open, he presupposes on the one hand a mysterious (in the sense of enigmatic) substratum underlying the organisation of musical material (based for the most part on serial techniques) and on the other hand the possibility of freedom which transcends that underlying order. (Stäbler 1999, p. 67)

Here, in the statement of fellow composer Gerhard Stäbler (1949-), we find an acknowledgment of Nono's romanticising presupposition of depth (presumably, of some essence that is prior or at least fundamental to the musical material) and also of transcendence. Depth and transcendence are two ideal categories that have contributed to the problematisation of chamber music since the early romantic period. To put it polemically, it could be proposed that these two presuppositions – (i) of an essence prior to instrumental or sounding material, and (ii) of music's ability to transcend its material aspects – are the main legitimation of purely instrumental music's claim to seriousness and even superiority over less pure and supposedly absolute genres. I will return to this point shortly.

Commenting on the rise of what he labels the new 'obscurity' in lyric poetry at the start of the 19th century, beginning with Hölderlin and soon gathering pace in France under the influence of Baudelaire, Karlheinz Stierle notes:

> [T]here is a plurality of incoherent allusions, images and speculations referring to a void center which is the speaking ego of the poem itself. Nerval takes over Goethe's poetic gesture of dark allusion, intense sensuality of disconnected images and in contrast to the semantic level a strong formal coherence of rhythm, sound patterns and rhyme. (Stierle 2003, p. 8)

Intuitively, this fits well as a characterisation of the layers of allusion at play in Nono's quartet; it also throws up an issue that I have not yet addressed, but which I will tackle now – namely, the contrast between all these elements of fragmentation and an overriding coherence of style. '*Stille*' (silence) stands, in the title, in a diametrically opposed relation to these incomplete references to something both prior and transcendental in relation to the written music. For nothing actually relates the use of the term 'fragments' to anything but the Hölderlin quotes. Nothing indicates that Nono regards the music itself as containing fragments. If the

main '*Stille*' of this piece is not manifested in durations of no sound, then neither are the piece's '*Fragmente*' a significant aspect of the music. The work seems to be constituted by everything other than what is to be heard.

In Nono's quartet, there is a "strong formal coherence" – of rhythm, articulation, sound patterns, style and instrumental tropes. In other words, the islands of sound in this work could just as well be regarded as aphorisms (self-contained, complete and finished), not fragments (parts torn off from a whole). There is little counterpoint of interruption between the quartet's voices, no violent stylistic rupture between sounds. In terms of the vocabulary of fragments, there is no indication that the sounds refer to any ideal whole, unless one were to interpret the implication of Beethoven as a reference to the 'master' as maker of ideal, 'perfect' works, or the implication of the string quartet as a reference to the string quartet repertoire as some kind of finished oeuvre.

My point in introducing a comparison between aphorisms and fragments, then, is to point up a tension that I perceive between the score and what is heard in performance, in terms of completion and fragmentation. Despite extreme timbral fragility and temporal irregularity, interruption, discontinuity and fracture are not necessarily the qualities experienced when listening to *Fragmente – Stille*. A high level of stylistic synthesis in Nono's compositional administration of his sounds and silences leads to a texture which can quickly be perceived as having a certain logic, following its own internal conventions. Irregular and uneven, yes; but discontinuous, not really.

4.5 History and referentiality

Not only Hölderlin but also Hölderlin's contemporary Beethoven is invoked in the score (remember that the work was a commission from the city of Bonn's Beethovenfest). At rehearsal-figures 26, 34, 36, 38, 43 and 45, Nono uses the instruction from the third variation movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 30 in E major op. 109 (1820), "*mit innigster Empfindung*" (literally, with innermost sentiment).[18] The quartet's sounds are framed by silence and by intertextuality: the music could almost be snippets from a Beethoven quartet, just as the text is made up of fragments from Hölderlin. But the listener does not hear snippets of Beethoven; Beethoven is not invoked in any way that the listener could be aware of, other than through the choice of the string quartet as medium.

Asked about the logic of his musical ideas, Nono called his own musical thinking fragmentary, sprunghaft, and chaotic, adding:

> Das Chaos ist eine sehr lebendige Angelegenheit, wo nicht alles in eine Richtung geht
> – und Schluss. (Linden 1988, p. 258)

And his answer to the question of the goal of composition was:

> [D]as ist für mich ein Wort, das muss so sein. (ibid.)

Once again, a hommage to Beethoven.

Early romantic lyric poetry, together with the more self-conscious subsequent radicali-

18 See page 17 of the score. This occurs, somewhat paradoxically, together with the Hölderlin quote … *heraus in Luft und Licht …*

sations of it within a French context (from Nerval through Baudelaire and Rimbaud to Mallarmé, say) have been a source of great inspiration for composers of the late 20th century, not least due to its characteristics of referential ambiguity, and material discontinuities.

Like late Beethoven and late Hölderlin, this late music of Nono is also characterised essentially by discontinuity and fracture – in the score, at least – and shows a preference for an aesthetics of 'difficulty' as a matter of compositional style. Let us return to Sontag's characterisation of the 20th-century artist's position when problematising the materials of his art form by retreating into silence – the kind of silence that I am now calling a composerly *Schweigen* or withholding of content:

> So far as he is serious, the artist is continually tempted to sever the dialogue he has with an audience. Silence is the furthest extension of that reluctance to communicate, the ambivalence about making contact with the audience which is a leading motif of modern art, with its tireless commitment to the "new" and/or the "esoteric." Silence is the artist's ultimate otherworldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work.
>
> Still, one cannot fail to perceive in this renunciation of "society" a highly social gesture. The cues for the artist's eventual liberation from the need to practice his vocation come from observing his fellow artists and measuring himself against them. An exemplary decision of this sort can be made only after the artist has demonstrated that he possesses genius and exercised that genius authoritatively. *Once he has surpassed his peers by the standards which he acknowledges*, his pride has only one place left to go. For, to be a victim of the craving for silence is to be, in still a further sense, superior to everyone else. It suggests that the artist has had the wit to ask more questions than other people, and that he possesses stronger nerves and higher standards of excellence. (Sontag 1969a, pp. 6-7)

This characterisation adds grist to the mill of the British tradition of Nono reception, which has tended to regard his intellectual gesturing as being an empty posture – the emperor's new clothes. Given the strong anti-idealism of British musical aesthetics, it is easy to see how a short-cutting of all idealistic pretensions results in a view of *Fragmente – Stille* as empty in the entirely pejorative sense.

Nono's dense and problematising, paratactic communication – alluding constantly to authors and eras distantly off-stage – seems to hold the present moment in an insoluble tension with the past, questioning even the possibility of truly being in the present, instead of in "other spaces, other skies". This problematising embrace of history in the present is a characteristic of Nono's oeuvre that has often been categorised under a more simplistic perception of his stance as 'political'. Not that political art, or the perception of art as political, is in itself a simplistic response. But politics has the aspect of inducing finite choices (votes) that necessarily come down firmly on one side or the other in relation to historical developments. A more ambivalent integration of historical baggage into a new artwork, on the other hand, is able to retain an überpolitical dimension. Nono's engagement with historical revolutions (part of his highly-profiled socialist commitment) has previously been interpreted as sheer celebration, as opposed to acknowledging the extent to which his work reflects on the ambiguity of the gains of revolution – its failures, as well as its successes. The fever of his well-broadcast and impassioned convictions comes in fact packaged in doubt and uncertainty, as

it were. This point leads back to my earlier observation on the tension between regressive and progressive tendencies in this quartet.

The whole celebration of 'difficult' art and the general problematisation of compositional practice within music with its roots in Darmstadt at that time produced not only a whole family of musical works associated with Hölderlin (by Henri Pousseur, Heinz Holliger, Wolfgang Rihm, Hans Zender, Gyorgy Kurtág, Gyorgy Ligeti and others)[19].

Another layer of referentiality, one that I propose more tentatively, lies in a possible reference to a Hebraic cultural background. *Fragmente – Stille* was written for the LaSalle quartet, an American quartet active from 1946 to 1987, led by Jewish violinist Walter Levin. With the high level of referentiality in *Fragmente – Stille*, it is natural to speculate about the possibility that an awareness of the Talmudic mandate of silence in relation to Jehovah's name might have influenced Nono's work on his quartet. An interview from 1986 reveals that Nono associated Hebraic song with a level of nuance and delicacy that he found mirrored in elements of uncertainty and temerity in Hebraic thought in general (as opposed to Gregorian chant and thinking).[20] I have already discussed Lyotard's essay 'Several silences'; here – in the course of a detailed discussion of Schoenberg's Jewish relation to a higher silence – Lyotard addresses the 'unsingability' of Jehovah:

> Jehovah, for his part, does not sing and is not singable: according to a short text on Hebrew vowels and the unpronounceability of the tetragram, to be able to voice the name of the father would be to bestow upon him a sensible, sensuous, idolatrous presence."
> (Lyotard 1984, p. 103)

And later:

> Like Judaism, analysis – notably of the Lacanian kind – lays down a principle that the noise-silence of the passions must be dissipated by the silence of the Signifier. […] Not the words of Moses and Aron, but the silence of Jehovah = the silence that he observes (no answer), and the silence he has others observe (unpronounceable). (ibid.)

This chimes well with all I have observed about the presence of a totality that is not actually presented except by oblique reference.

4.6 Sound and idea

The romantic period's critically heightened sensibility towards referentiality can be seen as part of the complex battle between art's material and ideal facets. In music, this manifested itself in the need to legitimate the newly emancipated art of instrumental music in the terms of the day. Instrumental music was to be indulged as autonomous sound (liberated from word, drama, or religious spectacle); yet to gain real value it had to transcend its material presence.

Hans Georg Nägeli, in his *Vorlesungen über die Musik mit Berücksichtigung der Dilettanten* (1826), asserted that pure instrumental music is closest to its divine origin when it sounds least,

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19 See Hodkinson 2004.
20 Linden 1988, pp. 256-60. Nono's comments during this interview are, however, not specific enough for us to be able to conclude that his reflections on Hebraic music (and, for that matter, on late Beethoven, which he also mentions here) guided him in composing *Fragmente – Stille* six years earlier.

or when it doesn't sound at all. Thus his preference for the near-silent clavichord over modern and more efficient keyboard instruments, and his praise for the grand pause as the apex of pure instrumental music. The absence of sound in the Generalpause is, according to Nägeli:

> … a silence (Schweigen), before which sensuality shrinks. Fearing destruction, sensuality senses imminent death. However, where sensuality senses death, the spirit senses life – an inner, own and undivided life.[21] (Nägeli 1826, p. 20)

The early romantic era that produced aphoristic lyric poetry, the kickstart to modern hermeneutics, and a succession of feverish artistic manifestations at odds with their own perceptual characteristics, invested aesthetic value in the particulars of acoustic material only in as far as they could elude to something beyond the individual and particular (i.e. beyond the sounding event). Auditory appearances as such were contemptible unless they could uphold an association with a more ideal impulse. I have described this thing, or place, beyond the particular as a 'totality', or, less polemically, a 'bigger picture'. The legitimation of pure, absolute instrumental music by even its most ardent devotees was therefore undermined in its essence by a distance towards the very sound for which they sought autonomy (Hesselager 2004). The ideal (i.e. idea-based) fundament of early 19th century musical aesthetics set up a tension akin to what we met in Sontag's description of the aesthetic of the empty artwork in the mid-20th century:

> Art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it denies him the realization – the transcendence – he desires. Therefore, art comes to be considered something to be overthrown. A new element enters the individual artwork and becomes constitutive of it: the appeal (tacit or overt) for its abolition – and, ultimately, for the abolition of art itself. (Sontag 1969a, p. 5)

We can adopt this characterisation for our purposes here, modifying it with the observation that the manifestation of idea through sound results, in the case of *Fragmente-Stille*, in extremely fragile sonorities that almost seem secondary in relation to the overbearing idealism invested in the score's preface. Music's unease with its means jumps out of this work both in the score and, arguably, through the timbral fragility of its sounding aspects.

On this division of music as sound and idea, we can say that sound is the immediate manifestation of individual and contingent qualities of the sound body, whereas a musical idea is the phenomenon of sound perceived primarily as an ordered epistemological phenomenon. Musical idea is emancipated from the individual and contingent properties of sound, and defined only as a formal object. Now, emancipation is an interesting word here, because as we have seen, Cage's project in the 20th century was to re-emancipate sound from idea. Thus, Nono's strong identification with music's ideal aspirations puts him in a tradition that is starkly at odds with the phenomenological priorities of the 'new sensibility' that I described in the previous chapter.

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21 My translation: "… ein Schweigen, wovor die Sinnlichkeit erschrickt. Sie fürchtet vernichtet zu werden; sie ahnt den Tod. Wo aber die Sinnlichkeit den Tod ahnt, da ahnt der Geist das Leben, ein innerliches, einiges, ungetheiltes Leben."

4.7 The postmodern and the fragment

It is necessary to consider my observations about Nono's use of the fragment within the timeframe not only of the early romantic period to which the score refers, but also of Nono's composition. *Fragmente-Stille* was completed in 1980, on the cusp of the decade that has come to be regarded as synonymous – artistically and culturally – with the postmodern. My main point here is that I consider Nono's deployment of the fragment to be different than the common cultural understanding of the 1980s postmodern fragment. I therefore expand this through two historical analogies: (i) the romantic fragment, characterised by a commitment to referentiality, depth and transcendence; (ii) the postmodern fragment, characterised by a commitment to quotation, surface and ahistorical presence. Additionally, I couple to this discussion about the postmodern a short 'limiter' regarding the association of Lyotard with the postmodern and my interest in rehabilitating Lyotard elsewhere within this thesis.

I have gone into the romantic fragment at some length already, so it will suffice to summarise its characteristics here: a high degree of referentiality (gesturing *incompletely* to a higher or prior instance); a projection of depth (of meaning or cultural significance); a will to transcend the limits of artistic material.

I turn now to a characterisation of the most general understanding of the prevalence of the fragment within postmodernism. The postmodern fragment is neither complete in itself, like Schlegel's hedgehog-like aphorism, nor does it refer beyond itself to a utopian totality. Rather, the postmodern fragment is the result of an unashamed admission of defeat in the face of the mid-20th century quest to be 'new', original and authentic. The postmodern fragment is a movable part, able to be subjected to the endless combination, recombination and repetition of already-existing entities. Embodying a strong sense of quotation, the postmodern fragment may carry elements of copy, pastiche, ironic reference, imitation, or duplication – of motifs from the present or, very often, from the past. It is, above all, anything but 'authentic' and original. Working with quotation points to an original (for example, a historical precedent). But even while homaging the original through quotation, the postmodern fragment undermines the authority (also famously called the 'aura', by Walter Benjamin) of the original through copying it. Postmodern art that employed these techniques of collage, copy and montage embraced a new accessibility (after the apparent 'difficulty' of so much of the art of the 1950s to 70s), and thus represented a kind of return to something that could be assimilated into a broader cultural market. In the art of the copy, surface was all, and the materiality of images that could be copied was an opportunity to be embraced and exploited. Thus, there was a total identification of the 'message' of the artwork with its material aspects, stripping not only the quotation but also the original from which it quoted of their power to transcend the materiality of the sensual world.

Given such a comparison of characteristics, it must be fairly obvious how I read Nono's fragments as being at odds with the cultural postmodernism burgeoning around him at the time of his composition of *Fragmente – Stille*. In contrast to the art of surface, Nono presented an art obsessed with depth (of meaning) and height (sky-high utopian imaginings). The expectations are infinite ('never give up'), the desire to transcend feverish. Difficulty is in the front seat, underlined not only by the notation, and the deliberate non-accessibility of the act of Schweigen, but also by the choice of medium: the string quartet.

It is not my aim to label *Fragmente-Stille* 'modernist', either approvingly or pejoratively. Rather, as I have stated several times, I wish to show a fruitful ambivalence at the heart of the

quartet, between what I have called, somewhat reductively, regressive and progressive tendencies. A possible parallel, in these aspects, from the world of visual art, might be the work of Georg Baselitz (b. 1938), which returned to painting – a more accessible and marketable, but also more traditional form than, say, conceptual art or video art. Despite this return to a more traditional form, Baselitz' art seemed to retain a political thrust, acknowledging the fragmentation produced in his native East German society by the failed utopia of political revolution. The oblique referentiality at play in a work like *Finger Painting I – Eagle – à la* (1972) – a painting of an eagle upsdie down – seems to both rejuvenate a tradition of representation, whilst at the same time literally turning it on its head.

It seems appropriate at this point to bear in mind that the early 1980s was also the period when Alfred Schnittke matured a referential style through two string quartets. Schnittke's Second String Quartet (1980) referenced medieval Russian sacred music, whilst the Third String Quartet (1983) used material from Lassus' Stabat mater, Beethoven's Grosse Fuge and fellow-countryman Shostakovich's DSCH motto. In these works, he moved from a very direct form of polystylism and quotation to a stylistic resolution through compositional transformation of the borrowed material.

Returning to the broader cultural discussion of the postmodern, this is the place to issue a limiting claim on the occurrence of Lyotard elsewhere within this thesis, as many readers' primary association with his name will have been discussions of the postmodern. This is due to his 1979 text, *The Postmodern Condition*, which was one of the first accounts of what constituted the specifically postmodern challenges to philosophy. Even though the term 'postmodern' actually went back to at least the 1930s, and there had already been several major publications on the issue of the postmodern[22], the reception of Lyotard's text was huge and immediate, often overshadowing both the actual content of the work itself, and the rest of Lyotard's work (including the fact that he quickly became one of his own sharpest critics in respect of that particular text). In my view, Hermann Danuser's circular use of Lyotard to legitimate his view of John Cage as postmodern is one example of that misunderstanding; Lyotard moved away from his Cage phase during the late 1970s, and by the time of *The Postmodern Condition* he had moved Edgar Varèse to the centre of his musical commentaries (Danuser 1983).

In relation to the characterisation of 'postmodern' tendencies listed above, we can squarely say that Lyotard was not a philosopher of the postmodern. The art that he held most dear, and which he commented at great length was anything but the art of the collage and montage. Composers John Cage (as we have seen) and Edgar Varèse, and Abstract expressionist painter Barnett Newman are figures utterly outside the version of postmodernism that has dominated cultural studies, led by architecture. Philosophically, what Lyotard articulated through the concept of the 'postmodern' was the idea of a contemporary incredulity to mainstream grand narratives that propose a legitimising history of progress, (socialism, say, or the Enlightenment). This loss of the 'overall picture' offered by grand narratives produced a corresponding instability in traditional notions of, say, reason and rationality, creating an opening for a new dynamics in epistemology that was then hotly debated.

My main point in separating Lyotard from my characterisation of the postmodern is that Lyotard was not a part of defining the art-historical sense of the term 'postmodern'.

22 A special issue of the journal New Literary History on 'Modernism and postmodernism' in 1971 included literary critic Ihab Hassan's influential essay 'POSTmodernISM: a paracritical bibliography'.

Beginning from an observation of clear differences between modern and postmodern manifestations, Lyotard later regarded the postmodern increasingly as an ongoing dynamic *within* the modern – i.e. a progressive force within modernity, active from the early romantic era onwards and not tied to any historical chronology more specific than that. Interestingly though, in his explanation of the concerns of the modern and the postmodern respectively, Lyotard did position precisely the aesthetics of fragmentation at the heart of the difference between them. While modernism was seen to embody a nostalgic yearning for a lost sense of unity, postmodernism celebrated the break – a claim made most evident by Lyotard's comparison of the modernist 'fragment' (i.e. the artwork conceived of as a part of a greater, albeit unattainable, whole) with the postmodern 'essay' (an attempt in the spirit of experimentalism which disdains either to construct or lament totality). This chimes with my characterisation of the postmodern fragment as committed to surface and ahistorical presence.

4.8 Hermeneutics and *musica negativa*

I see Nono's quartet, then, as prompting a discourse that falls within hermeneutics, the study of interpreting texts, in the way that it presents difficulties to simple deductions of meaning. To characterise the hermeneutic enterprise since the early romantic period, one might say that the way in which difficult works point up the impossibility of making 'translations' of meaning from one context to another is precisely what sets modern hermeneutic interpretation in motion. At a number of levels, the score at hand offers something that is withheld – the Hölderlin fragments are written in the score, but are not to be shared with the listener; it remains silent (in the face of the possibility of speaking). In the sense of the German intransitive verb, 'schweigen', to remain silent means to keep *something* silent, i.e. to voluntarily omit some articulation. *Schweigen = etwas verschweigen.* And the question of what intentional object it is that is withheld from articulation is basically a question of meaning. Therefore, the hunt is on for the meaning that has been withheld, and this is the prime pursuit of modern hermeneutics, in which interpretation becomes ever more problematic. The hope of achieving some kind of textual interpretation recedes, whilst the hermeneutician becomes immersed in an interpretive mode of experiencing (art) and of orientating oneself reflectively in relation to that experience.

One of my earliest points in this thesis has been the observation that radical acts of silence in scored music seem obviously resistant to musicological readings that place the study and interpretation of scores at their centre. Here, I was concerned with the problems of musical analysis. In the meantime, I have also ruled out the schematic study of the composer's intentions as a basis for claims to establish the meaning of an artwork. What remains are the opportunities of phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. In this case, a purely phenomenological, listener-angled account of silence would bypass so much of what makes a work like *Fragmente – Stille* into one of the most famous (and notorious) examples of foregrounded silences in the concert music of its time and type. But where a work seems to be founded on some prior meaning that is postulated although not revealed, hermeneutics can go to work, weighing the textual evidence of the score in the hope of unpeeling layers of 'lost' significance not immediately apparent. The hermeneutic journey from a sense of lost meaning backwards to a prior sense, motivation or intention embedded in the making of the work travels the nostalgic path defined by Lyotard as (merely) 'modern', unaccepting of the disturbing consequences of glimpsing the sublime – the path that can be called 'nega-

tive'. Work that directs attention to the particularity of the perceptual moment, by contrast, dependent on the perceptual performative, and not postulating any prior meaning, Lyotard calls jubilantly 'postmodern', and I call 'affirmative'. In this future-oriented project, the listener's intentions, motivations and constructions of meaning(fulness) are cut off from any intentions the author may have had.

Work that explicitly thematises the question of its own possibility as artwork, carries internally, as its most intimate topic, the question of the essence of art. (This goes for all art that confronts the work-concept with disjunctions in its continuity, with any constitutive obscurity, ambiguity or rupture.) This questioning can seem to take the form of either negational or affirmative strategies that seek, respectively, alienation or identification, problems or opportunities. Dialectical oppositions of these kinds can appear at different levels within a work, such that a work may seem to repel a certain kind of access at one level, while inviting access at another. Authorial intention, for example, may seem wilfully absent when a work is regarded from one perspective, manifesting itself however quite strongly when the work is regarded from a different viewpoint.

This chapter concludes with a consideration of the negative/affirmative problematic that was already introduced in connection with Cage's *4'33"*, this time together with an appreciation of the role of Adorno in the 'negative' or negational associations at play in *Fragmente – Stille*.

Earlier, I observed a connection between the critical or subversive gesture of negation and the affirmative aspect of the creative act involved in such subversions. I have traced this playing-off of the negative and affirmative from Cage's identification of his own project with the white (not black) monochromes of painter Rauschenberg in the early 1950s, to a shift in Lyotard's position from an affirmative aesthetics to an engagement with negative presentation. Another trope to be considered is the common identification of the negation position with modernism, against a perception of the affirmative as essentially postmodern.

The point here is not to say that the latter work is modern and negative while the former is postmodern and affirmative. Even on the basis of a thorough argumentation for the terms 'modern' and 'postmodern', this would be an impossible and also totally meaningless project. My interest here has partly to do with pointing up differences between the overall role of silence in works as different as *4'33"* and *Fragmente – Stille*, and partly to do with a discussion of principles concerning the possibility of art to *be* fundamentally negative or affirmative at all. For on the one hand, the production of art is essentially an affirmative act (even the articulation of nothing is an attempt at communication). But on the other hand, the artwork necessarily distinguishes itself from everything around itself by implicitly negating its surroundings, just as the aesthetic attitude defines itself by negating all purposes other than the aesthetic. Art's autonomy thus rests on a negative logic inherent in aesthetic experience: consolidating the identity of the artwork by negating all that is outside it.

This latter point is one of the most influential and problematic legacies of the writings of Adorno, for it lent central European scored music of the late twentieth century a legitimising autonomy that, in the long run, served to alienate the music from any social context. The dismantling of this distance between artwork and society, and the rehabilitation of the social fact of music, lies at the heart of the present rehabilitation of Adorno. In short, a renewed acknowledgement of the dialectical aspect of his aesthetics is required. Max Paddison has offered a detailed and authoritative reading of Adorno to this end in the publications *Adorno's aesthetics of music* and *Adorno, modernism and mass culture* (Paddison 1993, Paddison 1996).

In this chapter, I have traced connections between bodies of 'difficult' work made late in the careers of figures such as Hölderlin, Beethoven and Nono. Adorno can safely be added to this list. To extend an obvious link between silence and Beethoven, one could say that an onset of deafness (at a literal or metaphorical level) is the perceptual pendant to silence – a dulling of the priority of the material and perceptual aspects of art, combined with a problematisation of syntax and aesthetic project. We have seen that the fragment is of particular interest to discussions of musical silence, as it makes claim on silence for its demarcation. In the twentieth century, the fragment was revived (from early German romanticism), not least by Jewish literary intellectuals in the wake of the Second World War. In that specific historical moment, it becomes indicative not only of gestures towards the transcendent and sublime, but also of a post-war recasting of languages and communication in a negative vein. The fragmentary late work of the poet Hölderlin witnessed a revival after the Second World War, becoming a symbol of precedent for art that attempts and heroically fails to articulate the inarticulable (Nielinger-Vakil 2000, Hodkinson 2004).

The body of work from the final years of Hölderlin's life is characterised by silences pierced with fragmentary flashes of poetic lucidity. This paratactic tendency was pointed out by Adorno in his 1963 lecture on Hölderlin, indirectly making Hölderlin into a figurehead for composers congregated around Darmstadt who wished to inscribe themselves into a particularly German cultural history. Adorno's Hölderlin lecture was just one event in a long chain of articulations that bound Adorno's aesthetics closely – for better or worse – to the composers and works of the musical paradigm of Darmstadt.

When he drew attention to the disintegration of musical material and the discontinuities of its historical orientation, Adorno did so on the basis of the understanding of a dialectical relationship with the continuities of historical progress residing in the self-same material. The paratactic rejection of a linear narrative – a refusal to choose, or to eliminate alternatives – honours the fragment as a possible form of articulation. No longer authorised (or simply unable) to narrate grand myths, the artist chooses a more modest task.

