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SILENCE AND SOUND AS INTERRELATED PHENOMENA: THE EXISTENTIAL SEMIOTIC NATURE OF LISTENING AND A METHODOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCE

SUMMARY: This study applies existential semiotics to examine the semiotic nature of listening, providing a novel framework to understand silence and sound as interrelated phenomena. Building a theoretical and methodological framework by interpreting the existential semiotic concept of *situation* and *Z*-model in a new way; silence is examined through the lens of Latin American minimalist music. By presenting a case study analyzing Oscar Bazán's *Del Silencio*, this work positions listening as a transformative act, bridging the existential, artistic, and semiotic dimensions of human experience. With the help of this methodological exploration, it is argued that, when listening is taken from an existential perspective, silence and sound must be understood as an interrelated phenomenon rather than two distinct elements. In turn, it can bring methodological developments through modalities whereby silence can be analyzed as a dynamic situation of a space of possibilities.

KEYWORDS: existential semiotics, sound, silence, auditory perception, Latin American Minimalism, modalities.

1. Introduction

Listening is a significant semiotic connection with the world that involves more than just receiving auditory stimuli. It is a dynamic and immersive act that involves the listener in a relational process wherein they construct meaning with

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their surroundings, going beyond basic auditory awareness. Auditory sense is an active process in which subject and object, sound and silence, and presence and absence interact to generate meaning.

This article examines how listening can be seen as a semiotic method for understanding sound and silence as interrelated phenomena, drawing on existential semiotics. This piece places listening in a larger existential framework and highlights its function in bringing human attention to the fundamental structures of the world that has a deeper connection with cultural, social, and existential dimensions, emphasizing its ability to bridge “internal” and “exterior” realities. This article’s examination of listening is a relational construct highlights the importance of silence as a fundamental constituent of semiosis, as a modality of the listening experience. Here, silence—often understood as the lack of sound—is reframed as a dynamic space of possibilities where resistance and interpretation meet.

The semiotic approach seeks to deconstruct the phenomenon and identify a common situation between the subject and object where the specific attribution of meaning as silence can arise. Its main goal is to interpret this complex phenomenon without establishing a definition because silence escapes it. Recommendations for a single way of listening or a definitive viewpoint are distant from this study.

The existence of sound is not contingent on its interpretation. The sound we hear is an active, dynamic process created by a continuous dialogue between a subject and its surroundings. This inherent relational characteristic provides various interpretation options for the intricate relationships between the situation as a soundscape and what we perceive as silence in a particular circumstance.

According to Salomé Voegelin (2010, p. 3), the auditory universe is filtered and shaped by our daily life soundscapes’ active interaction and co-creation. Silence in this context does not prevent hearing or listening; it actively contributes to creating our auditory sensation, in which aesthetic and ideological bonds extend beyond it and play a role in the multi-layered process of semiosis.

Since the mid-twentieth century, the phenomenon of silence has gained more attention in the arts and in the humanities. The increased attention comes from sound art and music artworks frequently using silence as a resource and as a particular sound material, consequently improving the notion’s interpretations, allowing silence to be gradually accepted as a listening modality rather than only as a verbal act.

This change in perception is linked to the widespread one-sided view that silence is the absence of sound, a void, or complete stillness. There is never a total lack of sound material, as John Cage (1961, pp. 12–13) pointed out in 1951 when he entered the anechoic room at Harvard University. Instead, we are constantly talking about a certain meaning attribution, a connection to the phenomena related to the sound itself.

According to Voegelin, we tend to create communication links between the many symbolic constructions that each person creates with the occurrence of

silence. Additionally, this produces a potential language and future sociability that reflects the will and the endeavor to communicate more accurately than a pre-established code (2010, p. 87).

2. Listening and the Semiotics of Silence

Cage's writings offer a powerful illustration of this. Famously, his '4'33'' turns the lack of a composed sound into an invitation for listeners to interact with the soundscape of their surroundings. Cage's experience in Harvard's anechoic room, where he learned that body sounds are unavoidable, emphasizes how impossible complete silence as stillness or void is. As Cage noted: "There is always something to see, something to hear" (Cage, 1961, p. 12); auditory experience is relational and contingent. Silence in '4'33'' is transformed into a place of heightened awareness where listeners are encouraged to actively contribute to meaning-making. Thus, sound and silence are interrelated phenomena existing within a dynamic continuum whose interconnection challenges their common binary opposition.

