

# Introduction

We do not expect people to be deeply moved by what is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

To reach George Eliot's roar on the 'other side of silence' requires a state of mind so finely tuned as to produce a terminal oversensitivity to the mechanics of human life. Yet it also invokes something of the acutely meditative, an alternative to desensitization and a desire to rise above the quotidian that links to other types of transcendence and to stillness. Overcoming the mundane requires an ability to move through sound to silence – a journey Eliot equated with the journey to death.

Like Eliot's undifferentiated 'roar' on the other side of silence, music often functions in philosophical discourse as a metaphor for the unsayable. It is semantically slippery; we can never know its meaning. At best, as an object of fantasy, it might become a discourse of ideas – whether motivic, psychological or narrative depends on the consumer's taste. But it seems strange that in this history of ontological elusiveness, the most obviously intangible aspect of music – its silences – have so seldom been addressed. Music's meanings are obscure, but at least sounds leave traces onto which we can project meaning: a 'something' that both defines and limits what we can say. Silence, in comparison, offers the limitless. It confronts us, perhaps it even 'roars'; in negotiating its hazy boundaries we may meet, head-on, chasms that open up within ourselves. The unsaid and the unsayable – and undifferentiated time – gape before us.

Dictionary definitions of silence privilege its negative qualities: absence of sound, prohibition on speech, refusal to communicate.<sup>1</sup> These negative characteristics reflect a rather narrow European perspective, where silence is too easily equated with the passive, the submissive and the void. The idea that silence can be perceived as a form of communication – expressing reflection, for instance, as it might in Japanese culture – is less widespread in Western social contexts. However, the overarching theme that emerges from this collection of essays is that musical silences are cognitive in the deepest sense. From performers communicating through musical rests and

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of English* gives: 'complete absence of sound ... the fact or state of abstaining from speech ... the avoidance of mentioning or discussing something'; see 'Silence noun', in *The Oxford Dictionary of English*, rev. ed., ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), accessed in *Oxford Reference Online*, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=140.e71834>>, (accessed 24 March 2006).

composers drawing on meditative silences as fundamental compositional elements, through film sound designers layering and juxtaposing music and its absence, to mystics hearing a silent form of ‘music’, it is clear that in human perception silence in relation to music does not exist as a vacuum. Perhaps this is why Susan Sontag scorned late twentieth-century modernist art’s ‘appeals to silence’.<sup>2</sup> Unable to recognize endeavours to abstract music towards silence as generative of the open and non-prescriptive, she instead saw it as ultimately self-annihilating: Sontag did not look beyond silence as absence, thereby confirming her roots as a thinker schooled in European ideas. Embracing silence as a positive, active entity was simply not in her thought spectrum. But then, Western musicians are trained to recognize codes of organized sounds – and Western music curricula do not usually include the reading of silences.

For many composers, silence within their music does not represent a single idea. Silence can stand as the softest kind of music, and it can also exist as the nothingness represented by rests, which the activity of performance must challenge to be alive. There might be a sense of silence that ‘is’ music unsounded, a kind of ideal condition of music to which a composer’s contemplations and compositions might aspire; and there might also be a sense that silence is a sea on which rafts of sounds float.<sup>3</sup> As in film, silence in music may play a diegetic role, a specific part of the action; or silence may be masked by music that in sounding, takes over silence’s usual role. At first sight, these ideas stand separately from each other. But, in fact, it is ‘the ways in which various silences and hearings of silence point to each other’<sup>4</sup> that may be perceived as significant. Moreover, they meet in the silences that frame occurrences of music, and also in the contextual, often structural, silences within music. What all these silences have in common is their fecundity: they are pregnant with unanswerable questions.

It is tempting to imagine that readings of these silences are easier to grasp the more silences are bound to their immediate contexts. However, as Stan Link has suggested, ‘silence is where *we are*, not where it is. ... Our impression of the input and meaning of silence in a musical context is therefore heightened by a sense of transcendence: the ideal silence banishing the real’.<sup>5</sup> The problem with such contextual silences is that they are still temporally bounded by music; when glimpsed, there may not be enough time to transcend the moment before music again interrupts. But sometimes contextual silences do produce those extraordinary moments where everything stops, so that – *what?* – so that *something else* might begin. In these cases, the contextual silences of heard music may bring us face to face with the eternal silences of the

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Sontag, ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’, in *Styles of Radical Will* (1969; London: Vintage, 1994), 3–34.

