MUTE EXPECTATION
Drawing on Silence
in
Free Improvisation

It's better to be king of your silence than slave of your words
W. Shakespeare, *Othello.*

I. SOME CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 1 - 21), Elizabeth Hallam and Tim Ingold quote Edward Bruner's observation that "people everywhere 'construct culture as they go along and as they respond to life's contingencies' (Bruner 1993, 326)." They add that

> in this process, they are compelled to improvise, not because they are operating *on the inside* of an established body of convention, but because no system of codes, rules and norms can anticipate every possible circumstance. At best it can provide general guidelines or rules of thumb whose very power lies in their vagueness or non-specificity. The gap between these non-specific guidelines and the specific conditions of a world that is never the same from one moment to the next not only opens up a space for improvisation, but also demands it, if people are to respond to these conditions with judgement and precision (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 2).

We wholeheartedly agree, and as such, our goal in the present text is simply to reflect upon various aspects of silence from the perspective of freely improvised music in hopes that this will allow each improviser to generate their own "non-specific guidelines" for using silence as and if they see fit. Our intentions are decidedly *not* to propose, prescribe, proscribe or defend any particular aesthetic or style of free improvisation, which, happily, is free enough to span an astonishing variety of practices and beliefs about what it is and how to do it. Some of these involve practically no silence at all, while others, such as "London New Silence," seem to embrace it as a primary ingredient (at least in the opinion of music critics, who are generally responsible for naming musical "styles"). For us, this freedom can only be cause for celebration.

There is less cause for joy in the paucity of attention paid to silence as compared to other elements of musical discourse. In its 1980 edition, Grove's *New Dictionary of Music and Musicians* dedicates 19 pages to the entry for "sound," but nowhere in its 20 volumes is there an entry for "silence." The English word, silence, has no entry in the second edition of the Harvard Dictionary of Music, either. Its French cognate, *silence,* does appear, but only to explain, in less than a single sentence, that it is the French word for "rest." In more specialized literature the first serious treatment of silence appears[1] in the theories of pioneering musicologist and composer Hugo Riemann (1849-1919). Over the course of the 20th century he was followed by Wallis D. Braman, Zofia Lissa, Thomas Clifton, Wilson Coker, William Patrick Dougherty, Éric Gaudibert, Richard Littlefield, Suzanne Alepin, Jennifer Judkins and others. Work continues into the 21st century with Elizabeth H.

[1] Notwithstanding the fact that someone can *always* find (and academically brandish) precedents.

Margulis, Kai-Yin Lo and Bohdan Syroyid. This incomplete list of names might suggest a growing interest in silence, but while interest may indeed have increased, it doesn't seem to have grown much wider. With the exception of Judkins, who directly proposes a study of silence in live musical performance, almost all of the other authors mentioned here are focused more-or-less entirely on how silence is used in musical scores. Moreover, even a superficial reading of the first chapter of Syroyid's study reveals just how many of these studies seem to be inventing new names for the same categories of silence.

There are, of course, numerous texts on silence from other disciplines, including philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, art theory and media studies, and some provide ideas that can be directly applied to, or simply contrasted with, our specific area of study. One example appears in the work of U.S. philosopher Susan Sontag, who found pathos in her conclusion that

> the idea of silence allows, essentially, only two types of valuable development. Either it is taken to the point of utter self-negation (as art) or else it is practiced in a form that is heroically, ingeniously inconsistent (Sontag 1966, 17).

We find pathos only in the first of these. Given the number of elements in contemporary society willing and able to negate artists, it is relatively easy to associate this quality with an artist's deliberate act of self-negation. There may be some value to the decision to stop making art, which Carlos Martí Aris includes among the "eloquent silences" he attributes to Hölderlin and Rimbaud with two quotes by George Steiner: "beyond their poems, and almost more vigorous than them, is these poets' renunciation, their choice of silence." Steiner adds that "Silence is an alternative. When in the *polis* words are full of savagery and lies, nothing is more resonant than the poem not written" (Steiner, quoted in Martí Arís 1999, 50).

The second of Sontag's two "types of valuable development" brings us back to Hallam and Ingold's assertion that people are compelled to improvise "because no system of codes, rules and norms can anticipate every possible circumstance." To us, this strongly suggests that, in the context of freely improvised music, musicians need to be able to use their resources, including silence, not systematically, but rather in "heroically [and] ingeniously inconsistent" ways when participating in an art form whose principal virtue may very well be its ingenious inconsistency.

Here, then, we intend to consider the appearance and possible functions of silence in free improvisation, directly, and by contrasting them with similar or different uses and functions in other musical practices, especially certain forms of composition. It is our hope that improvisers can use these observations to sharpen their own perceptual capacities, to find new ways to deal with those silences they have found most intractable, and to create and employ new ones with the truly heroic inconsistency that Hallam and Ingold call "fluent response." As they put it, with a warning to beginners: in order for life

> to keep on going, it has to be open and responsive to continually changing environmental conditions. A system that was strictly bound to the execution of a pre-composed script would be unable to respond and would be thrown off course by the slightest deviation. This indeed, is the typical predicament of the novice in any craft who has, of necessity, first to learn by the rules. Fluent response calls for a degree of precision in the coordination of perception and action that can only be achieved through practice. But it is this, rather than a knowledge of the rules, that distinguishes the skilled practitioner from the novice. And in this, too, we find the essence of improvisation (Hallam and Ingold, 2007. 12)

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF ABSOLUTE SILENCE

Inasmuch as sound is vibration, there can be no absolute silence within human reach. Something is always vibrating, even when it is not audible to us. Outer space is said to be silent but, as John Cage showed us in his now canonical description of his experiences in an anechoic chamber, the presence of a human being itself generates considerable sound. So even if we were physically able to survive in any space where absolute silence might exist, our very presence there would interrupt it.

For the matters that concern us here, absolute silence is actually irrelevant. In fact, readers are invited to imagine quotation marks around the word "silence" each time it appears in this text if that helps them to accept that it is being used here as a concept or more accurately as a body of concepts rather than as a pure, immutable physical phenomenon. We can divide this body of concepts into two basic categories: environmental silence and volitional silence. And we should add that the first of these *always* has an acoustic existence, while the latter may or may not, depending on circumstances that we will attempt to clarify over the course of this text.

THE BOUNDARIES OF MUSIC IN MUSICAL PRACTICE OR VICE VERSA

Before we consider silence in improvised music, let us consider the larger context of music as sound and silence or music as performance. To do so, we will begin with concepts drawn from an English philosopher working with European classical music.

