

MUS 571 (1 Credit)
Fall 2020
Wed. 1:00-2:00 pm
Online Class (zoom)

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Composition with Silences: The Constructive Functions of Silence in Music and their Creative Implementation in Music Composition

Objectives. This course is targeted at composition and musicology students interested in deepening their knowledge on the constructive functions of silences in music. Musical silences are a vital component in music, although very few authors ventured to theorized on their constructive functions and significance. Composers that were aware of the importance of silence explored its creative power as a shaper of musical tension, form and potentially all constructive elements of music (rhythm, dynamics, pitch, timbre, and texture). This course combines theoretical lectures with the discussion of practical composition and writing assignments.

Attendance. Three unexcused absences result in the final grade dropping by one letter grade (each unexcused absence lowers your grade by 3.3%). Six unexcused absences results in being dropped from the course with a W or F. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for the assigned homework and for knowing what was covered in class. Get the information from me or another class member. Excused absences include official University or College of Music activities, medical emergencies, and illnesses. If you have any types of problems, please let us know via me. Excused absences do not count against your attendance or lower your grade. Please provide appropriate documentation (note from a physician or from the Dean of Students Office of Music Office) upon your return to class.

Accommodations. The University of Rhode Island makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability (DSS) to verify their eligibility. You may also contact them by phone at (401) 874-2098 If you have a chronic medical condition that might affect your class attendance or performance, please see the Office of Disability Services for Students for special accommodations: <https://web.uri.edu/disability/>

Student behavior. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or in the Classroom other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at URI. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Office of Student Life to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at: <https://web.uri.edu/studentconduct/files/Student-Handbook-FINAL-08.22.2019.pdf>

Inclusion statement. Respect for Diversity: It is the instructor's intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Students' suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let the instructor know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course.

Grading. The grade structure will be as follows:

Attendance & Active Participation	20%
Formative Assignment	30%
Final Assignment	50%

Grading, by numbers:

	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	59 & below F
94-100 A	83-86 B	73-76 C	60-66 D	
90-93 A-	80-82 B-	70-72 C		

Assignments

You will be asked to submit two assignments (formative and summative) and you are free to choose from three options. Your formative assignment will be submitted towards the midterm of the course, whereas the summative will need to be handed before the last lecture. All assignments will be discussed in class and will be provided with oral feedback. You are free to resubmit your formative assignment as summative by taking into consideration the feedback you were provided. You can also submit different options for your formative and summative assignments.

Option A (Score Composition). Composition of Notated Silences. Write a short piece of 1–3 pages in length with at least one self-assertive silence for a chamber ensemble of 3 instruments of your choice. Justify in at least 100 words the roles that silence(s) have in your piece. Submit a PDF file of your score and your written commentary.

Option B (Audio Composition). Composition of Acoustic Silences. Create a piece of 50 to 70 seconds in a digital audio workstation or sequence by samples, MIDI data, electronic, or pre-recorded sounds... Justify in at least 100 words the roles that silences have in your piece. Provide an MP3 file of your piece with a written commentary.

Option C (Essay Writing). Analytical Essay. Write an essay of 800 to 1200 words in which you analyze the functions in a music piece or series of works of your choice. Beyond description of the silence itself, discuss the interaction of silence with surrounding sounds. Cite at least one source bibliographical sources from the reading list to justify the taxonomy chosen in the analysis.

Academic integrity. Academic Integrity is defined in the URI Student Handbook. See the Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity on the website: <http://www.uri.edu/judicial/StudentHandbook/ch1.html> Truthful Information, Truthful Access, Tampering with Information, Academic Honesty, Procedures, Records. Any suspected case of Academic Dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of “F” in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at: <http://www.uri.edu/judicial/StudentHandbook/ch1.html>

Guidelines for formatting your essays or commentaries

- Type your essay
- Double-space your essay. Align your text to left (not justified)
- Use 12-point Times New Roman
- Use one-inch margins all around
- Number the pages in the bottom center
- Head your paper with your name, my name, the number and title of the course, and the date
- Give your paper a succinct, descriptive title
- Do NOT use a cover sheet
- Use APA style for referencing the work of others

Grading Rubric

“A” range. Outstanding, original ideas developed exceptionally well.