This point is not so far from Lyotard's acknowledgement of the disappearance of grand narratives in favour of little (partial) narratives. However, as we have seen, there is a difference between the paratactic fragment that Adorno focussed on and the experimental 'essay' characterised by Lyotard as discovering relations, correspondences, constellations of meaning. (I regard Lyotard's own essay 'Several silences' as an illustration of this point.)

The famously (and notoriously) fragmented form of Adorno's own late texts and those of the writers he admired (Beckett and Hölderlin) also embody this problem of form and its struggle with material or content. All the fragmentary texts that I consider here (Adorno's, Hölderlin's, and Nono's) proceed through the presentation of fragments of an interior monologue (or rather, dialogue, because dialectical) that is in itself self-reflective. That is to say, the fractured form is not identical to its fragmented material, because through the self-consciousness of construction (the assemblage of fragments) it separates itself from the chaos of the material while at the same time 'expressing' it and externalising the inner conversation.

Thus, the carefully constructed absence begins to look like excess. The humble and abject silence at work in *Fragmente – Stille* seems to wilfully withhold what has been promised as beyond the composer's reach. Self-consciously planted evidence of what is left out keeps 'the great unsaid' within the composer's realm of control. Nono's recruitment of Hölderlin's 'other spaces' points beyond the world of composer, listener and work to a mythic other that

is idealised as sublime and un(re)presentable; but Nono's act of signalling what he also with-holds is a demonstrative and self-referential act of *schweigen*, choosing to remain silent in the face of expectations which his own work sets up. In this rather cynical sense, we can trace a strong act of negation in the artwork. Alienation is a fundamental experience in this situa-tion – but only of the audience and its expectations. There is no alienation of the author from the work, no stepping-back on the part of the artist, and no absence of the authorial voice in which we are tempted to bestow intention and ultimate meaning. Thus, not all gestures towards the sublime point away from the author, and not all absences of this kind signal the author's retreat from his material. What may seem, at first glimpse, an act of self-abnegation and humility can reveal itself from another perspective as supreme self-control.

Opposite this somewhat cynical view of the artistic enterprise of engaging with the prob-lematic aspects of the modern artwork, we have Adorno's account of why there is aesthetic value in the negational approach:

> Artworks that divest themselves of any semblance of meaning […] enunciate their meaninglessness with the same determinacy as traditional artworks enunciate their positive meaning. Today this is the capacity of art: Through the consistent negation of meaning it does justice to the postulates that once constituted the meaning of art-works. Works of the highest level of form that are meaningless or alien to meaning are therefore more than simply meaningless because they gain their content through the negation of meaning. Artwork that rigorously negates meaning is by this very rigor bound to the same density and unity that was once requisite to the presence of mean-ing. Artworks become nexuses of meaning, even against their will, to the extent that they negate meaning. […] The dividing line between authentic art that takes on itself the crisis of meaning and a resigned art consisting literally and figuratively of protocol sentences is that in significant works the negation of meaning itself takes shape as a negative, whereas in the others the negation of meaning is stubbornly and positively replicated. (Adorno 1997, pp. 153-4)

As Paddison has written of Adorno's writing-style, we could also say of Nono's *Fragmente – Stille* that:

> [its] fragmentation needs to be understood against a sense of a missing totality, [its] negativity against an absent utopian affirmation. (Paddison 1993, p. 14)

CHAPTER 5

Hören

5.1 Introduction

> There is one thing without which no delight in sound makes sense, and that is the intensity of silence. The tension and the thoughts of the person who listens made perceptible by the person who plays. (Sciarrino, quoted in Osmond-Smith 2001)

This quote presents the inversion of the tenet that silence is dialectically dependent upon a musical work-concept and its implication of sound; here, music is conditioned – at least, rhetorically – by a dependence on silence.

In this chapter, I turn to a discussion of silence in the work of Italian composer Salvatore Sciarrino (1947-), in particular a quintet for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and celeste from 1985, *Lo spazio inverso*. The main phenomenon of silence to be discussed in the context of Sciarrino's chamber music is a general but radical timbral quieting. Through this timbral quieting, I propose that Sciarrino's music attains – on more classical grounds than Nono's – a heightened perception of presence that may be associated with a performative mode of listening.

This chapter also represents a movement from the discussion of works by composers now deceased (Cage, Nono) to that of an artist who is still writing and very active on the music-festival circuit in terms of both commissions and performances. The historiographical aspect of my thesis necessarily takes a turn towards a kind of 'history of the present' that will become more marked in Part IV, where I discuss recent sound art. One aspect of this turn towards the present is a shift from writing about reception as a history in itself, to considering artistic production in the light of a reception that is only half established. The specific work of Sciarrino's that I focus on here was written over 20 years ago, but still the reception of Sciarrino's early works is influenced by his present ongoing production and by the relations that he upholds with the musicians who collaborated on his early output.

This may seem a rather fine point, were it not for the fact that I discuss, for example, the issue of performance practice in relation to what is actually written in the score. This aspect of Sciarrino's work can hardly be appreciated so long as those who give the first performances of many of his works, on the basis of extensive rehearsals with the composer, are still the main proponents of his work.

Another obvious point to note about doing musicology on living composers is that the reception history is shorter, and the influence of the composer greater. Thus, in the only released CD of *Lo spazio inverso* to date, it is the composer's words that introduce this and the other pieces of the album, on the CD sleeve.

It is tempting to seek an interpretation of the piece in Sciarrino's descriptive (almost programmatic) notes –

> Pulsating islands of sound enfold lakes of silence, and in silence we rediscover the sounds of the body […]

> No longer disguised, the [margins of thought] produce an unbelievable unevenness
> – the caesuras. […] No continuity, no fragments or dialectics. […] The awareness of
> the mental process is in itself sufficient, via a capillary attention to perception – to-
> gether with an awareness that the network of the senses can also organize disorder, and
> thus chaos is readable. (Sciarrino's programme notes for *Lo spazio inverso*, on the CD
> *esplorazione del bianco*)

– were it not for the fact that the whimsicality of the writing leads to as many dead-ends as
openings:

> The desert allows physiology to appear. […] A melody of emptiness. Moving around it
> over the years, its lyricism is evoked. Only the aura, almost magically, since even the as-
> sumptions of a hard sequence are lacking. Our minds are generous. To them this feeble
> music turns. No longer made to quieten the beasts. Indeed, the wild animal sleeps in us
> as well, its instrument of knowledge. (ibid.)

Even looking for Sciarrino's references to silence can be puzzling; in the very work whose title
refers directly to an act of *schweigen*, there is hardly an empty (inactive) moment in the score.
The wind quintet *Il Silenzio degli oracoli* (1989) is characterised by scalic flurries of demi-
semi- and hemidemisemiquavers throughout the upper parts (and even some semihemi-
demisemiquavers in the clarinet part!). Naturally, the horn and bassoon are somewhat less
active, and there is a fair amount of redundancy (long sections of rests) in these parts – above
all, in the bassoon part. But sustained timbres and repeated notes swell the underlying carpet
of sonic presence such that in the whole quintet the longest total silence in all parts is a four
septulet-demisemiquaver + triplet-quaver rest (bar 33) – that is, until the final crotchet rest
(with *fermata*) in the final bar.

I will describe Sciarrino's music in terms of a classical concern for proportion and bal-
ance that is very different from the chaotic alienation effect of so much other music contem-
porary to *Lo spazio inverso* (including Nono's *Fragmente – Stille*). *Lo spazio inverso* is a drama
in sound, but a drama that is crafted with a great sense of the accommodation of the listener
and the resolution of dramatic disjunctions and ruptures. The context for this perspective
is a comparison of the performative mode of listening evoked by *Lo spazio inverso*, with the
hermeneutic mode of interpretation evoked by *Fragmente – Stille*.

5.2 Formal notation

I will look first, however, at the actual notation of silence phenomena in *Lo spazio inverso*. The
reader is referred to Figure iv in the supplementary appendix, in which the entire score of *Lo
spazio inverso* is reproduced.

The 'special case' of Nono's extension of the *fermata* sign – extreme, though unsystem-
atic – had parallels throughout the history of 20th century notation. Composers have made
the limitations of conventional western musical notation into an opportunity for creating
one's own symbols. The individual composer's tailoring of notational symbols to his or her
own timbral, durational or other needs is the equivalent of the graphic designer's use of fonts
and colours – a site of originality, offering a stamp of immediately perceivable graphic iden-
tity to the score. The move from handwriting to computerised notation has, if anything, only
stretched these demands on writing even further. Despite the fact that notation programmes

such as Finale and Sibelius are devised for both professional and home-use, the standardisation of notation that might be expected from this integration of software, publishing and individual composers' writing skills, against the background of five decades of experimentation, has not really happened. Nevertheless, the 1970s may be regarded as a highpoint of idiosyncrasy in notation (influence of graphic notation), and by the 1980s things were beginning to settle a little.

Neither Nono nor Salvatore Sciarrino are to be considered as being alone at the forefront of the development of notation. Nevertheless, all that I have written in the previous chapter supports the view that Nono placed high demands on the notation he used, providing a graphic identity, and that his extension of *fermata* notation was a part of the desire to stretch musical writing as far as he could make it go.

Considering the notation of rests, it is worth mentioning György Kurtàg, who similarly devised a series of symbols for evincing both extreme and nuanced silent durations out of his performers – for example, the piano series *Játékok* (1973-).

Sciarrino's close collaboration with instrumentalists, together with his preference for paramusical sounds at the periphery of what can be notated conventionally, has led to his participation in the wave of advanced notation. Sciarrino was apparently the inventor a particular silence-related notational detail that has become extremely widespread: the use of a circle ('zero') at the end of a hairpin dynamic for signifying '*crescendo dal nulla*' or '*diminuendo fino al nulla*'.[1] This arises from his characteristic interest in border phenomena of the audible: transitions between silence, sound and not-yet-sound, from noises external to 'musical' sound-production, to more traditionally profiled musical tone.

Sciarrino puts considerable effort into his notation of ethereal timbres; this is his lasting trademark and the aspect of his work that has had maybe most influence on younger colleagues. In as far as *flageoletti*, timbral fingerings, pitchless tongueslaps, and similar timbral effects make up the focus of his notation, one could say that his primary notational effort is directed at bringing conventional western musical notation to the proximity of silence. I call this pervasive and influential aspect of his work 'timbral quieting'.

Another of Sciarrino's technical innovations that falls under the category of timbral quieting, is his three-sided *flageoletti*. Sciarrino must surely be the composer who has written most *flageoletti* in musical history, and the economy of the three-sided (as opposed to four-sided) notation might be regarded as a kind of 'speed-writing', which has largely remained a personal idiosyncrasy. Characteristically and rather appropriately, it's a perforation of an enclosed sign with added white, empty space invading something as impermeable as a diamond.

5.3 The drama of listening: a classical style

In my discussion of Cagean silence, I discussed the desire of many mid-20th century artists to distance themselves from their works through various moves in the direction of desubjectification. In the case of Nono, I have discussed the distancing of the ideal of an otherworldly music from the materiality of musical sound. Both moves involve the deliberate production of alienation effects. In this chapter, I consider Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso* under the proposal of a classical concern for proportion and balance that is very different from the

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1 That this was his invention is a claim made by Sciarrino himself in interview with M. Kaltenecker: "L'exploration du blanc" (Entretemps, no. 9, Paric, Dec. 1990, p. 139-140)

aforementioned alienation effects. Associating this proposal of a classical style in Sciarrino's work with the extremely quiet timbral writing will then lead me to suggest how *Lo spazio inverso* can be heard as producing a heightened sense of presence. This production of presence might be allied with what is articulated in theories of performativity: a focus on the ephemeral and the perceptually-founded, a sensibility of the particular, a desire to divert attention from the fixed object – in short, a heightened drama of the 'event' as embodying these characteristics.

This assumption of a performative premise in my reading of Sciarrino's music, following directly after a hermeneutic interpretation of Nono's quartet, is in some sense a continuation of the distinction between phenomenology and hermeneutics, with my understanding of phenomenology developing away from the discussion of perceptual frames and schemata, towards an appreciation of the 'present-moment' aspect of a performative listening mode.

My use of the 'classical' model in relation to Sciarrino's music has much less foundation than that of the romantic model in the case of Nono's quartet. The discussion of the classical paradigm in this chapter is motivated firstly by a desire to offer a contrast to the hermeneutic, interpretive mode suggesting by Nono's reference of the early romantic period. Secondly, such a 'classical' analysis supports my proposal of a performative listening mode that rides on the awareness of a heightened sense of presence.

Taken together, the contrast between these two approaches point to a distinction between silence's ability to emphasise experiences of a presentation of absence (in *Fragmente – Stille*), and a production of presence (in *Lo spazio inverso*).

Also, I find it useful here to contrast competing ontologies within the paradigm of the scored musical work. The two score cultures were already well established by the early 1800s, with Rossini's scores understood as offering scripts for an experience in which the performance was everything, whilst Beethoven's scores were understood as authoritative texts in their own right, to which performance was a secondary product.

I draw on Charles Rosen's seminal work on Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, *The classical style*, in order to point up the profound differences between Nono and Sciarrino's chamber music in relation to their stylisations of silence (Rosen, 1971).[2] Rosen's work represents for my purposes a clear and conventional analytical model, well suited to my project. I make no discussion of the historiographical premises for Rosen's proposal of "the classical style".

Two and a half decades separate Rosen's analyses of, respectively, the classical and romantic styles, and much had changed in these years within musicology to account for the difference between the two books, with the first proceeding primarily by structural and harmonic analysis and the second giving much more space to discursive models. However, something in the nature of the stylistic periods themselves seems to support a more formal approach to the classical style and a more discursive approach to the romantic.

Discussing the opening of Mozart's C minor Fantasy for piano, K. 475 (1785), and having demonstrated the symmetry of harmonic form in the introduction, Rosen observes two aspects of the work in terms that give cause for reflection in relation to Sciarrino's work.

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2 Although Beethoven figures in both *The classical style* (Rosen 1997 [1971]) and *The romantic generation* (Rosen 1996), Rosen begins the Beethoven section of *The classical style* with two subsections that position Beethoven somewhat beyond the classical style itself: 'Beethoven and post-classical style' and 'Beethoven and the Romantics'.

The form has a very subtle balance […] the symmetry is clear […]. The music has the sound of improvisation and all the advantages of organized form: only in this way could it give such an impression of unity while sounding so rhapsodic.

This relation of the individual detail to the large form even in apparently improvisational works, and the way the form is shaped freely in response to the smallest parts, gives us the first style in musical history where the organization is completely audible and where the form is never externally imposed. (ibid., p. 93)

And later:

The structure of a classical composition is related to the way its themes sound, not to what might be done with them. […] In the late eighteenth century all extramusical considerations, mathematical or symbolic, have become completely subordinate, and the whole effect, sensuous, intellectual, and passionate, arises from the music alone. (ibid., p. 94)

I propose that Sciarrino's chamber music contrasts with all that I have observed in connection with Nono's association with the early romantic era, and I draw on Rosen's characterisation of the classical style to illuminate the structuring elements in *Lo Spazio Inverso*, as a preface to proceeding to link my reading of the piece with a performative mode of listening. Briefly, I associate Sciarrino's work as offering, in common with the classical style, a drama of hearing as opposed to an interrogation of meaning, although it is not my intention to characterise the performative turn as being an advance on the sensual front at the expense of all intellectual enterprises. Rather, I associate the kinds of meanings at play in Sciarrino's music as being a kind of meaning in-action and without any transcendental aspect.

The very idea of referencing a historical style directly would be at odds with the subordination of "all extramusical considerations"; it is not referentiality that is the relation at work here. To make this difference clear, one has only to think of the self-reflective quotation of 18th-century style as practised at times by Hindemith, Stravinsky, Schnittke or Aldo Clementi. It is not stylistic quotation that I am talking about here, even though Sciarrino is no stranger to such references.[3] Rather, I aim to describe a compositional style that is concerned with formal balance, proportion, and with a relatively non-idealised approach to sound and its timbral content that has parallels with the music of the classical period.

I stated above that the main way in which silence could be considered to be manifest in Sciarrino's chamber music is that of timbral quieting. Now, it is hard to say that Nono's score is not equally demonstrative of timbral quieting. But the conclusion of my observations in the previous chapter must surely be that to a great extent the issue of sound is so idealised that the music heard is largely subordinated to extramusical aspirations. Moreover, the extremely (almost deliberately) erratic and sometimes self-contradictory notation of *fermata*, duration, and other aspects of articulation that even survived a total rewrite of the score after the first performance, suggests that Nono was ambivalent about the final sound of his quartet. Such ambivalence towards sound is absent from Sciarrino's score in every detail, with the possible exception of tempo.

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3   Sciarrino has written a number of free transcriptions of songs by composers from the Italian Renaissance to 20th-century American popular music, including Machaut, Bach, Scarlatti, Rossini, Mozart, Cole Porter and Duke Ellington.

I will now consider *Lo spazio inverso* under the terms of some characteristics of the classical style, as articulated by Charles Rosen, namely: coherence of motivic writing, rhythmic variety of motifs, dramatic effect through contrast, the sense of a climax close to the centre of the work, a resulting symmetry in the overall form, resolution of material towards the end of the piece, and the sense of a final cadence.

The coherence of motivic writing is nowhere more stringently demonstrated than through the opening motif: a minor third produced in the clarinet part by a split-tone fingering (specified in the preface to the score). This dyad is initially played *ppp* for the duration of a dotted minim, approached *dal nulla* and exited *al nulla*. Throughout the course of the piece, the repetition of this motif is the only material of the clarinet part. Small variations are limited to: (i) the motif's duration and rhythmic articulation, and; (ii) the occasional omission of a *dal nulla* or *al nulla* here and there (these are marked specifically, e.g. '*interrotto*', '*pp, fisso*' or '*senza dimin.*'). The element of variation animates this otherwise fairly static motif such that it gains the '*col respiro*' character with which Sciarrino has characterised the entire piece. This is surely an example of extreme coherence in motivic writing, and also of rhythmic variation. The other parts are less strict in their internal stylistic coherence, but each has a clearly limited range of motivic articulations that quickly sets up a mode of listening that is an orientation around the development of familiar material, rather than the constant introduction of new ideas.

Opposite this coherence *within* individual parts, is a great dramatic contrast *between* different parts. This is most clearly observed in a comparison of the clarinet and celeste parts: the one frozen into a static pitch-world, deeply continuous, and muted; the other filled with chromatic chords and clusters that spread right across the instrument's range, and alternating between sforzando and sub-pianissimo dynamics.

Regarding the sense of a climax close to the centre of the work, and a resulting symmetry in the overall form, it might not seem over-simplistic to suggest that the work falls roughly into three sections. In bars 1-17 most of the piece's material is presented for the first time. Bars 25-37 offer a sense of climax (partly through the heightening of the introduced material, and partly through the development of tentative semitonal pitch-slides in the string-parts to full-blown extended glissando-phrases involving registral extremes), and bars 47-59 can be heard as recapitulating material with some sense of resolution (or at least alignment) of motifs, ending with a cadential flourish. (I leave two passages, respectively before and after the central section, open as to whether they belong in the preceding or subsequent section – there is no need to go into categorical structural considerations here, where we are concerned with form only as an expression of style.) Whether one chooses to divide the piece as I suggest here or differently, any observation of the structure will surely come to the conclusion that it seems guided by motivic content – not by any a priori formal, literary or metaphysical points of reference. A sense of climax is evidenced in a central passage in bars 25-37: (i) a *flautando* melody in the violin part, played in glissandi with a minor-third range, c#3 – e3; (ii) this is followed by the celeste-part's most extensive passage in the whole piece, perforated by a brief total silence; (iii) the violin hits its highest concrete pitch of the entire piece (a4), followed by a slow-moving downward glissando, which drops off suddenly and is taken over by the cello (now as an artificial harmonic), to be brought lower before being returned (*glissando* all the while) to the original high register in the violin part, with ends the section with a spiky *glissando* flourish underlined by striking *sforzando* figures in the celeste, cello and flute parts. In

the middle of this central section, the clarinet's dyad motif holds its only extended silence of the piece. The climactic character of this central passage creates a strong sense of before and after, into which the rest of the piece falls, more or less symmetrically.

To give a more 'local' example of symmetry in the piece, we can look at the end of what I have called the first section. Bars 15-21 are characterised by approximately symmetrical celeste flourishes that are separated by a 'pivot' moment. This pivot consists of rhythmically animated repetitions of the clarinet motif, accompanied by a bass trill in the celeste. The celeste flourishes are in turn mirrored by sustained *glissandi* in the cello part moving in the opposite direction.

The very title of the work is suggestive of symmetry. Inverted space: a reflection of space (such as in water or a mirror) standing in, perhaps, as metaphor for musical reflection.

Without going as far as claiming that there is a 'recapitulation', we can safely describe a number of motivic returns that contribute to a sense of resolution of material in the final section. One such return is that of the strings' *glissando* theme to the level of short pitch-slides, although now infected with the registral expansion that has occurred since the first pitch-slides were introduced. Ornamentation is at a premium, evidenced in the violin part's '*vibr. rapido*' (bars 48-9), and the fact that most of the string-part articulations are played with a *tremolo* bow. The rhythmic variation of the clarinet motif is polarised between repetitions of the 'original' opening version (a smooth dynamic arch, lasting a dotted minim, followed by a quaver's rest to inhale) and the animated punctual repetitions of what I previously called the 'pivot' moment at the end of the first section. The cello returns decisively to its opening material in bar 47.

A final cadential flourish is introduced by two bars of agitated trills (in the flute and cello parts), and by the return of the most animated rhythmic aspect of the clarinet part. The cadential figure itself consists of a dramatic downward *flageoletto* swoop on the violin's g-string, a *mezzoforte* downward *glissando* in the cello part, with agitated *tremolo* bowing, and a final scamper in the celeste part – all explicitly marked *senza rall.*

5.4 Prescription for action

All of the above supports my reading that generally classical formal concerns are at play in *Lo spazio inverso*. This is in itself not a reason to banish the possibility of the music being subordinated to extramusical concerns, nor to presume a special mode of listening. However, a brief consideration of the relationship between score and performance in the classical and romantic eras – along the lines of the Rossini-Beethoven distinction described above – will underline my argument that there is a comparative difference regarding the production of presence and of alienation, respectively.

I discussed, in the previous chapter, the rejuvenation of hermeneutics at the beginning of the romantic era. The hermeneutic project sought not only increased understanding, insight, and meaning, but also some kind of totality presumed to lie beyond the work's materiality. Thus, a given text would provide the object for interpretive endeavours aimed at influencing perception with the results of these intellectual or metaphysical gains. In the field of music, this interpretive investment underlined the score as textual representative of the totality of each piece. The score was not the work itself, but through interpretation of the score (for example, in performance), one could begin to glimpse the work, which existed as a kind of aspirational ideal.

In the classical era, prior to this transcendental development, the score was rather a prescription for action, a series of technical instructions to be executed. The economy of the classical score was due to a large degree of consensus around performance practice. Ornamentation, repetition, phrasing and many other parameters were more specifically detailed in classical scores than in those of the baroque, but still there was a normative practice that could be assumed as given.

Comparing the prescriptive clarity of Sciarrino's scores (where the clarinet is given the timbral fingering necessary to hit the minor-third dyad) with the difficulties of Nono's scores (in which performers are forced to step in and out of various levels of reading the text literally and figuratively), we see not only parallels in the difference between classical and romantic attitudes to the score as text, but also the crux of the requirements of the hermeneutic project. For, if nothing other than listening to sound is *intended*, then the hermeneutic project has little work to do. Asking what *Lo spazio inverso* means or is, is simply the wrong question.

It is worth qualifying this claim concerning the prescriptive clarity of Sciarrino's scores with the observation that there are typically no metronome markings in Sciarrino's music. The only expressive tempo marking in *Lo spazio inverso* is the instruction '*come senza tempo, col respiro*', a remark that is underlined by the compositional writing itself (as I have shown in relation to the respiratory nature of the clarinet part, for example, and its rhythmic animation) and therefore more illustrative than informative of the duration. One can only speculate on the reason why a composer writing in an age of extreme notational precision would write a music which is at once so precise in timbre and articulation and so loose in tempo. The interpretive issues are in any case analogous to those of the 18th-century classical style. The performer has the choice of rehearsing with the composer, of referring to performances sanctioned by the composer, or of finding an internal logic in the music that might dictate tempo. Certainly, there are physical issues of respiration, bowing or fingering in each of the instrumental parts here that might rule out certain temporal extremes, giving a physiological aspect to the inner logic of musical phrasing.

Finally, before leaving comparisons between the score as prescription-for-action and as text-awaiting-interpretation, I would like to emphasise that the respectively classical and romantic relations discussed here are only intended to serve as models within a comparative framework, not as proposals of deep historical roots. I have drawn on a commonly-perceived historical sequentiality in the development from regarding the musical score as a prescription for action (18th century) to reading it as a text for interpretation (19th century). But it is worth pointing out that the sequentiality of this development is not extended to the 20th century. I say this in order to avoid the construal of Sciarrino's adherence to the classical model in this respect as a historical regression. Late 20th-century scored music was characterised by a series of extremely individual and therefore 'manneristic' relations between composer, score and performance, so that neither Nono's nor Sciarrino's approach can be said to be more or less typical of the prevailing attitude towards these issues in the 1980s.

5.5 Resetting perception

Leaving the relatively conventional discussion of the classical model of prescriptive score and formal balance, I now move ot a consideration of *Lo spazio inverso* as prompting a performative mode of listening. This entails an introduction of my understanding of the performative

mode as such. But first, I must discuss why I find it appropriate to bring in a consideration of performativity in relation to Sciarrino's chamber music at this point in the thesis.

It is worth looking at Sciarrino's own rhetoric of 'resetting the listener's perception to zero'.[4] I will pursue a discussion of this attitude toward perception, together with other ways in which a heightened sense of 'presence' is produced through Sciarrino's music, with the aim of linking the perceptual present with what I propose as the 'aural performative'.

Compared with Nono's *Fragmente – Stille*, Sciarrino's scores are relatively prosaic in respect of their relationship to performance. The listener is thus stationed in an ideal position to understand the music through direct experience – that is, through listening alone. Attention focuses on a relatively unproblematised act of listening. I will try to elucidate my point in relation to Sciarrino's music, before concluding with the not-uncomplicated theoretical considerations on performativity at play here.

The instrumental writing in *Lo spazio inverso* gestures towards silence through a series of timbral quietings. I propose that this timbral quieting contributes to a sense of heightened presence.

One way in which presence is heightened is through a strong sense of the performer's live presence. Thus, presence might precariously be linked to silence through the performer-listener matrix. Most of Sciarrino's main instrumental innovations have evolved through the use of wind instruments, and it is no accident that the respiratory quality of his music often comes through very clearly as an experience of the physicality of the performer's body. Regular oscillations parallel the breathing activity with a kind of cardiac pulsing, and more 'traumatised' flurries of sound are reminiscent of sudden breathing in shock. In fact, the overriding direction at the start of the score of *Lo spazio inverso* (1985) is "*come senza tempo, **col respiro**".