<sup>3</sup> Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La musique et l’ineffable* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), trans. Carolyn Abbate as *Music and the Ineffable* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Chapter 4 ‘Music and Silence’, 132.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4 (Link).

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Boyd Link, ‘Essays towards Musical Negation’ (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1995), 5–6.

infinite spaces that so frightened the French philosopher, Pascal;<sup>6</sup> but they may also indicate the kinds of silences that have analogies in speech: silences of assent, of contemplation, of trauma. In other words, at the moment of musical silence we may reach into ourselves, but that may be precisely what enables us to ‘make a reading’ of the music.

## Silence and Music

In this book, we’ve begun to feel our way into a new branch of musicology, in which different disciplines – history, music analysis, psychology, cognition, performance practices, social practices, music therapy, religious studies, philosophy – intersect in considering the multiplicity of relationships that exist between music and silence. We’ve discovered no model that could guide this process of intersection to full effect, to define what this field might encompass or ‘mean’; the essays in this book begin to explore some of the possibilities. By approaching music’s relation to silence from different points of view, the essays question the obvious, the invisible. And by looking at the obvious through different lenses, the responses attempt to break through the rather rigid bounds that still confine the field of musicology, often wandering into realms of the personal or spiritual that may embarrass many who protect as paramount ‘objectivity’ in the discipline. But we strongly affirm this trajectory into the unsayable, remembering the words of Philip Brett:

Our scholarship always reflects our selves however hard we try to objectify it. The truths we discover and reveal are never so much about a historical situation as they are about our own situations, tastes and perceptions. Once acknowledged, this idea actually facilitates the Platonic search for, and dialogue with, the past and its denizens characteristic of genuine scholarship. And it leads to the further acknowledgment that critical judgments, however ‘right’ they feel, are only further aspects of the training, personality, associations and predilections of each of us.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps a reason why engagement with this rich, interdisciplinary field has not been properly initiated before now is because it involves the subjectivity of the personal, the psychological and the spiritual as well as the objectivity of the analytical and theoretical. In moving from sound to silence and back again, the traveller thus challenges not only traditional academic boundaries of discipline, but also those of personal views and beliefs.

Thus, in considering a book on music and silence, we wished to provide both a substantive platform of diverse topics and a variety of perspectives, personalities and

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<sup>6</sup> The full passage is from *Pensée* 68: ‘When I consider the brief span of my life absorbed into the eternity which comes before and after – *as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day* – the small space I occupy and which I see swallowed up in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I know nothing and which know nothing of me, I take fright.’ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées sur la religion et sur quelques autres sujets* (1665), trans A. J. Krailsheimer as *Pensées* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 48.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Brett, Review of *Letters from a Life: Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, vols. 1–2, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119/1 (1994), 145.

approaches. A single volume can only begin the process of opening up and launching this field of study, and we have chosen to do so with twelve interrelated essays. They are presented within the volume in groupings that give alternative views on music and silence in relation to the world around us: (1) the paradox of music evoking silence as a means of perceiving beyond reality, in Olivier Messiaen's exploration of spiritual, aesthetic and compositional expression; (2) the power of silence in the context of modern reality, considering the music of Anton Webern, Charles Ives and Tōru Takemitsu; (3) music as silence in the constructed realities of film; (4) music as perceived in altered realities in music therapy; (5) the impossibility of silence in physical reality, considering the music and philosophies of John Cage; (6) performing silences in musical reality, both medieval and modern; and, ultimately, (7) the contemplation of silent music in reaching beyond reality.<sup>8</sup> Despite the relative scarcity of musicological literature that explicitly discusses silence and music to date, the composite bibliography provides both substantial evidence of the 'existence' of this field, and what we hope will prove to be a useful tool for its further interrogation by future scholars.