In her book, *The Quest for Voice. On Music, Politics, and the Limits of Philosophy,* Lydia Goehr (Goehr, 1998) recalls the Romantic-era ideal of *Werktreue* (being faithful to the original [work]) to contrast two different approaches to musical performance. These are what she calls "the perfect performance of music" and "the perfect musical performance."[2]

The former, "the perfect performance of music", which Goehr places within the limits of *Aufführungspraxis* (a term she attributes to Walter Wiora), sees the score as the absolute musical work to which the performers should be as faithful as possible[3]. In that sense, *Aufführungspraxis* calls for the performer and all of the apparatus of performance to be as invisible as possible, since only the sounds (and silences) constitute the music. As Goehr puts it, "the demand here is for performance *transparency:* performances should be like windows through which audiences directly perceive works." According to Goehr, *Aufführungspraxis*

> is conditioned by the expectation that compositions be fully composed prior to performance, an expectation that releases performers from the obligation—indeed it forbids them—either to embellish or improvise, i.e. creatively to compose the music in performance. In this *Werktreue* practice performers are obligated to comply as perfectly as they can with the composers' fully notated scores and to interpret faithfully the works they perform (Goehr 1998, 139)

Of course, this can never be more than an unattainable ideal. As Goehr adds

> For performances to be perfect they would have to reach the condition of the work itself. But this is ontologically impossible ... Thus, speaking about the perfect performance of music is oxymoronic

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2 Similar concerns emerge in performance theory, as succinctly described by Karin Barber in "Improvisation and the Art of Making Things Stick" (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 28 ff.).

3 In the common German use of the term, *Auffürungspraxis* refers to the performance of Early and Baroque music with period instruments, which it considers part of the *Werktreue* faithfulness to the score. Goehr extends this concept somewhat beyond historicist performance practice to include the aesthetic ideas that led Wagner to place his orchestra at Bayreuth in a covered pit, which not only made it invisible to listeners but also muffled the orchestral sound enough to make the singers more audible.

> unless one intends to capture an ideal of the practice that performers strive, but of necessity fail, to meet (Goehr 1998, 141-142).

On the other hand, "the perfect musical performance" corresponds to what Goehr calls *Ausführungspraxis*, in which the performance itself is understood not only as the realization but also as the *completion* of the work. As such, it redefines both the personal and temporal borders of the creative act, which are no longer the exclusive concern of the composer and are not fully defined in his or her score before the performance. Instead, *Ausführungspraxis* assigns an interpretative and thus creative role to the performer, considering his or her visibility, expressive gestures, and so on as fundamental parts of the music. Those parts are what the prefix "aus" refers to, that is, the aspects of a musical performance that are outside of or beyond the score.

Unlike Goehr, the performer's capacity to adjust to real-life situations in order to deliver as faithful as possible a rendering of the composer's work at each performance is something that Hallam and Ingold already identify as improvisation. They do so with a metaphor in which interpreting a musical score is replaced with the efforts involved in constructing a building from architectural plans.

> A famous modern architect designs a building, the like of which the world has never seen before... Building is not straightforward. It takes time, during which the world will not stop still: when the work is complete the building will stand in an environment that could not have been envisioned when it started (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 3-4).

Here we may interrupt their narrative to ask, could Bach or Haydn possibly have imagined the environment in which their works are performed today?

> In order to accommodate the inflexible design to the realities of a fickle and inconstant world, builders have to improvise all the way. There is a kink, as Stewart Brand writes, between the world and the architect's idea of it: 'the idea is crystalline, the fact, fluid (Brand 1994, 2). Builders inhabit that kink (ibid, 4).

So, too, do musicians when they make living, breathing music from a score conceived for a world that disappeared two or three centuries ago. To do so, they cannot help but improvise, though not on the same scale as free improvisers, for whom there is no score *per se*. So, as part of our study of silence in the context of free improvisation, let us first establish a basis for contrast by relating the two ways of understanding the performance of a musical score identified by Lydia Goehr to larger conceptual questions about art as a whole.

THE MYTHS OF ART

Susan Sontag (Sontag 1966), distinguishes between a myth of art that coincides with the subsuming of the activity of painters, musicians, poets, dancers, etc. under the general name of "art", and a newer myth derived from a post-psychological conception of consciousness. The earlier myth "treated art as an *expression* of human consciousness, consciousness seeking to know itself" (Sontag 1966, 8)[4]. The newer myth, which follows recognition of the unconscious and its influence on creative process, posits the rather cagean notion that "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, 8-9)[5]. The relation between these two myths and the conflicting ideas of 19th

[4] As Philip Alperson observed, "one way to understand this perspective is to situate the view historically, with the birth of the so-called Modern System of the Arts in the 18th century, when it was proposed that there was a group of arts—the "fine arts"—that possessed a common thread by virtue of which they formed an affinity group" (Alperson, "Anglophone Philosophy of Music and the Musical Object, paragraph 3).

[5] Alperson finds a more fundamental difference in the shift from one myth to the other. As he explains it, "In the 20th and 21st centuries the notion of artistic *expression* gave way to the idea that it was *aesthetic experience* that was the glue that held the group together" (Alperson, "Anglophone Philosophy of Music and the Musical Object, paragraph

Century *Aufführungspraxis* and *Ausführungspraxis,* especially as the latter relates to free improvisation, becomes clear in Sontag's description of one aspect of the earlier myth of art.

> In the early, linear version of art's relation to consciousness, a struggle was discerned between the "spiritual" integrity of the creative impulses and the distracting "materiality" of ordinary life, which throws up so many obstacles in the path of authentic sublimation. But the newer version, in which art is part of a dialectical transaction with consciousness, poses a deeper, more frustrating conflict. The "spirit" seeking embodiment in art clashes with the "material" character of art itself. (Sontag 1966, 9)

This "clash" lies at the very heart of the transition from *Auf* to *Aus,* as it corresponds to a belief—often both unstated and unrecognized—by contemporary artists, including many free improvisers, that what Sontag calls "the 'spirit' seeking embodiment in art" and "the 'material' character of art itself" are not at all in conflict. In other words, that the fundamental paradigm shift embodied by the more recent of the two myths of art proposed by Sontag and manifest in most free improvisation could be characterized by the proposition that, inasmuch as art is imbued with a certain spirituality, the *aesthetic* contemplation of our material reality constitutes the discovery of at least certain spiritual aspects of everyday life[6]. So art, not as a reflection upon everyday life, but rather as a part of it, a peculiar element of its constitution as such. In sum, all that could previously have been considered *Ausführung* is actually a fundamental part of the musical act, and thus of the music itself.