- Composition: writing shows a deep understanding of the music itself
- Writing: a persuasive, insightful presentation of your own ideas, thorough analysis
- Referencing: two or more sources from the reading listed are cited and the writing demonstrates that student has an excellent understanding of the topic

“B”-range. Displays sound understanding of the topic, some originality, and a sense of the issues involved in interpretation.

- Composition: original, but weak links are established in relation to the provided readings
- Writing: structure and argument are clear, but ideas lack depth and/or detail
- Referencing: at least one source is cited, and good command of the reading is proven

“C”-range. Displays competent assignment; however, without any real attempt at interpretation.

- Composition: original, but weak links are established in relation to the provided readings
- Writing: develops basic ideas without any type of analysis or interpretation
- Referencing: the source that is cited is incorrectly framed or poorly discussed

“D”-range. Important flaws of topic comprehension and/or presentation in addition to “C”-range.

“F”-range. no paper submitted; paper contains plagiarism.

Syllabus

Lecture Number	Topic
1 (Sep 9)	Course introduction. Definitions silence
2 (Sep 16)	Riemann's <i>Pausenlehre</i> (theory of rests): negative dynamics
3 (Sep 23)	Braman's classifications of self-assertive silences
4 (Sep 30)	Compositional applications and discussion of analytical examples (I)
5 (Oct 7)	Lissa's aesthetic function of silences
6 (Oct 14)	Clifton's temporal, registral and in-motion silences
7* (Oct 21)	Dougherty's semiotic categories and Lo's functional types of silence
8 (Oct 28)	Workshop. Discussion of student's formative assignments
9 (Nov 4)	Gaudibert's poetic silences & Littlefield's framing silences
10 (Nov 18)	Alepin's tensional classification of silences
11 (Nov 18)	Margulis's functions of perceived silences
12 (Nov 25)	Compositional applications and discussion of analytical examples (II)
13** (Dec 2)	Course overview (feedback regarding assignments)
14 (Dec 9)	Workshop. Discussion of student's summative assignments
15 (Dec 16)	Revision of possible questions

* = Mid-term. Submission of formative assignment

** = Final. Submission of summative assignment.

Introductory Notes

Silences are integral part of music and they appear in all types of forms and shapes. For one, silence is a necessary constituent part of music: silence is a musical canvas or background on top of which sounds are laid out (Lissa, 1964; Dougherty, 1979; Littlefield, 1996; Alepin, 2001). Second, silence can be presented simultaneously in all instrumental parts by means of a synchronized withholding of the performers from producing sounds. Third, this withholding can affect only certain parts or voices which implies that no total silence occurs as such, but rather a partial silence (Braman, 1956). Fourth, as Clifton (1976) and Littlefield (1996) suggest silences can occur in the registral space pointing towards the notion of a vertical silence. Fifth, silence can be the generator of other musical elements, beyond pitch (vertical silence), namely: rhythm, texture, timbre, articulation, etc. (Lissa, 1964). Sixth, silence might be introduced in a metaphorical or pictorial way, by being referenced with sounds or sung word that deliver a silent and quiet mood—which can vary in character, from peacefulness to suspense (Lissa, 1964; Clifton, 1976; Littlefield, 1996; Yin-Lo, 2015). The corpus of works examined in the present seminar series focuses on modern music since 1900 although examples from previous composers and styles are also provided.

Some key definitions include the following:

- **Notated Silence** is a written sign that musicians might interpret as an abstention from the production of sounds. Most commonly it takes the form of a music rest.