In Sciarrino's understanding, the presence of the performer, the listener and the composer are all simultaneous and interlinked. Various techniques for inhaling through a wind instrument (a sound that was a cornerstone of the style developed in Sciarrino's close collaborations with flautist Roberto Fabbricciani[5]) remind us of the presence of the performer's body. Sciarrino says of this effect that such physiological manifestations seem like hearing the breathing of the instrumentalist or the breath of the listener, or maybe of the person writing (i.e. the composer).[6] Thus, a concrete and physical intimacy arises through this para-musical act, binding not only musical sound and non-sound (silence) but also performer, listener and composer. This relation is further twisted – in a Cagean direction – when Sciarrino adds that, "in any case, there are these silences, where physiology manifests itself, as if in an anechoic chamber"[7] (where the listener suddenly becomes actor, by virtue of the fore-grounding of his own body).

Overlapping with the foregrounding of the performer's body and breath and also with this Cagean twist is Sciarrino's fascination and frequent reference to wind and nature. This aspect is present from works like *Di Zefiro e Pan* (1976) for double wind quintet to the community music project *Studi per l'intonazione del mare* (Studies for tuning the sea) (2000) for 4 flutes, 4 saxophones, percussion and orchestras of 100 flutes and 100 saxophones, in which he uses the large forces to create a quiet murmur.

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4   See Giacco 2001, pp. 24, 54.
5   Fabbricciani was also one of Luigi Nono's close collaborators, influencing instrumentally advanced works such as *Das atmende Klarsein* (1981).
6   See Giacco 2001, p. 32.
7   Ibid.

But there is more to the Cagean allusion than this: what links Sciarrino and Cage is the desire to produce a kind of presence where intentions are presumed to subside in favour of the volatility of the perceptual moment.

Through this link between advanced instrumental techniques and virtuosic gesture, then, I propose that the physicality of the performer's body produces a strong experience of presence. This experience of presence seems linked in Sciarrino's music to the employment of timbres at the extreme end of the dynamic scale.

Further, silence is constructed rhetorically as an inverted space of listening, through production of the kind of aural experience that Sciarrino describes as *azzerare* – resetting the listener's perception.

Sciarrino's interviews are full of this rhetoric of putting back the listener's perception to zero, in the search for a new approach to listening through the use of sounds close to no-sound: harmonics, breaths, and key-clicks. This mode of listening is closely connected to his desire to construct a form that consists of motifs balanced within a formal, silent space. Form could itself be regarded as sounding silent, in that it is an aspect of art music that usually arises only through memory of a movement of music (once it is over), or through silent reading of the score.

Comparing Sciarrino's quintet with Nono's quartet, it seems that Sciarrino's intentions towards the listening experience are more positive and transparent than Nono's. Sciarrino's timbral quietings act as an axis upon which desire for sound turns (rather than desire for meaning). If Nono's silence is overshadowed by a dark converse with dead souls, Sciarrino's silence is white, virgin and "seems to us absolute … full of potential: this is a silence which we suddenly understand."[8] This focus on pure sonic exploration through hyper-presence leaves no room for intertextuality and "other spaces" of the kind that we find in *Fragmente – Stille.*

The basic line of my comparison between silences in the music of Nono and Sciarrino can be further illustrated by invoking spatial metaphors. In *Fragmente-Stille,* Nono gestures (through what he withholds from the listener) to a place *outside* the context of the piece in question ("silenzi di altri spazi", silences of other spaces – as it says in the preface to the score). Sciarrino, on the other hand, gestures to the *present* place, the site of listening – albeit an inverted present space, as he calls it in his title. Inversion is also a metaphor for the switching of silence and musical sound between background and foreground, as I have noted. Again, this underlines the distinction between the uses of hermeneutics and performativity. The meanings that are the hunted bounty of hermeneutics can be presumed to lie beyond or behind Nono's text (i.e. in an other space), whereas the performative act of listening to Sciarrino's music tracks the present place in the present moment, producing presence as time passes.

I am not proposing that Nono's game of referentiality to 'other skies' completely obliterates any possibility of accessing the work in a listening mode that indulges in perceptual presence. Nor that Sciarrino's work raises no hermeneutic considerations. But rather, that each work invests somewhat to one side of the distinction. Sciarrino achieves an aural transparency by continual dramatic ruptures that nevertheless occur within a balanced and symmetrical form. The symmetry might be considered as an accommodation of the listener, quite opposite to the strategies of alienation that I observed in my discussion of Nono's *Fragmente – Stille.* On this account, then, Sciarrino's silence contributes to a mode of aural per-

8   Vasilii Kandinsky, quoted by Sciarrino in sleeve-notes to Ensemble Alter Ego's CD *Esplorazione del bianco*

ception in which listening predominates over understanding, and where aurality can remain enraptured in a constantly moving present moment.

My earlier characterisation of Sciarrino's style as 'classical' served to rinse reception of the hermeneutic-interpretive urge. Once the intellectual understanding of meaning is muted, then sensual or perceptual aspects of the music can come into focus. Also, the static object of the text-to-be-interpreted gives way to a temporal dynamics which, together with the afore-mentioned accent on perception, underlines a dynamic construction of present-based experience that moves between a series of events.

5.6 Hermeneutics and performativity

A further discussion of the hermeneutic and performative projects will help us to encircle my construal of Sciarrino's quintet. The discussion of distinctions between hermeneutics and performativity also collects a series of observations on the role of body, presence and listening in the performative mode that will serve as a point of reference for my critique of listening as a performative mode in itself, in Chapter 7.

The comparison of these two academic modes can be regarded as a continuation of my earlier distinctions between hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to understanding empty artworks. Here, the themes of bodily presence and sensual perception as tied together in aesthetic contemplation are considered in the light of the performative turn within the humanities. I will not undertake a detailed analysis of the concept or history of performativity, but I introduce it here as an opening towards my later reflections on performative listening modes and subliminal sound art in the new millennium.

If hermeneutics is all about the deepening of understanding through engaging with ever-receding layers of meaning embedded in a text, then performativity is all about remaining loyal to the experiential promise offered by the perceptual act, giving hearing priority over meaning. In this sense, then, hermeneutics has the reputation of a comparatively more intellectual discipline, whilst performativity is chiefly concerned with a return to sensuality. However, this return to perceptual sensing is not to be seen as a proclusion of intellectual understanding (just as the phenomenological mode also acknowledged the body's *knowledge*).

Just as I suggested a relationship between Nono's quartet and the hermeneutic project at its roots in the early romantic period, so I would like to proceed with a comparison of Sciarrino's quintet with some characterisations of the performative project that has established itself recently within the humanities. The very idea of 'resetting' perception, through classical traits of style, is suggestive of a project that bypasses the historical romantic era and its fundamental questioning of meaning and articulation. I loosely associate the performative turn with a classical *re*turn that in some way 'undoes' romantically-based hermeneutic beliefs in the super-textual powers of the text.

The relation between performativity and musicology is still relatively young, and therefore subject to widely differing tendencies. Performativity cannot yet be reckoned as an aesthetic-theoretical position of equal pondus to hermeneutics, but it could be regarded as a beneficiary of the wane of hermeneutics' dominance. A distinction between the theories and methods of hermeneutics is helpful in understanding the struggle for stability that performativity studies are presently undergoing in musicology.

Hermeneutics in musicology might be traced through two main waves. The first was the European aesthetic-theoretical approach that moved from a text-interpretive mode to

a reception-oriented mode. The second was the Anglo-American 'New Musicology' of the 1990s, in which the hermeneutic mode was a methodological vehicle for bringing socio-cultural projects into the musicological field.[9] The key to this difference between the uses of hermeneutics as methodical contra theoretical musicology was described already in the mid-1970s, within the context of a German enquiry into the use of the term hermeneutics within musicology. In 'Das geliehene Licht des Verstandes', Helga de la Motte-Haber seeks clarity within the muddled hermeneutic discourse within musicology. She pursues a distinction between, on the one hand, method that proceeds by legalistic and logical argument and, on the other hand, philosophically-based theory that is directed at the establishment of truths, and thus has universalising ambitions (Motte-Haber 1975). This is bound up in an inherited musicological practice that she dates from Hermann Kretzschmar's poeticising descriptions of music, right at the start of the 20th century.

Three decades on from Motte-Haber's text, it is not hard to find parallels between the situation that she describes and the present musicological discourse on performativity. In the 1970s, the term 'interpretation' provoked confusion between levels of hermeneutic and musi-cological discourse. This is paralleled in the new millennium in relation to the term 'perform-ance' within performative and musicological discourses. A distinction between theories and methods of performativity is mapped out in a recent article by Søren Møller Sørensen that fittingly considers both European and Anglo-American musicological discourses (Sørensen, 2004). This inclusive approach acknowledges the twin root of musicological performativity discourses in aesthetic and socio-cultural projects. At the same time, important distinctions are made between theories of musical performance, performance art, performance analysis and performativity theories.

The level at which I propose that we can talk of a performative mode of understanding *Lo spazio inverso* is somewhat removed from the issue of musical performance. I have indi-cated a role for the performer's body in establishing a heightened sense of presence, but my main interest in the performative relates to distinguishing a mode of understanding through perception that describes the *listener's* activity as performative. It will therefore be valuable to draw some connections between my earlier phenomenological discussions and the present consideration of the performative perceptual mode.

5.7 Phenomenology and performativity

In my discussion of Cagean silence, I briefly made some links between the kind of intentional attitude that Cage proposed towards his works and a roughly phenomenological mode of listening. In Cage's case, this was an attempt to show that there are different modes of inten-tionality towards sounds, and that one could replace a perceived 'romantic' or 'expressive' subjectivity – of the kind that Cage and so many of his contemporaries despised – with a perceptually-based subjectivity.

The prevalence of performativity theories in the humanities today can be seen as a re-turn, in some sense, to phenomenology. Judith Butler (1956-), whose work is a cornerstone of performativity theories, based much of her early work on phenomenological discourses. A phenomenological approach might be described as prioritising and legitimising the purity of a subject's spontaneous and immediate experience of a given phenomenon. Thus, the

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9   This was anticipated to some extent by prototypical socio-hermeneutics in the 1970s.

intuitive perceptual experience is considered before all pre-judgements (e.g. historical and cultural baggage).

In aesthetics, this opens up for a direct relation between artwork (as phenomenon) and audience. Such a direct relation is a contrast to the bourgeois relation, where enjoyment of an artwork was surrounded in social codes acquired from childhood onwards – including anything from the decorum of remaining silent between movements of a string quartet, to knowing how to play the violin oneself and thus being better able to judge a skilled musician. The bourgeois art experience focused attention on the implicit knowledge that audiences brought to their encounters with artworks, subsuming the new experience under already-existing categories.

The phenomenological aspect of the relation between artwork and audience is reinforced in the humanities through movements such as reception-hermeneutics and theories of performativity. Reception hermeneutics (otherwise called, in Anglo-American theory, reader-response criticism) resembles phenomenology in the position represented by Heidegger, for whom hermeneutics was no longer a matter of meaning residing either in authorial intention or in textual interpretation, but was an interpretive mode of being in the world and of orientating oneself in it. Wolfgang Iser and the Constance school also drew heavily on phenomenology in developing the (literary) framework of interplay between author, text and reader as a triangular opportunity for the reader to enter into the construction of meaning in literary texts.

Performativity theories go further, implicating all identity in action and thus in relations with the world. Like phenomenology, performativity undermines talk of 'essences' with talk of what is perceived. But performativity adds a temporal dimension, lending this 'new phenomenology' more dynamic and processual qualities. Phenomenology and performativity have in common that they dismiss social reality as a given or essence, proposing instead that phenomena in the social (and thus the cultural) sphere are continually created and recreated (through artificial, conventional, and historical constructs). The reiterative aspect of this creation and recreation of identities is one hallmark of the performative.

> Performativity must be understood […] as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. (Butler 1993, p. 2)

Arising originally from philosophy of language (Austin's observations on speech acts in the 1950s) through discourse analysis, performativity reached a provisional high-point in Judith Butler's application of performative utterances to gender theory, before spreading throughout the arts within the past ten years through feminist studies, film and literary theory and so on to the visual arts. In its (slightly belated) application to musicology, performativity theories have had to undergo some teething problems, due to the fact that the term 'performance' is already spoken for within the field of music, and has also generated a vibrant research activity within recent decades due to the revival of the use of historically authentic instruments and associated performance practices. Moreover, there is the added complication of the fact that the relation of variability between, say, a score (or otherwise work of fixed identity) and its many performances goes under the name of 'interpretation'.

5.8 Performative listening and presence

My understanding of the performative mode relies on a separation of musical listening from considerations of performance understood as the actions of a performer in relation to a score. All that I have to say about the performer's bodily presence in Sciarrino's music has already been said above. I now turn to a listening mode that I call the 'aural performative', that makes listening into a reiterative act, or practice, akin to the act of utterance, an act of appropriating sound through perception.

My purpose here is to separate the consideration of the listening act from acts of musical performance. But the bodily aspect of the performative has to be preserved. There is of course a bodily aspect to listening, for perception has body, and if there is a link between presence and performative listening, then it is through the stimulation of this act of perception.

We are concerned, then, with a mode of listening that: (i) prioritises the sensual over the intellectual or cultural; (ii) attends to a series of events through a repeating practice (as opposed to relating to one, singular text or act), and (iii) constitutes the form of a musical work as it goes along (as opposed to standing outside it). All these are evoked through a heightened sense of presence (or presentation, as opposed to representation).

Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's book *Production of presence: what meaning cannot convey* is a plea for attending more closely to presentation, as well as being a symptom of the tension between hermeneutic and performative approaches in the humanities (Gumbrecht, 2004). Gumbrecht's book is basically a complaint about the continued prevalence of hermeneutic methods in the humanities. What is injured by a preoccupation with the interpretive search for the holy grail of meaning, he argues, can be summed up under the term 'presence' – the tangible aspect of cultural objects. Presence is characterised here as that which is produced under a heightened sense of perceptual awareness, referencing a desire for some kind of immediacy. Body, sense, perception and immediacy are thus placed opposite all that is metaphysical, transcendental, or otherwise of higher (or further) value than what is physical. Gumbrecht's relevance here is the double observation that: (i) there is a difference between "presence effects" and "meaning effects" in our encounters with artworks, and (ii) that aesthetic experience is "an oscillation (and sometimes an interference)" between them (Gumbrecht 2004, p. 2).

I have earlier characterised the performative as a heightened drama of the event that focuses on the ephemeral and the perceptually-founded, evoking a sensibility of the particular, and suggesting a desire to escape (or at least divert attention from) the fixed object. In the performative mode, the moment constantly and repeatedly discards its temporal traces, in order to keep up with a flow of unmediated presence. In the sensibility of the particular, each perceptual event offers a self-contained experience, and is not a representative of some other more abstract or idealised thing. The performative mode is not deaf to the production of meaning, but it suggests an ability to move between one moment of understanding and another without accruing interpretive ballast. In the performative mode, listening is rather a dynamic drama than a search for essential truths.

I hope that through these characterisations of *Lo spazio inverso* and performativity, some connections are becoming clear. I am aware that the theoretical grounding for my performative reading of *Lo spazio inverso* is much weaker than in the case of the hermeneutic reading of *Fragmente – Stille* that I offered in the previous chapter. This can be partly accounted for by the volatility of the performative project within musicology that I have already discussed.

And partly by the fact that *Lo spazio inverso* is not a particularly radical object on which to practise the aural performative.

But the main difficulty at this point is the establishment of 'performative listening' as a concept – a challenge which I will persist with, in Chapter 7, in relation to sound art that stages silence totally outside any considerations of score, performer, and other musical categories.

For how can some acts of listening be more performative than others? Based on my earlier characterisations of the performative mode, it could intuitively seem that *all* aesthetic listening must necessarily be performative, in as far as listening is an intensely temporal activity. On the other hand, if we argue from the occurrence of phenomena such as formal repetition, then it would seem that totally random musical processes would produce a 'more performative' experience than, say, musical works of average complexity that display coherence through inner logic at several levels.

Maybe it is only possible to define performativity negatively here. For, if we regard the performative as a mode of understanding that is constituted through a perceptual act that has elements of (i) change through time, (ii) a concentration on shifting presence, (iii) constant reorientation in relation to consecutive events, and (iv) is concerned with the production and reproduction of presence, then there is no way of anchoring the mode to any work or style other than in accordance with the idiosyncracies of the listener's personal stylistic preferences.

But if we characterise the performative as opposing the static aspects of things, and as constituting an artwork as a kind of trace in the mind of the listener (as opposed to in elusive directions in a score not available to the general listener), then we can more safely couple the experience of listening to Sciarrino's music with a performative mode.

In Chapter 7, I will consider the aural performative at more length, together with its relationship to radical instances of silence in 'subliminal' sound art. This leads to considerations concerning the way that the artwork is constituted for the listener through the performative listening mode. I have shown here that constitutive silences act as both challenge and confirmation of the artwork as object. This issue becomes particularly pressing in a comparison of works with very different physical manifestations (such as the difference between scored concert music and CDs mixed for being heard through personal headphones).

I therefore rest my case, for the moment, on this comparison of hermeneutic and performative modes in the reception of Nono and Sciarrino's music respectively – modes that are, in both cases, integrally bound up with the way that they are constituted by radical silencings. The combined models of, respectively, hermeneutics-and-early-romanticism and performativity-and-the-classical-style assert something different than the more categorically phenomenological approach underlying my discussion of Cagean silence.

The comparative analysis of the two chamber-music works has proceeded on the grounds of a more conventional musical discourse. Where Luigi Nono's string quartet *Fragmente – Stille: an Diotima* was discussed through the work's references to the early romantic aesthetic project, the composerly act of '*schweigen*', and the hermeneutic discourse surrounding such a project, I have drawn on a contrasting model extracted from musicological analysis of the mature classical style in my discussion of *Lo spazio inverso*. Thus, the hermeneutic approach of Chapter 4, elucidating an aesthetic experience of the presentation of absence, was contrasted with the proposal of a performative listening mode in Chapter 5 that emphasised the performative production of presence.

PART IV – New-millennium digital silences

6.0 Introduction to Part IV

The basic paradox of presenting absences underlies all the work that I discuss in this thesis. The final chapters of this thesis concern the presentation of absence in a categorical way, similar to the extreme stance of the empty artwork discussed in Part II. Entering into a series of reflections of Christof Migone's CD album *Quieting* and Francisco López' CD piece *Untitled #129* prompts a more rigorously theoretical consideration of the terms of presentation and absence. I have chosen to orientate my discussion of the presentation of absence around Jean-François Lyotard's concept of 'negative presentation'. Also, I will further explore what I have termed the 'aural performative'. This is connected to a discussion of some new-millennium sound art on CD – primarily, Christof Migone's *Quieting* (2000) and Francisco López' *Untitled #129* (2002).

It is time to close in on the distinction between presentation and representation. In Chapter 2, I considered the prevalence of the mid-20th century empty artwork in the light of a post-war crisis of representation. It is hard (and confusing) to talk of 'representation' in music, but by situating musical works within a common historical context with artworks in other media (literature and visual art, for example), the theme of representation can be explored at a step removed – by association, as it were.

I noted that Lyotard also saw the legacy of the late 20th century as inheriting problems of articulation as a direct result of the Jewish holocaust. Nevertheless, the term I consider here – negative presentation – that was central to Lyotard's understanding of avantgarde art, was largely unfolded with reference to a broader historical picture that did not give the Jewish holocaust any special role. Lyotard first wrote about negative presentation in the early 1980s (Lyotard 1984), and the term led him to a re-evaluation of the Kantian sublime that culminated with the publication of his lectures notes *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* some ten years later (Lyotard 1994).

Attaching these issues to a perceived 'neo-modernism' in some new-millennium sound art, I pursue the supposition that the problematic of the crisis of representation is to some extent still operative today, but that it has been rinsed of its former historical overtones (the reference to the Second World War), and has become a thematisation of presentation – through non-presentation, or the presentation of absence.

In the following chapters, I consider the term 'negative presentation' as a theoretical framework that contributes both to a summarising of the earlier chapters' aesthetic discussions (of constitutive silence and the particularities of musical listening) and also points forward to my discussions of Christof Migone and Francisco López' digital sound art. The concept of negative presentation and its position within both Kant's and Lyotard's philosophies of the sublime is a weighty subject. Additionally, there is a considerable task of description and presentation of the artworks to be discussed. Therefore, I have chosen to give a short presentation of the two works for the reader's orientation, before embarking on the theoretical discussion. The term 'aural performative', however, is addressed during the course of the more detailed work discussions, and is eventually attached to a consideration of the 'personal listening' mode that has largely succeeded the decorum of collective concert listening.

The discussion of 'negative presentation' works at a fairly abstract level, compared with the earlier chapters' incorporation of theoretical considerations in the presentation and discussion of specific works. The need for this more strictly theoretical discussion comes partly from an accumulation of concepts through the thesis. Another reason that the theoretical and

artistic observations are more separate here lies deeper within the post-structuralist project – one that I cannot hope to address in much depth here.

Post-structuralist discourse can be characterised by the fact that it constructs a series of dichotomies or oppositions that seem contradictory but nevertheless act like magnetic attractors upon one another. The fate of these oppositions is compelling for intellectual thought about the arts and has generated much advanced theory within the humanities. Not least, artists themselves are attracted by post-structuralist critical discourses and the way that they acknowledge a number of remainders in the meeting of aesthetic beholder with objectified artwork. As an analysis of aesthetic emotion, post-structuralist has had much to contribute.

However, post-structuralist discourse rarely involves the close reading of individual artworks as objects with unique internal structure. Identifying incompatible values residing within the same work, post-structuralist theory becomes a game of locating exciting problems, distancing itself more and more from the aesthetic experience as specific to artworks.

Presence and absence are one pair in a range of dichotomies that become more and more conceptually complex as they combine in post-structuralist theory.

The presentation of absence is elucidated here by means of an in-depth examination of Lyotard's Kant-derived concept of 'negative presentation', relating it to the case of sound art that refuses to present representative sounds. Negative presentation arises – in both Kant and Lyotard's writings alike – as a sub-set of the sublime. Drawing out in particular Lyotard's pinpointing of negative presentation as a defining moment of the avantgarde, I discuss this in relation to terms such as modernist, postmodernist and neo-modernist.

The move away from scored music brings us back to some of the themes raised in Part II on Cagean silence: the conceptualisation of silence as idea, and the production of intention. Also, the distinctions drawn up in Part III between the hermeneutic and performative modes form the basis for the proposal of an oscillation between hermeneutic and performative modes in relation to experiencing Migone and López' CD works. Further, the concept of the aural performative is also explored further.

In Chapter 6, I set out Lyotard's latent theories[1] of the sublime and of negative presentation in relation to understandings of the avantgarde and the postmodern, using this theoretical basis to ask how the sounds and framings of sound art can manifest negativity through silence and quietness. I indicate a small number of works that I believe form a unified aes-

1 I say 'latent' because, as Finn Frandsen has pointed out in his introduction to the Danish translation of Lyotard's *Pérégrinations*, Lyotard's insistence on the suspension of final interpretations and of the formation of meaning entails that his texts are to be taken as being in an unrelenting performative mode and thus pitted against the formation of systematic (ie. stable) theories. This applies not only to his early texts which stylistically embody the fight against reduction to a core meaning or main argument, but also to his entire work, in as far as Lyotard never relinquished his faith in the importance of the event, the now, and the inability of critical theory to ever say the final word on aesthetic issues – that role of the completion of the aesthetic project being most properly left, according to him, to art itself. . It could be argued that almost all primary philosophy texts written in French during the second half of the 20th century are 'latent' in the sense that their combined avoidance of familiar philosophical forms of argumentation leave the generation of theories in the hands of the authors of the wealth of secondary literature that is required to open up these works for their readers. In the context of discussing Lyotard alongside Kant, however, I think it is safe to point out that Lyotard's positioning of his writings within the framework of an 'explanation' (*explication du texte*) of Kant's Analytic of the Sublime embeds the agenda of the sublime that Lyotard had already been proposing for 10 years previously in such a way that it needs to be extrapolated from Kant at some considerable effort in order to be unfolded.

thetic project within current digital sound-art, and I discuss general issues arising from the medium in which they are created and presented. Specifically, I make an analysis of Christof Migone's CD *Quieting* and discuss to what extent the constitutive silences in *Quieting* are elucidated by recourse to Lyotard's brand of 'negative presentation'.

Christoph Cox has used the label 'neo-modernism' to describe a new tendency within sound art that combines interests in abstraction and the perceptual act with formal strategies of reduction. I regard the works by Christof Migone and Francisco López that I discuss in Chapter 7 as falling under this description. Cox has himself made the link between López and the new modernism in sound art (Cox 2003). I contextualise Migone and López' work as part of a gradually cohering group of works created for CD-distribution, all seeking to highlight or thematise digitalised silence. I will call this movement 'subliminal sound art', while acknowledging that it sometimes goes under names such as lowercase, microsound, New London Silence, and so on, and also overlaps with glitch. I discuss strategies of abstraction, formalism and reduction in relation to an aesthetic of the presentation of absence.

Negative presentation

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to join characteristics of new-millennium subliminal sound art with an aesthetics of the presentation of absence, grounded in Lyotard's mature reflections on 'negative presentation', the presentation of the unpresentable.

In Part II, I linked the 'unpresentable' and the perceived crisis of representation with a specific historical moment – the immediate post-Auschwitz midcentury. Although there is some continuity between the abstraction of immediate midcentury modernism and the new purity of new-millennium formal reductions, it is impossible to claim that the new sound art I will go on to discuss in Chapter 7 is formed under the continued weight of the post-Auschwitz paradigm.

This change over time (the shift from midcentury towards new-millennium abstraction) is also reflected in Lyotard's writings. Although he continued to comment on Jewish historical and ethical concerns up into the 1990s[2], Lyotard's eventual unfolding of the concept of 'negative presentation', which had been the cornerstone of his development of notions of not only the artistic sublime but also of the avantgarde and of the postmodern moment within modernism *per se* since the mid-1980s, eventually takes the form of an intensely theoretical analysis with few links to historical context.

It is as if the onward history of the term 'postmodern' after the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979 exhausted Lyotard's desire to continue discussing the modernist, postmodernist and avantgarde cultural positions, and led instead to a more abstract consideration of the sublime, cleansed of the political urges that he had previously prioritised.

It is worth looking carefully at the movement in Lyotard's use of the term 'negative presentation' in respect of an aesthetics of non-representation which has found new life in some recent sound art's revival of extreme abstraction, formalism, and experimental reduction.