In freely improvised music the interaction among its creators is part and parcel of the creative process that is taking place exactly when the sounds and silences occur and should therefore be grasped as such by listeners. The audience is not experiencing the interpretation or recreation of music from a score, but rather the interactive creation of music in real time. In that sense, in free improvisation, there is no possible existence of the music as a phenomenon independent of its performance. Collective free improvisation is a way of making art, but it is also a social act.[7] As both, it involves, draws on, and reflects material realities such as where and when it is being carried out, the resonance and noise floor of that location, the presence or absence of a listening audience, the nature, sound and combination of the instruments *in that space*, and many other factors far removed from the abstract idea of a musical score. This has a fundamental influence on how silence is conceived and employed in improvisation as opposed to composition.

AUDIATIVE[8] SILENCE VS. ACOUSTIC SILENCE

In traditional score-based composition, "silence" is entirely abstract or, at best, audiative. Scores contain no sounds, and no silences, only symbols that represent them. For a composer, working in his or her studio, silence, like sound, is conceptual; it does not exist as a physical phenomenon during the compositional process because the work he or she is creating is generally considered a product of his or her audiation which has yet to take form as a physical phenomenon in an acoustic space, and is generally not even conceived *for* a specific time and space (not an entirely predictable one anyway). Silence's presence in a score is indicated by one or more symbols alongside those that represent the sounds with which it is expected to interact. As such, compositional silence is not an

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6 As Henri Lefebvre put it, "Art, poetry, music and theater have always brought something (but what?) to the everyday. They haven't *reflected* on it. The creator descended to the streets of the city-state; the portrayed inhabitants lived amongst the citizens. they assumed the city life" (Lefebvre 2004, 24).

7 In a description of the social aspect of musicians playing chamber music together, Karin Barber recalls Nicholas Cook: "they are, in a quite literal sense, playing by ear' (Cook 1990, 130), each listening to the others and accommodating him or herself to them in a 'mutuality of performance' that is like the rapport of a conversation" (Barber in Hallam and Ingold 2007, 34).

8 Audiation is a term coined by U.S. educator and music researcher Edwin E Gordon in 1976 and refers, roughly speaking, to the capacity to hear sounds in one's head in the absence of any external or physical sound. To a degree, it is a sonic equivalent of imagination.

acoustic reality but instead a graphic indication of the composer's will. In short, it is volitional but not acoustic. Moreover, the silence that is not a direct part of that score's projected musical discourse, but that is expected to *surround* it when it is actually turned into sound in performance, is also foreseen by the composer as part of a body of social and architectural norms that dictate ideal audience behavior and the ideal acoustic qualities of the performance space. These, too, are only expectations during the compositional process and they may or may not be fulfilled during the actual performance of the piece.[9]

For electroacoustic composers, "silence" is what Braman (1956, p. 1) called "time without sound." Unlike the silence in a score, it exists in the digital domain as *data.* Rather than being indicated by a symbol, it is embodied by the sequence of ones and zeros read by whatever technology is employed to turn it into an audible reality. As such, it may take two different forms. It may be "digital silence," that is, data indicating that no sound at all is to be produced. Or it may be "recorded silence", that is, data derived from a recording of the relative silence found in an acoustic space. Recorded silence will never be as silent as its digital counterpart but it will often work better if it is intended to be perceived as part of an ongoing piece rather than an interruption.

For free improvisers, "silence" is an acoustic reality defined by the sonic threshold of the venue, a reality to be dealt with and to be used if they so choose. It is this deliberate use of silence that marks the transformation of environmental silence into volitional silence. There may also be incidental sounds there that function as part of the improvisation (passing cars, refrigeration units, people talking, etc.) if the improvisers choose to include them in their discourse or if the listener(s) perceive them as such. In either case, the ongoing threshold of sound in a venue constitutes its "silence". In that sense, a venue's silence is one determinant of what improvisers do/play there. It is, in fact, ineluctable, just like the hiss of an electric guitar amplifier (if, in fact, it hisses), which is accepted as an inescapable sonic threshold of "silence" by the guitarist.

The venue's resonance can also affect silences in the music. As Jennifer Judkins observes: "Obviously, in a hall with a very quick response [very little resonance], silences can be shorter, since they have a more instantly silent quality. When sounds take longer to dissipate, silences must be longer" (Judkins 1997. 43)

As we will see further on, for improvisers, not all volitional silences are generated by transforming environmental silence. Personal silence in the midst of sounds being produced by other musicians or by other factors in the environment (audience noises or others entering the performance space from outside the venue) is also volitional inasmuch as it reflects the will of the improviser who chooses to employ it.

II. SOME PRACTICAL USES OF SILENCE IN FREE IMPROVISATION

Here, it is important to keep in mind that not all music, improvised or not, is built with phrases, not all music is based on tension and resolution, and not all music requires any sort of internal silences.[10] Improvisers are invited to draw from this brief overview as they see fit, experimenting with silences in their playing if they so choose. As part of that process, I would encourage improvisers to explore uses that lie outside their comfort zone.

How improvisers use silence will affect its duration, so let us consider some of those uses in terms of their scale within the musical texture.

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[9] For an example of these expectations and their possible outcome, see: Matthews, Wade. n.d. "intimacy and Limits; Reflections on Stockhausen's Dog." Online at http://www.wadematthews.info/Wade_Matthews/Intimacy_and_Limits%3B_Reflections_on_Stockhausens_Dog.html

[10] Silences before and after a piece are more generalized and are not always subject to the musicians' will or control.

Silences on the smallest scale (microsilences) could be considered a function of articulation (the difference between staccato and legato). They can also be used to generate space within a phrase, making rhythms more irregular than if they were played as an unbroken string of sounds.

If, rather than phrases, the improviser is working with large masses of sound, microsilences may be inserted to change the texture of that sound, reducing its density or its apparent speed.[11] Gradually increasing or decreasing the occurrence of microsounds can alter the texture and intensity of an otherwise unaltered sound mass, generating greater tension or greater relaxation over time.

Silences on a slightly larger scale can be used to separate consecutive phrases, possibly generating the expectation of another phrase. They may also be used to create surprise by rhythmically/temporally displacing a repeating phrase or by separating a series of repetitions from a following phrase that is *not* a repetition and may therefore come as a surprise. When repetitions are separated by silences of more-or-less uniform duration, the introduction of a slightly longer silence often suggests closure or transition to something else.

Silences of tension are those that are deliberately extended slightly beyond what is comfortable, or those that follow material whose intensity seems to require audible resolution of some kind. Instead of resolving, an improviser can insert a silence that generates even more tension before resolving it with sounds. How long these silences last depends on the overall speed of the playing, the resonance of the space, the attention span of the audience, and often, how nervous the improviser is.