### **The Paradox of Music Evoking Silence: the Attempt to Perceive Beyond Reality**

It is notable that a number of composers have consciously sought to express their silent contemplations of the spiritual through composed sound: John Tavener, Tōru Takemitsu, Olivier Messiaen and Federico Mompou spring to mind as examples. Their written 'testaments' have similarly arisen through contemplations of silence. Tavener's *The Music of Silence* is replete with references to René Guénon and other philosophers of Nothingness, in his search for 'metaphysical meaning behind the notes', his rejection of modernism in music and his return to traditional social and musical sources as purer means of achieving spiritual expression. Takemitsu's *Confronting Silence* reflects on the historical place of the Japanese aesthetic *ma*, the space and silence between events, in his cultural background, as well as in his musical expressions.<sup>9</sup> Similarly Messiaen explained in written notes that the

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<sup>8</sup> The absence of a chapter on the experience of music and silence in relation to hearing loss and deafness make strike the reader as notable; the extensive literature in the fields of Medicine and Deaf studies has not been paralleled in any way in musicological literature, after all. Either we could have explored the obvious (Beethoven, Evelyn Glennie – both of whom developed hearing losses after knowing sounding music and whose 'deaf' experience was/is informed by having been part of the world of hearing); or, we could have explored ways in which people who are profoundly deaf from birth experience vibration as music through particular sections of the cortex, by summarizing the medical perspectives currently available. However, after giving it deep thought, we decided that this potentially enormous topic could not be covered in a meaningful way in a single chapter. It is a subject that deserves a book-length study of its own.

<sup>9</sup> John Tavener, *The Music of Silence: a Composer's Testament*, ed. Brian Keeble (London: Faber and Faber, 1999); Tōru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence: Selected Writings*, trans. and ed. Yoshiko Kakudo and Glenn Glasow (Berkeley, CA: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995).

seventeenth of his *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*, the 'Regard du silence', is about the silence–sound paradox, 'each silence from the crib reveals sounds and colours which are the mysteries of Jesus Christ'. Mompou, too, was spiritually inspired to explore music's relationship with silence. Between 1959 and 1967, he composed *Música callada* ('silent music'), a piano work in four volumes on texts of the mystic Catholic explorer, St John of the Cross. This work distilled Mompou's search for purity of expression: like Webern, he found that maximum expression paradoxically led to minimal compositional means.

This music is silent because it is heard in one's inner self. Restraint and discretion. The emotion remains hidden, and the sounds only take shape when they find echoes in the bareness of our solitude. This music is silent because it is heard inwardly. Restraint and reserve. Its emotion is secret and only takes sonorous form when it finds echoes in the great cold vault of our solitude. I desire that in my silent music, this newborn child, we should be brought closer to the warmth of human life and to the expression of the human heart, that is always the same and yet always being renewed.<sup>10</sup>

Through spiritual questioning and contemplation, each of these composers found himself at that elusive border between music and silence, uncovering silence as the ultimate means of expression and transcendence.

It is easy to dismiss attempts to write music 'that lies on the other side of silence' as at worst insincere, and at best naïve. It can never be more than music, after all. The transcendence claimed by composers such as Tavener, Takemitsu, Messiaen and Mompou is a reflection of a mental state, deeply connected with musical languages familiar from other contexts associated with the introspective or the religious. Such musics might induce a feeling of tranquillity in listeners, or even encourage a 'silence of the mystic', but, it may be argued, they cannot ever reach across to the 'other side', other than as an agency of human transformation (though this might be important enough in itself). However, the idea that music can *express* aspects of the condition of silence is less an act of delusion than one of humility; it acknowledges that all forms of mystical knowledge, however transcendent they appear, must take place through a form of human endeavour that is familiar. Art in itself is neither a direct fruit of transcendent knowledge nor a form of contemplation; but it can be the fruit of that contemplation, since contemplation leads from silence to that which is apprehensible.

Messiaen's exploration of cognitive silence in the 'Regard du silence' is examined in this volume by Matthew Hill (Chapter 2), who studies correlations between musical portrayal and Catholic dogma that Messiaen articulated in prose programme notes

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<sup>10</sup> 'Esta música es callada porque su audición es interna. Contención y reserva. Su emoción es secreta y solamente toma forma sonora en sus resonancias bajo la gran bóveda fría de nuestra soledad. Deseo que en mi música callada, este niño recién nacido, nos aproxime a un nuevo calor de vida y a la expresión del corazón humano, siempre la misma y siempre renovando.' Federico Mompou, extract from speech made when entering the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Jorge, in *Discurso leído en la solemne recepción pública de D. Federico Mompou: Dencausse el día 17 de mayo de 1952* (Barcelona: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Jorge, n.d.), 8.

to his pieces. Hill looks to the Catholic explorer of the mystic and the silent, St John of the Cross, drawing on St John's concept of the 'dark night of the soul' to posit connections between faith, silence and darkness that are useful in understanding how that most paradoxical of endeavours – contemplating silence through sound – can be understood as a piece of theology. The inaudible mysteries surrounding the Christ-child – the silences – revealed something to Messiaen in contemplation, and that revelation took place in sound. The silence from which the music emanates is like the 'night' from which the 'sounds and colours' of the music emerge.