Negative presentation is not only the cornerstone of twenty years' worth of mature theoretical reflection by Lyotard. It is also originally part of Kant's extremely complex analysis of 'the sublime' in nature and religious feeling.[3] The term 'negative presentation' thus arises from writings that span two centuries, formulated at a level of abstraction that offers no straightforward 'application' to this or that art, much less a marginal subcultural digital trend at the start of the 21st century. In addition to the weight of this philosophical tradition, the post-structuralist approach has never been noted for easing the close reading of specific artworks.

It is in no way possible here to honour the complexity of either Kant's Analytic of the Sublime, or Lyotard's expanded 'explication' of the Analytic. A review of the field of the aes-

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2 See Lyotard (2001): *Soundproof Room: Malraux's Anti-Aesthetics*. Translated by Robert Harvey. Stanford University Press.

3 See Kant 1993, pp. 122-3 (in German) or Kant 1987, pp. 135-6 (in English). Pluhar's translation of Kant's *Critique of judgment* (1987) – one of the most widely used English translations – translates 'negative Darstellung' with 'negative exhibition', whilst Rottenburg's excellent translation of Lyotard's *Lessons on the analytic of the sublime* and most other translators of Lyotard use 'negative presentation'. For consistency in my own text, I have chosen to stick to 'presentation', in order to draw on the links with my earlier discussions of presence (see Part III).

thetic sublime would be a formidable task. The subject has been active in writing about aesthetics for several hundred years, and in fact stretches back to ancient classical times.

What I hope to achieve here is, firstly, the indication of two phases in Lyotard's engagement with negative presentation as a sub-category of the sublime: roughly speaking, a 'postmodern-avantgarde' phase, followed by a '(post)structuralist-analytical' phase. Thereafter, I will follow Lyotard's distinction (from his second phase) between two types of aesthetics of the sublime: the aesthetics of the too-much, and the aesthetics of the almost-nothing. The latter type formed the basis of Lyotard's attachment to minimalist, abstract act and its experimental evasion of conventional forms and figures. In the context of my discussion of silence, I will attach the aesthetics of the almost-nothing to a discussion of subliminal digital sound art.

6.2 The sublime and the postmodern

In the late 1970s Lyotard articulated the aesthetics of a postmodern avantgarde, which he refined during the 1980s. Lyotard understood the avantgarde primarily as a particularly radical moment within modernist art – a point of critical reflection within broader-stream modernism. There is some ambivalence in Lyotard's writings between the perception of postmodernism and the avantgarde as synonyms, and as a continuum. At times, the avantgarde is tantamount to modernism, within which the postmodern is a dynamic force. At other times, the avantgarde is postmodern itself, working within modernism.

Lyotard defined the avantgarde as all self-reflexively future-oriented art of the past 200 years. Thus, the sublime and the postmodern avantgarde are, for Lyotard, twinned at birth, together with the modern politics ensuing from the time of the French Revolution. Lyotard was concerned with art that was radical and regenerative (at least in its own and in his understanding). In particular, with recalcitrantly minimalist avantgarde art, where there is a shyness towards the presentation of content. Lyotard saw in Kant's formulation of the presentation of the unpresentable a description of the same impulses that later set the experiments of the reductionist avantgarde in motion.

Similarly to Cage's retreat from formulating his silent piece as a media action (for broadcast on Muzak radio) to strengthening his grasp on the traditional concert-hall, Lyotard later retreated from engaging with Cage's benevolent negativity to the tidy squaring frame of the painterly (abstract expressionist) canvas. Lyotard devoted a number of essays to the discussion of the sublime event in association with the painting of Barnett Newman (Lyotard 1989a, Lyotard 1989d). Lyotard's choice of Newman sidesteps other figures from Newman's artistic generation such as Rothko, Pollock and most significantly of all, perhaps, Rauschenberg. But it also sidesteps the art contemporary to Lyotard's theories. In the 1980s, an artistic and architectural aesthetic of collage, pastiche and quotation emerged that – in the more general, cultural understanding – seemed to follow on from Lyotard's writings on the term 'postmodern'. This gap between Lyotard's writings and the art of his own time evidences the fact that the Lyotardian postmodern is at odds with the aesthetic postmodern as it developed in architecture and the arts during the 1980s.

One striking postmodern cultural attitude was a celebration of the de-auratification of aesthetic material. Aesthetic objects were freely cut, copied, transferred and recombined in a 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get' democratisation of the hierarchies of production and reception. Against this, Lyotard's desire to uphold aspirations to the sublime – precisely in the name of the postmodern – was a complete anachronism.

Lyotard first commented Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime* in 1982.[4] His first move is to transfer the analysis of the sublime from nature to history (specifically, the French Revolution), as a prelude to a discourse that equated the avantgarde impulse (from 1800 onwards) with an aesthetic of the sublime.

In 'Answer to the Question: what is postmodernism?', Lyotard introduces Kant's notion of the sublime as a means of elucidating the postmodern.

> I think in particular that it is in the aesthetic of the sublime that modern art […] finds its impetus and the logic of avantgardes finds its axioms.
>
> The sublime sentiment, which is also the sentiment of the sublime, is, according to Kant, a strong and equivocal emotion: it carries with it both pleasure and pain. Better still, in its pleasure derives from pain. Within the tradition of the subject, which comes from Augustine and Descartes and which Kant does not radically challenge, this contradiction, which some would call neurosis or masochism, develops as a conflict between the faculties of a subject, the faculty to conceive of something and the faculty to "present" something. (Lyotard 2001, p. 368)

According to Kant, then, the sublime is a feeling evoked in the beholder by the presentation to the intellect of something that defies conceptualisation (a natural spectacle that defies reason, a number too great to be imagined, etc.). Lyotard draws a parallel with the postmodern, which can be characterised as a mode of expression that seeks to present new ways of expressing the sublime feeling. Postmodernism is, on this account, an avantgarde aesthetic discourse that aims to overcome the limitations of traditional conventions by searching for new strategies for the project of describing and interpreting experience.

Lyotard's writings on the postmodern are tied up from the start with a revisitation of Kant's 'Analytic of the Sublime' – a short section of the *Critique of Judgment* to which Lyotard returned time and again, eventually expanding his 'explication' of the Analytic to a complex book five times the length of the original. Following on from his important formulation of the differend, Lyotard's submersion in issues of the sublime was an appropriate exercise for arguing logically for a tension between the negative and affirmative aspects of the aesthetics of art that seems to present the beholder with an experiential spasm.

The Kantian term of negative presentation gains centrality in Lyotard's formulation of the avantgarde, until it appears almost as *the* defining moment of all of the art that Lyotard would claim as the sublime avantgarde. Here is how Lyotard links negative presentation with modern and postmodern art, a distinction that has been as misunderstood as it has been influential:

> I shall call modern the art which devotes its "little technical expertise" (*son "petit technique"),* as Diderot used to say, to present the fact that the unpresentable exists**.** To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible: this is what is at stake in modern painting. But how to make visible that there is something which cannot be seen? Kant himself shows the way when he names "formlessness, the absence of form," as a possible index to the unpresentable. He also says of the empty "abstraction" which the imagination experiences when in search for a presentation of the infinite (another unpresentable): this abstraction itself is like

4   J-F. Lyotard (1982): 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime'. Artforum (April 1982), no. 3.
Lyotard, Jean-François (1982): 'Réponse à la question: Qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?'. Critique 38, no. 419

a presentation of the infinite, its "negative presentation". He cites the commandment, "Thou shalt not make graven images" (Exodus), as the most sublime passage in the Bible in that it forbids all presentation of the Absolute. Little needs to be added to those observations to outline an aesthetic of sublime paintings. As painting, it will of course "present" something though negatively; it will therefore avoid figuration of representation. It will be "white" like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see only by causing pain. One recognizes in those instructions the axioms of avantgardes in painting, inasmuch as they devote themselves to making an allusion to the unpresentable by means of visible presentations. The systems in the name of which, or with which, this task has been able to support or to justify itself deserve the greatest attention; but they can originate only in the vocation of the sublime in order to legitimize it, that is, to conceal it. They remain inexplicable without the incommensurability of reality to concept which is implied in the Kantian philosophy of the sublime. (Lyotard 2001, p. 369)

Lyotard goes on to list the visual and institutional techniques by which the avantgarde defies conventions of representation that exclude the unpresentable, before proceeding to a consideration of the essay's title question: "what, then, is the postmodern?" (Lyotard 2001, p. 369). The writers Proust and Joyce exemplify his distinction between the modern and the postmodern in terms of the degree to which their styles break with rules and categories, for which one might read: syntax and narrative forms.

Here, then, lies the difference: modern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unpresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognisable consistency, continues to offer to the reader /viewer matter for solace and pleasure. These sentiments do not constitute the real sublime sentient, which is in an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain; the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept.

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy these but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. The work is not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and it cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The art/writer are working without rules in order to formulate them. (Lyotard 2001, p. 370)

The point in looking at this extensive quote here is not to decide which works are modern and which postmodern, nor to give formulae for how the unpresentable is presented on these two levels (missing content and missing syntax). However, the observation that the difference between these two levels is more than just a question of radicality (the step between content and syntax) is a useful tool for discussing which of the works I am addressing are merely affirmative of a stylistic preference for acoustic obscurity, and which are more genuinely 'ungraspable'.

According to Lyotard, avantgarde art (i.e. art constituted through sublime effects) never entirely loses its ability to disturb (despite historical softening), because its disturbing power is grounded in the feeling of the sublime and the indication of the differend. The presenta-

tion of the unpresentable is never resolved. It's the defining alterity of this kind of work that exhibits the extreme of alterity that he seeks when he prefaces his later publication *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* with the formulation that these lessons

> try to isolate the analysis of a differend in Kant's texts […] and connect this feeling with the transport that leads all thought (critical thought included) to its limits."(Lyotard 1994, *x*)

Lyotard's early engagement with 'negative presentation' is characterised by rhetoric of emancipation and critique, not without political associations. His later interest in the term is by contrast more analytical. This sequential shift of allegiance is paralleled by a stylistic shift which the reader will be able to sketch for herself, from the idiosyncratic style of 'Several silences', through the historico-narrative style of 'Answer to the question: what is postmodernism?', to the more classical philosophical stringency of the *Lessons*.

We have to bear in mind that *Lessons* is a published set of teaching notes, so necessarily has more methodical and explanatory ambitions than publications oriented towards international philosophical circles (although it would surely be misleading to describe *Lessons* as a 'pedagogical' work). Also, Lyotard's contact with the USA moved, during the 1980s and 1990s, from an engagement with artistic milieus in New York to high-ranking academic affiliations with several universities. This affected his work in terms of reorientating the European post-structuralist programme towards the Anglo-American analytical tradition. It is surely no coincidence that Kant's Analytic should be the classical work of philosophy that Lyotard chooses to treat with such attention to argumentation and terminological detail, for it was arguably with Kant that the split between European and Anglo-American philosophy occurred.

6.3 Silence and the sublime

Having distinguished between these two phases in Lyotard's production regarding the concepts of the sublime and negative presentation, I will now attempt a brief characterisation of the Lyotardian sublime as a synthesis of these two positions, before considering the roots of Lyotard's discussion in Kant's Analytic of the Sublime. The contrast between Kant's and Lyotard's contextualisation and use of the sublime offers an interesting perspective on the aesthetic project of the avantgarde in the late twentieth century. Above all, it is interesting that although Lyotard was at pains to identify the avantgarde with the postmodern (a radical, affirmative moment within 'negative' modernism), he nevertheless seems to situate the sublime firmly within a modernist project that mourns the loss of idealism in late-20th century art.

The sublime, then, is something we sense when we come into contact with some object that seems to overstretch our own powers to represent objects to our imagination. Being confronted with the sublime results in an experience that disrupts our frames of reference. We are presented with the unrepresentable (or, precisely because it is unrepresentable, with something that shows us that there is something which is unrepresentable). In as far as the unrepresentable is indicated by way of techniques that are 'other' to tradition, silence can be staged as one of music's significant others, signalling the limits of musical conception and coherence.

Presenting the unrepresentable has a history in the growth of constitutive gaps, disruptions and silences in the arts from the early Romantics to the present. Lyotard has an important distinction to make between two ways of signalling the sublime, which are relevant to the

'negative' and 'affirmative' projects of silence that I have already referred to (Lyotard 1988). Building on Kant's idea of the sublime as producing feelings of both pleasure and pain in a complex response, in which we are simultaneously both attracted and repelled, enthralled and horrified, Lyotard distinguishes two ways in which the existence of the unrepresentable can be signalled. What Lyotard calls the modernist response focuses on the negative experience of pain, loss and nostalgia in the face of disrupted frames of reference, the subject's failure to comprehend, and a desire to return to the stability of rational proportions; what he calls the postmodernist response is characterised by excitement in the face of rupture, anticipating a future that offers new dimensions of experience and understanding. Moreover, at the level of the artwork itself (as opposed to our response to it), Lyotard distinguishes between more or less radical operations with the sublime, where 'modern' artworks exhibit only the transgressive missing content (the gap) in an otherwise continuous context, whereas 'postmodern' artworks employ disruption as a strategy for generating both content and form, thus shattering previous traditions and codes of narrative and representation and raising questions of their own viability as artworks and of the existence and nature of art as such.

It is not the point of my discussion to decide whether the label 'modern' or 'postmodern' is to be applied to the works I will discuss. The reason for introducing Lyotard's distinction between the modern and the postmodern is rather that it offers the perspective of regarding art which embraces constitutive silences in an affirmative light as able to build on the experience of rupture at a more integral and radical level of the work's nature than art that appears to mourn transgressions in its powers of (re)presentation.

Similarly, the terms 'sublime' and 'negative presentation' are not introduced as labels or properties of this or that work, but rather concepts that may help in understanding experiences that arise in the encounter with art that seems baffling in one way or another.

6.4 The artless aesthetic of the sublime

> The sublime can be described thus: it is an object [...] *the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an presentation of ideas.* (Kant 1987, p. 127)

Kant's Analytic of the Sublime forms part of the third of his three critiques of the human mind. The third critique, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, published in 1790, is an analysis of the basis for aesthetic judgments – which, following the spirit of his times, Kant considered first and foremost to be passed in relation to natural phenomena of apparently outstanding beauty or sublimity.

The main impact of Kant's Critique of Pure Judgment was concentrated around his observations on the beautiful, and his analysis of the sublime was somewhat overlooked in his time. A text from 1801 by Christian Friedrich Michaelis, 'Über das Erhabene in der Musik' (1801), may well be the first application of an interest in the sublime to the field of music. Michaelis does not name Kant's analytic anywhere, but he clearly built on the rejuvenation of the sublime prompted by Kant.

In Kant's day, thinkers were in great awe of nature, the exponent of both religious beliefs and scientific observations. Enlightenment thought about the sublime hung on observations from nature, its purposiveness (to mankind) or otherwise, and the religious question

of man's position within the universe and the natural world. Frustrated by powerful contemporary ruptures provided by phenomena such as technology, communications, capitalism, terrorism and globalism, current intellectual knowledge and understanding is once again attracted to the concepts of the sublime.[5]

According to Kant, the experience of the sublime in nature is radically different from the experience of beauty in either nature or traditional artworks. Coupling the chaotic side of nature with the chaotic side of artistic experience offers an authenticity of experience to replace the traditional artwork's authenticity of object, and also brings Kant's aesthetics of the sublime into sudden relevance in relation to experimental art in the 20th century. I will later consider the significance of the sublime for a contemporary aesthetics of sonic immateriality, drawing on Kant and Lyotard.

With the rise of aesthetics in Kant's day, the sublime had become a subject of debate and controversy. An important motor behind the actualisation of the sublime as a burning philosophical issue was the meeting of the Enlightenment's scientific advances with the power of the church. Burke's seminal text *Essay on the sublime and beautiful* appeared the year following a natural catastrophe: namely, the epic Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which generated both a tsunami and a huge urban fire, killing over 50 000 people. A society still under the sway of the Church but producing a growth of knowledge and self-knowledge that would lead it toward secularisation needed new accounts of the purposiveness of nature's violence and its affect upon the senses.[6] Burke and Kant addressed the difficulty of placing this significant historically rupturing movement within a systematic account of an aesthetic estimation of what appeals to the senses.

Kant argues for the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful:

> the beautiful in nature concerns the form of the object, which consists in [the object's] being bounded. But the sublime can also be found in a formless object, insofar as we present *unboundedness,* either [as] in the object or because the object prompts us to present it, while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality. (Kant 1987, §27, p. 98)

A sublime feeling does not, then, arise from a meeting with a limited and perfectly formed item of nature, but rather when the mind is confronted with chaos, irregular disorder or destructive power. This extreme irregularity prompts a sensation of quantitative "unboundedness", which is nevertheless thought of as a totality. According to Kant, a sublime feeling is therefore characterised by a feeling of unboundedness and totality in one, or, simultaneously both a sense of unifying totality and a diverging sense of chaotic totality.

The sublime feeling functions as a means of elevating the human imagination in such a way that the displeasure that accompanies it (viz. the feeling of impotence in the face of all-

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5 See Terry Eagleton on terrorism and the sublime (Eagleton 2005). Also, Hugh Silverman uses the bulk of his editorial introduction to his book *Lyotard: philosophy, politics, and the sublime* in framing 9/11 as a sublime event that unites the aesthetic with the political.

6 "The earthquake of Lisbon sufficed to cure Voltaire of the theodicy of Leibniz, and the visible disaster of the first nature was insignificant in comparison with the second, social one, which defies human imagination as it distills a real hell from human evil." Adorno, 'After Auschwitz', in *Negative Dialectics*, p. 361. By 'the second, social disaster' Adorno means Auschwitz. Here, Adorno refers to Voltaire's renunciation of religion in favour of an immersion in the mores of Newtonian science.

powerful nature) is off-set by the fact that it also causes a feeling of pleasure, in that "this very judgment … is [itself] in harmony with rational ideas" (Kant 1987, §27, p. 115).

> Harmony is the key word here, for it is the reward of a rationalisation of the difficult experience of the sublime.

Basically, there is a resolution in Kant's characterisation of the sublime (pinpointed in the meeting of the human mind with nature's excesses), whereas in Lyotard's account of the sublime the fundamental differend between conflicting experiences cannot be resolved by out powers of rationalisation. What lends the encounter with the sublime its value for Lyotard is, on the other hand, the reflexivity inherent in the mind's being aware of its simultaneous experience of conflicting feelings.

I have mentioned that Lyotard avoided making links between the art contemporary to his own reflections on the sublime and the experimental potential of the theoretical directions that he examined. In Lessons, there is hardly a single mention of an artwork. This is not surprising, considering that Kant's Analytic of the Sublime was famously cool towards the subject of art. But Kant's time produced an outpouring of nature-painting and nature-poetry, celebrating the rapture in the face of our ability to indulge in our dread of super-human forces purely by contemplation. It may be precisely Kant's focus on the pure structure of the experience of the sublime, with no recourse to the art of his time, that has screened his text from seeming to rest on outdated judgments of artistic taste. (Think, for example, of the stigma still attributed to Adorno on account of his musical likes and dislikes.) Untainted by antiquated artistic affiliations, Kant's aesthetics are still interesting for current critical theorists reviving the appreciation of the sublime feeling in relation to contemporary art, as well as politics, media and advertising. This distance to actual artworks may, then, be a major attraction for Lyotard in Kant's writing, and may even be the key to how Kant comes to be postmodern in the Lyotardian sense.

6.5 The sublime as differend

I have briefly introduced the sublime, in accordance with Kant and Lyotard's writings. Now I will proceed to compare the two philosophers' projects, from the position that where Kant saw an ultimate resolution in the sublime effect, Lyotard eagerly retained the sense of an irresoluble experiential spasm. To put it another way, where Kant placed value on our capacity to *understand* cognitively that a sublime experience presents something that is beyond our grasp, Lyotard cherished our ability to *feel* the feeling of being confronted with the ungraspable.

To what extent was Lyotard a Kantian? On the one hand, he engaged with Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime* very deeply over a period of several decades, and the first text in which Lyotard extracted the term 'negative presentation' from Kant's Analytic of the Sublime is entitled *Answer to the question: what is postmodernism?*, echoing Kant's essay *Answer to the question: what is Enlightenment?*[7] On the other hand, it is hard to imagine that the thinker of the differend and the postmodern could have anything in common with Kant, chaser of transcendentals and *a priori*s. As we have seen, Kant was concerned with nature (and, implicitly, God), whereas Lyotard was concerned with avantgarde art. A central difference lies in the

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7 Kant, Immanuel (1784): *Beantwortung der Frage: was ist Aufklärung?*

fact that Lyotard needed to revise Kant on his totalising Enlightenment view that there was a unitary end (i.e. ultimate point of progress) to both history and the individual/subject. This contrasts with the postmodern's case-to-case, moment-to-moment relativisation of absolute transcendentals, constantly postponing final meanings and conclusions – above all, perhaps, those concerning the 'path' of history. One of Lyotard's hallmarks was his jettisoning of the belief in 'grand narratives'. Against Kant's transcendentalism, Lyotard's ambitions are more immanent, more open to the sway of the individual moment.

> Heterogeneous language games are closer to the spirit of Kant's Critique of Judgement; but must be submitted, like the Critique, to that severe re-examination which postmodernity imposes on the thought of the Enlightenment, on the idea of a unitary end of history and of a subject. (Lyotard 2001 p. 366)

I have noted that, for Kant, there is basically a resolution, a concluding affirmation, in the sublime feeling – namely, the confirmation of man's mental superiority. For Lyotard, however, the suspension involved in the differend, which is by definition irresoluble and final; thus the negativity of the position is crucially accentuated.

We can regard this strong retention of the sense of irresolution in Lyotard's astute descriptions of the sublime feeling as an intellectual feeling which is a spasm of pleasure and displeasure, a feeling evoked by a thing before which thinking retreats and toward which it races, in a simultaneous cacophony of yes-and-no (or rather, no-yes). The sublime feeling is a 'sensation' by which a thought (reflective in this case) is made aware of its own state. This self-reflective state is complex, and:

> ambivalent as to the quality of the judgment that is made about the object, for thinking says both 'yes' and 'no' to the latter, according and refusing the object its 'favour': thinking is both 'attracted' and 'repelled'. (Lyotard 1994, p. 23)

> Thinking grasped by the sublime feeling is faced, in nature, with quantities capable only of suggesting a magnitude or a force that exceeds its power of presentation. […] Divorced, thinking enters a period of celibacy. […] Thinking can feel its own finality on the occasion of a form, or even formlessness. (ibid., p. 52)

> What awakens the 'intellectual feeling', the sublime, is not nature, but rather magnitude, force, quantity […]. A 'presence' that exceeds what imaginative thought can grasp at once in a form. (ibid., p. 53)

Through these three passages, we can see how the Kantian rationale is suspended in Lyotard's account. In the "intellectual feeling" that is the sublime, feeling persists beyond the rational limitations of the intellect, and thus into the realm of pure presence. The sensing of presence is a key observation for the purposes of my discussion of subliminal sound art.

Already in *The differend* (1983), Lyotard associates the identification of a differend with the feeling of the sublime, the mixture of pleasure and pain that accompanies attempts to present the unpresentable. He privileges art as the realm that is best able to provide testimony to differends through its sublime effects (as opposed to theory's limitations in effect – it can only show to the intellect, not perform to the senses, the true gap of the sublime effect).

Lyotard returned to Kant's Analytic of the Sublime many times from 1982 and on through the 1990s, in support of his acclaim for mid-20th century minimalist painting, and in tandem with his work on articulating the postmodern as a moment of differend within the modern. Thus Lyotard recruited Kant into a programme of championing abstract, elite art that to many seemed alienating (towards the viewer) and negative (towards the traditional language and norms of painting).

For Kant, the theory of the sublime was a mere appendix to aesthetic judgment, not at all as important as the theory of the beautiful. But Lyotard went as far as to say that the Analytic of the Sublime provides the impetus and logic for all modern (i.e. non-realist or post-realist) art, and that the art of the past two centuries is, considered collectively, an art of the sublime. Lyotard used Kant's Analytic of the Sublime to open up the path for non-figural art and for the numerous avantgardes that have waged war on figuration and representation since then.[8]

6.6 Negative presentation

The crux of the issue of the sublime, for Lyotard, turned on the Kantian term of 'negative presentation', which occurs in the General Comment that concludes Kant's *Analytic of the Sublime.*

> The sublime must always have reference to our way of thinking, i.e., to maxims directed to providing the intellectual side in us and our rational ideas with supremacy over sensibility. We need not worry that the feeling of the sublime will lose something if it is presented in such an abstract way as this, which is wholly negative as regards the sensible. For though the imagination finds nothing beyond the sensible that could support it, this very removal of its barriers also makes it feel unbounded, so that its separation from the sensible is a presentation of the infinite; and though a presentation of the infinite can as such never be more than merely negative, it still expands the soul. Perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish Law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto three any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. This commandment alone can explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in its civilised era felt for its religion when it compared itself with other peoples, or can explain the pride that Islam inspires. (Kant 1987, General Comment, p. 135)

Lyotard based the entire modern history of avant-gardes on this term, negative presentation, in the early 1980s (Lyotard 2001a), and in the 1990s he expanded his own analysis of the term 'negative presentation' specifically in four pages of the *Lessons* (Lyotard 1994, p. 150-53).

The sublime idea of something infinite or absolute calls up, in an artistic context, a negative presentation or non-presentation. Kant's thoughts on the unpresentable via negative presentation, can, according to Lyotard, be perceived as the philosophical germ of minimalist art. This is borne out by Lyotard in the way he saw Kant's example of the commandment against graven images in Jewish law as a historical precedent and technical solution to the questions raised by the 20th-century abstract expressionist painting that he so cherished.[9]

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8   Lyotard provides accounts of the rise of the sublime in modern art (since Mallarmé) in *Lessons* p. 68, and he argues its association with the abstract in 'Answer to the question', p. 368-70.

9   "At the edge of the break, infinity, or the absoluteness of the Idea can be revealed in what Kant calls a negative presentation, or even a non-presentation. He cites the Jewish law banning images as an eminent example of negative presentation: optical pleasure when reduced to near nothingness promotes an infinite contempla-

It is interesting that all of Kant's examples from nature concern immeasurably *great* phenomena, whereas the one example he gives of manmade construction (the Jewish commandment in the law forbidding graven images of god) concerns a negative absenting gesture. As we have seen, writing on Jewish themes was one of Lyotard's ongoing preoccupations. But more striking than this is the fact that Lyotard latches onto this inversion of the over-dimensioned, which thus turns into the abstraction of non-presentation.

'Negative presentation' describes the mode in which what is immeasurable (immeasurably great, or immeasurably small) presents itself in the feeling of the sublime. There is a certain energy in the feeling provided by the unpresentable presence of the immeasurable, due to the tension involved in the sublime feeling. The imagination is initially blocked by the initial experience of total bafflement, but by overcoming its own limitations gains a feeling of being unbounded. Losing control in this limitless horizon, the imagination produces the illusionary experience of being in the presence of the infinite – a kind of momentary delirium that Lyotard calls an "insane mirage" (Lyotard 1994, p. 152). Reason thus obliges the imagination to force its barriers and attempt a "presentation of the infinite", but because this feeling arises due to an absence and not a presence, it will never be more than a negative presentation (of the infinite).