Silences of repose are those that follow the resolution of certain levels of tension. The longer they are, the more likely they are to play a framing function, as we will see in the next section.

FRAMING SILENCES

Initial silences

These are silences at the beginning of a piece. In the context of a performance they are generally characterized by a palpable sense of audience expectation which grows in intensity right up to the moment the piece begins (from whence the title of this essay). This sense of expectation can produce a certain level of anxiety in some improvisers, as may the knowledge that whatever sound he or she begins with will have particular importance, both rhetorically, as the beginning of the piece, and discursively, as determinant in the direction the improvisation takes. It is therefore fundamental for an improviser to take command of the initial silence rather than responding to it exclusively as an external element beyond his or her control.

One way to do this is to actually start the piece with silence, rather than with an initial sound. In order to do so, one must make a clear distinction—for oneself and for the audience alike—between the framing silence, which is acoustic and occurs before the piece begins, and the silence that one *plays* to actually open the piece. To a large degree, the transition from one to the other can be transmitted gesturally, by using one's body language to communicate the decision to begin playing—in this case, playing silence. This capacity to *project* one's musical intentions requires conscious exploration of one's own gestures, something often better understood by dancers or actors than by improvising musicians. At the very least, it may be of interest to realize that playing a silence involves assuming a physical posture associated with playing, not with repose. Some of these physical gestures may produce a certain amount of self-consciousness at first, but they will soon become an integral, and in that sense unconscious, part of one's playing.

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[11] Sometimes reducing density will produce a sensation of greater speed as the ear begins to distinguish individual details rather than an almost totally uniform mass.

Here, according toTamar Barzel, is how pioneering Mexican free improviser Ana Ruiz describes this process in her early (mid 1970s) concerts with *Atrás del Cosmos* in Mexico City.

> Ruiz and West had grounded their early forays into free improvisation in the practice of starting from silence, and she noted that Atrás del Cosmos recast this practice as an act of theater during their performances, explaining that sometimes, in order to command the audience's attention: "We began
> with silence and only then began to create a sound. It excited people. 'Fired up' [prendida] is the word." (Barzel 2018, 219)

In that sense, it is important to understand that the silence that begins the piece is being *played* by the improvisor and, as such, is not simply an extension of the framing silence. As the beginning of the piece, it is, in fact, *within* the frame.

Final silences

These are also two consecutive silences of differing character. In fact, only the second plays a framing role. Most improvisations end with a silence in which all of the improvisers have stopped making sounds but are listening to and watching each other to be certain that the piece has, in fact, ended for all of them. During this silence, the improvisers' body language signals their attentiveness. When all are certain that there is consensus as to the piece's closure, this is signaled to all involved parties, including the audience, by a visible relaxation on the part of the musicians. The attentive silence is, in fact, part of the piece and is therefore within the frame. The silence that follows it is the frame. It begins when the musicians relax and tacitly invites the audience's applause.

FRAMED SILENCES

Rather than the idea of silences as frames for sound in music, we can consider silences as obtaining their meaning from the sounds around them. They are thus, to a high degree, *framed by those sounds.* These include but are not limited to the brief silences inserted into musical phrases or textures discussed above. They can also be employed as larger parts of an ongoing musical discourse, and in that sense, they are similar to Basque sculptor Jorge Oteiza's use of what he called "open spatial silence".

> During the nineteen fifties, his period of maximum creative effervescence, Oteiza's research took two basic directions: vacating the cylinder, cube and sphere, a process of hollowing or spatial emptying to create an active void he defines as a source of spiritual and physical energy. Pierced and thinned, the sculptural mass seems to grow ever weaker as the void progressively takes over the piece. Surrounding space breaches the limits of the sculpture, penetrating it and becoming indistinguishable from it. The ultimate goal is the conquest of an uninhabited, available space that bears the marks of the laborious process of removal and elimination. The void generated by Oteiza's sculpture is shot through with mystery, loaded with questions, and the viewer stands before it expectantly, struggling to evoke an answer that the sculpture refuses to give, but the silence it gives off is absorbing and welcoming.[12] As Oteiza himself observed: "For the statue of empty solitude, I seek an open spatial silence which man can occupy spiritually" (Martí Arís 1999, 5).[13]

Contemplating these spaces, we can clearly see how the sculpture's overall form imbues the spaces with meaning, directly including them in it and creating a distinction between the space around the

[12] For an example of Oteiza's work, see: https://www.pinterest.es/pin/339740365615332619/

[13] In 1924, the German-American anthropologist Edward Sapir suggested that 'creation is a bending of form to one's will, not the manufacture of form *ex nihilo'* (Sapir 1924, 418). In that sense, Oteiza's "empty" space is actually as full of the artist's will as is the material with which it shares its formal existence.

artwork and the one(s) contained and defined by it. If we carry Oteiza's ideas over into free improvisation, considered as activity in time, we quickly arrive at one aspect of the Japanese concept of *Ma*, which perceives the street as

> an activity-space, where there is a bringing together and intermingling of certain human activities. This space cannot clearly be defined by borders, and is a temporary space based on activity. The experience of this space is limited to the activity or dance occurring there. It is an example of an activity which produces a place that is restricted in terms of time (Day 1988, 11-12).

This space is neither undefined nor indefinable, but it cannot be clearly delineated with physical borders as it is "a temporary space based on activity" which ceases to exist when that activity ends. It is "restricted in terms of time." It is relatively easy to define a musical improvisation in the same manner. This is an artwork whose "support" has no existence before its creation (unlike the white canvas or paper that precedes a painting or drawing), nor any posterior to it. On the large scale, we could say that from a *Ma* perspective, a musical improvisation defines an activity-space as evanescent as its own sounds and silences. On a smaller scale, that same perspective allows us to affirm that the silence it contains will be defined by the temporary activity space, just as the overall form of one of Oteiza's scultures defines the "spatial silences" it contains.

INDIVIDUAL VOLITIONAL SILENCE

This is the decision to play an individual silence, that is, to participate in at least part of an ongoing improvisation with silence rather than sounds. As such, it often takes place while other sounds are occurring (either those of other musicians or surrounding environmental sounds or both). When this happens, the improviser is actually doing two things. First he or she is listening, which is the primary and most elemental activity carried out by an improviser *throughout* the piece, regardless of whether they are making sound or not. And second, he or she is *playing.* It is important to understand that a volitional silence is active, not passive. As the result of an individual decision, this silence is played with the same clarity of intentions as instrumental sound. Volitional silence, then, is most definitely *not* the result of *not playing.* As Anthony Braxton put it,

> There is no section of the music where any member of the group is not depended on by either another musician or the music itself… the "responsibility ratio" of extended creative music demands the complete involvement of every participating musician: that is, the musicians of the quartet are expected both to "play the silences" as well as the "sounds." there is no point in the music where any member of the group can "dis-connect" his or her vibrational link with the composite ensemble (Lock 1988, 147).

