

## Abstract

Silence is a negative term denoting absence of sounds. However, our ordinary way of speaking about silence suggests that the latter is some perceptible reality, ‘something’ perceived. But is it legitimate to say that we hear silence – absence of sound? What implications about perception does such a way of speaking have? The aim of the present thesis is to analyse these questions. The analysis unfolds along three axes.

The first part of the thesis reconstructs the problem of perception of silence in John Cage’s ‘silent piece’ *4’33”* in context of its conceptual origin, Cage’s aesthetics, and reflection of his work in his written texts. Hence the introduction of the problem of perceptible silence in recent thought. It discusses the thesis that we cannot hear absolute silence, not even in the soundproof chamber, and considers the question whether it is adequate to say that we can hear silence if we expect to hear music, but the music does not sound – a question that was raised by the premiere of *4’33”*.

The second part of the thesis scrutinizes the position according to which we can directly hear/listen to silence which is the absence of sounds, namely the arguments of Roy Sorensen and Ian Phillips. Emphasis is put on Sorensen’s theory since it is in direct contrast to Cage’s position (though Sorensen and Cage both share an empirical and physicalist understanding of perception), and also – even especially – because it is based on the causal theory of perception that counts among the major theories of perception in recent Anglo-American philosophy. This part analyses the methodological basis of the arguments put forward by Sorensen and Phillips, and asks general questions concerning definitions of perception and of the relation between perception and mind. It shows that it is not correct to say that we hear silence in the sense of the absence of sounds, and presents arguments for why it is so.

The third part of the thesis examines the perception of silence as gap between sounds. The issue is developed along two lines based on Leibniz’s analysis of conscious perception and on Husserl’s analysis of time-perception respectively. These two lines can be summarized by these questions: (i) How does it come to that we realize (are aware of) something? (ii) Can we perceive sounds as limited wholes on the basis of time-perception? Finally, the third part analyses the distinction between the two conceptions of silence: privation of sound (i.e. term referring to an experienced phenomenon of gap between sounds) and absence of sound (i.e. negation, form of thought that cannot be literally perceptually experienced). The conceptual reflection on their difference and possible relations leads to final consideration of the metaphorical basis of our ordinary talk about silence in which the word silence refers to a perceived ‘something’.