Similarly, the semiotic potential of silence as a form of cultural resistance is explored in the works of minimalist¹ composers. Silence challenges conventional Western musical paradigms by symbolizing suppression and resilience in pieces such as *todavía no* (1979) by Graciela Paraskevaïdis (for an extended exploration on this topic, see Aharonián, 2012; Nabón Hernández, 2024). Through static soundscapes and extreme austerity, Paraskevaïdis establishes generative listening spaces where silence serves as a medium for political critique and collective memory. These pieces highlight the relational aspect of silence and show how it can express meaning in particular historical and cultural situations:

¹ Minimalism and minimalism are understood here as specific compositional techniques for austere music in the context of two different groups of composers. The former represents a group of composers all around Latin America, with Coriún Aharonián and Graciela Paraskevaïdis as the precursors of the term, and the latter constitutes a group of composers such as La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich, from the United States, and Louis Andriessen, Michael Nyman, and Gavin Bryars as the representatives from European Minimalism. Minimalism has more connections aesthetically with the *musique pauvre*. Although Minimalist composers explicitly reject both conceptions of American and European Minimalism schools, its roots in the idea of dialogue between scanty elements that imply absent ones make a strong connection with *musique pauvre*. It seems apt to consider here *musique pauvre* or *austere music* as the umbrella term for describing a more general aesthetic of sparse music and leave *Minimalism* and *Minimalism* as terms referring to the specific schools and composers already mentioned. In this regard, both Minimalism and Minimalism, referring to specific schools and works, partake in the more general aesthetic trend of *austere music*. More on minimize in Latin-American music comments Luciana Natalia Orellana Lanús in her article *Aproximación al 'minimalismo' latinoamericano* (2020).

[...] when the musician works on a particular aspect of sound or suspends his emission on one or all instruments to propose listening to moments of silence, as does Anton Webern or, in another way, John Cage. [...] When the writer leaves a page blank where the reader expects an answer; if he abandons his characters in the secrecy of his inner deliberations, forgetting for a moment the complex dominion he has over them; or if he frequently uses suspensive points or ellipsis, as in Japanese literature; or also, if he uses veiled writing as Camus does in *The Stranger*. The aesthetic figures of silence are numerous. The painting also contributes its own with the symbolic equivalents of monochrome (Klein), of the void in which the form floats, or of the creation of an evocative atmosphere of silence specific to the situation described or as an addition to give it a metaphysical resonance (De Chirico, Hopper, etc.). (Le Breton, 2009, p. 56)

The relationality of silence is further emphasized by Le Breton (2009), who characterizes it as a phenomenon that appears in interpersonal encounters. According to this perspective, silence is a communication act influenced and shaped by social and cultural forces rather than just being a void. We discover silence's function as a structural component in the semiotics of listening by analyzing it via this relational lens. Listeners use the interaction of presence and absence to create meaning as silence becomes a place for negotiation, mostly called "empty space".

Coriún Aharonián (2012) also noted that many musical compositions in the Latin American minimalist movement used aesthetic figures that alluded to silence, pointing out that this was a common theme among them. Aharonián claims that composers today are no longer afraid of nothingness:

[The composers have] managed to understand the expressive musical process not as a sonorous mass that from time to time breathes, but as a wide space where silence ceases to be negation to become affirmation, in a sonorous space charged with expressiveness. This conquest has an essential significance as a cultural symbol. (Aharonián, 2012, p. 100)

As interest in silence as an artistic/musical phenomenon has grown over the past 60 years, numerous authors have developed various approaches to discern its fundamental features. Some significant studies include those by Kurzon (2007), who developed a typology of silence in social interactions; Bruneau (1973) also identifies a taxonomy; Jensen (1973) illustrates the various purposes of silence in communication; and Johannsen (1974), who also identifies the purposes of silence in counseling and psychotherapy by providing a list of twenty possible meanings of silence. Without delving into the ontological side of things, all of these works enhance one another and provide a more comprehensive map of typologies and functions of the phenomena. In his book *Silence, The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance* (1980), Bernard Dauenhauer delves deeply into the ontological aspects of silence from a philosophical perspective, highlighting it as an active performance that involves "abstaining from some previously engaged in stream of experience" (1980, p. 101).

It appears plausible that three contingent and dynamic features will continue to exist in the signification framework and entwine the various perspectives. One has to do with how the environment and its dynamic degree of sound intensity interact with how the body's sounds are perceived; in other words, the body enhances the hearing experience. A second is associated with the subject intention, when the internal desire to create connections between sounds is retracted to listening in a scenario where the relational possibilities are nearly equal in likelihood, akin to an entropic scenario. Lastly, a third one concerns a possible desire and endeavor to share the fleeting experience. The three coexist and enhance one another in a dynamic and contingent specific setting; this list does not imply any sequence of occurrence.