In contrast, Jan Christiaens (Chapter 3) focuses analytically on Messiaen and the paradox of music evoking silence in his interrogation of the early organ work, *Le banquet céleste*. Through this religious piece, to be played during the Eucharist when communicants become at one with Jesus, Messiaen encouraged listeners toward an intense state of 'silent' contemplation, overcoming the sound–silence paradox, Christiaens suggests, with music that would act upon the psychology of auditory perception. From the extreme quiet framing its beginning and end, *Le banquet céleste* gradually shades silence into and away from sound. Harmonic stasis and the acoustic qualities of the organ present sound as static and eternal, while the extremely slow tempo causes listeners to lose their sense of a time framework within which the musical events can be 'placed' in relation to each other. Christiaens relates these effects to the theories of Henri Bergson, who noted that the more events that fill an interval in the present, the quicker time seems to go; the more events that filled similar intervals in the past, the longer they seem to us now. Thus through careful formal, textural and harmonic construction, Messiaen deliberately sought to evoke this intentional fallacy in *Le banquet céleste*: listeners experience stasis and timelessness, to induce contemplation of silence and eternity.

### The Invisibility of Silence in Modern Reality

For Messiaen, the dynamic of *pianissimo* could act as a threshold, shading between silence and sounding, a stage on the scale of musical dynamics. For some this 'shading space' is simply and literally the beginning of music's dynamic continuum; but for others, like Messiaen, it might stand for the nexus between human musical practice and the Divine musical universe. Silence thus can be seen to represent music's 'other', in the sense that music exists in 'parallel' to silence.

Industrial developments of Western society in the early twentieth century led remarkably quickly to surrounding landscapes and soundscapes that were unrecognizably altered from the centuries before. In particular, the ubiquity of sound technologies and their products changed the balance between the parallel worlds of sound and silence, leading many, like the Swiss theologian Max Picard, to abhor modern noise, sound media and mechanization. For Picard, it was 'as though the sounds of music were being driven over the surface of silence'.<sup>11</sup> This conception served as a starting point for Jenny Doctor's essay (Chapter 1), which considers

<sup>11</sup> Max Picard, *Die Welt des Schweigens* (1948), trans. Stanley Goodman as *The World of Silence* (1948; repr. Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1952; facs. repr. Wichita, KS: Eighth Day Press, 2002), 27.

the relationship of silence to music for composers in this modern context. Anton Webern's focus on minute details and moments may be seen as epitomizing this view: music as gesture sounds through the texture of silence. In contrast, for Charles Ives, silence functioned within the sound continuum of 'that human faith melody', and the immensities of life were expressed by tapping into it. But Ives also wondered whether music was actually to be heard, perhaps how music *sounds* is not what it *is*. 'Silence is a solvent ... that gives us leave to be universal',<sup>12</sup> rather than personal and specific.

This conception has similarities with the relationship between music and silence that emerges from the Japanese aesthetic represented in *ma*, 'a "sensually" perceived space'<sup>13</sup> or time between events. For the composer, Tōru Takemitsu, silence did not merely articulate sound structures. Instead, music is either sound or silence; sound, 'confronting the silence of *ma*, yields supremacy in the final expression'.<sup>14</sup> Thus, for Takemitsu the act of composition was a confrontation with silence, which was itself a kind of death. To return to Eliot, 'we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence'. The philosopher and musicologist, Vladimir Jankélévitch, also actively explored this conflict between human activity and the 'silence of the eternal spaces'; human presence is a barely audible sigh in infinite space, and human endeavour needs to keep affirming life itself to resist the invasion of nothingness.<sup>15</sup>

### Music as Silence in Constructed Realities

This idea of music confronting silence as death, a spiritual, philosophical, private and individual encounter, rather strangely becomes a dramatized, heightened and communal experience within the conventions of commercial film. Stan Link's chapter (Chapter 4) explores diegetic and non-diegetic silences in film scores to examine Hollywood's means of sounding death.<sup>16</sup> As Link reveals, the emotions of death tend to be associated and effected cinematically through different kinds of silences. In the technical construction and recording of silence, a result of digital sound manipulation, post-synchronization and sound effects, it becomes a 'representation', a 'product of contrast', its unnatural quality within the soundtrack pointing inevitably, through decades of film conventions, to death. But Link also shows that it is not silence, nor music, nor dialogue, but *everyday noise* within the soundtrack that allows audiences to enter the filmic world. Recorded ambient noise is the ether in which we can coexist with what we see on screen. Thus, in situations where ambient noise is replaced by music, we may be removed from that world.