Ultimately, what establishes the vibrational connection throughout the piece is the ongoing and uninterrupted listening by everyone involved. So the foundation on which all "playing" rests is not the emission of sound, but rather, intense and continuous listening. After all, while improvising, one can listen without making sounds but one cannot make sounds without listening. What is continuous, then, is the listening.

A much more relative version of volitional silence (equally volitional but less silent) is Thomas Clifton's idea of "registral silence" (Clifton 1976, 171). This involves "silencing" a specific range of frequencies that lie within the tessitura of a given instrument for some part of a piece. For example, playing exclusively in the lowest part of the instrument with no recourse to other registers for a chosen length of time. One is, in fact, making sounds, but the excluded ranges are silent. When one finally brings in sounds from those previously "silent" areas, the results can be both fresh and surprising.

Playing silences, then, is a matter of direct involvement with the ongoing process of creating the music, as well as with the music itself. It is also a way of playing with audience expectations, which means engaging directly with them. This engagement is channeled by the energy produced by collective listening and is largely responsible for the sense of continuity in an improvisation, as we will see below. Recognizing this, learning to work with it as a personal responsibility and assuming it as a matter of personal volition are fundamental parts of becoming a mature improvising musician. Through their scores, composers delegate some of this responsibility to performers in the form of interpretive decisions. Improvisers, however, are creating music in the audience's presence, they have no score and therefore must fully assume this responsibility themselves.

SILENCE AND CONTINUITY

So far, we have considered a number of ways that silence can work in free improvisation. In that sense, it is fundamental to understand this practice of musical creation as *process,* rather than product. Ideally, that will help us to avoid an overly binary approach to silence. The fundamental difference between observing process and analyzing product (a score or a recording, for example) will hopefully be clear in the following metaphor. Imagine someone walking on the beach, close to the water. If we study the product of their act we will see footprints that appear at more-or-less regular intervals, separated by smooth sand. These are individual marks that suggest they have been produced by equally individual steps. And, of course, the smooth sand in between tells us little or nothing about the movement beyond the length of the walker's stride. If, however, we watch the process that made them, we will see that

> in the actual *practice* of walking, steps do not follow one another like beads on a string... rather, each is simultaneously a following-through of the one before and a preparation for the one following... One may learn the practice as a string of beads... but proficiency lies in being able to run operations together—to *move through* them with the fluency of a dancer instead of executing each in a linear series of point-to-point connections (Hallam and Ingold 2007, 14).

Here, then, let us apply the metaphor of walking itself, not that of the footprints it leaves behind. If we think in terms of *product,* the individual marks separated by smooth sand—or sounds separated by silence—we will lose sight of the smooth and uninterrupted *process* of walking. So, too, both silence and sound are part of the *uninterrupted* act of improvising. The continuity is *not* in the sounds, nor in the silences, it is in the act of moving in time, where both elements have their place. If there is a difference it is that generally, as improvisers, we are not simply walking along the beach at a regular pace; we are dancing.

In our metaphor of walking or dancing on the beach, we conclude that the sense of continuity lies in watching the movement of the person, rather than studying its effect on the sand. Watching is also an important part of grasping continuity in free improvisation—especially given the importance of body language in the transmission of intentionality—but even more important is listening. It might even be argued that an improvisation begins, not with the first sound, but rather when everyone involved begins truly listening.[14] Continuity is constituted by the maintenance of uninterrupted listening throughout the improvisation, including *after* the last sound. In that sense, improvisation could be defined as *a state of listening.* Improvisers learn how to maintain unbroken listening for an entire concert. But how can that state of attention be transmitted to an audience during prolonged silences? One part of it has to do with what happened just before the silence, as that can give a clue to how the silence is functioning discursively, but even that may not be enough to maintain the listeners' attention for very long. Another part has to do with the improvisers' body

[14] In fact, this level of intense, shared listening may begin before or *after* the first sounds are emitted.

language. As Australian field-recordist Lawrence English put it: "We can see someone looking, but can we hear someone listening?" The answer is probably not, but we *can see* someone listening, and that is what the musician on stage needs to transmit during a silence if he or she seeks to maintain continuity.

The use here of the term "uninterrupted" indicates that, in an improvisation, sound does not *interrupt* silence. Instead, it occurs *over or within it.* For an improviser, silence is a *support*, the way canvas or paper is a support for painting. As such, it extends in a continuous manner from the beginning to the end of the piece. As a support, it is not automatically read as a part of the creator's volition, although the artist may choose to bring it into the foreground at any time during an improvisation. This is especially clear in the idea of figure and ground when a watercolor painter uses the white of the paper rather than paint to convey the white parts of the figure. The same occurs when an improviser allows some of the ground (that is, the silent support) to "show through" and assume its role as a silent part of the sonic discourse. That is what I mean by "playing the silence" and it is an answer to Jennifer Judkins' half-baked question about silence in music: "How can forward motion be maintained through moments of 'empty' time (Judkins 1997, 40)?" Setting aside the question as to whether music, and in this case improvisation, requires her metaphorical "forward motion," we could more productively replace that term with "discursive continuity." We could also question her idea that silence is somehow "empty". The moment it is used deliberately it contains the same volition as sound. It is the absence of volition that produces emptiness, and that is equally true of both sound and silence.

LE *NON FINITO,* OR SILENCE AS AN INVITATION

In 1984, French-Canadian philosopher and art historian Guy Robert wrote *Art et non finito, estétique et dynamogénie du non finito,* an analysis of the esthetic effects of incomplete artworks. Robert's interest in this subject led him to identify various categories[15], and also to propose his personal definition of *dynamogeny*. In physiology, this term refers to how a body organ's function increases under the influence of certain kinds of stimulation. In the field of art theory, however, Robert uses it to define how contemplation of an incomplete artwork can stimulate our imagination and aesthetic reflexion. He contrasts this appeal to our own creative resources with a quote from Paul Valéry, for whom "what is finished, overly complete, gives us a sensation of our own powerlessness to modify it (Valéry 1957, 375).