> What is this negative presentation? It is neither the absence of presentation nor the presentation of nothingness. (Lyotard 1994, p. 152)

The unpresentable remains unpresented, but the trace left by the infinite in its retreat is felt by the imagination.

In the context of the sound art that I will discuss in the following chapter, one might regard the durations of no audible audio input as some kind of immeasurable that leaves its traces in the scraps of 'insufficient' (very quiet) sound that are in fact presented in the realm of audibility.

Lyotard's extraction of the term 'negative presentation' from Kant's Analytic of the Sublime is followed by a hommage to sublime feeling as an embracing of the encounter of a differend. Lyotard weaves into his explication of negative presentation, a differend between the finite and infinite.

> The differend of the finite and the infinite can only be felt fully in thought if the finite thought (that of form) removes itself from its finality in order to try to put itself at the measure of the other party. There is no differend without this gesture. Moreover, because this gesture cannot succeed, there will remain in the order of presentation only a trace, the trace of a retreat, the sign of a "presence" that will never be a presentation. "Negative presentation" is the sign of the presence of the absolute, and it is or can only make a sign of being absent from the forms of the presentable. Thus the absolute remains unpresentable; no given is subsumable under its concept. But the imagination can signal its "presence", an almost insane mirage, in the emptiness it discovers beyond its capacity to "comprehend". This gesture must only be understood reflexively. Only through its sensation can the thought that imagines be aware of this "presence" without presentation. The differend does not signify that the two parties do not understand

tion of infinity. [...] Avant-gardism is thus present in germ in the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime." Lyotard, Jean-François: 'The sublime and the avantgarde' in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, p. 204

each other. It requires that each know the idiom of the other (form, Idea), although each cannot satisfy the demand of the other by means of its own idiom. This is why the various sublime feelings, whatever their particularities may be, are all of a "strenuous" [Kant's term], courageous type. (ibid., pp. 151-2)

The central point here is the explanation of the self-reflective relationship between sensation and thought that goes on in the feeling of the sublime, producing a strong sense of the presence of something that is not in fact presented. The self-reflective aspect consists in the fact that each of the two domains (thought and sensation) possesses the capacity to acknowledge the other, even though they have no means of being resolved.

These central explanations of the importance of negative presentation in Lyotard's understanding of the sublime feeling as a reflexive sensation are followed by an indication of the significance that Lyotard attributes to the art that he regards as producing these effects. This observation takes the form of a kind of summary of Lyotard's earlier art-historical accounts of the way that negative presentation is bound up in an ongoing avantgarde project. Although this project has a beginning (the revolutionary age of early romanticism), it is better described as an artistic position (in relation to conventional artistic notions of beauty) than an art-historical moment; therefore I find it relevant to speculate on whether the radical formal experiments of the sound art introduced in the following chapter of this thesis might be regarded as having somehow internalised the challenge posed by Lyotard's question cited below:

The shock of the thought of the absolute for the thinking of forms expresses and sanctions a major shift in the stakes of art and literature. This shift does not have the characteristics of a "revolution". Historically, it is a slow, uncertain movement, always threatened by repression, through which the faculty of presentation seeks to remove itself from the *techne* of beautiful forms [...]. This shift in the finality of art and literature was pursued in Romanticism and the avantgarde and is still being debated. Its stakes can be formulated simply: is it possible, and how would it be possible, to testify to the absolute by means of artistic and literary presentations, which are always dependent on forms? Whatever the case may be, the beautiful ceases to be their "object", or else the meaning of the word is indeed subverted. (ibid., p. 153)

6.7 The too-much and the almost-nothing

Lyotard distinguishes two kinds of aesthetic sublime: the much-too-much (figural) and the almost-nothing (abstract):

Two aesthetics can be described on the basis of these tensions, two aesthetics that are always possible, that always threaten art, periods, genres, and schools, whatever they may be; a figural aesthetic of the 'much-too-much' that defies the concept (i.e. the excess of the Baroque, mannerism, surrealism), and an abstract or minimal aesthetic of the 'almost nothing' that defies form. (Lyotard 1994, p. 76)

Through this distinction, the "minimal aesthetic" that was so beloved of Lyotard and that is also my concern here concerning subliminal sound art, is associated with the avantgardist radical experiment with form, of which it could be held that all works constituted by silence are examples.

The Lyotardian aesthetics of the 'almost nothing' is not identical with the concept of negative presentation. Negative presentation is a feature of all kinds of the sublime, not just the almost-nothing sublime. But maybe we can say that art with sublime effects of the almost-nothing variety (Lyotard would say abstract minimalist painting, here I am proposing instead ultra-quiet sound art) works consciously with the process of negative presentation as a solution to side-stepping other conventions and forms of presentation. I think this is also the kind of productive conflation that Lyotard finds convenient. As he proposes in explication of Kant's example "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image…":

> [optical] pleasure when reduced to near nothingness promotes an infinite contemplation of infinity. Even before romantic art had freed itself from classical and baroque figuration, the door had thus been opened to inquiries pointing towards abstract and Minimal art. (Lyotard 1984)

In a passage critiquing Kant's use of the term 'simplicity', Lyotard addresses the nagging feeling about the gaping hole in abstract art, referring to the dispute about

> whether the sublime style is the 'grand style' in the sense of ancient rhetoric or, on the contrary, the absence of all style. What is at stake in this controversy is the conflict between an aesthetic of 'presence' and the pagan poetics of good form. (Lyotard 1994, p. 156)

The sublime is analogous with modern art that is an outrage to aesthetic judgments yet simultaneously prompts the question 'is it art?':

> this simplicity announces neither the end of art nor the beginning of ethics. As style, it belongs to the aesthetic. It is the sign made by the absolute in the forms of nature and in human more. The absolute sign in all simplicity. In art, the formulation of the absolute under this sign gives rise to various 'schools', suprematism, abstraction, minimalism, etc., in which the absolute can signal itself simply in presentation. (Lyotard 2001, p. 157)

Greatness (formulated through the mathematical sublime) is the main focus of Kant's Analytic, which makes us feel its immensity by contrast with our own negligibility. The smaller we feel, the greater the object (that causes the sublime feeling) seems. But in Lyotard's celebration of the "minimal aesthetic of the almost nothing" it seems as if the final triumph would be the disappearance of the object – its materiality – altogether. This desire for an art that shakes off its material manifestation is paralleled in our previous discussion of the romantic era's idealisation of sound. Matter stands in the way of the absolute (to make a graven image of the absolute would be to reduce its mysterious elusiveness to a determinate formula, and thus to nullify it). Better an infinite continuum of meaningless matter than an excess of material.

The almost-nothing is a strategy of negation common to much late-twentieth century art. Negation (of something specific) is indeed a common artistic and historical strategy for renewal, but when the "of something" is multiplied, and crosses the threshold of specificity, negation becomes a mature position in itself.

Critiquing experimental aesthetic projects as such, David Carroll outlines a view under which all avantgarde art would be seen as following a negative strategy:

experimental art is not easily classified in terms of socio—historical totalities except as their negation; for most historians or sociologists, the 'negation of history' is the greatest threat to history, the sign that one is attempting to flee or do away with history […]. Sartre condemned what he called 'aesthetic purism' as a retreat from political responsibility: " We know very well that pure art and empty art are the same thing and that aesthetic purism was only a brilliant defensive manoeuvre of certain bourgeois of the last century who preferred to see themselves denounced as philistines rather than as exploiters." (Carroll 1987)

6.8 The subliminal sublime

I have noted the link between the almost-nothing kind of sublime and a Lyotardian interest in negative presentation as a kind of paradigm in art with avantgarde aspirations. I find this discourse useful for looking at with subliminal sound art. It is this 'subliminal' almost-nothing sublime that is useful for looking at silences in subliminal sound art such as Migone's *Quieting* and López' *Untitled #129*. Further, I wish to retain the importance of the 'feeling of presence' in aesthetic situations where experience goes beyond what is intellectually graspable or 'rational'. I will combine this sense of presence with considerations of the performative mode in listening practices.

It is worth pointing out that the sublime/subliminal pun is pure wordplay[10]; there is in fact no etymological link between the sublime and the subliminal. The adjective 'subliminal' is descended from Latin '*sub*' (below) and '*limin/limen*' (threshold), with a combined meaning, therefore, of 'below the threshold'. The noun 'sublime' comes also from Latin, but from 'sublimes', meaning uplifted. So, despite the seemingly obvious pun, which Migone actually conflates (and surely he is not the only one to do so), not only is there no etymological link between the two terms, but on the contrary, they seem to point in opposite directions – down (below) and up. Moreover, as qualities, they differ in that in relation to hearing and auditory perception, 'below the threshold' can where desired be defined more or less quantitatively.

Nevertheless, at the risk of causing some confusion, it is still worth using the punned term 'the subliminal sublime' of the nearly-nothing sublime that I discuss in relation to negative sound, because of the term's neat subsumption of both roots under one concept.

The step towards immateriality inherent in the subliminal sound project is poised between the high level of abstraction in the discourse of the sublime and a recalcitrant technological 'timbre' that seems to go hand in hand with the aesthetics of the almost-nothing.

Furthermore, the sound art that I discuss possesses (in respect of its newness) an art-historical virginity that is well suited to conceptual explanations. Its distance from traditionally musical compositional strategies prompts a series of categorical discussions embracing philosophical concepts that largely sidestep music history.

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10 Migone uses the term 'subliminal' informally, to describe the processed sounds of *Quieting*. See Migone 2005, p. 69.

CHAPTER 7

Subliminal sound art

7.1 Characterisations of the empirical field

While earlier chapters dealt with issues of reception and the re-interpretation of changing reception histories over time, in relation to works with a certain historical distance from the present, this chapter deals with an empirical field that is still under development, and that rides on the speedy wind of new technologies. MP3 file-sharing, home burned CDs, and independent home-run record labels[1] all contribute to a level of activity that belies the smallness of the field. I will now sketch an overview of some characteristics of what I am provisionally labelling 'subliminal sound art' in lieu of an attempt to groun an actual 'genre' as such.

The following chapter concerns work produced in the new millennium, and my discussion of it entails a certain amount of groundwork in establishing categories and extremely short-range traditions, about which there is as yet little consensus or stability in the terminology. There is a risk that in seeking to stabilise these new traditions for the purposes of discussing them, I make them appear as fixed and static entities. They are of course in fluctuation. The following characterisation is therefore not a proposal of a genre, but rather a status report on a present tendency. I discuss a very new (and therefore historically unstable) phenomenon, and an extremely peripheral aesthetic within an environment that might be described as almost a 'subculture'.

The establishment of terminology is one of the most useful tasks that the humanities can contribute to the arts, and the historical span of this thesis matches the modern debate on genre, which genre-theorist David Duff dates from the early romantic era (Duff 1999, p. 3). However, the subcultural is often characterised by anti-generic attitudes (according to which the uniqueness of artworks is considered to be undermined by their being grouped together). Francisco López' unwillingness to be grouped with anything other than the transcendental is one instance of this kind of attitude.

Another reason why we cannot roundly talk of genre here is the fact that the artworks that might come in under the tendency I observe are few and far between. This difficulty could perhaps be overcome by talking of a 'subgenre'. The main obstacle, however, is the fact that one of the descriptions most widely used by artists and journalists alike about the tendency that I describe – namely, 'lowercase' – is squarely contested by all the artists whom I have contacted in connection with my research.[2] Part of this resistance might stem from an anti-generic attitude among artists themselves (along the lines that being grouped into schools of thought undermines the artistic identity of the individual artist). But it also has to do with the fact that 'lowercase' is already regarded as an outdated trend. Within a space of under five years, *The Wire* magazine manages to talk of 'second-generation lowercase', which is a strong indication of the speed at which this and other trends within sound art rise and fall. Londoners such as Mark Wastell are already described as 2nd-generation (even 3rd) lower-

1 In the present case, Trente Oiseaux and Mille Plateaux, for example.
2 See interviews with Matt Rogalsky and Francisco López in the appendix. Also Brandon LaBelle, in an e-mail correspondence.

casers, less than 5 years after the origination of the lowercase terminology. In any case, I have chosen to give the artists the final word, by relativising the term 'lowercase' to the specific instances in which records were produced under that label, instead of attempting to extract a 'lowercase aesthetics' from the broader trend.

The works that I consider to form the trend of subliminal sound art do not form one sub-culture or one artistic milieu. However, I will attempt to characterise the criteria by which I regard them as somehow coherently related to one another.

Predominantly low volume is obviously the primary criterion, together with passages of pure digital silence (no input/output). What sound there is, is often generated through the incorporation of field recordings – i.e. recordings that harvest sounds in a roughly indeterminate manner (as opposed to having instrumental musicians play pre-planned material). Other characteristics of the aesthetic that are salient for my investigation here are: materiality in the recording process (attention to microphones used); passivity towards the sounds recorded; processing as a laboratory for the meeting of conceptual ideas (often in common with visual arts, and with consciously social resonance), and processing methods; materiality in transmission (advanced speaker set-ups); and, glitch.[3]

The works discussed in this chapter are produced for distribution via compact disc or experimental radio stations (i.e. they have no performance context). Most of the artists come to their work through home-studio experimentation and software programming. Their musical backgrounds are more typically progressive rock and electronica, as opposed to formal musical education. Many of them are inspired by, or educated within, the visual or plastic arts, architecture or new media, and most of them practise a high level of critical theory and aesthetic reflection as the emblem of their experimental practice. Some are linked by e-mail mailing lists, others by CD compilation issues with a strongly binding graphic identity, but most of the links between artists are much looser than this, displaying characteristics of the 'global underground' type of artistic allegiances formed through internet and e-mail communities and a high level of personal mobility.

All the pieces discussed here exploit the digital domain in order to achieve different or more radical results than possible with analogue techniques. Like much other digital art, this sound art often has strong connections to Duchamp, Dada, Cage, Fluxus and conceptual art, through the common emphasis on a strongly conceptual approach, a stringent contact with material, the use of pre-existing elements (sonic *objets trouvés*), and the interplay of randomness and control.

A brief survey of descriptive language-use in the London-based experimental music magazine *The Wire* (primarily from 2005 and 2006), in connection with terms such as lowercase and silence, gives the following constellation of names: Steve Roden, Akio Suzuki, Rolf Julius, Max Eastley and Felix Hess, Kim Cascone, Mark Wastell, Rhodri Davies, Jacob Kirkegaard, Bernhard Günter, Francisco López, Taku Sugimoto, Akira Rabelais, Thomas Köner, Sachiko M, Otomo Yoshihide, Carsten Nicolai, Richard Chartier, Ryoji Ikeda and Thomas Moore.

Christian Marclay and Christina Kubisch are also relevant and interesting in a general consideration of sound art and silence. As they work within the installation format, however, and their work falls (institutionally, at least) within the visual-arts gallery discourse, their work falls outside my present discussion. There is definitely a strong trans-disciplinary, or

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3   Discussions of the term 'glitch' can be found in Cascone 2000 and Sangild 2004.

interarts tendency within the subliminal sound art trend, but this is also an aspect beyond the limits of this thesis.

Ascetic, reductive, restraint, sub-minimal, ultra-minimalist, austere, sparse, glacial, are all adjectives used in *The Wire*, to make stylistic or 'mood' descriptions of work by the above-mentioned sound artists. To some extent these descriptions overlap neatly with an illustrious precedent: "The notions of silence, emptiness, reduction, sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc." wrote Susan Sontag (Sontag 1966a, p. 13), quoted in *The Wire*, May 2006, p. 40. The rest of the sentence, not quoted in *The Wire*, runs: "which either promote a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or confront the artwork in a more conscious, conceptual way" – an observation which I would also say goes for this repertoire.

In respect of terminology, there is a general instability of terms such as not only 'genre', but also 'sound art', 'music', 'work', 'artist' and 'art', in relation to these works. In common with Lyotard's description of artworks that work to achieve sublime effect, these works seem to present a subtle outrage to aesthetic judgments, while simultaneously prompting the question again and again: 'is it art?'

To some extent, the lack of a performance aspect displaces focus from the object (due to its negligible character) to the subject. Intersubjective relations are strengthened in the meeting with an unstable object. However, this claim needs to be qualified by two observations: (i) that the negligible object-character of the sound is compensated for by a fetishisation of the material packaging (the digibox or jewelcase), and (ii) that it is possible to propose an 'aural object' and an 'aural performative' aspect (Stuart 2003). I will return to both these issues shortly.

Although I have explained that 'lowercase' is not tenable as a genre description, it is nevertheless a term worth discussing in the context of the characterisation of what I am calling subliminal sound art. Bremsstrahlung Records' website cites a review of the Lowercase-Sound 001 compilation that describes lowercase as a subgenre.

Lowercase has been described as a form of ambient minimalism, in which extremely quiet sounds are juxtaposed with long passages of 'purer' silence. The term was originally launched by the Californian sound-artist Steve Roden, to describe his sound art album *Forms of paper* (1998). *Forms of paper* was based on a series of sound-recordings (of Roden handling paper – the original piece was a sound-art commission from a public library) whose referential qualities were quasi-erased through a series of filters, leaving quiet ethereal suggestions of long-gone sounds. The lowercase ethos was strengthened by an internet chat-group set up by Boston-based thereminist James Coleman, and by the publication of a double-CD compilation in 2002 by Bremsstrahlung Records.

Lowercase came originally from techniques of recording, processing and installing sound – with significant elements of field or documentary sound-recording and compositional filtering. But the ethos has since given rise to a second-generation instrumental variety: lowercase Improv. The second category is not only distinct from non-instrumental lowercase in that it uses instruments,[4] but also by the fact that improvisations are often a group endeavour entailing joint authorship, whereas digital silences created through studio processes are more comparable to scored composition in the sense of there being one artist/author.

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4 Often classical instruments (e.g. cello, harp), also percussion and extended percussion, and acoustic instruments amplified with contact mikes.

7.2 Christof Migone's *Quieting*

Christof Migone's CD *Quieting* (2000) is in terms of length and content a relatively extended piece amongst subliminal sound art.

Migone works as sound artist mainly within gallery contexts, through performance and installation. He is also active as curator and publisher, and runs a small independent CD label, Squint Fucker Press. Squint Fucker Press' catalogue holds artists such as Alexandre St-Onge, Cal Crawford, Kim Dawn and Jonathan Parant, and includes, for example, a series of works by Migone and others "for jewel cases without CDs". These empty jewel cases are issued as limited editions – a strategy that not only ironies the situation of vanity publishing through independent CD labels, but also applies the object-value relations of visual art to sound.[5] This move, common to most sound-art, seems to be the elite artist's answer to the challenge posed by the undermining of the commercial value of sound recording in an age of mechanical and digital reproducibility.

Migone is based in Montreal, a city with a thriving sound-art community. Alongside the above activities, Migone also forms a duo, *Undo,* with Alexandre St-Onge (aka Françoise Blanchot). They list their work under: "instrumentation: microphones, site: mouths". Mouths (the body's hole and site of abjectivity) and microphones (that 'find' sound through recording) are key elements.

Writing in *The Wire*, critic Phil England describes the general aesthetics of *Undo*:

> the duo's variations on the 'microphone in the mouth' theme (tape hiss on max, mumbled voices, sub-vocal sounds, etc.) are like so many shades of grey. Appropriately enough, the track titles are taken from Samuel Beckett's "The Unnameable". And the grey cover is something Beckett himself might have 'warmed to'. (*The Wire*, Issue 199, September 2002)

In their own words, Migone and St-Onge's manifest states:

> *Undo* is a duo which, since its inception in 1997, explores the barely perceptible, the unacceptable and the forgettable. *Undo*, delete, efface, do not […] It's lowercase […] We are both resisting arrest, both heeding Beckett's warning, "The thing to avoid, I don't know why, is the spirit of system.

This statement couples the lowercase modesty towards sound with a bellicose avantgarde (or, subversive subcultural) heritage. They describe one of their performances (at the No Music festival, London, 2000) as follows:

> Two mouths open toward the wide-open nothing were saying "no" in its affirmative movement of excess. Stuffed by dead snails, these two mouths were not even able to speak, saying "no" by being unable to say a word – a silent speech present through its absence. A word – an infinitive marked by the infinite – without a subject; a work – destruction – which is accomplished by the work itself.

The suppression of speech (by snails) stems from a wilfully abject gesture – a demonstration of the (self-reflexively affirmative) noise of negation. This can be seen as a demonstration of non-presentation (unable to say 'no'), and a very literal kind of *Schweigen*, too.

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5 Another lowercase album, by Petite Sono, numbers each 'copy' of a limited edition of 500 by handwritten pencil.

The abject and the sublime seem, intuitively, to be opposites – at least, in everyday language. But they have in common an edgy combination of affirmation and negation that revolves around a kind of inverse presentation, in which the abject could perhaps be regarded as another word for the kind of sublime that is too-little or nothing.

The abject appears frequently in contemporary art in association with the body. Migone's and Undo's highlighting of bodily orifices or holes is familiar from the aesthetics of many other current artists, often working under a feminist or gender-sensitive identification. Although Migone's album *Quieting* – as a compact disc – seems too far removed from the body to link up neatly with this kind of abjectivity, nevertheless, the fact that all the sound-material emanates doubly from a hole and from an event of extreme violence[6] does seem continue the lineage of the abject from Undo's work to Migone's solo album.

The CD *Quieting* presents itself as a self-sufficient concept-album, a project that is heralded by the materiality of the digibox. The front-cover shows the title and artist's name together with a graphic imprint of a bouncing-needle type VU (Volume Unit) metre[7] – here, without the needle itself. This graphic logo is repeated on the upper face of the CD itself (incorporated into the outside curve of the disc) as the only information or graphic identity printed on the object.

Fig. 4   Digibox front cover of Christof Migone's album Quieting
Alien8 Recordings, ALIENCD25 ©2000 Christof Migone
The inside of the front-cover lists the tracks, together with the total duration and the following 3-line text above the copyright and distribution information:

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6 Although absolutely beyond the topic of this thesis, it might not be too exaggerated to link Migone's CD to another kind of contemporary abject sublime performed by the body: the explosion of material that is the suicide terrorist's ultimate triumph of mind over matter. See Eagleton 2005 for a discussion of terrorism and the sublime.

7 An audio metering system that shows the volume of sound being recorded or played back.

> "In 1996 I recorded the cannon that is fired every day at noon from the Citadel in Halifax, Nova Scotia (Track 18), all pieces here are based on that recording or inspired by the shock of the shot."

The CD lasts 41 minutes 44 seconds, and contains 36 tracks, grouped in pairs. In each pair there is one track without any digital signal (0) and one track with some kind of digital signal. These are marked on the digibox cover with, respectively, the indications (0) and ( ) between the track-number and track-duration (i.e. the site, normally, of a song-title). So, the zero is affirmative (yes, there is no signal here) and the open, empty space between brackets indicates the presence of a (lacunic) content.
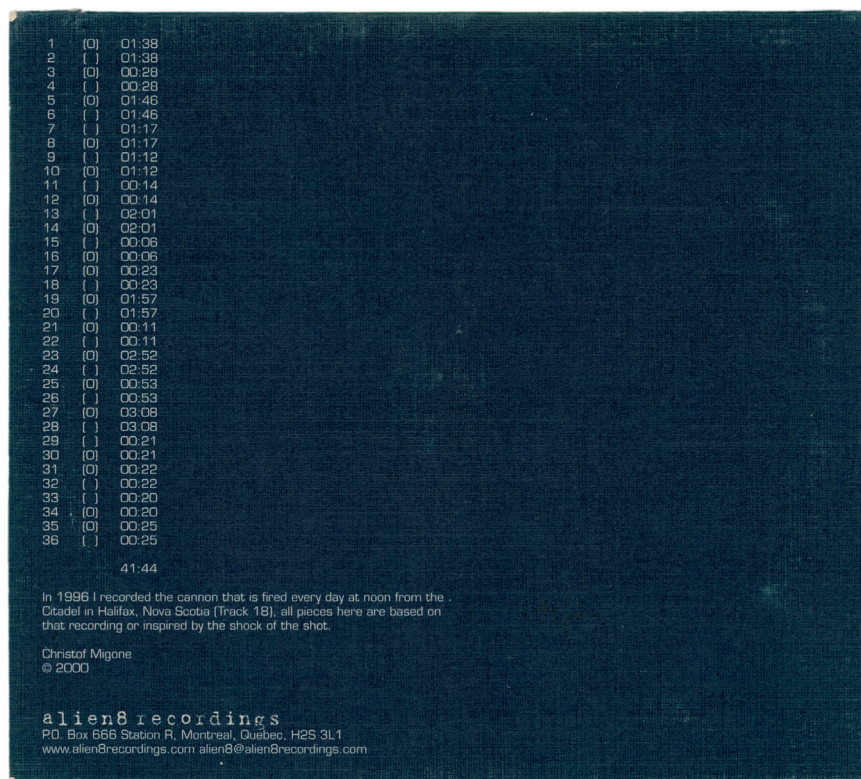
Fig. 5   Digibox inside cover of Christof Migone's album Quieting (showing tracklist)
Alien8 Recordings, ALIENCD25 ©2000 Christof Migone

Faced with this apparently stringent conceptual structure, it is important to note that tracks with signal – those marked ( ) – are not necessarily filled with sound from end to end. Track 18 starts almost half-way in, track 29's sound enters after 8 seconds, and the sound on the final track, 36, starts just 5 seconds from the end of the track. That means that the listener cannot detect the form of the assembled sound-fragments (as independent tracks of alternating pairs of silent and sounding content) as they are presented on the digibox cover, by perception alone. The listener has to read the box and watch the CD-player display to be able to follow the form of the tracks.

Migone recorded the cannon from several places, but chose only one recording on which to base his CD: thus, with the exception of track 22 and 36, an entire album of 40 minutes' duration is wrung from a recording of just 20 seconds.

Parallel to this CD release, and reinforcing its extensive conceptual development, Migone published an extended essay on the somatic shock of the firing of a bullet, 'Ricochets' (Migone 2000). The article makes no mention of *Quieting*, nor the cannon in Halifax, but Migone discusses in some detail two films by Burden and Connolly/Anderson that are prescient for this album (as we shall see), and much of Migone's rhetoric seems to be supported by the CD, and vice versa.

All the sounds on this CD, except those on tracks 22 and 36, are derived from a recording of a cannon-shot: an un-choreographed, un-staged (yet precisely anticipated) event captured through a microphone. It is one of the most violent manmade sound-events imaginable. The shot as trauma, its ensuing silence, and the literal and mental ricochets, are some of Migone's interests, as demonstrated in the article 'Ricochets'.