This interpretative process evolved into generative listening in the context of communication, as demonstrated by the musical examples examined in this essay. It transformed a silent situation into a source of sound for musical expression and acquired distinct aesthetic and ideological ties with the considered context.

The compositions of minimalist composers show how silence may challenge normative expectations and make listeners re-evaluate their assumptions about silence and sound. They question prevailing cultural narratives by remaining silent and providing a different framework for comprehending memory, identity, and resistance. This viewpoint emphasizes how crucial listening is as a structural tool for comprehending soundscape dynamics and symbolic constructions.

Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics introduces a structural method for analysis via the Z-model. The subjectivities of *Moi* (the internal self) and *Soi* (the exterior, socialized self) are at the heart of this approach. They interact dialectically to generate semiotic events (Tarasti, 2000). I argue, within the framework of this theory, that listening functions as a mediator between the *Moi* and *Soi*, bridging the gap between one's "internal" view and the "outside" world. The interplay between these subjectivities emphasizes how listening is a relational semiotic act in which meaning is negotiated within a dynamic space of presences and absences in a specific *situation* (for a more detailed exploration, see Nabon, 2024, pp. 39–46). We can discover later how hearing can negotiate the complex relationship between cultural background and subjective interpretation by looking at it through the prism of modalities.

3. The Notion of Situation as an Analytical Tool

Given that a sign can be understood in part as an act performed by a subject and that the body is the first entity involved regarding any theorizing (music, text, and phenomenon), the existential semiotic concept of situation serves as a category that suggests that music, rather than existing as a fixed object, appears as a specific dynamic-sound environment. In this sense, it *is understood as* "a continuous intermingling of happenings that represent various modes of being in the real contexts in which they occur. [...] Situation is that part of the world with which one enters into a relationship" (Tarasti, 2002, p. 72).

In addition to providing a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions of musical semiosis, communication, and signification, the concept of situation serves as a bridge between the semiotics of music, cognitive musicology, and, as Juha Ojala (2023) noted, the 4E interdisciplinary paradigm, which encompasses “cognitive views of subject and mind as a brain/body-in-the-world system” and embodied, enactive, embedded, and extended cognition (Tarasti, 2023, p. 260).

The events, acts, and actions that create and sustain musical situations must be closely examined when discussing musical discourse. According to Tarasti (2002), a situation can be considered space. This relationship appears applicable because minimalist composers typically tried to develop sound structures rather than traditional harmonic structures and linear-syntagmatic chains of sounds.

Situation might be easily identified with a space: the space at a given moment as perceived by a given actor. In music, situation always implies an actor; no situation can exist without an actor somehow pertaining to it. Therefore, what is crucial for a musical work is the way it draws listeners into the situation and forces them to participate in it. (Tarasti, 2002, p. 76)

Understanding the idea of an actor in musical terms as an actor-theme—typically associated with the idea of a developing motif or a cell that serves as a minimum unit before becoming a structural carrier of future formal development—is crucial for my research here in terms of methodology.

It suggests a deeper understanding of kinetic energy and cannot be reduced to a melodic cell or a single harmonic relationship. Ernst Kurth (1886–1946), a Swiss music theorist, is the foundation for translating the actor topic in Tarasti’s theory (2002) into musical discourse. In its seminal notion of music as motion, Kurth wrote about kinetic energy (1991), with examples referring to melodic content. As Tarasti stated, the idea “revolutionizes the traditional criteria of segmentation” of the musical discourse, but it may also be applied more broadly.

Kurth’s theory accordingly revolutionizes traditional criteria of segmentation; and using it one can also treat music that analysts have generally had trouble segmenting, such as electronic music, freely pulsatile music, “sound mass” compositions for example, some works by Ligeti and Penderecki), minimalism, spectral music, and computer works. (Tarasti, 1994, p. 100)

Tarasti noted that “the energy which flows through melodic lines influences all single tones in a melody, which we experience as a closed whole, a linear unit” (1994, p. 100). In this sense, music may be analytically divided into movement phases constrained by their kinetic energy. The author also noted that kinetic energy is distinct from the rhythmic and metric impulses of music. I, from my view, understand kinetic energy regarding music as the interplay between the inner and outer tensions of sound material, i.e., the inner tensions as horizontal (melodic) and vertical (harmonic), and the outer tensions as the relationship between background and foreground and center/s and periphery/ies, even though

metric and rhythmic impulses are crucial in identifying the kinetic energy units that Tarasti refers to as kinemes and can also form an independent kineme.