The amount of reflexion on incompleteness in the arts is far too extensive and complex to address here, but a few ideas definitely deserve mention. Marcel Duchamp, whose enigmatic *Large Glass: The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* was officially declared unfinished in 1923, famously observed that "an artist does only 50 percent of the work in creating art. The remaining 50 percent is in the viewer's brain" (Duchamp 1973. 139-140). That part created by the viewer is often called "the beholder's share," a term attributed to art historian Ernst Gombrich. Leaving room for the audience to do so may be what led Miles Davis to tell pianist Herbie Hancock "don't play the butter notes" (Hancock n.d.). Similarly, Louis Armstrong is reputed to have said "I don't play all the notes of a melody, just the best ones."

Of course, Guy Robert's idea of dynamogeny contemplates the dynamic relation between the incomplete artwork and the people seeking to experience or study it. The same is essentially true of Duchamp's idea. Both, however, are predicated on the idea of an individual creator whose work is contemplated after he or she has stopped working on it. In free improvisation, there are very different models for both the work's creation and its contemplation. It is the first of these that merits reflexion here. Robert's idea suggests that contemplating an incomplete artwork somehow

[15] Among the most interesting, though perhaps not for the present text, are those works that are physically complete, yet so polemical that there has yet to be a consensus about their artistic merit. In that sense, their incompletion is social rather than physical.

strengthens the artistic experience. Duchamp's indicates that what it may stimulate is the viewer's need to *complete* the work, at least in the experiential sense. In most free improvisation, there is not a single artist, but rather several. So listening and creating are shared by various individuals whose craft includes the skills involved in listening to each other and to the music as a whole, as well as contributing their own creativity to its shared discourse.

Here, then, we can reinterpret Robert's idea. If the creative contribution of each improviser reflects his listening to that of all the others, then we can contemplate the deliberate playing of incomplete ideas as a means of stimulating the other creators, not just the audience. This, then, would be dynamogeny as a strategy for dialog.

Playing something that is deliberately incomplete not only stimulates the other musicians to do their fifty percent; it also leaves room for them to do so. The result, a shared discourse that depends directly on the contributions of all of the improvisers, can imbue the improvisation with a sense of coherency more difficult to attain when each musician is playing a complete and independent line. The sense of making something together cannot but increase when each contribution sounds essential to the musical meaningfulness of the others. As such, there may be considerable value to using silence, not to balance what one is playing, but rather to create a sense of *imbalance* that calls for others to provide the sounds it has unexpectedly replaced. The decision to insert a silence where one's intuition calls for a particular sound can be extremely fecund. It will also make one aware of just how much unspoken, unconscious and unrecognized agreement there is among improvisers when playing. More often than not, if one does not generate a sound where one's intuition seems to call for one, someone else in the group will do so. In a conversation, it can be rude to finish other people's sentences; in an improvisation it can sometimes be magical.

Of course this sort of deliberate incompleteness does not necessarily have to come as a surprise to the other improvisers; it may actually be a shared stylistic or procedural strategy. An excellent example can be found in the improvisatory practice known as Berlin Reductionism, developed by a group of improvisers from that city during the last decade of the 20th century and soon so widespread that London percussionist Eddie Prevost once outraged its practitioners by calling it "the new orthodoxy".

In their improvisations, the reductionists were not using silence to produce a sense of incompleteness in individually conceived musical ideas with the idea of stimulating others to complete them. Instead, they were deliberately playing parts of an idea *to be conceived and constructed collectively* by the group. Each member of the group alternated sounds (some pitched, others not) and silences in such a way that *no one* person was playing a phrase or even part of a preconceived phrase. Instead, the combinations of their individual sounds and silences generated composite phrases that *none* of them could have foreseen or predicted. In its early stages, this way of improvising produced an entirely new language that defied not only convention but also individual musical intuition. The combinations of sounds and silences established proportions that were surprising, sometimes beautiful and sometimes quite uncomfortable. Of course, as this way of playing spread, formulae were established and its temporal proportions, so surprising at first, became familiar enough to improvisers that they actually became a part of our shared temporal intuition. The music grew less exciting and more predictable, but anyone who ever seriously played that way found that it had changed their understanding of time, silence, interaction and phrasing.

INNER SILENCE, OR THE END OF (SELF) JUDGEMENT.

For improvisers, not all silence is external. It is equally important to silence the inner voices generated by judgement, either of one's self or of others. Free improvisation takes place in a specific place at a specific time, it is therefore fundamental for musicians to be fully present and listening.

If improvisers are actually creating in and moving freely through the moment (remember dancing on the beach?), they must first accept it as it is. Judging and/or lamenting what has already occurred is thinking about the past. This shifts the musician's awareness away from the ongoing process, affecting their listening and consequently weakening the music's coherency, which is as much synchronic as diachronic. In that sense, it is worth recalling that acceptance is not resignation, it is awareness of the moment and of the possibilities it offers. That is how synchronicity and diachronicity can be fully integrated to insure coherent improvisation. As Kirsten Hastrup observes,

> there may be actions one regrets, and events one would rather forget — yet on the whole, the past is what has led to the present, and only 'now' is one able to change this course, and project oneself into the future. In the process of appropriating the future, through one's actions, the nature of the past is constantly reinterpreted (Hasdrup in Hallam and Ingold 2007, 195).

If Hastrup's 'now' is the only time to 'change this course' we must be sufficiently aware of the moment to actually take measures, rather than deafened by the voice of our inner judge. The acceptance required to do this as part of an ongoing process, rather than as a momentary reaction, also involves avoiding withdrawal from the moment to judge others, that is, accepting *beforehand* the agency of others in how an improvisation progresses.

> We have to accept that we cannot *will* the future either. The eventness of being and the emergent nature of character make such control impossible. The future is orchestrated by many partly unknown players whom one cannot direct at will (ibid).

Learning to silence one's inner judge is not always easy but there are some strategies for dealing with it. Often, those musicians who most judge themselves are those who approach free improvisation with an excessive sense of responsibility but an unclear understanding what that responsibility actually entails. Essentially, free improvisation requires the capacity to do three things: first, to perceive the moment, second to react, and third, to propose. The idea that collective improvisation is like a conversation is a decidedly shopworn truism, but its convenience for illustrating certain aspects of that art and its practice is unquestionable[16]. In a conversation, first you must listen. If you don't, nothing you say will make any sense at all. Second, you must react to what you have heard, even if only to indicate that you are, indeed listening to and grasping what has just been said. Third, you must be willing to propose your own ideas, including a level of dissent that gives any conversation a dynamism sadly lacking when everyone is in agreement or when one or more of the participants is just surfing the conversation without actually contributing to it.