- *Acoustic Silence* is a refraining from sound production produced by performers, registered in an audio file, associated with a region during which the amplitude and dynamic level are below a determined threshold.
- *Perceived Silence* is an impression or perception that a listener has of the absence of sound or presence of silence

Brief Notes on Main Authors

Riemann's theories go beyond the physical concept of dynamics, and attribute negative values to silences (something for which this theory has been criticized by his contemporaries and ultimately disregarded). The concept of negative value is accompanied by a graphical representation that can be used to highlight the tensional implications of musical silence (Kim, 2013).

Braman's (1956) dissertation presents a very rich and broad silence taxonomy, with over 50 different silence functions and categories (false ending, echo, augmentation, bravura style, variant, interruption, to cite a few). In his research Braman does not provide a clear analytical method for examining silences, but rather he presents multiple categories and subcategories of silence with 399 examples of 47 composers of Baroque, Classical and Romantic Periods.

Lissa (1964) includes a broader perspective on silence, by introducing the idea of silence as canvas (background) and silence as frame (pre-performance and post-performance). Lissa draws back to the music of J. S. Bach in order to point out the use of silence as a suspense medium, builder of expectations, most commonly seen in music with an improvisatory character (toccata, fantasia, etc.). Beethoven further develops silences for creating thematic materials, underlying contrast between motives and ideas. Silence begins to be used as dramatic element, builder and reliever of musical tensions. In contrast, in impressionism, silences are used as re-echoing of the music that was heard as a tone-color resolution of sound structures.

Clifton's (1976) silence taxonomy presents a classification in 3 types (temporal silences, registral silences, and silences in motion) and 10 subtypes (surprise, anticipation, sfumato, ridge, highlighter, to cite a few). He is one of the first authors that laid out a vertical definition of silence, which he denominated as "registral silence". Traditionally, silence is understood as the absence of sound in time (which Clifton names "temporal silence"). However, when music is represented in a 2D graph (e.g.: MIDI piano-roll) one can find that silences (absence of sounds) occur in both vertical and horizontal axes.

Dougherty's (1979) taxonomy divides in 2 broader groups (normative and non-normative silences), with 6 categories (pre-performance, post-performance, structural, to cite a few) and 20 subcategories (unequivocal, imperceptible, introduction, time standing still, resolution, to cite a few). Dougherty interprets the value of a silence, giving it a meaning. This is more clearly seen in non-normative silences, as one has to decide the direction in which the music is better understood: predictive (future), retrodictive (past), or simulditive (past, future and present).

Gaudibert (1995) presents 7 silence categories: silence dramatique, interrogatif, pathétique, intégré, ponctuel, vacant and entretenu. Gaudibert mentions how the last two silence categories

are exclusive of 20th Century music. On the one hand, punctual silence is as silence empty of substance, without a distinct category, and no tonal framework or no drama. On the other hand, maintained silence is present in pointillistic music, where interruption is the rule, music comes from and returns to silence, music becomes fragile and uncertain.

Littlefield's (1996) defends the idea of vertical silences in the registral space—in a way that brings his theories closer in line to those of Clifton (1976). Littlefield's discussion of framing silences is articulated around four functions. An analogy between visual arts, paintings, and music is drawn. The analyses of selected musical passages of composers such as Verdi, Debussy, and Stravinsky, incorporate a closer discussion of the transitions that appear between sound and silence, as well as their structural and interruptive properties.

Alepin's (2001) includes a discussion of several musical elements that are responsible for generating tension and repose. One of these elements is silence. Alepin also incorporates an overview of the theories of Clifton (1976) and Schafer (1977), after which she suggests her own classification based on the concept of continuity and interruption.

Margulis (2007a) discusses five types of perceived silences by means of diverse examples that range from Haydn to Prokofiev. In her second paper, Margulis (2007b) conducts two experimental studies on the perception of temporal qualities, the ratio of tension-repose, and the expectations set during the listening of musical silences. In both cases, Margulis's main argument is that silences are not empty but full of impressions.

Kai-Yin Lo's (2015) examines selected extracts of the instrumental twelve-tone works of this composer. Lo establishes three categories, grounded on the position that silences have in relation to a formal unit. His analyses go beyond the process of classifying silences into three categories (opening, transitional, and closing). Lo also provides a detailed discussion of various types of complications and ambiguities which acknowledge the convoluted nature that silences have in music.