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Charles Ives, 'Epilogue', in *Essays Before a Sonata, The Majority and Other Writings*, selected and ed. Howard Boatwright (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961), 71 and 84.

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Deschênes, *Aesthetics in Japanese Arts*, <[http://www.thingsasian.com/goto\\_article/article.2121.html](http://www.thingsasian.com/goto_article/article.2121.html)> (accessed on 24 March 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 131.

<sup>16</sup> As Stan Link defines it in the film context, 'silence is diegetic, taking place within the world depicted, or non-diegetic, imposed from without'; see Chapter 4 (Link).

Music in film, unless it diegetically participates within the ‘reality’ of everyday noise, *thus may become a type of silence*, the musical score acting as ‘sound without being’ within the multi-layered soundtrack.

Ed Hughes (Chapter 5) questions this modern means of constructing complex soundtracks, and the emotional responses that film sound designers aim for them to produce. He returns to the era of silent film to consider the binary effects of music or silence in the early film environment, recalling the power of silence when contrasted with the musical sound continuum. When applying similar principals to sound film, Hughes, like Link, examines scenes in which sound tracks were carefully constructed to deploy the presence or absence of music as a dramatic feature; the tension is enhanced and the perception of passing time altered by the sudden withdrawal or reappearance of music. This quality of filmic ‘silence’ may include ambient or other sounds, the effect of no music powerful enough to heighten the sense of concentration and drama. Hughes suggests that a carefully discriminate, successive approach to the assembly of aural components has more dramatic potential than the simultaneous, multi-channel mixdowns that have become the norm in Hollywood films. In a world filled with sound, adding more is the obvious answer to creating an impact; but the practice of overloading a soundtrack to heighten emotional content ignores the past art of silencing music, which may have achieved even greater effect.

### **The Impossibility of Silence in Physical Reality**

Mystics such as Sterry and St John of the Cross agree that silence is a pre-requisite for achieving a condition of spiritual contemplation. Yet, John Cage’s experience in the anechoic chamber proved that true ‘silence’ can never exist within human perception: for Cage, silence is a window through which ambient sound might enter consciousness.<sup>17</sup> Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, writing in 1938, had brought similar ideas to the foreground in relation to listeners’ experiences of music through sound reproduction equipment of the time; mediation through technologies was already starting to become a primary means for audience access to music. He considered both the noises of the actual equipment (e.g. the film projector, radio tuning or gramophone needle making contact with the groove) and sounds emitted due to technical imperfections of media themselves. ‘This slight, continuous and constant noise is like a sort of acoustic stripe ... [music] appears to be projected upon the stripe and is only, so to speak, like a picture upon that stripe;’<sup>18</sup> in other words, the music ‘is compromised by a second-order presence, a technological filter whose effects ... may function only at the level of the unconscious’<sup>19</sup> If one

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<sup>17</sup> John Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’ (1957), in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961; London: Marion Boyars, 1978), 13–14.

<sup>18</sup> Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, ‘Memorandum: Music in Radio’, unpublished essay, June 1938, Paul F. Lazarsfeld papers, Columbia University, New York; quoted in Richard Leppert, ‘Commentary’, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction commentary and notes by Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2002), 219.

<sup>19</sup> Leppert, ‘Commentary’, 219.

extends this observation to Cage's findings in the anechoic chamber fourteen years later, the question then becomes: if noise is an inevitably *presence*, a 'hear-stripe' that moves into consciousness as conscious sound recedes, does it 'compromise' human experience of silence? Or can this relationship be 'heard' in another way, as a function of human *attention* in the perception of music and silence?