What we wish to emphasize here is that, when improvising freely with other musicians (regardless of whether there is an audience or not), it is *your responsibility* to do all of these things. You are part of a group that is working together to create something collectively. That is a privilege, but also a responsibility. So, it is *also your responsibility* to refrain from doing things that impede your listening, your capacity to react or your contribution of your own ideas. Letting your inner judge distract you from the music-making weakens *all three.* It is therefore essential to generate a degree of inner silence that allows you to be fully present in the moment. Sometimes, you may not know what to play. That is not the time to feel insecure or judgmental. When you don't know what to play, *stop making noise* (that is, sounds not guided by clear musical volition). Contribute your silence and *listen.* If you are truly present, what you hear will soon give you an idea.

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[16] Cf. Karin Barber's description (cited in footnote n. 4, above) of playing together by ear as the establishment of a '"mutuality of performance' that is like the rapport of a conversation" (Barber in Hallam and Ingold 2007, 34)

III. SOME IDEAS ABOUT WHY MANY IMPROVISERS HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH SILENCE

Unlike some musical practices, which musicians begin learning in their childhood and to which they often dedicate their entire professional careers, free improvisation is rarely the first music learned. Almost all improvisers arrive at it after considerable experience in other forms. It is not uncommon to find musicians from the worlds of rock, jazz, classical or punk playing together in a free improvisation group. Inevitably, and this is one of the richest aspects of this music, they reflect their origins in their playing. As we know, there are many musical practices in which there is almost no silence whatsoever, and little or no reflexion about it. Thus, improvisers whose origins lie in those practices will often improvise with very little silence and may feel uncomfortable with it.

There are also musical practices in which silence is used much more by some instruments than others. In those musics that employ the term "rhythm section" bassists and drummers are often expected to play structural sounds (harmonies and/or pulses) non-stop from the beginning to the end of each piece. This is not so much a matter of aesthetics as of responsibility. In much jazz, for example, the rhythm section is largely responsible for delineating the musical structure, and its members are expected to sustain it throughout a piece. Thus, when they begin exploring free improvisation, they often feel that it is their responsibility as "structural anchors, to maintain a sonic presence at every moment. Often, learning that in free improvisation assuming a structural role is a matter of choice rather than an obligation, and that it can be taken on by any member of the group, they will be relieved simply to be able to stop making sound. Discovering this freedom, however, is not automatically synonymous with knowing how to manage their silences in ways that enrich the group dynamic.

Score-based musical practice often dictates what sounds and what silences are to be played, and where they are to be located within the piece. Musicians whose background lies mainly in these sorts of music will inevitably learn to make their own choices about sound when they begin improvising freely, but they may find little guidance when it comes to their uses of silence.

Finally, there are two elements that can block the use of silence, both of which can best be understood from a psychological viewpoint.

First, there is the matter of how one makes contact with one's own creative flow. Each artist has their own ritual for accessing parts of the mind that are generally unconscious but can be determinant in any sort of creative process. For some musicians, this can take the form of bodily involvement with the instrument itself. A certain level of intensity in how one actually operates one's instrument can open the doors of the unconscious, helping to propitiate a form of improvisatory playing in which parts of the conscious mind actually shut down. This can produce amazing and shockingly intense music, but its roots in the physical intensity of instrumental operation present the risk that introducing silences, which calls for far less physical involvement with the instrument, may cause those doors to close. Over the course of this text, we have emphasized the importance of *playing* silences, but while doing so can be surprisingly intense in the sonic sense, it will generally be much less so in the instrumental one.

Equally psychological is the anxiety produced by the erroneous notion of a binary relationship with the audience, which can even affect one's perception of the duration of silences. We may call this "delivery-boy syndrome."

Some of the musics that involve little or no improvisation[17] have the advantage of providing the musicians involved with a relatively clear script (generally a score but sometimes a similarly defined work from oral tradition) of what they are to play when they get on stage. The amount of rehearsal required to insure a successful, or at least competent, performance will contribute to their confidence. This can be quite positive, but it does have one possible danger: understanding one's relationship to the audience as binary, that is, as "us and them."[18] From that perspective, the musicians can inadvertently take on the role of a highly skilled delivery boy, who comes out on stage and *delivers* a carefully rehearsed *musical package* to the audience.[19]

This becomes clear when musicians trained (often quite rigorously) in that sort of practice come out on stage to improvise and realize that *they don't have any package to deliver.* There sits the audience, eager to receive what they have prepared for them, and there stands the musician, with *nothing prepared.* The anxiety involved is often manifest.

Of course, the brain is an organ, and the presence of adrenaline in the quantities produced by that sort of anxiety will clearly affect it. Specifically, it will alter the perception of time. A text published in the scientific journal *Plos One* in 2007 concluded that the experience of a period of time is recalled as approximately 36% longer when the brain is flooded with adrenaline (Stetson et al 2007, n.p.). When musicians feel they are supposed to deliver something to the audience, the combination of adrenaline-producing anxiety and the resultant distorted perception of time can lead them to play much more densely than they would in a relaxed situation (for example, when there is no audience). If we apply this idea to silences, which are often used deliberately to produce expectation, the pressure of hearing these silences as considerably longer than they really are can easily cause improvisers to shorten them accordingly, to feel a pressing need to fill them, or simply to avoid them as unnecessarily uncomfortable.

One possible solution to this situation is to discard the binary conception of the improviser's relation to the audience. Rather than seeing oneself as there to deliver something to an expectant audience, an improviser may ask: what do we all share? The answer is *listening,* which is a fundamental aspect of musical continuity. What improvisers and audience share throughout the music is that both are listening and both will inevitably be surprised by what they hear. Sharing this listening, and the surprises it produces, is what brings all together to form a closed circuit whose energy is generated by listening. This idea also has a visual corollary. When improvisers meet to play together without an audience, they tend to set up in a circle, which benefits both listening and seeing each other. On stage, that same group will set up as a semicircle, inviting the audience to complete the circle, participating with the energy—clearly felt by the musicians—of their listening.

IV. RECORDED SILENCES

Listening to recordings may give us some sense of how silences work *within* the music, but almost no sense of framing silences since, in a recording, the expectant silence that precedes an improvisation and the silence of repose and applause (if it is a recording of a live performance rather than a studio recording) have often been edited out of the final version. It that sense, it is important to understand

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[17] There are probably none in which there is no improvisation at all, but there are certainly many in which the musicians may be unaware that the interpretive leeway needed to comply with the composer's wishes actually involves a certain amount of improvisation.

[18] As Iyer Vijay observes, "the presupposition of a division between music and listener, between performer and audience, stems from a fundamentally non-participatory understanding of music, which runs counter to most anthropological evidence about how music tends to function in culture" (Iyer 2016, *intentions* paragraph 3).