Readings

Available at <https://bit.ly/2YZj7P4>

Beeman, W. O. (2006). "Silence in Music". In M. L. Achino-Loeb (Ed.), *Silence: The Currency of Power* (pp. 23-34). New York: Berghahn Books.

Braman, W. D. (1956). *The Use of Silence in the Instrumental Works of Representative Composers: Baroque, Classic, Romantic* (PhD Dissertation, University of Rochester) – recommended reading pp. 1-40

Clifton, T. (1976). The Poetics of Musical Silence. *The Musical Quarterly*, 62(2), 163-181.

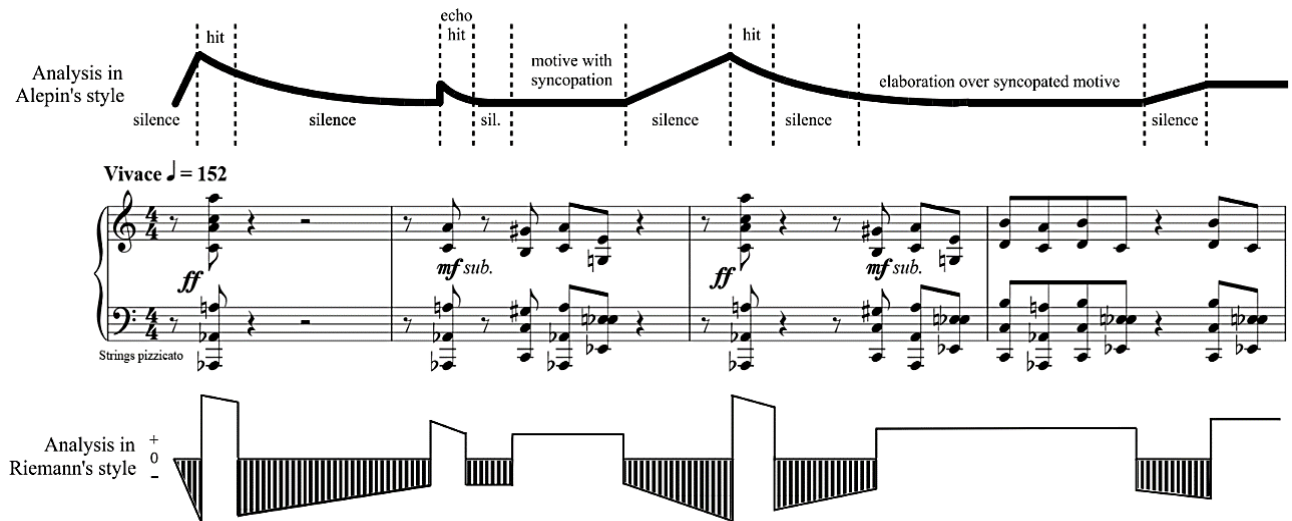
Cooper, B. (2011). Beethoven's uses of silence. *The Musical Times*, 152(1914), 25-43.

Doctor, J. (2016). The Texture of Silence. In N. Lossef & J. Doctor (Eds.), *Silence, Music, Silent Music*. Routledge. (Original work published 2007)