William Brooks (Chapter 6) explores this question in terms of the agreement regarding noise and attention that is 'tacitly' understood by the listener of a performance: the 'conventions of listening' instruct the listener to disregard ancillary sounds in a concert hall, dismiss the static on a radio or ignore the noise produced by imperfections on a sound recording. In Charles Ives's music, silence is cast as an audible *presence*, perhaps to counteract the dangers of noise distracting listeners from the transcendental potential of his musical 'silences'. In contrast, John Cage explores the possibility of composing silence as a featured *absence*. Developing a particular lens drawn from the philosophies of William James and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, Brooks considers Cage's *Silent Prayer* (never performed), conceived before the experience in the anechoic chamber, and *4'33"*, composed afterwards. Cage's crisis as a result of his recognition of silence's physical impossibility led not only to a reassessment of listener etiquette, but to an entirely redefined perception of listening, of *attending* to music, silence – and noise – in a way that is *true* to consciousness and the human experience.

Susan Sontag examined Cage's modernist engagements with silence through the gaze of a contemporary critic and discovered not truth, but the aesthetic of the negative, as Darla Crispin explores in her essay comparing Cage's and Sontag's polemical stances with regard to art and silence. In her essay, 'The Aesthetics of Silence',<sup>20</sup> Sontag expressed her fear that the artistic drive towards challenging listeners with the new and different was ultimately destructive: 'Committed to the idea that the power of art is located in its power to negate, the ultimate weapon in the artist's inconsistent war with his audience is to verge closer and closer to silence.'<sup>21</sup> According to Sontag's 'elegiac pessimism', the final achievement of silence would be to obliterate the artwork and the artist. But Cage opposed this in his explorations, which doubled as statements addressing the aesthetics of silence and as artworks in themselves. Realizing that silence could not be experienced as a literal phenomenon, discussions about it had to become metaphors. In *Silence*, the blank, white page becomes a metaphor for silence, the type, text spacing and paragraphing creating a 'visual dialectic' with silence. Cage's statements on the subject became like Zen koans, gaining both clarity and obscurity with repetition: 'I have nothing to say and I am saying it.'<sup>22</sup> For Cage, silence had the potential to make the listener aware, to *attend* to silence, to art, to the sounds all around. Not only was art not obliterated, but the opposite was true: heard through ears attuned outside the Western norm, acknowledging silence enables the realization that 'what one might call art is omnipresent'.

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<sup>20</sup> Sontag, 'The Aesthetics of Silence', 3–34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Cage, 'Composition as Process' (1958), in *Silence*, 51.

### Performing Silences in Musical Reality

Within music's discourse, silences may be optimized in a psychoanalytical sense when they are read as psychological imperatives, for instance, by considering their impact on an individual's awareness of self. When composers compose silences into musical works consciously, they do not necessarily know why they have done so. And we are wary of making over-facile analogies with, for instance, silence in psychotherapeutic sessions that may indicate some kind of traumatic rupture – times when the client comes face to face with what is unutterable or unthinkable. There are certain works, such as the late Beethoven String Quartet, Op. 132, in which the listener may make strong connections with this kind of broken, traumatized speech, as Susan McClary has noted.<sup>23</sup> Psychoanalytic readings of musical works usually presuppose that composers do not know exactly what they 'meant' by writing in the way they did. Some composed works may bear the weight of the history of Western art music in their constructions; whereas other music may be closer to improvisation, and connections with speech narratives perhaps more obvious. In either case, composers may have a limited awareness of what they are 'working out' through their musical ideas, through their inclusion of silence.

Performers, too, have a role in this psychoanalytical complex. The players of the Beethoven string quartet may each feel a sense of 'singular linearity' that transcends, for them as individuals, awareness of the whole fabric. Performing a single line within a contrapuntal texture may indeed bring an increased sense of individuality: of needing to hold 'my' line 'against' the texture. Thus there is silence within the individual performer as other sounds are rendered 'silent' by close, exclusionary concentration; there may also be silence as the player encounters a rest in his or her part, while the other lines continue to sound. These silences may well not be evident to the listener, who hears the total texture. Historically, performing musicians have been acutely aware of the performativity of silences – of what silences can effect in the musical narrative – and of the importance of directing contextual silences expressively in ways that make interpretative sense. In silences, directions may change; new paths may emerge.

For John Potter (Chapter 8), silences have always functioned communicatively. His account of 'communicative' rests reveal that although silent, they are far from inert. For the story-telling singer, such contextual silences offer opportunities to give the idea of spontaneity and creativity in performance, to give a sense of 'making the story up as it goes along'. And as part of performance rhetoric, from the listener's point of view, there is a reflective element.<sup>24</sup> In communicative rests, listeners can make sense of what has gone before, entering into a creative process of constructing meaning. Thus in performance situations, it is the conspiracy between performer

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<sup>23</sup> Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: the Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 119–33.