[19] This idea did not disappear with the transition from an "expressive" paradigm to an "experiential" one mentioned in our earlier reference to Susan Sontag's two myths about art (page X). According to Alperson, although "in the 20th and 21st centuries the notion of artistic *expression* gave way to the idea [of] *aesthetic experience*... the emphasis on the production of objects presented to subjects... has remained at the center of the discussion" (Alperson, "Anglophone Philosophy of Music and the Musical Object, paragraph 3).

that, just as a photo of a friend is not a friend but rather a photo[20], so too, a recording of an improvisation is not an improvisation, it is a recording, that is, an archive. Most importantly, it is an incomplete and highly subjective archive. A sound recording does not allow us to see the musicians playing. It does not allow us to see where they are playing, nor does it offer the same balance between their sounds and silences and the resonance of the venue itself, as microphones are almost always placed in order to capture as directly as possible the sounds being made by the musicians, which is, itself, a criterion of exclusion. Even a video of an improvisation imposes limitations due to the placement of the camera and microphone(s) and how both respond to the resonance of the space, how well it is lighted, and so on. And those are only the limitations associated with how the concert is recorded. If we add the fact that the resultant archive may well be reproduced in a space with its own noises, resonances and distractions, on a telephone, a computer with tiny loudspeakers, or some similarly limited technology, we can understand that, while it may transmit an astonishing amount of information, subtleties will inevitably be lost, and how the improvisers work with silence may very well be one of them. Most of all, there is an inevitable transformation of process into product, into an impostor of the moment. As Henri Lefebvre put it, "through a kind of magic, images change what they capture (and claim to reproduce) into things, and presence into simulacra, the present, the *this*... Parodies of presence" (Lefebvre 2004, 23).

We must also take into account our own attitudes to silence when witnessing a live improvisation as opposed to how we deal with silence in a sound recording or a video. In the case of a live improvisation, our attitude will be shaped by a variety of factors, two of which merit particular attention: first, social norms regarding how to listen to a concert; second, our own familiarity with improvised music. In the case of a sound recording or a video, we must consider the degree to which our constant exposure to mass media has shaped our way of looking and listening to transmitted or archival sounds and images. As French anthropologist and sociologist David Le Breton has observed, the "unending flow" of the mass media

> considers silence its declared enemy: not a single empty moment should occur on television or radio. No instance of silence should be allowed to slip into what should always be an uninterrupted flow of words or music [intended] to ward off the fear of finally being heard (Le Breton 1997, 9).

It therefore stands to reason that under the onslaught of mass media we learn to contemplate it as it is delivered, that is, to expect an absolute minimum of silence. How does the first sound of an improvisation affect us at a concert, coming as it does after a sometimes prolonged expectant silence? Can it possibly have the same weight or effect on us when contemplating a video that has deliberately been edited to start just seconds before that first sound is emitted? Can it possibly excite us the same way when listening to a sound recording that has, at best, 4 seconds (often just 2) of digital silence before the first sound? As Lefebvre observes,

> the quasi-suppression of… waiting periods (by the media) amplifies the present, but these media give only reflections and shadows… you are not there; your present is composed of simulacra; the image before you simulates the real, drives it out, is not there, and the simulation of the drama, the moment, has nothing dramatic about it (Lefebvre 2004, 31-32).

Just how much our understanding of the dynamics active in an improvisation can be misrepresented in a recording became especially clear to me several years ago during the second set of a concert in which I had the pleasure to participate, although almost entirely in silence.

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[20] As photographer Diane Arbus put it: "a photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know." (Schjeldahl, 2005. n.p.)

> Some time ago I was invited to play with the improvising duo of Marta Sainz (voice) and Laurent Paris (percussion). They decided to play a first set in duo, with me joining them for the second set. Everything went swimmingly during the sound check before the concert, and I left my instrument on my chair, ready and waiting for my participation. The first set went well; Marta and Laurent have a good rapport and the music was full of energy, with quite expressive rhythms and gestures. After a brief break, I joined them on stage for the second set. The surprise came when I began playing, only to discover that my instrument was not responding. Rather than transmitting what I was playing to the loudspeakers, my sound card was entirely silent except for two extremely quiet clicks every three or four seconds. Thus, my initial contribution to the music was limited to a gentle "click-click"—inaudible to the audience and almost inaudible to my colleagues—over which I had no control whatsoever. For all practical purposes, I was playing an almost uninterrupted silence.
>
> Neither of my fellow musicians realized that I might be having a problem with my instrument (a laptop that had never given me problems before), so to them, it seemed like my silence was deliberate. In fact, after the set was over, Marta told me her first reaction had been to think 'what an extreme proposal!' So, thinking that I was, indeed, set on playing such a long silence, they began improvising very softly and with long silences as well. That made the second set entirely different than the quite lively first one, and it generated a much more contained mood.
>
> Of particular interest to me was the fact that it was not specifically the silence but rather my silent presence on stage that contributed to the musical decisions taken by my colleagues. Let us imagine, for a moment, that a sound recording of this concert had been made. Listeners to it would hear a first set in duo, filled with energy and emotion, and a second set, *also in duo,* with much more contained energy, lower dynamic levels and so on. There would be no evidence at all of my silent presence on stage, which was largely responsible for my two colleagues' musical decisions (Matthews 2022. 84-85)

Am I suggesting we stop listening to recordings of improvised music or that we no longer watch videos of concerts by our favorite improvisers? Not at all. But let us not lose sight of what we are doing and how it affects our understanding and reception of the contents of what is, in fact, an archive, not an improvisation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Among the 46 mostly undated scraps of paper[21] on which Marcel Duchamp (another artist who, like Hölderlin and Rimbaud, chose the "eloquent silence" of ceasing to make his art) unfolded his concept of the *inframince,* is one with the idea that a barrier is simultaneously what separates two different things and what joins them. As we have seen in these pages, silence can do exactly that in an improvisation, but its temporal nature also makes it a very useful tool for working with expectations, a fundamental part of understanding many types of music, including much that is freely improvised. Most of all, however, silence seems like a sculpting tool, a way of making significant space, of shaping listening and expectations, of generating proportions through an often surprising dialogue of presence and absence. And like many other sculpting tools, it is sharp enough to be dangerous in careless, inexpert or simply tired hands. When used well, it can generate contours, transitions, surprises, anticipation, closure and most of all—a most apposite word to close with—listening.

Wade Matthews
Madrid, July 2022

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[21] Now in the *Cabinet d'Art Graphique* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

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