- Dougherty, W. P. (1979). The significance of silence in the string quartets of Beethoven (Doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Graduate School of Music, Department of Music). – recommended reading 1-39
- Gaudibert, E. (1995). Essai sur les différentes catégories du silence musical. *Dissonance/Dissonanz* (45), 15–17.
- Harris, E. T. (2005). Silence as sound: Handel's sublime pauses. *The Journal of Musicology*, 22(4), 521-558.
- Hodkinson, J. (2007). *Presenting Absence: Constitutive silences in music and sound art since the 1950s* (PhD Thesis, University of Copenhagen). — recommended reading pp. 1-45
- Judkins, J. (1997). The aesthetics of silence in live musical performance. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 31(3), 39.
- Kim, Y. (2013). “The Voice in Silence”: Hugo Riemann’s Pausenlehre and its psychological implications. *Journal of Musicological Research*, 32(4), 287-313.
- Kurzton, D. (2007). Towards a typology of silence. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 39(10), 1673-1688.
- Lissa, Z. (1964). Aesthetic Functions of Silence and Rests in Music. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 22(4), 443-454.
- Littlefield, R. (1996). The silence of the frames. *Music Theory Online*, 2(1).
- Margulis, E. H. (2007a). Moved by nothing: listening to musical silence. *Journal of Music Theory*, 51(2), 245-276.
- Metzer, D. (2006). Modern Silence. *The Journal of Musicology*, 23(3), 331-374.
- Syroïd Syroïd, B. (2020). Analysis of Silences in Music: Theoretical Perspectives, Analytical Examples from Twentieth-Century Music, and In-Depth Case Study of Webern’s Op. 27/iii (Doctoral Dissertation, KU Leuven).
- Tønseth, J. M. (2015). *Pausens uttrykk I kunstmusikk: Kraften av ingenting, En hermeneutisk analyse og diskusjon av pausen som musikalsk virkemiddel* [The Expression of Pauses In Art Music: The Power of Nothing. A Hermeneutical Analysis and Discussion of the Pause as a Musical Tool]. (Master’s thesis in Norwegian, University of Oslo).
- Van Elferen, I., & Raeymaekers, S. (2015). Silent dark: the orders of silence. *Journal for Cultural Research*, 19(3), 262-273.
- Wang, S. (2013). *The Aesthetics of Silence in the Works of Federico Mompou, Chou Wen Chung, and George Crumb*. (Master’s thesis, University of Cincinnati, Division of Composition, Music History, and Theory). — recommended reading pp. 1-16
- Yin-Lo, K. (2015). *Functions of Silence in the Twelve-tone Music of Anton Webern* (Master’s thesis, McGill University). — recommended reading pp. 1-19

Annexes

Example 1: Score Analysis (Flow of Tension)



Note. Own analysis of "Pas d'action (2)" from *Orpheus*, mm. 1–4 by Igor Stravinsky (1947/1948), based on an expansion of the ideas of negative dynamics by Hugo Riemann (1884) and the graphical representation of tension-repose by Suzanne Alepin (2001). Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 127, fig. 1.31)

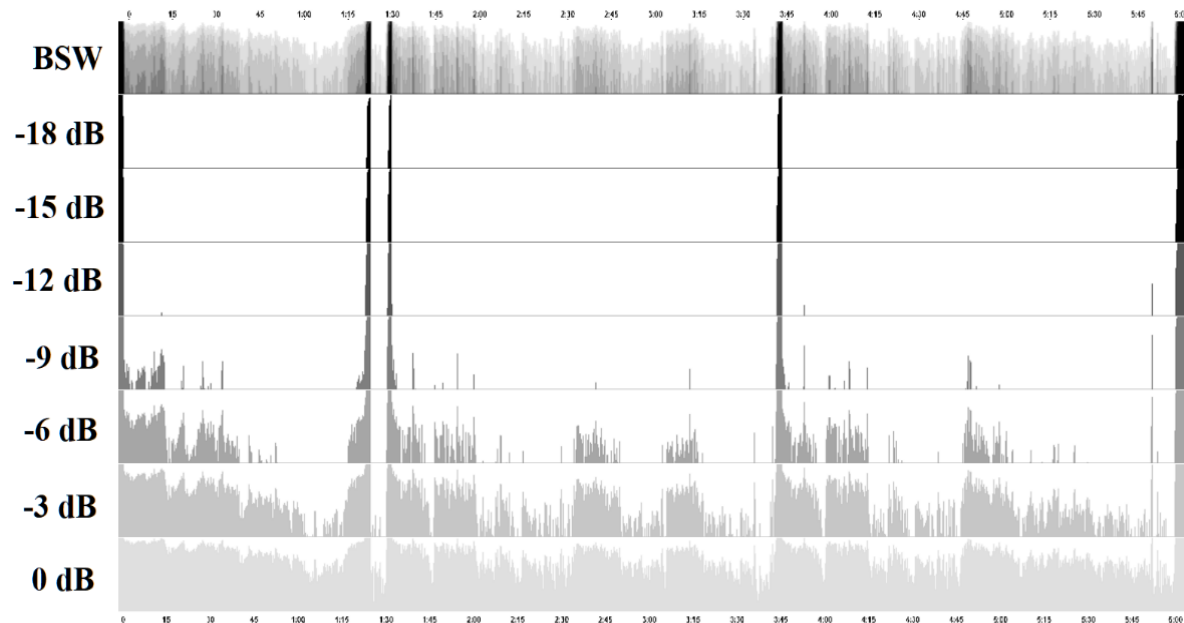
Example 2: Score Analysis (Annotations)