<sup>24</sup> This idea is also explored by Zofia Lissa; see 'Die Ästhetischen Funktionen der Stille und Pause in der Musik' (1962), repr. as 'Stille und Pause in der Musik', in Lissa, *Aufsätze zur Musikästhetik: eine Auswahl* (Berlin: Henschel, 1969), 162.

and listener that opens up dramatic possibilities – that is, it is in the silences that performers and audiences meet.

Listeners may engage with silences to whatever degree they like, depending on how attentively they feel like listening, how actively they are engaging with the material they are hearing, or not at all. In contrast, a performer cannot disengage from whatever it is that silences may force him or her to confront. A work's contextual silences must be actively grasped – which is why the term 'rest' seems so odd, as resting is so completely inappropriate in the circumstances. Even the silences that permit a performer just to 'be' are not passive, since the audience must still be held, and the performer must carry the conviction of being able to do so. For Potter, it is in the silences that performer and audience conspire together in the communicative act.

Before measured silences began to be notated in musical sources in the thirteenth century, the relationship between performer and rest was perhaps not dissimilar to modern experience, but evidence suggests that the text–music–conspirator triangle had a somewhat different configuration. Emma Hornby (Chapter 9) considers the uses of silence in Gregorian chant, the monks of the Benedictine order chanting the entire Psalter together each week as a means of encouraging meditation. The performance involved a pause in the middle of each verse, long enough for the singers to exhale and inhale, each breath providing an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to visit. Beyond the practical necessity of taking in air, the endorphins released by such controlled breathing had a calming and uplifting effect. Thus the monastic community literally 'conspired' together daily in choral psalmody, their performance, particularly in the breathing rests, communing directly with their audience, the Holy Spirit. In contrast, difficult, complex chants were sung by a soloist for the community once or twice a year. The cadences ending each phrase and verse were linked with following silences, which had primarily textual rather than performative functions. However, if the silence was shortened or skipped, the effect added dramatic rhetorical tension, creating a direct engagement between singer and audience. In both choral or solo chanting, resting was inextricably related to breathing, a spiritual silence intended to intensify and clarify communication with auditors, both earthly and Holy.

### **Silence as Perceived in Altered Realities**

Perhaps, many chapters of this volume are preoccupied with silence as an 'object' to be understood in certain ways. While Link's cinematic 'silences' are constructed to evoke death, Hughes makes a plea for soundtracks to cut through modern sound technologies and return to the powerful language of silences more generally. Doctor's textural silences are bounded within the musical context, while Nicky Losseff debates whether there is a category of music that 'exists' as music but silently. Even for Potter and Hornby, performance is a means through which music and its silences may be communicated *to* listeners. Julie Sutton's approach (Chapter 10) differs: she asks that we think of music, and its silences, as a communicative act that unfolds *between* people.

One of the primary differences between music and silence, Sutton argues, is that musical sounds are made and then heard; but musical silences are not made. They are a kind of ether, shared between player and listener. Potter asserts that it is in the silences that performer and listener meet in the creation of a performed drama. In music therapy, Sutton's analysis of the living drama of free improvised duets reveals that both musicians made use of silences at structural points as a means of slowing the overall pace of the music, stimulating affective changes in the performing musicians and their listeners. More significantly, silences have a definite role and function in creating tension; they are not static, but have variety in quality, pacing and impetus. Sutton shows that sounds and silences are meaningful in the ways in which they are experienced between people. This relates to how we acquire an ability to react to sound: *we enter the world* as interactive listeners and as sound-makers. Sutton's work is especially moving because of its implication about music's relationship with silence: silence can offer a space within which the greatest intimacy between composer, performer and listener can be found.

Sutton also examines how subjective experiences of time are a core feature of musical silences. Silences in music appear to alter time – at the very least, they interrupt our perception of the ongoing flow of musical sounds. On the one hand, *chronos* describes time passing in a linear way, as with the beat of a clock. But there is also *kairos*, which relates to a sense of space and a subjective experience of a *lack of chronos* – of a time 'out-of-time'. Silence can create an impression of atemporality which erases any sense of movement. Sutton's findings with respect to 'time out-of-time' are thus similar to both Christiaens' analysis of Messiaen, evoking a sense of silence and timelessness through deliberate auditory effects, and Hughes' observations about altered time perceptions in film scores, when music is suddenly withdrawn.

