

Some notes on ‘silences’

Most of what I would write in some notes on this piece I included in the ‘intent’ section of the score. This feels markedly different from other pieces that I have written in which I have kept the score as pared down as possible to facilitate open-ended readings, and to separate a site of invitation and a site of reflection, consideration and intent. It felt important to include the ‘intent’ of the score, perhaps because it seemed absolutely possible that the intent would not translate from the score itself. Which somewhat undermines my assertion that pieces should ‘stand by themselves’. I still feel that the score—inclusive of the ‘intention’—feels very open-ended, functioning more as an invitation to explore rather than a set of prescriptive instructions.

This piece took partial inspiration from Cage’s *4’33”* as well as Craig Dworkin’s *Unheard Music* (Dworkin, 2009) which catalogues a number of ‘silent’ pieces and describes them in some detail. For me, the pieces in Dworkin’s book fall into a number of rough categories:

1. silent scores, or scores with silent sections (John Cage, Alphonse Allais, Mike Batt, (Leif Elggren, Per Jonsson and Kent Tankred), Yves Klein, Peter Våhi, Mieko Shiomi, Ervín Schulhoff, Baudouin Oosterlynck, Vasilii Gnedov);
2. recordings of ‘silence’ (Pavel Büchler, Ken Friedman, David Hoyland, Jonty Semper, Reynolds, Pavel Büchler, Christopher DeLaurenti, The Phantom Pregnancies, Matt Rogalsky, TAC, Jens Brand, John Levack Drever, Jacob Kirkegaard);
3. recordings that leave only the silence, (Nick Thurston, Language Removal Service, George Maciunas, Alvin Lucier);
4. pieces or recordings that we cannot hear (Stephen Vitiello, James Whitehead, Jarrod Fowler, Tellium Group, Linear Regressionists, Coil, *o);
5. pieces that consists of noise or sound, but lack agency (Christian Marclay, W Mark Sutherland, Steve Reich, Matmos, Coil, Institut für Feinmotorik, Richard Eigner, Joseph Beuys, Ulrichs, Braco Dimitrijevic, Nick Thurston);
and
6. recordings of sounds not usually heard (Haco, Mattain and Taco Unami).

None of these pieces compose with different silences sitting against each other, or explore the contexts that *contribute* to the silences that they consists of or encompass (though some explore the context of one particular context).

My interest in ‘silences’ feels markedly different to most of these pieces in that it explores the emotional, performative aspect of various silences *in context*. In some ways, the focus lies on the context, most of which the performers must create in their improvisation (or devising). Presumably, the “amusing, unexpected silence” has these qualities because of the sounds preceding it—in another context this “same silence” would have different qualities. In this sense, the score plays with ideas of presence and absence and the visceral, emotive experiences of players and audience in a way which many other silent pieces do not—either because they explore silence as a conceptual idea and/or in the abstract.

With this piece, I wish to queer the idea of silence as a transcendental signifier—even if that transcendental signifier signifies “nothing”. I wish to invite an exploration of the messy, context-ridden silences of actual performances. And to invite an exploration of these contexts to try and facilitate the kinds of silences that the score demands. In this way, the focus lies not on the silences but on the sounds that create (or facilitate) them and a foregrounding of these contexts as spaces of potential for manifesting a wide-variety of silences that ‘sound differently’ even though, out of context, they might ‘sound the same’.

Bibliography

Dworkin, C. (2009). Unheard Music: Information as Material. Retrieved from <http://www.informationasmaterial.com/>