The figure displays a musical score for Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 (ca. 1740–1760) attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach (1831/2007, p. 1). The score is in C major, marked "Adagio". The music is for organ, with dynamics ranging from *p* (piano) to *f* (forte). The score is annotated with "suspenseful silences, separation of brief motives" and "brief silences non-legato separation".

The "suspenseful silences, separation of brief motives" is represented by red boxes around specific silences in the score. The "brief silences non-legato separation" is represented by blue boxes around specific silences in the score. The "cadential silence larger structural impact" is represented by a green box around a specific silence in the score. The "dominant, increasing musical tension" is represented by a red box around a specific silence in the score.

Note. Own analysis of Toccata and Fugue in D minor, BWV 565 (ca. 1740–1760) attributed to Johann Sebastian Bach (1831/2007, p. 1). Example also cited to illustrate a bravura silence in the doctoral dissertation of Wallis Dwight Braman (1956, fig. 133) Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 22, fig. 10)

Example 3: Identification of Acoustic Silences



Note. Adaptation of figure 2 retrieved from a paper by Bohdan Syroyid Syroyid (2019) which displays a performance by Belgian Brass of *Valse Sacrée* for wind band by Frédéric Devreese (1989/2011). The dB scale was adapted at intervals of 3 dB_{FS}. Waveforms were generated with Sonic Visualiser 4.0.1 (CDMQM, 2020). In this case, filled areas represent acoustic silence, whereas empty regions (white) are sounds. Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 180, fig. 2.9)

Example 4: Transcription of Performances

Edition by P. Stadlen (1936/1979)



Peter Stadlen (1946)



Yvonne Loriod (1961)



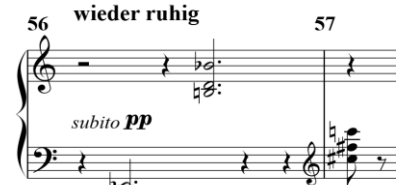
Glenn Gould (1974)



Sviatoslav Richter (1989)