The artist's instrument here is his microphone. Instrumentality and virtuosity in the production of the original sound seems to be almost taboo; the field recording that is the basis of the album harvests sounds 'warts and all', including the giggles of random tourists surprised by the sound of the cannon. The decisive elements for composition of the album are the artist's decisions in how to process it. It is in this process that virtuosity steps in, most often completely intransparently for the listener. Thus, some habits pertaining to the production of the work are displaced from the history of sound as performed music, where the performing artist demonstrates instrumental virtuosity live in front of an audience, to relations of pre-production more common to the history of visual art, where the viewer enters after the artist has left and all the technical manoeuvres have been performed and completed – and can only guess at what techniques have been used to produce particular colours, perspectives, etc.

In much contemporary CD sound art, the complexity of the perceived sound may not stand in any logical relation to the complexity of the compositional work behind it. Convoluted manipulations may produce results that are deceptively smooth to the ear, and *vice versa*, complex sounds may be produced by just a few straightforward pre-programmed operations.

Within this discussion of instrumentality, it is interesting to note a link between subliminal (silent) sound art and noise music; respectively, the too-little and too-much ends of the spectrum. In some such artists' work, subliminal sound art displays qualities that border on experimental noise. The Japanese musician Keiji Haino, for example, could equally be described as both a noise- and lowercase-artist. However, in noise-rock and noise-electronica there is historically a tradition for instrumental virtuosity, stemming from noise music's roots in electric-guitar riffs and improvisation. Sound coming through the guitar-amplifier is developed, through feedback and distortion, to noise. The corporeality of the instrument, and spontaneity of improvisation, provide an opportunity for the listener to be seduced by the power of the sound, and this energy comes through very clearly in even the most abstract experimental-noise.

In the case of subliminal sound art, however, all form of contact with instrumental music and the physicality of sound-production (also all form of musical historical background) are missing. Again, with the severely structural approach to harvesting sounds, the subliminal trend reveals itself as closer to the visual arts than to other music. The missing instrumentality contributes to an alienation of the object. And the result becomes accordingly more sober, distanced, processed and reflected, often indulging in conceptual sophistication as an end in itself.

There is certainly a high degree of virtuosity and instrumentality in the use of microphones and computers – not to mention the conceptual virtuosity involved – but it comes

through the mind rather than the fingers and, above all, it is not live. If the musical instrument might be considered as a prosthetic extension of the composer/musician's body, then the microphone could be regarded as the prosthetic extension of the ears, and the computer the extension of the brain.

7.3 Twins and mirrors

> In keeping with the basic initial idea of creating an aural/somatic shock by having the blast at the center of an otherwise silent CD, once I treated (i.e. silenced) the blast into variations that were barely audible, I thought I would in turn contrast them by putting them beside their absolute silent twin. (See Appendix I: interview with Christof Migone)

I read the pairs of twin tracks in *Quieting* as alternating between two ways of presenting the unpresentable: (i) pure digital silence (no signal); (ii) extremely low-volume sounds. Each track's duration is identical to that of its twin, but one track in each pair has a signal ( ), and one track is without signal (0). In each pair, there is an inverse relation played out – each one of the pair is the inverse silence of the other silence/sound. The frame is the inverse of the content and vice versa. One could say that it is especially fitting that this pairing of pure silence (no audio in-/output) with mirror-tracks which contain input should be manifested on a CD and not, say, with the use of a stop-watch in an instrumental concert: the digital relation is a binary one of noughts and ones, the digital structure is essentially binary, negative-positive. It makes sense to regard 'digital silences' as a special silence phenomenon, because of this relation, and Migone seems to reflect on this essential property of the digital domain with the conceptual design of the tracks.

By embedding the cannon-shot in the centre of the CD,[8] Migone points to an equality of before and after that have equal importance in both isolating and contextualising the event and thus pointing up the event-character of the sound of the shot. Coupled with the use of techniques of sound-reversal (achieved using the simple 'reverse' plug-in on ProTools software), a theme not only of twinning and but also of mirroring from the visual arts is introduced. Reflection occurs both before and after the event. As with the thematisation of the digital, 'reflection' is also embedded in the album's design.

Taking this interpretive approach to the conceptual basis for compositional design a bit further, it could be proposed that the hollow cultural gesture of sounding a cannon every day without a cannon-ball is submerged on this album into a lo-fi electronic field, and further inverted by being situated in the middle of a near-silent CD: the CD seems to implode towards the hole at its centre. The CD as object, as material medium, has a hole at its centre. All around lie the shards of sound from the cannon-shot: unrecognisably fragmented splinters. Amplified, they have been literally 'blown up', exploded, even while being muted.

It may be objected that this line of thinking projects an over-interpretive approach onto a relatively simply object of art. My point here is that from the moment the listener handles the digibox to the moment the cannon-shot is heard on Track 18, scraps of unfulfilled (or, at least, incomplete) referentiality prompt a sub-hermeneutic search for signification. The

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8   In terms of track-numbers, it lies at exactly the halfway point, although in terms of total duration it is just short of the middle of the CD.

interplay of presentation (processed 'remainders' of the cannon-shot) and non-presentation (silence) produces a response that combines a strong sense of presence (a heightened sense of listening) with a provocation to the understanding (a search for references around which to orientate the fragmented sounds). This interplay might be summarised as an oscillation between performative and hermeneutic modes of perception and reception.

7.4 Track 18

Track 18 is a straightforward reproduction of the sound of the cannon recorded in its normal acoustic environment: situated atop a fortification of originally strategic military domination, and now surrounded by the sonic detritus of tourism. The shot is placed in the centre of the track, with ambient sounds fading in just before it and the sound of tourists' voices dying out over the ensuing 10 seconds.

All the other 42 minutes and 35 tracks are derived acoustically and conceptually from this short recording, which is subjected to reversal, filters, time-stretches and time-compressions – all performed simply through basic ProTools plug-ins. All these manipulations serve to make the original sound-source unrecognisable.

The bombastic, colonial, military motif stands in sharp perceptual (and iconic) contrast to an exaggerated sensitivity to the quietest of ethereal sounds that inhabits all the other tracks. This contrast signals a compositional expressive range that is not based on an expressivity in the sounding material but rather in its deployment. The rudeness of the cannon-shot breaks in on a sonic landscape that has spent twenty minutes educating us to use the finest degree of fine-tuning in our listening; the listener is drawn into a position where the cannon's brutality will have maximum effect.

The cannon-shot breaks through the album's register of sound, and therefore through its style and form – the violent, psychological effect of this has a traumatic characteristic of *reality* that jolts the listener out of the aesthetic attitude. This brutal de-aestheticisation is underlined by the no-fuss documentary characteristic of the field recording of the canon.

Migone is a prolific articulator of his own aesthetics and of the possibilities of new media, performance, transmission, publication and critical reflection in the 21st century, and there are also many texts on his work by close colleagues, including a monograph publication issued by Errant Bodies Press: *Sound Voice Perform* (Migone 2005). As already noted, the release of the CD *Quieting* was accompanied by a piece of advanced writing, 'Ricochets', that has links to the conceptual development of the record (Migone 2000). This text documents a considerable sophistication in Migone's approach to the conceptualisation of gunshots and ricochets, which is relevant to this account of the effect of Track 18.

We might be helped in contextualising the remove of this intellectualised approach to the brutality of the cannon-shot by alluding to Hal Foster's term 'traumatic realism', expounded in *The return of the real* (Foster 1996, pp. 130-6). Foster's concept of traumatic realism turns on a coupling of the desubjectification of the artist in the mid-20th century with a shock aesthetics such as that at play in Warhol's car-wreck pictures of the early 1960s, in which traumatic effects are produced by mere reproduction. (In the case of *Quieting*, reproduction occurs through the presentation of the documentary recording of the cannon-shot). Foster's understanding of traumatic realism is built on the Lacanian sense of the traumatic as "a missed encounter with the real" (ibid., p. 132). Both Lacan's and Foster's thematisations of the traumatic acknowledge the central importance of repetition as a means of distancing reality

and causing trauma. Repetition is the means by which the act of representation (the showing of a photograph, for instance) becomes an act of presentation. Seen in this light, the non-expressive presentation of the cannon-shot on Track 18 of *Quieting* exhibits a tension between the shock of the real auditive event and its 'repetition' through the recording medium.

This account of the shock of the cannon-shot could be construed as being reminiscent of the sublime experience (here, the aesthetics of the 'too-much' type of the sublime). Responding to the physical trauma of the assault on their eardrums, the audience of tourists are heard to react with audible relief at realising they are historically placed outside the danger-zone. After the shock and horror, a moment of rational superiority follows, produced by the tourists' realisation that there is no real physical threat to their lives. Just as the actor's cry of "fire!" in the theatre is understood as an artistic fiction not requiring the audience to act, the daily cannon-shot in Halifax is also devoid of original threat, even though the acoustic impact of the shot on the tourists' eardrums is just the same.

> What follows a gunshot, however momentary, is a silence. The gunshot traverses the real, it pierces through time. The silence, which follows the amplitude peak of the shot, is the trough where life reacquaints itself with death. It is the moment, however fleeting, between the gun and the gunned. It is that travel time which is inerasable. You may put the needle on the gunshot and play the record backwards, scratch the surface of the shot back and forth, but you can never undo the hole. […] "It's not the bullet that kills you (it's the hole)" [a Laurie Anderson performance title]. A bullet always holes more than a wound, it holes a sound, a psyche, a time. You cannot reverse its thorough thruness. (Migone 2000)

And later:

> in *First Contact*, the sound of the shot is not real, it has been added, yet it is in sync. Up to that point the early footage was silenced, distanced – by the narration, by the documentary form. (ibid.)

The shot's irreversibility causes Migone to propose the shot (generalised) as the *sui generis* of rupture. Protracted, extended, stretched beyond recognition, "the longevity of the shot" produces a series of ricochets.

> The shot can be played back and forth, the needle picking up the scratches and scars, amplifying the shot until it can be heard as the echo of every word. (ibid.)

Migone points again and again to an abiding interest in processing the time (in the sound) of the shot and its resonance, but just as his essay avoids linking up to the album in any explicitly elucidating manner, so the relations within the album *Quieting* are submerged and sophisticated.

How, then, does the sound of the cannon shot generate material for the rest of the album? I will illustrate this by taking one 'rumble' motif (the bass register of the shot) and showing some of the ways Migone works compositionally with it within the confines of his chosen software, ProTools, and its basic plug-ins.

The following tracks seem to present either an extension of the shot's attack (presumably by use of the time-stretch plug-in), or possibly its resonance: tracks 2, 6, 7, 11, 24, 28

and 32. In tracks 2, 6, 7 and 11, this stretch occurs at the same pitch as the original cannon-shot from track 18. In track 24, the cannon-rumble glissandos above and around its original pitch. Track 28 has the same glissando activity as track 24, but now extremely quietly. (This decreased volume has the interesting effect of making it difficult to place the pitch; i.e. im-materiality of pitch is produced by volume reduction.) In track 32 it is also difficult to locate pitch due to the extremely quiet dynamic, but my guess is that it is probably the original pitch. This motif takes to an extreme electronica's stylistic love of the sub-sonic bass, derived from a bass-drum gesture, stretched to become gentler in the attack (more like a short roll than a strike) and pitched down to the 'subliminal' range. This sound might be regarded as an instance of the presentation of the non-representable: we cannot say exactly *what* the sound is (we cannot, for example, discern its exact pitch), but we are aware *that* it is there. We sense more than we can actually register.

7.5 Tracks 22 and 36

In an e-mail correspondence[9], Migone revealed that two out of the 36 tracks of *Quieting* use sounds not derived from the recording of the Halifax cannon-shot. These two external sources seem to have a referential significance. But this is not revealed to the listener through the CD cover-notes, and nor is it apparent from the sounds themselves. There is an ambiva-lence from Migone's part towards the investment of 'meaning' and significance in *Quieting*. Obviously, the choice of his sound references rests on a highly sophisticated conceptual un-derstanding of their original significance. But this signification is only embedded in the CD's sounds, not exhibited clearly.

As sketched above, it seems that precisely due to its stubborn opacity, *Quieting* draws the listener into a quasi-hermeneutic game of decipherment, where the listener is tempted to assign significance wherever possible as a 'way in' to the work. Meeting the few scraps of information we are given on the digibox tempts one to believe that there must be more stringent structure to be uncovered, codes to be broken, in relation to the work. It is as if *Quieting* obliquely prom-ises but does not deliver a meaning that is immanent in the work yet not fully presented.

Track 22 is based on an audio excerpt from a performance video. Track 36 is a reproduc-tion of an audio excerpt from the documentary film by US artist Chris Burden.

Chris Burden's video work evolved through performance art. In the original perform-ance *Shoot* (1971), Burden asked a friend to shoot him in the arm. The action was recorded on video, and in that format became a renowned installation-object. Since then, Burden has gone on to work with thematisations of the power of money, technology and the military.

What we hear on track 22 of *Quieting* (the excerpt from Burden's *Shoot*) is a short sound (like an intake of breath, or possibly a vocal noise), a woman's voice saying "and the" with a US accent, a brief gap with no signal (1-2 seconds, like a break between two edits), a 'kkkhh-hhh' noise with attack, a distorted echo or perhaps feedback boom, followed by a sound simi-lar to passing traffic, and finally a brief snippet of a male talking voice. The sound quality is much more diffuse and less controlled than on the other tracks derived from Migone's own field recording of the Halifax cannon.

Crucially, there is no sound of a shot, no traumatic scream, neither expressivity no literal reproduction of the kind that one might expect from the significance that Migone invests

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9   See Appendix I, an interview with Migone.

in the sound of gunshots and their repercussions. When armed with the knowledge of the source-material of this track (privileged information though this is, not provided on the digibox cover), we are confronted first and foremost by the absolute non-presentation of the key event that makes the link between Burden's and Migone's projects.

First Contact is a film (1983) and history-book (1987) by two Australian anthropologists, Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson, who relate the arrival of pioneering Australian miners in New Guinea in the 1930s. Their account focuses on the meeting between isolated communities and the armed white newcomers, and the film contains original footage that the miners made in order to document their forced entry into the country. The shot in this case is the shooting of a pig, an act by which the Australians explicitly demonstrated their physical power over the local villagers.

On track 36, a similar non-presentation occurs: five seconds before the end of the otherwise-silent track, a man's voice speaks, more or less indecipherably. As track 22, the sound quality is significantly different than the other Halifax-derived tracks, signalling both a kind of 'authenticity' in presentation (distortion is not provided by software filters but by the sound source itself) and an absence of the artist's controlling aesthetic.

The background noise to the voice seems to indicate an edit, but the flow and meaning of the words (once eventually deciphered) reveal this not to be the case: the edit is a fiction produced by the listener who has come through 35 tracks characterised by deliberately-inserted audible edits as a 'musical' style. Again, there is no shot, and the excerpt chosen by Migone closes itself to our understanding, presenting a recalcitrant message.

The use of voice in both tracks 22 and 36 is surprising, for if we expect one thing of a voice in the midst of an album that is so abstracted from the human touch of musicality, then it would surely be communication. But the fragment of speech presented at the end of track 36 – closing the entire album – withholds more than it reveals. This is clearly a different kind of non-presentation than we met when talking about Hölderlin, Nono, and the Romantic presentation of the ineffable.

Nothing within the digibox of *Quieting* helps us to decode the voice on track 36, but reading Migone's essay 'Ricochets', and coupling his commentary on the film *First contact* with a quote in the essay's appendix, the voice is revealed as that of one of the miners, speaking after having shot a pig in front of the villagers in New Guinea – a demonstration of power that was intended explicitly to establish the white invaders' superiority: "the gunshot and the silence in the colonial encounter" (Migone 2000, p. 1). In the following excerpts from 'Ricochets', my italics show the part of the transcription that is heard on track 36.

> Crank the phonograph. Cock the gun. Hear the pig squeal. Easy shot – point-blank. Show of force to establish who's the boss. (ibid.)

> The shot […] "*and we'll do the same to you as we did to the pig*, because we've got the guns to do it. You leave our stuff alone, and we'll leave your stuff alone. We're just looking for these stones in the creek beds as we go along. It's all we came to look for." (ibid., p. 14)

The distortion stems from the fact that this is the original 1930's recording, made by the miners to document their own successes (they also apparently amused the villagers by playing music to them on the gramophones they brought with them). Thus, the inclusion of

these 5 seconds of documentary recording serves to highlight the distance between the crude propaganda uses of sound recording in the 1930s, and the aestheticisation of sound media in the digital age (between 'them – then' and 'us – now'). Migone's treatment of his selected recordings is multi-layered and highly self-reflexive; the digital processing follows on from a cognitive reflection that expresses itself with considerable sophistication.

We saw in my earlier discussion of the sublime, that in the sublime feeling the object prompts a sense of quantitative unboundedness, which is nevertheless thought of as a limited totality, and that the sublime feeling is therefore characterised by a feeling of unboundedness and totality in one; a differend of unifying and chaotic totality.

Although we can observe composition-like elements ('motifs') recurring in modified forms in *Quieting* (such as the boom of the cannon that becomes a rumble when stretched and is then treated rhythmically), the main 'sense' of each moment is to be understood through constantly cross-referencing with the sourced cannon-shot. There is not one sound on the CD that is not related conceptually, logically or materially with the original shot, and thus the relentlessly fragmentary character of each track refers at every moment to the 'whole'.

In summary, the referentiality of the source material used in *Quieting* is only partly erased, leaving enough traces of signification to produce an oscillation between interpretive and sensual experiences. There are parallels with the kind of Schweigen observed in connection with Nono's *Fragmente – Stille* in Chapter 4, although Migone seems to have a different (possibly more straightforward) relation to what is withheld.

The reader is referred to Appendix I for an e-mail interview with Christof Migone.

7.6 Francisco López' untitled series

Francisco López is a Madrid-based sound artist, active since the early 1980s in sound art. A parallel aspect of López' work is his occupation as a biologist. Combining these two activities, López has accumulated a personal archive of field recordings of botanic and insect life from the South American rainforests (Cox 2001).

Aside from pieces created from CD, López also performs live (using laptop, mixer and turntables). His performances often establish an auditive space that lies between personal and collective listening. Audiences are sometimes led into totally darkened spaces, or given blindfolds, in order to shut out all visual stimulation. This deprivation of visual stimuli is not unique to López' work[10], but López has developed it to extremes, such as in his recent audio-walk programme Blind City, in which 'spectators' are led, blindfold, through the streets of Montréal by blind people.

I close my considerations of subliminal sound art with a brief discussion of some numbers from López' ongoing *Untitled* series (1997-), one of which is collected on the Lowercase 2002 album.

A very brief description of 5 works from the *Untitled* series should give an impression of the characteristics of López' work.

Untitled #74 (1997/2003) presents itself at first glance as a blank CD in an empty transparent jewelcase. On closer inspection, it turns out that the author, title and copyright details are engraved in the central transparent plastic ring around the CD's central hole, in a font that

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10 Undo and the Danish electronica trio system3f.com made a concert based on the same method of visual deprivation at the Disturbances festival, Copenhagen, June 2003.

is less than 2mm high. The piece's duration is 48 minutes and 48 seconds, of which the first 19 minutes are totally silent.[11] Eventually, a continuous hiss fades in and begins to crescendo over the following 19 minutes. A very faint machinic pulse is established under the drone-hiss. At 31 minutes, there is a brief and slight dip in the volume of the hiss, the filter changes (with the result that the timbre grows darker) and a new machinic pulse is introduced. By 37:30, the hiss is almost incredibly loud – it is tolerable only because it is continuous – and breaks off suddenly to total silence. The next 13 minutes are totally silent, barring a very quiet 10-second fragment of what seems like a field recording of a family home, with faint voices and muffled extraneous bumps of activity.

Untitled #91 (1999) is, similarly, a silver disc in an empty jewelcase with no graphic design or cover. Here, the album's information is printed onto the outer edge of the CD's silver ring, in a larger font that is clearly and immediately noticeable. The duration is 58 minutes and 4 seconds, and there are three kinds of sounds: (i) a continuous middle-register hiss, somewhat like the timbre of wind blowing through a narrow tunnel, although totally digital in characteristics; (ii) an occasional soft higher-register hiss that; and (iii) a barely-detectable bass tremor. The first sound fades in at 5-6 minutes, and continues throughout, the second sound makes appearances of just a couple of seconds at a time, spaced (irregularly) about a minute apart, while the third sound appears least frequently, initially together with (ii), later continuously with (i).

Untitled #118 (2002) lasts 5 minutes and 27 seconds, and is collected on the Lowercase-sound 002 album. This is possibly the most restrained of the five works presented here, comprising one continuous mid-range hiss that fades in and out over the duration of the piece, but is so quiet that even with the waveform graphics adjusted to 'jumbo' or 'extreme' on a sound-edit programme, no visual signs of a wave can be seen.

Untitled #129 (2002) appears on a three-track CD containing a track by Steve Roden and a collaborative track by López and Roden together. The sleeve instructs, in parenthesis: "(headphones recommended)". *Untitled #129* lasts 30 minutes, most of which is totally silent except for: (i) 3 minutes of quiet hiss with very faint bass tremor, starting two and a half minutes into the track, and; (ii) an 18-minute hiss with slightly more prominent bass shudder, beginning 19 minutes into the track.

Untitled #150 (2003) is presented alone in a white high-gloss jacket displaying, again, the minimum of information. Its duration is 37 minutes, and it presents a continuous drone whose filter is very gradually changed over the course of the piece. The two components of the drone are a wandering medium-range hiss whose timbre is under continual (although extremely slow) transformation, and a faint, timbrally constant bass rumble, whose decibel level varies subtly. On such a smooth transformational track, an 'event' occurring 5 minutes before the end of the piece makes a considerable impression: the sudden shutting-off of

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11 This is the CD referred to in the very first line of the preface to this thesis. When I first received this CD, I put it into my CD-player, and ooncluded after a few minutes' listening that it was a blank. The disc languished for several months amongst my pile of López' CDs before I eventually noticed the tiny print engraved on it, one day when I had picked it up to throw it out. Again, I put it in my CD-player and remembered (something I had failed to register the first time) that the seconds flashing past on the time-window indicated that there was at least a track, even if there was no audio. Eventually, I imported the audio into a ProTools session to get a graphic overview, and discovered (visually) that there was in fact sound to be heard a third of the way into the track.

a layer of the hiss, revealing a underlying softer, 'shadow'-hiss, which in its turn fades and rises towards the end of the piece, producing a strikingly expressive sense of cadential 'lift' to round off the number.

These descriptions are admittedly extremely reductive, and it has to be emphasised that once the listener is focussed on each piece, a considerable amount of timbral movement can be observed within the lengthy drones. Nevertheless, I hope that such a presentation goes some way towards pointing to a contrast between Migone and López' compositional styles. Where *Quieting* was full of fragments, López' *Untitled* works are far more continuous. This prompts a discussion of the basic contrast between them as a difference between events and drones.

A very special and above all endlessly patient kind of listening is expected of us by López. In contrast to the range of treatments by which Migone varies the dynamics of his silence, both in terms of decibels and concepts, López' soundfields are relatively continuous and homogenous – 'eventless', one might say. This apparent eventlessness seems related to the drone aesthetic of LaMonte Young, or Alvin Lucier's electronic works from the 1960s, such as *Music for Solo Performer* (1965).

When eventlessness is taken to such extremes, it prompts the question of how to continue listening over such considerable durations. López' works are the culmination of the historical period discussed in this thesis, and they bring to a head the latent question about the value of silence when it becomes centrally constitutive of artworks.[12] López articulates a worry that can be found in many contemporary artists' outputs: namely, is it due to the frame or the content, that art can lay claim to be both radically new and interesting today?

There is, after all, a huge difference between a theatrically-presented listening experiment that lasts 4 minutes 33 seconds, and the experience of sitting alone with headphones on for up to an hour. López' drones can thus be contrasted not only with Migone's fragmented shards of an explosive event, but also with Cage's *4'33"*. The description of drone vs. event is not only a description of content, but also signals a fundamental difference in listening practices.

In an event-based texture, listening moves from point to point as such events 'pop up' on a perceptual horizon; the heightened sense of awareness that I described in my discussion of Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso* seems to stem from an expectation of being ready to be surprised at any moment by a new sound event. This kind of listening is characterised by a constant state of rupture, however gentle. In a drone-based texture, listening seems more like a state than an activity, with changes in content dawning on the listener slowly; perception pulls sounds slowly from a subconscious level to full awareness, rather than having its attention grabbed by sudden and momentary occurrences. The sense of rupture that characterises event-based listening is absent here, as rupture would seem to fasten immediately and naturally to events, while only abstractly to continuous states.

In Lyotard's writings on the painter Barnett Newman, we find an event-based terminology that proposes discrete moments with individually-profiled characteristics as enabling a clear act of foregrounding in perception (Lyotard 1989a, Lyotard 1989d). But Newman and Lyotard's talk of the present 'instant', when coupled to the non-temporal art of painting, also draws on a spatial understanding of the here-and-now as a state that exhibits continuity and

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12 See the review in *Creative Loafing* net-magazine by Lang Thompson, of the Lowercase-sound 2002 compilation double-CD, for a colloquial discussion of this problem: the review is uploaded at Bremsstrahlung Records' website www.bremsstrahlung-rcordings.org/reviews

extension in time. In the consideration of the event – whether a performative event, or a perceptual event, or even a perceptually performative event – in the context of a time-based art, it seems obvious that it is very important to distinguish between 'now' as a moment or as a state. In other words: how long is 'now'?

It may be fruitful to return to the phenomenological considerations of earlier chapters, in order to consider the temporality of 'now' in terms of the notions of 'event' and 'drone', although the full consequences of this interesting conundrum will have to be postponed beyond the frame of this thesis. In as far as phenomenology filters out forms, essences or conscious intellectual constructions, focusing on the appearance of things as they present themselves to experience, it can be said that phenomenology is about the mental (perceptual, sensual, emotional) landscape of any given moment. This phenomenal reality is a 'now'. Intuitively, it would seem that 'now' is a reality that we grasp most easily in the case of short, discrete events with clear physical profiles, as opposed to extended states constituted by fuzzy temporal borders.

In my earlier discussions of the phenomenological experience of, say, Cage's *4'33"* and Sciarrino's *Lo spazio inverso*, I talked of what goes on in perception as sound 'events'. Cage's invention of the silent piece was seen to have descended from a consideration of rests as hierarchically equal to musical notes. Even when the duration of the rests expanded to cover a whole piece, it was still a composition of shorter durations. And the auditive field that was opened up by the rhetorical move of the piece was also one filled with discrete events. The perception of a heightened sense of presence in *Lo spazio inverso* was similarly descended from a relationship with notes as compositional building-blocks. The conception of 'now' is dominated by a prevalent idea that 'the present instant' is necessarily short.[13] Thus, I portrayed the performative mode as one that proceeds, experientially, from event to event as if hopping between stepping-stones. Each event is a kind of temporary fix for sensual perception, in between the intellectual construction of narratives about the past and projections into the future.