This notion is close to Roland Barthes's somatheme (1985), which is conceptualized with regard to music. Somatheme is a concept influenced by Kristeva's (1984) pheno-text and geno-text distinction, where the latter:

[...] Reveals transfers of drive energy that can be detected in phonematic devices (such as the accumulation and repetition of phonemes or rhyme) and melodic devices (such as intonation and rhythm). [...] The genotext organises a space in which the subject will be generated as such by a process of facilitations and marks [...] it is a process, which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral and non-signifying (devices that do not have a double articulation). (Kristeva, 1984, p. 86)

The social, cultural, and linguistic restrictions make up the pheno-text, which facilitates communication. In his article *The Grain of the Voice*, Barthes (1985), motivated by these concepts, applied them to music and introduced the idea of a *somatheme*, which refers to musical figures of the body that relate both the physical and metaphorical musical gestures.

In this sense, Moil (being-in-myself) is closely tied to Kristeva's idea of semiotic *Chora* (Kristeva, 1977, p. 57). Tarasti refers to the same type of being Moil (2018, pp. 40–41) as kinetic energy and *Chora* in his book *Musical Semiotics—A Discipline, its History and Theories, Past and Present* (2018).

The inner tensions of sound material regarding the relationship between consonance and dissonance are treated within a hierarchical system of roles and functions in a set of pitches regarding one central tone (center/periphery relationship), which is thought to be the point of release of these tensions within the tonic pitches. This is the case in actoralized music, where the actor-themes or motifs are defined and constitute structural parts in developing more complex melodies and harmony. Accordingly, various tension and release processes evolve over time, and the internal relationship between the horizontal (successivity) and vertical (simultaneity) tensions in terms of consonance and dissonance, their temporal distribution, and their tensional relationships with other kinemes is what gives the kineme its unity. Because of this, for instance, we can discern various transpositions or variations of a motif or melody, where the timbre (as perceived by another instrument) may change, the pitches may change, and the melody may be transposed to different registers, but there is an iconicity in its internal kinetic tensions that enables its recognition as a whole, as a unity.

The underlying tensions around the consonance and dissonance of the sound material are the stressed medium to push or draw the listener into a musical scenario, even though depth relationships (background and foreground) and center/periphery play a significant role in actoralized music. The foundation of narrativity in music is the fundamental notion that dissonance seeks a release in consonance or additional elaboration; as a result, the musical situation is viewed as an act or an event.

However, situations like acts and events cannot be reduced to music that can be examined from a narrative perspective or to actoralized music. It is not necessary to understand the link between consonance and dissonance as the pursuit of greater elaboration or the release of the latter in the former, even though, as I have stated previously, a situation always implies an actor, this actor being defined as a specific embodiment of a kineme. As with most avant-garde music, the implied listener is expected to create the situation in de-actoralized music.

As a result, without defining an actor in musical terms, an act in the musical discourse of de-actoralized music can exist as an act of the implied composer. As it refers to the actor-subject relationship, subject-less music, especially in minimalism, suggests that motifs, melodies, and harmonies are not regarded as hierarchical entities. As a result, the implied composers are not articulating actor-themes that behave differently; rather, they are articulating and acting within the material's kinetic energy, bringing the implied listener closer to the aural perception where the implied listeners are expected to project their significations, thereby creating musical situations, rather than placing them in a specific situation within a coded system of tension's relationships.

An event must be differentiated from an act based on activity or passivity. An act is to interfere with the normal sequence of events. An event is a passive circumstance, while an act is an active one. An act can generate and be generated by an event, but is not reduced to it because the intervention might maintain the status quo. An event always implies change; it occurs in the condition of affairs. As a result, Tarasti (2002) distinguished between three categories of musical facts: events, where something occurred; processes, where something is occurring; and states of affairs, where something occurs. These realities are interconnected and coexist. As previously said, an event invariably entails change, whether within the facts or from the current situation to a process or vice versa.