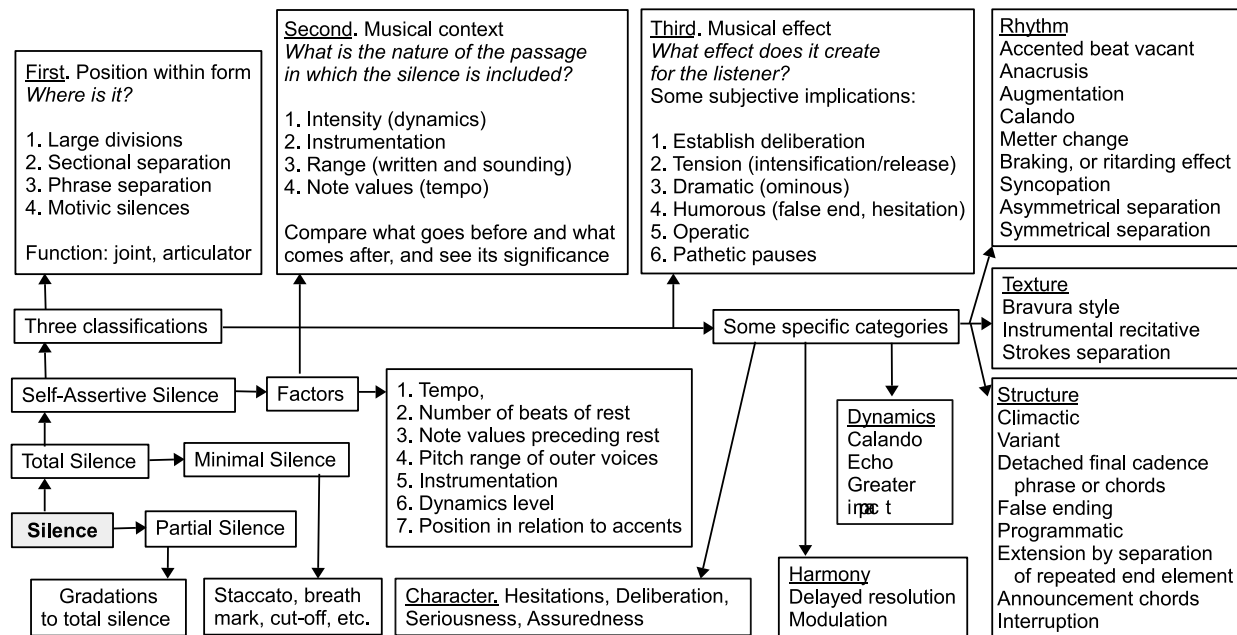


Mitsuko Uchida (1998)



Note. Upper left score extract retrieved from Stadlen's edition of Piano Variations, Op. 27/iii, mm. 56–57 by Anton Webern (1936/1979, p. 11a). Scores with transcriptions of five selected recordings (Webern, 1936/1993, 1936/1995, 1936/1996, 1936/2003, 1936/2019). Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 354, fig. 3.88)

Example 5: Taxonomy of Silence (Braman)



Note. Own reorganization of the theories described in the doctoral dissertation of Wallis Dwight Braman (1956, pp. 1–57). Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 68, fig. 1.10)

Example 6: Taxonomy of Silence (Dougherty)

Category of silence	Description
[I] Normative silence	Musical boundaries. Standard pattern, typical
(a) Pre-performance silence	Full of possibility and expectation
(a1) Unequivocal	Clear attack at the beginning of the piece
(a2) Imperceptible	Framing edge has been obscured
(a3) Introduction	Section acts as a transition from silence
(b) Post-performance silence	Coda/Full work are alive in listener's mind
(b1) Time standing still	Long sounds fade out, sound freezes
(b2) Resolution	Dissonance is resolved into silence
(b3) Jocular	Tricks the listener to think the music is over
(c) Structural silence	Frame between different musical sections
(c1) Textbook	Smooths the transition between sections
(c2) Ebbing	Suspends motion (rit.) before resumption
(c3) Drastic	Enhances contrasts and abruptness

Category of silence	Description
[II] Non-normative silence	Multiple functions depended on the context
(a) Predictive silence	Points to the future (not always surprise)
(a1) Fulfilled	Anticipation has been resolved as expected
(a2) Unfulfilled	Purposefully unexpected continuation
(a3) Uncertain	Listener is left unsure about what to expect
(a4) Resolved	Silence itself acts as the resolution
(a5) Developed	Alternative mode of continuation
(b) Retrodictive silence	Significance given by recalling past events
(b1) Pronoun	Silence substitutes a repeated musical passage
(b2) Internal	Reference to music from the same movement
(b3) Interfluent	Reference to music from another movement
(c) Simuldictive silence	Present now: predictive and retrodictive
(c1) Motivic	Demarcates and connects motives, ideas
(c2) Rhythmic	Separates notes and acts as a rhythmic filler
(c3) Deleted	Silence is filled with notes in a restatement

Note. Own compilation based on the master's thesis of William Patrick Dougherty (1979). Source: Syroyid Syroyid (2020, p. 98, tab. 1.9)