> The purpose of a painting by Newman is not to show that duration is in excess of consciousness, but to be the occurrence, the moment which has arrived. […] A painting by Newman […] announces nothing; it is in itself an annunciation. […] Newman is not representing a non-representable annunciation; he allows it to present itself. (Lyotard 1989a, p. 241)

In the case of López' continuous low-profile drones, it might be asked whether his music therefore stands or falls on the extent to which one agrees with the phenomenological characterisation of the present moment as an 'event' with a short duration and a step-like character in relation to the next event. Not only is 'presence' hard to grasp over long periods of time in which transformations are extremely gradual; the aesthetic experience itself risks losing continuity, and the artistic idea risks demonstrating "duration in excess of consciousness".

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13 This is a central observation of psychologist Daniel Stern's formulation of the 'now'. Stern notes that the present moment is often equated with what he calls a 'micro-kairos', where "only minor life-course decisions and short destiny paths are in play", and he moves to inflating the temporal dimension in order to acknowledge that there are also longer 'moments' (Stern 2004, pp. xi-xix, and 3-40). However, the mediation of memory is considered as the cut-off point for the now-ness of a present moment, and Stern operates with a 3-4 second range. Considering the duration of 'the present moment' in music, Stern interestingly relates previous theorists who have proposed between 2 and 8 seconds as the common duration of a musical perceptual present – and 3 seconds as an upper limit for silences (after which forward motion stops and the musical sense is violated)!

These are risks that López is clearly willing to take. He proposes the continuous texture of the drone as a strategy for escaping the limitations of the individual sound and, presumably, for opening up a path for the 'transcendence' of which the artist so readily speaks.

Christoph Cox has characterised López as representing a neo-modernist tendency in sound art (Cox 2003), reminding him explicitly of mid-20th century modernist composers such as Xenakis and Feldman. Cox acknowledges the outdatedness of the postmodernist project in art and theory, as signalled by Hal Foster in the mid-1990s, by proposing instead the term neo-modernism to account for the re-emergence of modernist strategies towards the turn of the millennium, and the revival of avantgardist conceptions of novelty and revolutionary aspirations. The characteristics that Cox associates with neo-modernism in sound art are abstraction, reduction, self-referentiality, and attention to the perceptual act itself.

Cox' proposal of the neo-modernist category is interesting because it also drives a wedge between earlier sound-art trends and a new generation. Artists such as John Oswald, John Zorn and Christian Marclay often worked within quotation, pastiche, time-collapse and jump-cut fragmentation – operations that were frequently performed on archives of pre-recorded music – producing work characterised by mixture, overload, and the warping of what is familiar and recognisable.

A new generation of sound artists born in the 1960s, however, have swapped the aesthetic of the 'too-much' (overload) for an aesthetic of the 'almost-nothing', seeking purity and reduction of form and abstraction of content.

> Like their postmodernist forebears, the new generation – Günter, Francisco López, Steve Roden, and wiliam Basinski – begin with found sound; yet these neo-modernists take care to abstract their raw material beyond recognition, stretching and layering it into dense drones and loops. (Cox 2003)

Cox notes the hommages paid to modernist composers such as Iannis Xenakis and Morton Feldman by the neo-modernists.

> To the postmodernist, the new sound art might seem to retreat from social and political concerns. But neo-modernism has a politics of its own – a distinctly avant-gardist one that recalls both Greenberg and Theodor Adorno and implicitly criticizes postmodernism for its symbiotic relationship with the culture industry. In eschewing mass-media content, the genre proposes a more radical exploration of the formal conditions of the medium itself. Against the anaesthetic assault of daily life, it reclaims a basic function of art: the affirmation and extension of pure sensation. (Cox 2003)

Cox is onto several things here that echo my earlier discussion of the mid-20th century new sensibility. The "affirmation and extension of pure sensation" parallels Sontag's observation that "the new sensibility understands art as the extension of life, for we are what we are able to see (hear, taste, smell, feel) even more powerfully and profoundly than we are what furniture of ideas we have stocked in our heads". In addition, there is a re-affirmation of the autonomy of the avantgarde beyond the pressures of mass culture and mass media.

Against this, it may be objected that digital art has no route to return to the premises of modernism, due to the digital age's subversion of modernist categories of the aura and authenticity of artwork, and deeply changed relations between artists and art-institutions (Andrews 2003).

López works with 'absolute' silence that he is not embarrassed to call modernist. He has no problems with the term 'music', even though his work makes little obvious use of musical traditions. López' has frequently referred to his work as 'absolute concrete music' and also makes free use of the term 'transcendental' to describe his music.

This transcendental bent is unusual among sound artists, as much of the motivation for the most basic genre distinction between 'music' and 'sound art' comes from sound artists' desire to escape the excessively hierarchical thinking behind music's reliance on Pythagorean harmony, the evaluation of some parameters above others (pitch over timbre, for example) and the authority of the composed score over the vagaries of performance.[14]

López' position puts us to some extent in mind of parallels with Nono in its blend of romanticism, high modernism and a metaphysical impulse. López differs from most sound artists in representing a return to idealism, formalism and the *a priori* character of the artist's role.

'Musical' considerations aside, the use of field recordings whose referentiality is more totally erased than in the case of Migone, chimes with the above description of lowercase, in as far as the capture (by recording) of originally concrete sounds is filtered by technical processes to become as non-referential and abstract as possible. López operates with a ideal of 'pure' sound, with no allegiance to language, text, image, instrumental virtuosity or visual stimulation. This explains his eagerness to distance himself not only from Cage but also from musique concrete (Cox 2001).

López' efforts to distance his sounds from the worldly referentiality of the humble field recording leads me to consider the point already raised about the struggle of immateriality and materiality in both the Sontagian new sensibility and the Lyotardian aesthetics of the sublime.

7.7 The timbre of technology

In the romantic era, one motivation for elevating silence to transcendental heights lay in a problematic relationship to the sounding materiality of an idealised music.[15] The non-instrumentality of digital music might seem to ease possible worries produced by the conflict between material and ideal sound. Once de-instrumentalised, the digital medium seems, at first glance, to be nicely dematerialised. This prompts associations of digitally-produced or digitally-processed sound with a more idealised conception of art. On the other hand, it is surely no accident that the term '*sound* art' has become so well established as a description of digital music in the new millennium, returning a focus to the sensual material as opposed to its cultural codifications.

Even digital processes have their own timbres: the scratch, the click, the cut, for example. All these operations seem to inhabit a percussive timbral paradigm, where the prevalence of glitch aesthetics appears as the new drums-and-bass of post-dancefloor electronica. One 'motif' in Migone's *Quieting* is the edit click, a hallmark of the glitch style, and particularly prominent on tracks 7 and 13. The edit click directs attention towards the medium itself in a deliberate strategy of medium-reference (Cascone 2000). We hear the sound of the medium attempting to produce itself, the Deleuzian virtual 'unsuccessfully' crossing over into the actual.[16]

It is typical for the aesthetic of this first wave of lowercase that composition begins with microphones, the artist taking a more or less passive stance towards the production of sounds, focusing instead on the capturing of noise from carefully-chosen sources. Virtuosity is dis-

14 See Vanhanen 2005, for a discussion of the de-hierarchization of music through phonography, based on Deleuze's 'machinic' concept.
15 See Hesselager 2004 for a detailed discussion of this opposition of timbre and musical idea in 19th-century music.
16 See Vanhanen 2003, for a discussion of glitch and the Deleuzian virtual.

placed from the instrumentality so important to musical sound-production, and is invested instead in the choice of what to record and how to process the recorded sounds, according to carefully-reflected aesthetic principles.

During this digital processing, traces of the original sound that could identify sound-sources are erased, disguising 'found' sound. This is arguably an extension of *musique concrète*'s project, which in turn may be related to another mid-century act of erasure already discussed in Chapter 3 – namely, Robert Rauschenberg's picture *Erased De Kooning*. Schaeffer originally went to great technological lengths to diminish or eradicate the associative properties of the recorded sounds he used in his works.

> By recording sounds, altering them (slowing them down, speeding them up, reversing them, chopping off their attack or decay), and playing them back over radio or phonograph, Schaeffer hoped to isolate a world of pure sound cast adrift from the sources of its production and independent from the domain of the visual. What began in the quotidian and the commonplace was, by a set of mechanical procedures and instruments, cast into another ontological realm. (Cox, 2001)

This strategy is confirmed, as Cox points out, in Lévi-Strauss' critique of *musique concrète*:

> Like abstract painting, its first concern is to disrupt the system of actual or potential meanings of which these phenomena are the elements. Before using the noises it has collected, *musique concrète* takes care to make them unrecognizable, so that the listener cannot yield to the natural tendency to relate them to sense images: the breaking of china, a train whistle, a fit of coughing, or the snapping off of a tree branch. (Lévi-Strauss 1969, pp. 22-23, quoted in Cox 2001)

Lévi-Strauss' grudge against this strategy is explained by the fact that for him, 'music' was the central concept. But the desire for unrecognisable sounds was influential, beyond musique concrete, for Stockhausen and the subsequent development of studio-produced electronic art music that short-circuited the original referentiality of recorded sounds altogether, going straight to non-referential sources. The glare of referentiality that turns up in Schaeffer's music on comparison with Stockhausen goes to show that referentiality and its erasure is to some extent a matter of degree.

The software filter may be regarded as a metaphor for the act of processing erasure, a way of exercising control over the random elements in recorded or found sounds. Filter is a mode of compositional control over field recordings that are harvested by chance.

Somewhat at odds with the concern for erasure of the sound source's identity, the sleeve-notes of lowercase albums are typically full of statements revealing both the origins of the original sounds, and the software used in erasing their identity. The element of paradox in this motion both towards and away from letting the listener in on the origin of the sound, and the displacement of understanding from ear to word, indicates a kind of antagonism in the aesthetic project. There is a desire to create an object that is to be understood conceptually, through the rational aspect of our appreciation of art and its ability to overrule the senses (for example, by persisting through long periods of silence). Yet the sound of this art is recalcitrant towards our desire to interpret and decode it.

This points to a strategy not only among artists, but also among contemporary art-consumers when faced with works constituted by extreme quiet or extreme noise. Where sound

itself refracts our scrutiny, the receiver's attention is displaced on the one hand to context, and to conceptual layers of meaning that may be woven into the musical/artistic gesture (i.e. the frame), and on the other, to an immersion in what is presented to the senses in excess of what we can grasp through the concept (i.e. the trace). Thus, an interesting dialogue is set up between coginitive frame and material trace.

7.8 subliminal sound art and the cagean legacy

> Art does not progress, in the sense that science and technology do. But the arts do develop and change. (Sontag 1966, p. 295)

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, López' strong move to distance his aesthetics from those of Cage – whilst acknowledging the persistence of the Cagean paradigm in experiental music and sound art today – signals a lively polemic at the heart of the position of Cage within sound art today.

To some extent, many sound artists from the field that I have considered are inspired by earlier musical movements such as Cagean silence, or the kind of minimalism exercised in La Monte Young's drones, for example, rather than more mainstream instrumental concert-hall composers such as Reich and Glass.

The Lowercase sound 002 double-CD box embeds the Cagean quote: "if you run across someone who pays attention to sounds, you will find that it's the quiet ones they find interesting."
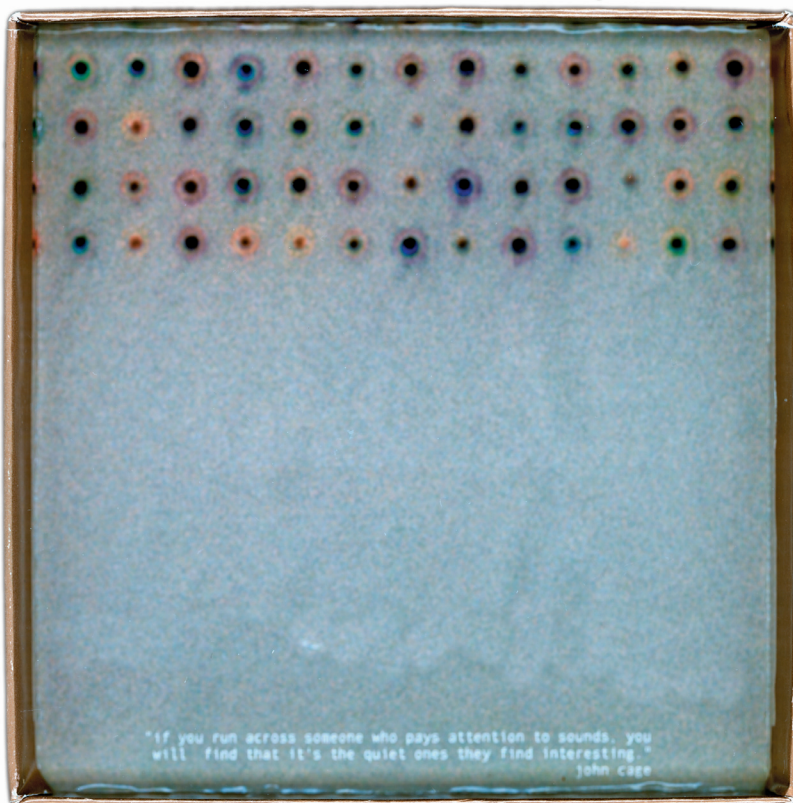
Fig 6. The inside of the Lowercase-sound 2002 double-CD box (showing the John Cage quote: "if you run across someone who pays attention to sounds, you will find that it's the quiet ones they find interesting.") Bremsstrahlung Recordings BLUNG 002

Despite the fact that many sound artists cite Cage as a point of reference in their work, the central paradigms of working artistically with sound have changed since the 1950s. Whether or not some of them may see themselves as working within a Cagean paradigm, sound artists working in the digital medium today have a fundamentally different historical, technological and aesthetic framework than Cage had, and therefore these new 'digital audio silences' have to be viewed as a basically new silence phenomenon.

In the light of the previous chapters of this thesis, it is obvious that there is a sense in which these tendencies have a number of historical pretexts, just as Cagean silence also did (the *tacet* indication, for one). But much of this sound art emerges from visual- and media-arts environments. This is an indicator of the fact that there is no simple continuity between earlier musical silences and this emerging body of digital silences. While I acknowledge that many movements within new-media artistic practice reinforce previous, mid-20th century artistic trends, I hope I have shown that despite elements of return and retrospection, homage and pastiche, the digital works discussed here also chart new territory both aesthetically and musically in the relation of silence and sound.

The medium is one aspect in which Cagean silence differs from the new subliminal sound art. The withholding of musical tone from the performance of 4'33" always brings out a theatrical aspect of the piece; the liveness of the concert situation is underlined. In sound art, the technological filters by which referential sound is erased produce a glitch aesthetics that almost has its own digital timbre.

> Glitches are the sounds of technology not working; the sounds of the grit in the machinery of sound-making. […] This is where technology reveals its téchne – its material, structural and ideological foundations which in everyday life have become transparent, invisible. (Sangild 2004)

The filter is another point of difference between Cage and new-millennium artists. In the case of *4'33"*, we saw that a phenomenological filter was at work, distinguishing between sounds already present but not presented (other than by virtue of the frame). In digitally-produced sound art, the filter is a compositional technique. (Moreover, software instrumentalism is heard through its own distinctive timbre, as already noted.)

7.9 Listening practices

Leaving behind the distinction between event- and drone-based listening, I close with a few reflections on listening to subliminal sound art as a broad category, and an alignment of sound-art listening with a comparatively performative mode.

The CD/headphone form of listening deserves a brief discussion as a special, ideal listening situation, and I would like to consider some important differences between personal and collective listening that lie between Part IV and the earlier parts of this thesis. Personal listening of the kind evoked through the CD/headphone relationship focuses on perception, and seems to exclude bodily or presence from any kind of collective or spatial situation. The move towards aural perception and away from bodily presence (as, for example, in the concert hall) inserts an interesting limitation in the phenomenological approach to music. It also presents an interesting contrast to the opening of the auditive field onto a larger space appealed for by Cage. Sound art de-

signed for headset-listening closes in on the individual listener and closes out the world of everyday sounds.[17]

The headphones-preferred instruction of the first lowercase-compilation CD[18] and of López and Roden's 2002 collaboration CD mentioned above is not merely a fetishisation of audio technology: rather, the sounds of the pieces can more or less literally not be heard without headphones, such is the subliminal emphasis. This instruction for the ideal listening situation is simultaneously an embodiment of the ideal or implicit listener. The instruction dictates a particular auditive competence (extreme concentration) and a minimum technological requirement (the right listener interface: headphones). It also decisively makes the break with any kind of dancefloor tradition prevalent in the electronica scene.

This expectation is at the same time an insistence on a (non-socialised) form of decorum: alone and in silence – the modern, digital mode of virtual music culture. Admittedly, in the classical concert hall, we want decorum to be upheld in order that we forget the other listeners around us. We want to forget the position of our bodies in a collective situation. The situation creates this illusion for us. At home, we are 'disembodied' from the concert situation and spared the concert-hall's collective social rituals, including – paradoxically – the repressive decorum that is the traditional prerequisite of aesthetic contemplation.

In the opposition I have indicated throughout this thesis between 'absence' and 'presence' lies a connotation of 'jenseits' and 'diesseits' that would seem to suggest that texts that focus on presence do not share transcendental aspirations to signal the sublime. On the contrary, the silent aspects of works that celebrate the rupture of narrative and the coherency of a syntactical language seem to force an upgrading of perception, where appreciation of the work occurs first and foremost through the aural performative of listening, and only second through interpretation or – if at all possible – analysis.

The acoustical and non-notated aspect of the sound art discussed here may be regarded as generally shifting the interpretive act away from a musical paradigm. Such a shift is manifest in modes of experimental sound practice that use the acoustical as a way to explore, articulate and antagonise their own limits. The acoustical can therefore be understood as a performative event whose particularity manifests itself in confrontations between sound and such categories as space, language and the body.

Returning to Lyotard, the coupling of the particularity of a perceptual performative in relation to an object of perception would seem to present no contradiction with the sublime. To put it another way, Lyotard associates the sublime with the experience of here-and-now under the term 'event'. It is precisely the 'immediate' power of a moment of perceptual intensity that disarms the perceiver's critical mode of understanding, evoking a strong sense that something has disrupted our frames of reference. Being thrown back into the mere acknowledgement that something has taken place (the event), without being able exactly to interpret or analyse it, presents the listener with a sense of the presence and immediacy of the unrepresentable. Thus, the particular – the postmodern pendant to plurality, as opposed to the universal – does not preclude experiences of the sublime. Coupling the hyper-present (the immediacy of the inexplicable) with the acoustical could then provide the foundation for a discussion of the aural performative as a mode of aesthetic presence opposite to *schweigen*'s strong evocation of meaningful absence.

17 See Sterne 2003, pp. 154-177, for an interesting historical discussion of personal listening and headset culture.
18 "Good heaphones at high volume recommended". From the liner notes to lowercase compilation BLUNG 001

It might seem strange to bring in performativity when talking of music produced purely digitally for CD distribution. Not only is there no 'performance'; the ephemeral nature of the event is contradicted in this sound art by the digital domain's enhanced possibilities for recording (Stuart 2003). That these pieces are created as recordings with no potential for live presentation is obviously far from the situation that most musical performativity theories address. On the other hand, the lack of a 'first-degree' original (and thus the lack of 'second-degree' copies or reproductions) undermines the traditional sense of an auratically materialised work, fruitfully emphasising the event-character underlying both production and reception here.

Performative listening is related to phenomenological experience (things as they appear to be, changing, in flux – experiences not objects) but fastens to material events. Thus, performative interpretations offer a perceptual focus on material as something other than 'object'. The proposal of the event as (intangible) object of perception offers a promising alternative to the physicality of the art-object.

In 'Answer to the question: what is postmodernism?', Lyotard comments that the rule-lessness of art that evokes feelings of the sublime in the more radical (postmodern) sense, has the character of an *event*. Such works seem to break free from history (fulfilling the main task of the avantgarde), because of the high degree of rupture on every level (e.g. the destabilisation of terms such as 'work', 'object', 'artist', etc.). The temporal sequence of this thing-following-on-from-whatever-has-gone-before is that of experience deprived of the support of grounding categorisations.

In *The sublime and the avantgarde*, Lyotard unfolds Newman's 'now' as a 'temporal ecstasy' to those who would constitute time on the basis of consciousness. Newman's 'now' is a stranger to consciousness, it dismantles consciousness, deposes it – it is what consciousness forgets in order to be able to constitute itself. This suspension is of course an integral aspect of the sublime: the suspension of material, form and subject.

But there is also a suspension of meaning in both the sublime and the performative, which challenges attempts at hermeneutic interpretation and its presumption that there is some stable significance behind the thing to be perceived. Art of the sublime seeks an effect, or a series of effects, in place of meaning.

The new vocabulary concerning listening – aurality, tempaurality, sonicity, and so on – is a sign of this suspension of interpretation in favour of phenomenological approaches. These terms might be argued to encourage a performative kind of listening activity that constantly delays judgment and opens itself to isolated events.

7.10 Rogalsky's media silences and Kyriakides' *Wordless*

I close this discussion of subliminal sound art and silence by offering an opening to a future line of inquiry: namely, the moral and political aspects of silence offered by the consideration of speech contexts. Within anthropology, politics and ethics, the figure of silence is frequently invoked to draw attention to the repression of individuals or groups in situations of unreasonably unequal power relations.

Matt Rogalsky's '*S*' project (2001) was composed by programming a software filter that operated for 24 hours on a radio broadcast signal from BBC Radio 4 (a domestic channel featuring mainly spoken word). A software programme designed by Rogalsky analysed the broadcast signal in real time, and harvested silences from in between the spoken words. The resulting 24 hours of collected silences were then released on 24 one-hour audio CDs. The '*S*'

project is a kind of centenary celebration of the first ever transatlantic radio communication, transmitted by physicist Guglielmo Marconi on 12th December, 1901. On that day, Marconi set out to prove that wireless waves were not affected by the curvature of the earth, using his patent No. 7777, for 'tuned or syntonic telegraphy'.

This project of harvesting silences from broadcast media streams using 'gating software' is also used in two other works by Rogalsky: *Two minutes fifty seconds silence* (2003) and *A little bird told me* (2004). The basis of *Two minutes fifty seconds silence* is President George W. Bush's address to the world on 17th March 2003, in which he announced a final ultimatum to Saddam Hussein prior to the US invasion of Iraq. In *A little bird told me,* a similar practice is exercised on President George Bush's announcement of the resignation of CIA chief George Tenet (over questionable intelligence on terrorism and the Iraq war).

In all these pieces, the criteria for gating off speech and preserving background-noise, mouth-noises, and the quiet 'ends' of articulations is determined according to a decibel threshold. In other words, silence is quantifiable in decibels. More information about the process is given in an interview with Rogalsky in Appendix II.[19]

Yannis Kyriakides (b. 1969) works within both composed scored music and sound art. *Wordless* (2004) was a commission from the Belgian audio-visual Argos festival[20]. In this work, Kyriakides edited out the words of spoken interviews, leaving – as Rogalsky did – background noise and non-verbal voice effects. The source for the interviews is an archive of interviews with ordinary citizens of Brussels: pensioners, cleaning ladies, students, artists, schoolchildren, and so on. The archive (BNA-BBOT) is a citizens' project, giving local residents in Brussels, literally, a voice on an extensive databank. Each archived interview is a portrait of the person speaking, his or her daily life and opinions. In editing out the sounds of their speech, Kyriakides 'musicalises' the remaining breathing and background sounds (treating the remaining fragments as sample), in a style chosen to represent each of the speakers' personal stories and the sonic environment in which the interview was recorded. Finally, the work was mixed for binaural headphones and stereo PA, creating a listening situation that combines the personal mode of headphone listening with a spatial, 'public' distribution.

Kyriakides takes a less clinical and considerably more musical approach than Rogalsky, adding his own "pulses, resonances and noise". In fact, there is hardly a silent moment on the *Wordless* album, except between tracks. Silence is therefore only present here as a musical foregrounding of the pauses in speech stripped away in Kyriakides' sound-editing process.

The reader is referred to Appendices II and III for interviews with Rogalsky and Kyriakides.

Rogalsky and Kyriakides' work lies outside the scope of this thesis, as their use of the spoken word is at odds with the 'instrumental' bent of my chosen area. This is so, even though we hardly hear the voices, for it is the suppression of speech that motivates the work. Voices are presented by their absence, as it were. It is interesting that precisely these speech-based works embrace a political dimension that is far from the level of abstraction of the non-speech-based works that I have discussed, and that the sole fragment of speech that creeps into Christof Migone's *Quieting* ("and we'll do the same to you as we did to the pig") lends this work an unmistakable socio-political edge.

19 See also Allen 2006.
20 See appendix IV for interview with Kyriakides about this and other work.

Concluding reflections

> The Great Silence of 1915 commenced on the 7ᵗʰ September and covered Western Europe from the Baltic countries in the north to the Balkans in the south.[1] (Højholt 2001, p. 7)

If only it were so easy to define a silence as here at the opening of Per Højholt's novel *Auricula*, let alone to be provided with a research object of such neat geographical and historical proportions!

But even the best-defined examples of silence have a habit of proving elusive in the face of demands for documentation.

> As it was unforeseen, no reports of it exist. (ibid.)

And then there is the problem of convincing the reader of its presence and voluminosity.

> Many didn't even notice it, due to its short and random nature, even though they participated in it themselves. (ibid.)

This thesis could easily have been a project concerning only digital sound art at the turn of the millennium – in other words, a thesis all about the present. It is no straightforward task to discuss a period that embraces both the past and the present without positing either a definitive break between the two, or a clear line of continuity; periodisation forces commitments on issues of change and continuity.

Handling separate decades in separate parts of the thesis has allowed me to offer speculative, episodic accounts of individual artworks, without a unified movement of history over a single coherent temporality. Nevertheless, my discussions are not a-historical, and I have attempted to sustain a number of topics of discussion topics between chapters and thus between decades. Obviously, the close reading of works from the 1960s, '70s or 90s would have prompted other musicological, theoretical and aesthetic discussions. My priority has been to explore aesthetic concepts as opposed to historical narratives.

The formal argumentation in this thesis is possibly more decisive in relation to the oldest works (by Cage and Nono), moving towards a more speculative style in the discussions of the newer ones (by Sciarrino, Migone and López). Cage's *4'33"* provided a convenient candidate for the discussion of the basic category of constitutive silence, which proved a fruitful historical point of departure for the thesis. López music is the culmination of the thesis' historical period, bringing to a head the latent question underlying the aesthetic experience of works that do in fact seem to be constituted by radical silence: namely, 'is it art?'