Unlike an event, an act cannot be identified as a change in the world. Rather, to act is in a sense always to intervene in the course of affairs. For example, to write a composition or to perform it is undoubtedly an act. There are both individual and general acts. For instance, a general act could be the performance of *Les adieux*, and the corresponding general change (event) would be that the sonata was performed at all. An individual act would be that "Claudio Arrau played *Les adieux* in Rome in 1970", the individual event being that it was performed in that year in Rome. The logical difference between acts and events lies in their activity or passivity: an act always requires an acting agent. Acts have to be distinguished from actions. It is, for instance, an act to perform *Les adieux*, but it is an action to be able to perform it. Events occur and processes continue; acts cause the occurrence of events, and actions make processes continue. (Tarasti, 2002, p. 77)

Acts are distinct from actions since they are the real activities a single subject performs in a particular situation. These specific actions can serve as a collection of institutionalized practices or techniques that, for example, the implied composer possesses in a particular composition context. In the case of the implied

listener, they may be related to the hermeneutical devices or competence required for the de-codification of the musical situation.

For example, a predetermined traditional musical form, as a general scheme, “serves as situations for the occurrence of certain things” (Tarasti, 2002, p. 78). This is because a situation is seen as the potential possibilities of relationships and space, which can be related to intertextuality. In this sense, it is necessary to distinguish between the actual scenario or the music as heard and the situation as a transcendental concept, such as a scheme, structure, idea, or grammar. While we are dealing with the music phenomenon as heard in the circumstance as act-signs (in Tarasti’s language), the prior situation as trans-signs may or may not be realized. According to Tarasti (2002), the situation encompasses both tangible and intangible indications, as well as “not only the remembrance of the choices, acts, and events that happened but also those that might have happened” (p. 79).

Another distinction that must be made while working with music settings is the difference between act-signs and event-signs, according to Tarasti (2002). Both categories belong to the transcendental realm, where the implied composers’ individual significations emerge from a break in the musical text in the case of the former (act-signs) and conform to the predetermined language constraints by following the “rules of communication” (Tarasti, 2002, p. 80) in the case of the latter (event-signs).

For clarity’s sake, I will illustrate these relationships as I see them in the context of this study. Acts that intervene in the current situation may be confused with act-signs that interpret earlier acts in the actual situation (listen to music, for example; note that the prefix act in act-signs does not refer to acts but to actual); these act-signs may be in accordance with or contrary to the pre-established code system; and lastly, the act-signs in the situation as a transcendental concept suggests the breaking of the system of pre-established codes to allow the flourishing of individual significance.

The Three Musical Facts:

State of affairs (something happens),

Processes (s. is happening),

Events (s. happened).

The Four Types of Elementary Acts (as intervening; von Wright’s logic of change symbols used by Tarasti, 1994, p. 85):

pTp —preserving of p

$-pTp$ —forbearance of p

$-pTp$ —doing of p

pTp —destruction of p

In the level of the musical text itself, a situation as actual; these acts are interpreted as

[act-signs]

In the level of a situation as transcendent, these act-signs bring two types of

[trans-signs]



[act-signs]
[event-signs]

Here is where I think the confusion arises; in this regard, I propose in this thesis to change the terms to:

[trans-signs]



[counter-current-signs]
[current-signs]

According to Tarasti (2002, p. 80), the intervening acts are interpreted as act-signs that make up the actual situation or music as heard. The actual situation as transcendence, which includes actions, schemes, norms, or grammar, brings two types of trans-signs: counter-current-signs (also known as act-signs) and current-signs (also known as event-signs).

Within musical facts, the elementary acts might induce either stasis moments, something that only “is”, or dynamic moments, which make things happen. Stasis moments are not directly associated with consonance and dynamic moments with dissonance. It is possible to create stasis moments by dissonance and vice versa, even if consonance implies stillness and dissonance motion in the internal interactions between sounds. The idea of a musical situation as kinetic space will be used to introduce these elements for analysis in the following section, along with an example of application as an analytical tool.

4. Semiotic Methodological Application: Musical Analysis

As a symbolic art form, music necessitates a collaborative approach in which listeners decode and co-create meaning. As proposed by Edward Pearsall (2006), the notion of *performative silence* emphasizes how silence is represented more by sound than by the lack of it. It is impossible to achieve absolute silence from an acoustic point of view, but it is possible to suspend meaning or significance at a semantic level.

In music, silence can be expressed not only by pauses, articulations, and endings but also by musical textures that forgo certain linear elements or contingencies between sounds, that is, the feeling or auditory guide that creates expectations about how certain sounds will affect other sounds in relationships that suggest a sequential order. Here, I explain a concept closely related to Leonard Meyer's more general notion of *tendencies* (1967, p. 24). These tendencies become conscious and play a significant role in the meaning-making process of musical discourse when the normal course of the pattern is disrupted, or their final completion is inhibited.