### **Silent Music Beyond Reality**

Music that exists as a type of silence – that is, disassociated from visceral reality – has a strange resonance with mystic perceptions of 'silent music'. Tom Dixon (Chapter 11) questions the 'model' of the seventeenth-century Puritan mystic Peter Sterry, in which music is a medium for spiritual fulfilment on individual and societal levels: through music, the discord of human imperfection would resolve into the perfect harmony of the Divine purpose. Sterry spoke of 'silent music', a music beyond earthly notions of time, space and sense perception, while encompassing all of them. *Musica divina*, music in the Divine mind, is a truly silent music, inaccessible to any of our faculties, yet the source of the music we know in all its manifestations. For Sterry, echoing Plotinus, music became a higher, truer realm of being; and it had the capacity to reflect that ideal realm.

St John of the Cross also seemed to experience a type of 'silent music' that was both a religious and a musical experience, as Nicky Losseff explores (Chapter 12). St John said that his conceptual audition tasted something of a musical condition – revealed to him as a serene and calm intelligence, that enjoyed both the sweetness of music and the quiet of silence, yet without the noise (read: sensuous distraction)

of voices. Because he was offered a type of ‘music’ that did not require degeneration into the body in order to be expressed, he could enjoy a wholly satisfying *musical* experience. Losseff suggests that this type of music had prototypes in other cultures: the Indian treatise *Sangītaratnākara* describes both sounding and non-sounding forms of music, and the idea of a ‘silent music’ also occurs in the Zen koan of the solid iron that has neither fingerholes nor mouthpiece. Thus, the idea of ‘silent music’ is seen by some as an identifiably musical phenomenon, part of a taxonomy of all musics, as well as a symbol for spiritual contemplative experience.

Hill’s explication of Messiaen’s contemplative process, tracing the trajectory from silence to music, may make Losseff’s distinctions between truly ‘silent music’ and merely ‘inaudible music’ seem rather precious. As Dixon explains, Peter Sterry may offer a way of blending the two: in ruminations on *musica divina*, Sterry’s thoughts included the softest earthly music along with godly, all-encompassing musical thought. Sterry, and others, may have thought that all that takes place within human cognition must be available to the human senses in a form that is intelligible. The difference, then, might be that what Losseff calls ‘truly silent music’ is apprehended by the mystic in a form that is *not* readily translatable into what we already know; in that sense, it seems almost *non-cognitive*, and the desperate grappling to find a way of spelling out what has been experienced rather misses the point.

There is, in the end, a wealth of difference between the ordered structures of Messiaen’s fruits of contemplation and St John’s searching prose, with its reliance on linguistic paradox to express the inexpressible. It is as if St John were groping not in a crystallizing sense towards the clarification we associate with sophisticated language, but in a ‘regressive’ sense to a kind of pre- or non-linguistic experience that defies language: hence, the communicative act of music – and silence – in the purest sense.

We have suggested that silence is deeply cognitive; in the absence of sound, an increased awareness of other senses, both physical and spiritual, seems to be initiated. Paradoxically, cognition of silence is often *re-cognized* as some form of enhanced musical encounter. We are back to St John, whose bride experienced her Beloved as silent music because she ‘tasted’<sup>25</sup> spiritual harmony in him; or to Keats, among so many others, for whom melodies are ‘sweet’. In the physical experience of the anechoic chamber, John Cage excluded sound and apprehended the impossibility of silence, his nervous and circulatory systems becoming, quite literally, the ‘music’ of life. And Messiaen: what colour was silence for you? The colour of God? The empowerment that silence offers may ultimately lie in its ability to activate an increased experience of almost anything else – music included, in proximity to which silence confirms its place as both absence and supreme presence. In this way, as the contributors to this volume contemplate silence through words as so many have through music, like Cage we fear not that we have nothing to say.

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<sup>25</sup> The main meaning of ‘*gustar*’ is ‘to enjoy’, and E. Allison Peers translates the passage thus, as reproduced in Chapter 12 (Losseff). Yet the Spanish does give pause here, suggesting that a more nuanced reading is possible. We thank Catherine Duncan for her help with this.