My reflections on silence have taken this thesis both in the direction of meaning, interpretation and cognitive understanding on the one hand, and sense, perception and feeling on the other. The basic oscillation, expressed in the thesis' title, between experiences of heightened *presence* and equally strong *absence* inform the choice of a series of contrasting models of stylistic and theoretical description. In attaching individual models to the discussion of

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1 My translation.

individual works, I do not aim to reduce either the scope of the models or the range of responses appropriate to the works, but I hope rather to close in on some interesting perspectives of each that await commentary.

Beyond the narrow field of this research project's interest in silence as a musicological topic, I hope to have contributed also to some broader discussions.

I have given considerable space to the consideration of Lyotard's writings, even though his work is not traditionally regarded as having much overlap with musicology. I have presented some of his own early discussion of Cage's work (coupled with that of Schoenberg), and I have considered one of Lyotard's key concepts – negative presentation – in terms of its relevance in the discussion a current sound-art repertoire.

The thesis also charts some common aesthetic frameworks for the discussion of music and sound art as both separate and related artistic enterprises. I have aimed to place some sound-art works within a music-historical perspective, without reducing their content or effects to what can be described using traditional music-analytical terminology. Whether pointing to contrasts or similarities, I have drawn a series of relations between music and sound art that I hope are fruitful to both fields.

APPENDIX I

Christof Migone[1]

Hodkinson: Was it one single recording of the cannon that you made?

Migone: In my preparations for this project, I made several recordings from different positions in the city, but I only used one on the CD. I initially intended to do a piece combining the various recordings, but I was stuck on just one in particular. Every time I hear it (to this day) it startles me.

In between the recording in 1996 and working on the CD in the summer of 2000 I had periodically tried to use it, but I could never find the right form, every time it was placed beside or alongside something, it would annihilate itself and the other thing. I finally realised it had to stand on its own. And so in thinking of how one would create that possibility in the listening experience I thought of putting just that bit of recording in the middle of the CD, preceded and followed by silence so as to further amplify the sound of the shot. And that point I felt I had found the right form, the CD got a bit more complex, but that is the genesis of it.

Hodkinson: Is there any symbolic significance in the choice of the cannon, apart from its being an explosive sound to contrast with your interest in small sounds?

Migone: The initial reason I did the recordings is banal and autobiographical. I lived in Halifax from 1994 to 1996 to do a Master in Fine Arts at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. One hears the cannon blast every day at noon from anywhere in the city, it is jolting at first, but one gets used to it after a while. In my last couple of months in the city I wanted to do some kind of sound portrait of the city, this seemed like an obvious choice. Of course, afterwards, and especially after viewing "First Contact" in the fall of 1998 I became interested in the moments of trauma which might be incredibly loud in and of themselves but impose a silence (silencing/quieting) in its aftermath.

Hodkinson: Can you describe (conceptually or technically) in what way the individual tracks are "based on/related to that recording"?

Migone: The only tracks that are not directly related to the one cannon recording are track 22 which uses the audio from a video recording of Chris Burden's infamous performance "Shoot" and track 36 which uses audio from the documentary film by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's "First Contact" (1982) on Australian gold diggers entering the interior of New Guinea in the 1930s and using guns to control the aborigines who had never seen whites before.

Hodkinson: Can you describe the software you used, and whether it was developed/adapted especially for this project?

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1 From an e-mail correspondence 16th October 2003

Migone: All was done in ProTools, so no special software, just laborious treatment with basic plug-ins.

Hodkinson: Does your work have any links (directly, or indirectly) with 'lower-case sound'?

Migone: I am not sure what would constitute directly as opposed to indirectly. I don't subscribe to a particular genre, what I do depends on the project/context/etc., though I do have recurring obsessions, political concerns, etc. I do subscribe to the lowercase email list, know some of the folks related to it, but I just see it as a loose amalgam of folks. My label, Squint Fucker Press, could be said to exhibit some lowercase tendencies, but that's just one of its characteristics.

Hodkinson: Can you say something about the symmetry between the tracks with and without a signal, and about this idea of pairing?

Migone: In keeping with basic initial idea of creating an aural/somatic shock by having the blast at the center of an otherwise silent CD, once I treated (ie. silenced) the blast into variations that were barely audible, I thought I would in turn contrast them by putting them beside their absolute silent twin.

Hodkinson: Would you regard recorded and digital silences as radically new categories of silence and quietness?

Migone: No. Silence has always been radical.

APPENDIX II

Matt Rogalsky[2]

Hodkinson: The introduction to the S project cites a historical basis in Marconi's inaugural radio transmision. Was the project inspired by any other precedents, such as Heinrich Böll's short story *Dr. Murkes gesammelte Schweigen*?

Rogalsky: I was unaware of Böll's story when I began the project. Shortly afterward, someone introduced me to it. It fits perfectly...

Hodkinson: Can you fill me in on the following two projects: (i) *Simultaneous silence* at Maerz Musik 2002, and (ii) your collage of Gertrude Stein's breath sounds taken from a 1930s recording?

Rogalsky: 'Simultaneous Silence' was a long day of overlapping performances of works by John Cage. I was commissioned to do a new realization of *Fontana Mix*, which is an indeterminate graphic score (multiple transparencies overlaid on each other) which can be used to generate unique instructions for making a performance using any sound materials. The version I did used the score materials to make a fixed set of performance instructions for three players using networked laptop computers, which control a central set of shared sound resources. The instructions tell the players when to initiate or modify sounds, which are heard moving in circular motion within a large loudspeaker circle (eight speakers). The sounds I chose for the piece ranged from high atmospheric radio frequency activity, to undersea animal communication, and in between were sounds of human activity – digging with a shovel, crackling fire, etc. I didn't start out with this premise, but in the end the four elements of earth, air, water and fire were represented. Although the score realization is fixed – the performers do the same actions in different performances – each performance is unique because Éthe sound materials are randomized.

I made a performance piece derived in various ways from Gertrude Stein texts, as a sort of hommage. Because much of her writing is so repetitive, I used the order of letters in the texts to generate melodies. Another element in the piece was the 1930s recording, for which I edited out her voice so you have just the background crackle of the record, and her breath sounds.

Hodkinson: Can you describe the software you used, and how it was developed from conceptualisation to realisation of the original idea?

Rogalsky: Since doing the Stein piece, where I did the editing by hand, I have written a variety of software tools for automating the process. I started working on this after reading about the device known as 'Cash', which is employed by many radio stations in the USA to compress time by removing slivers of 'silence' and other 'unneccesary sound' in order to make

2 From an e-mail interview, June 2003

room for advertisements. (There was another article recently about this: http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/02/technology/circuits/02spee.html).

I set out to write software which would do the inverse, that is to conserve 'silences' and remove everything else. For this I have used the programming language SuperCollider, which is kind of a sonic Swiss Army knife for the Macintosh. Also using SuperCollider I made an installation piece entitled *Ellipsis* which uses a single radio station as input. The visual part of the installation is a large time-counter projected on the wall. As you hear each 'silence' in the live radio stream, the duration of that silence is added to the counter, so it shows the amount of 'silent time' (as hours, minutes, seconds and hundredths of a second) which has accumulated since the start of the installation. I am developing a new installation piece which uses a live CNN feed. The CNN image (video projection) is controlled by the sound – it is only seen when there is 'silence' (and the 'silences' are all you hear, as well).

Hodkinson: Does your work have any links (directly, or indirectly) with 'lowercase sound'?

Rogalsky: Indirectly, I suppose. Various artists and composers have been working for a long time, using silence and/or unobserved sound as a starting point. The appearance of 'lowercase sound' as a genre seems a bit artificial to me.

Hodkinson: How do you regard the transfer of silences between media – say, from radio to CD, or from performance to internet? What changes, if any, does the silence undergo – acoustically, perceptually, ontologically, etc.?

Rogalsky: In the case of my other pieces that use collected 'radio silences', they are transformed in different ways. The 'S' project condenses an entire day of broadcast so that we experience time passing differently. All the sounds I collect, which fall below a very low threshold, become quite noisy on their own, when they are placed together end-to-end without gaps between. The background sounds of a radio play, when the 'content' of the play is extracted, can be experienced as the flats of a theatre set. We get all of the scenery minus the actors.

In the pieces I do as live performances, they usually use two different radio stations as input. Most recently here in Canada I used input from the national French- and English-language stations, and it was interesting to have them as resources which could be contrasted, since the silences collected from each were very different (when heard strung together). In the live pieces I think of the radio stations as performers which can be counted on to show up. If there is REAL 'radio silence' – the absence of a broadcast signal – then I can't do the piece. This has happened before, for instance in one venue which was underground and I couldn't get a signal.

So ultimately I am interested in the human presence reduced to elements which we often don't think of as part of the essential communication. In these live pieces I collect the 'silences' and put them through other processes in order to build complex textures. This is different from the 'S' recordings or the Bush piece[3], which simply presents the collected 'silences' without further processing. If you listen to the piece I made from the Bush speech, you'll hear the distortion introduced due to the fact I was using a recording from a RealAudio stream.

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3   *2 minutes and 50 seconds of silence (for the USA),* (2003)

Any audio that's compressed for the internet will have some of this type of distortion. It will raise the noise floor considerably.

I also have been using basically the same software I use for the live piece with 2 radios, in improvisational performances with musicians. There have been some surprising results. You can hear one such piece at http://rogalskybros.com ('untitled') – for two acoustic guitars.

Hodkinson: To what extent do you see your work as developing from that of Alvin Lucier?

Rogalsky: Alvin Lucier uses physical phenomena like a poet uses language. As a much younger student I was stunned by the simplicity and directness of his work. Later, it was great to spend time with him and perform quite a number of his pieces. He reinforced in me the notion that by apparently reducing a piece to fewer ideas, it opens it up.

Hodkinson: Would you regard radio-silences, recorded silences and digital silences as a new category of silence made possible by mediatisation?

Rogalsky: Well, these 'mediated silences' have their own meanings attached. Maybe they are not 'new categories' of silence. Radio abhors a silence like nature abhors a vacuum; when you turn on the radio and hear nothing, it suggests something awful has happened – especially since 9/11. I experienced this recently as I lost CBC Radio during the 'great blackout' in the eastern parts of Canada and the USA – very unnerving.

Some new silences were introduced, and vanished again, with specific technology. Consider the silence at the end of side 1 of an LP record. That pause, made necessary by available technology, was used as a framing device for the 'album.' Now we can have more than an hour of audio material on CD, and many hours of audio programming on a DVD, all without pause. When I have converted old LP recordings into CD, however, I find myself inserting a long silence between the 'sides' of the album, so that it will sound right to me!

APPENDIX III

Yannis Kyriakides[4]

Artist's description of the electronics-work 'Wordless':
The source material is interviews of Brussels residents from the BBOT/BNA archieves. The re-
cordings are edited in such a way as to leave everything but the words. This is then resampled.
The wordless interviews are mixed binaurally for the headphones, while the rest of the musi-
cal material comprising of resonances, pulses and noise are mixed in the space, so that there is
a play between internal and external sound sources. The form of the piece also takes the shape
of a wordless narrative telling astory in sounds that are based on the original interviews.

Hodkinson: What is the BBOT/BNA archive?

Kyriakides: It's a non-profit oprganisation in Brussels which has an archive of currently
about 1000 audio interviews, by and about residents of Brussels. So basically anybody can
walk in there – borrow a microphone and recorder and go and interview anybody in the city.
Therefore they have a broad variety of interviewees on tape, concentrating very much also
on minorities and communities which don't often have a voice in the mainstream discourse
of the city, the underclass, immigrants, pensioners… Their work has a political function, but
they also do art projects, including the one I was involved in; invited to use the archives to
make a sound piece. Their website is www.bna-bbot.be

Hodkinson: What are the sources for the sounds that do not come from the interviews
('resonances, pulses and noise')?

Kyriakides: Most of these sources are synthesized sounds, but very often derived from the
shape and contours of the voice material. For instance I would analyse a track (using the
worded interview), and map that analysis onto a synth sound, to create pulses or a synth line.
I would use also filter resoanters on the voice to create harmonic fields… The idea behind
the piece – and how it was first conceived was to take all the 'intimate' vocal material – the
in-between sounds and play them on the headphones creating an internal space – and take
the traces of words, enviromental sounds and other events which are transformed and create
a space around that, an external space which is played on the PA of the hall.

Hodkinson: Once the identity of the sound has been erased, through filtering and process-
ing, what relationship remains – if any – between the final result and the original source?

Kyriakides: There is of course the original inbetween sounds, which are not really processed
and maintain their original character – but because they are brought into focus by editing of
the rest of the material, a different identity emerges. The choice of how to treat the material
musically and in what context to put it is entirely subjective and done intuitively. They are

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4   From an e-mail interview, September 2006

'portraits' so I took a lot of liberties in putting my own associations (having heard the content of the whole interview) into the musical elaborations. So I don't try and look for some 'truth' about the identity of the subjects, rather I fantasize, and create an imaginary persona, based on the interviews.

Hodkinson: What software do you use generally? Do you use software that is developed/adapted especially for your work?

Kyriakides: I use a wide variety of software depending on what the necessity is for each portrait. In general I use the programs LiSa, SuperCollider, Logic, Metasynth, SoundHack, Peak. This was because I wanted to explore different characteristics in the different pieces and not rely just on one type of processing technique. In some of the piece I used an automated editing techniques (i.e. if the audio goes above a certain threshold it cuts automatically) but generally I found that I prefered to edit manually – slower but it enabled me to pick out louder 'non-word' material, emotional reactions or environmental sounds which might have been automatically cut out otherwise. I also found that sometimes I liked to keep peaks of consonants – the beginnings and endings of words, especially if the interviewee was very eloquent and didn't hesitate or breathe much. Otherwise I would be left with nothing to work with!

Hodkinson: Does your work have any relationship to Matt Rogalsky's filtering techniques in his 'S' project?

Kyriakides: I'm aware of some of Matt Rogalsky's work, but I don't know his 'S' project. Does it have to do with editing of speech to leave the consonant 'S'?

APPENDIX IV

Francisco López[5]

Hodkinson: What is your professional relationship to instrumental music?

López: None. Although I played drums in a punk band during my teenage years (late 70s), I wouldn't say I've ever had any relationship to instrumental music. It is precisely because of my disinterest with instruments (both traditional and electronic) that my work is fundamentally based on field recordings of sound environments. For me the 'real world' is the best imaginable sound generator, as well as a constant source of inspiration for the work with sound.

Hodkinson: Can you say a bit about drones in your music and generally in electronic sound art today? One could say that the first real 'drone music' was La Monte Young in the 1960s and early minimalist works such as Reich's *Four Organs* (1970) – working with expansive durations, and continuous sounds with relatively unchanging characteristics. Is silence a drone too?

López: I consider the work of the American minimalists as the 'harmonic' version of the drone. I'm personally not very interested in this direction, although there are some remarkable exceptions (like Charlemagne Palestine or Roland Kayn). Historically, you could find 'drones' long before the composers you mention, including, of course, mantric and shamanistic practices, as well as many other forms of traditional music worldwide with very intense drone qualities. To me, the most interesting aspect of drones is their potential to create immersive sound environments in which the perception of sound has more to do with the creation of a virtual space than with isolated sonic events. Drones create a territory where one can wander and explore. They can also give rise to a sense of immanence that is absent in most music.

Hodkinson: How do the silences at the beginning and end of pieces like *Untitled #150* influence your conception of form? Are they spaces of transition into the work, or absolute contemplation without the disturbance of audio input, or are they links out to the sounds external to your composition?

López: All the silences, pseudo-silences and quasi-silences in my pieces are essential parts of the compositions. Unlike Cage, I have no interest in using silence as a way to draw attention to outside sounds. Absolute physical silence (as a geometric circle, for example) is a conceptual construction. The Cagean question on silence is creatively irrelevant (it might be of more interest for an acoustic engineer). What is important is where we want to draw the perceptive attention, both as creators and as listeners. In my case, sound creations aim at being worlds in themselves, and they certainly contain silence. In fact, the existence and substance of silence is so dramatically paramount in my music that the features of any sounds are defined and conditioned by it.

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5   From an e-mail interview, September 2006

Hodkinson: One of your pieces – *Untitled # 118* – appeared on the Lowercase Sound 2002 double CD. How did your alliance with the lowercase project come about, and what do you think 'lowercase' is today?

López: The so-called 'lowercase' label is in my view basically that: a label. It might be useful at times for record store bins and reviews but says nothing about the quality or any other relevant feature of the music.

Hodkinson: I read that you have in the past used recordings from rainforests, etc. as sources for your pieces. What other kinds/types of sounds do you use as recording sources? On your website, you seem to celebrate the emancipation of listening from knowledge. Once the identity of the sound has been erased, through filtering and processing, what relationship remains between the final result and the original source?

López: I use all kinds of field recordings in my work, from rainforests to big cities, from insects to machinery, from very loud to extremely subtle sounds. The 'identity' of the sound is not erased by transforming the sound but by a 'reduced listening' in the Schaefferian sense (i.e., listening to the phenomenological properties of sound, as opposed to the representational ones). The number of real sources we can recognize in sound recordings is actually a minority; most straight sound recordings don't allow to identify the causes. When the original material is transformed we have a situation that I consider to be analogous to that of biological evolution, in the sense that there is a very wide possible range of 'genetic' distance from the original occurred through succesive mutation of the material. The degree of relationship with the recognizable original cause is thus a combination of the associative features of the sound and the extent of the transformation process. In any case, my work is focused on 'sound objects' (again, in the Schaefferian sense, regardless of their sources) as building blocks or malleable material to create self-contained virtual sound worlds.

Hodkinson: What software do you use generally? Do you use software that is developed or adapted especially for your work?

López: I use obsolete cracked or free software (mostly from the XXth century), of the common kind that is used today by thousands of other people worldwide (although most of them might have it updated). The most common programs for processing and editing that everybody knows and uses. We're now living in a revolutionary situation without precedent in history because of the immense number of people sharing the same creative tools and because of the almost immediate accessibility to start using these tools. Never before have we been able to so clearly appreciate the creative of spirit of people. That's why technology is dissipating as a tool and becoming conceptually and creatively irrelevant.

Hodkinson: In your solo cd projects, is all the work produced entirely by you, or do you work closely with technicians, sound designers, etc.?

López: I don't think I'd ever let a technician or sound engineer put his hands on the production or mastering of a piece. The rare occasions when this has happened it was a disaster.

Hodkinson: Finally, how do you respond to Christoph Cox' description of your work as reviving a modernist aesthetic?

López: Why not? After all, in many respects postmodernism is a bit decadent. The more music I hear the more I am convinced of the importance of the individual essence. Maybe we need to overcome the dream of collective merging.

Hodkinson: What personal investment do you feel in the terms 'composer' and 'sound artist'?

López: To tell you the truth, I don't really care. The attempted distinction between both from the realms of 'music' and 'art' is in my view futile and probably more related to bureaucracy and marketing than anything else.

Audiography

López, Francisco	*Untitled #74*	no label
	Untitled #91	no label
	Untitled #118	on Lowercase-sound 2002 (see below)
	Untitled #129	fario feardrop
	Untitled #150	antifrost
Migone, Christof	*Quieting*	Alienate8 Recordings/ AlienCD25
Nono, Luigi	*Fragmente – Stille*	'Nono: orchestral works & chamber music' Moscow String Quartet Col legno WWE 1CD 20505
Sciarrino, Salvatore	*Lo spazio inverso*	'esplorazione del bianco' Alter Ego ensemble Stradivarius STR33539
Various artists	Lowercase-sound 2002	Bremsstrahlung recordings/ BLUNG 002

Due to the narrow distribution of some of these records, I have made a short compilation of the tracks discussed closely in this thesis, which is available together with the supplementary appendix. However, due to the highly personal visual and material aspects of many of these releases, which are intended for 'individual' consumption, I strongly recommend the interested reader to get hold of a personal copy of these albums.

Sample cd

1	Nono: *Fragmente – Stille*	27:03
2	Sciarrino: *Lo spazio inverso*	06:40
3	Migone: *Quieting*, track 1 (0)	01:38
4	Migone: *Quieting*, track 2 ( )	01:38
5	Migone: *Quieting*, track 17 (0)	00:23
6	Migone: *Quieting*, track 18 ( )	00:23
7	Migone: *Quieting*, track 21 (0)	00:11
8	Migone: *Quieting*, track 22 ( )	00:11
9	Migone: *Quieting*, track 35 (0)	00:25
10	Migone: *Quieting*, track 36 ( )	00:25
11	López: *Untitled #129*	30:01

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Abstract

This is a thesis about silence – as aesthetic concept, as rhetorical idea, and as perceptual object.

The thesis explores musical and aesthetic issues concerning silence in an empirical field that covers music and sound art of the past 50 years – specifically, works of notated concert music from the mid- and late-20th century, and digital sound-art works created for compact disc at the turn of the millennium.

Part I offers a review of related academic literature, followed by a historical account of the use of rests and pauses in western art music, and some general considerations on the theoretical approaches attempted in the thesis. The main argument in Chapter 1 is that the works to be discussed are centrally constituted by silence of one kind or another. The way that silence manifests itself so radically varies from work to work, and the elucidation of that difference is one of the main tasks to be performed by the rest of the thesis. In Part I, the task is to distinguish the constitutive nature of silence in the chosen empirical field from other, mainly historical uses of the musical pause and rest.

Part II considers the paradigmatic status of John Cage's concert score *4'33*. The work is discussed through a number of interpretations, including the composer's own representation of the rhetorical trope of silence in his writings. The discussion of Cagean silence in Chapter 2 turns firstly on the extent wo which we can talk of silence 'constituting' *4'33"*, and secondly on a comparison of a range of historical and aesthetic positions in the discourse on Cagean silence. Chapter 3 offers an account of the mid-20th century as a period rife with empty art-works in several artistic media. The period is discussed in relation to a number of cultural factors such as a postwar shyness towards artistic representation.

In Part III, a comparative analysis is offered of two chamber-music works from the 1980s, which propose the consideration of silence within a more conventional musical discourse. Chapter 4 offers some perspectives on Luigi Nono's string quartet *Fragmente – Stille: an Diotima*, through a discussion of the work's references to the early romantic aesthetic project, the composerly act of '*schweigen*', and the hermeneutic discourse surrounding such a project. Chapter 5 discusses Salvatore Sciarrino's quintet *Lo spazio inverso*, drawing on a contrasting model extracted from musicological analysis of the mature classical style. The hermeneutic approach of Chapter 4 is contrasted with the proposal of a performative listening mode in Chapter 5. Taken together, these two chapters move towards the proposal of a contrast between silence's ability to emphasise experiences of a presentation of absence in the former work, and a production of presence in the latter.

Part IV proposes the term 'negative representation', from Jean-Francois Lyotard's re-evaluation of Kant's analysis of the sublime (in the *Critique of Judgment*) as a theoretical basis for a discussion of recent sound art characterised by radical silences. Conceptual considerations advanced in Chapter 6 form the point of departure for an analysis of Christof Migone's CD album *Quieting* and Francisco López' *Untitled* series, under the category of 'subliminal sound art'. Further, Part IV proposes an oscillation between the interpretive (hermeneutic) and perceptual (performative-phenomenological) projects discussed in Part III, as the basis for a series of reflections on listening modes in relation to 21st-century sound art.

Resumé på dansk

Dette er en afhandling om stilhed – som æstetisk koncept, retorisk idé, og som sanseobjekt.

Afhandlingen undersøger musikalske og æstetiske emner vedrørende stilhed, indenfor et empirisk felt, der dækker over musik og lydkunst fra det sidste halve århundrede – specifikt, partiturmusikværker fra 1950erne til 1980erne, og digitale lydkunstværker skabt til compact disc omkring årtusindeskiftet.

Del I indeholder en literaturoversigt, efterfulgt af en historisk redegørelse for brugen af pauser i vestlig kunstmusik, samt generelle overvejelser over de teoretiske tilgange, der forsøges i afhandlingen. Hovedargumentet i kapitel 1 er, at de værker, der efterfølgende analyseres, konstitueres af stilhed på under en eller anden form. Måden, hvorpå stilheden fremstår centralt i de enkelte værker, varierer fra værk til værk; anskueliggørelsen af denne forskel er en af afhandlingens hovedopgaver. Hovedopgaven i kapitel 1 er, at skelne den konstitutive stilhed, der kommer til udtryk i det valgte empiriske materiale fra andre, primært historiske, tilfælde af musikalske pauser.

Del II omhandler John Cages paradigmatiske koncertstykke *4'33"*. Værket læses ud fra en række fortolkninger, herunder komponistens egen repræsentation, igennem hans skrifter, af den retoriske stilhed. Diskussionen af Cages stilhed i kapitel 2 drejer sig først om hvor vidt man kan tale om, at *4'33"* 'konstitueres' af stilhed, dernæst om en sammenligning af en række forskellige historiske og æstetiske standpunkter indenfor Cage-literaturen. Kapitel 3 beskriver 1950erne som en periode, hvor mange 'tomme' kunstværker blev skabt i mange kunstformer. Perioden sættes i perspektiv af en række kulturelle faktorer, såsom efterkrigstidens repræsentationsflugt indenfor kunsten.

Del III er en sammenlignende analyse af to kammermusikværker fra 1980erne, som lægger op til betragtninger af stilhed indenfor en mere konventionel musikdiskurs. Kapitel 4 tilbyder perspektiver på Luigi Nonos strygekvartet *Fragmente – Stille: an Diotima*. Dette sker ud fra overvejelser om dels værkets referencer til det tidlig romantiske æstetiske projekt, dels komponistens bevidst valgte '*schweigen*', og dels den hermeneutiske diskurs, der omgiver et sådant projekt. Kapitel 5 omhandler Salvatore Sciarrino's kvintet *Lo spazio inverso,* og trækker på en kontrasterende model fra musikvidenskabelige analyser af den klassiske stil. Den hermeneutiske tilgang, der blev fremført i kapitel 4, sammenlignes her med idéen om en performativ lyttemåde. Sammenholdt peger disse to kapitler i retning af, at der kan konstateres en kontrast i stilhedens evne til at fremhæve en oplevelse af henholdsvis 'fravær' og 'tilstedeværelse' i de to værker.

Del IV foreslår begrebet 'negativ fremstilling', fra Jean-Francois Lyotards reflektioner over Kants analyse af begrebet det sublime (i *Kritik der Urteilskraft*), som teoretisk grundlag for en diskussion af stilhedsprægede lydkunstværker fra årtusindeskiftet. De konceptuelle overvejelser, der er fremført i kapitel 6, danner udgangspunkt for en analyse af Christof Migones CD *Quieting* og Francisco López' *Untitled*-serie, under kategorien 'subliminal' lydkunst. Derudover foreslår Del IV en oscilleren mellem de interpretative (hermeneutiske) og perceptuelle (performativ-fænomenologiske) projekter, der blev fremlagt i Del III, som basis for en række reflektioner over lyttemåder, med henblik på nutidig lydkunst.

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