The properties that control the hierarchical organization of music are related to these aspects of oriented processes, which include, among other things, melodic continuity and thematic functions, in which events proceed in a linear fashion; that is, one event appears to lead to another gradually. These features of the musical phenomena are determined by each person's level of acquaintance with particular stylistic conventions.

How these components interact within a given environment determines the content of any given occurrence of silent articulation in music. As we can see in many minimalist compositions, there is a choice to create a static spatial quality where texture and timbre become the main focus of attention for pieces that firmly do not pursue process-oriented, thematic purposes and/or occurrences that seem to address others progressively. In these circumstances, Barthes' concept of *degré zéro*, in which the author is released from "all bondage to a preordained state of language" (1967, p. 76) can be used to interpret music. When music is transformed into its structural arrangement and the first level of articulation, its semantic aspect remains silent: "[S]ilence is more than a void. Silence constitutes a dramatic presence in music similar to that of music at its most overtly discursive and plays an important, if not indispensable, role in the production of meaning" (Pearsall, 2006, p. 58). This *dramatic presence* creates a "musical situation" (Tarasti's term) where listeners can discern meanings and tensions woven into the interactions between sound and silence through the interpretation of the kinetic energy of the sound material.

This framework is enhanced by Meyer's (1961) anti-teleological art, which suggests that the lack of goal-oriented progression highlights the listener's experience of sound as distinct events. This is consistent with Tarasti's idea that musical settings are dynamic environments (situations) where tensions and releases occur. We can reveal the semiotic interaction between meaning, sound, and si-

lence by examining these places using the dimensions of simultaneity, successivity, and spatial depth.

Furthermore, the idea of mobile statics—a sound world that alters subtly without progressing teleologically—is introduced in the compositions of Paraskevaïdis (1979) and Bazán (1975–1977). In order to use this technique, the listener must completely immerse themselves in the aural environment, interacting with its complex relationships and textures. In these pieces, silence is more than just an absence; it is a force that guides and molds the listener’s attention.

5. The Kinetic Space of Musical Situations

The words employed are purely spatial, which alludes to a musical situation metaphorically when I describe the kineme as the interaction of inner and exterior tensions through its distribution time. The external tensions are: foreground/background and center/periphery, and the internal are: simultaneity (vertical) and successivity (horizontal). In this analysis of kinemes, time can be viewed as the duration or real rhythmic figures as its inner tension, and the metrics or broader rhythmic structure as its outside tension since space and time cannot be discussed independently.

Musical space can be articulated according to the following dimensions:

Table 1

Inner and Outer Tensions

<i>Inner</i>	<i>Outer</i>
Successivity Simultaneity	Center/Periphery Depth (Foreground/Background) Registers
Rhythmic Duration/Figures (Time)	Metrics/Temporal Structure (Time)

Note. Source: author’s own elaboration (Nabón Hernández, 2024, p. 56).

Since the tonal hierarchical system around a single tone and the fundamental relationship of the release of dissonance in consonance in this work and applied to minimalist music are not interpreted as “must be” relationships, I view center/periphery as belonging to outer space. Using dynamics, timbre, or another interaction of characteristics unrelated to the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of tension and release can create a center/periphery relationship.

Accordingly, kineme is defined as a specific arrangement of tensions and releases in the musical context that is acknowledged as a single entity that can either repeat itself or function as a structural point for additional growth. This idea is related to the notion of gesture proposed by Robert Hatten (2004). Furthermore, Hatten’s (2018) theory of virtual agency in music intimately relates to

the basic notion of a musical situation as a kinetic space involving motion. As he pointed out:

[...] Gesture may best be understood as part of a more cohesive and comprehensive theory of virtual agency in music. Stimulated by Seth Monahan's (2013) proposal of four levels of agency in the analytical discourse of music theorists, I propose four rather different levels to speculatively account for listeners' inferences of virtual agency in music. In order of most basic to most complex, these levels proceed from (1) unspecified virtual actants to (2) virtual human agents to (3) their ongoing actorial roles in lyric, dramatic, and/or narrative trajectories and, finally, to (4) their transformation as parts of a larger, singular consciousness or subjectivity that is negotiated by each individual listener. These four levels guide the coherent interaction of musical forces, gestures, topics and tropes, embodiment, identity, and the continuity of musical discourse. Furthermore, they lead to the expression (not merely representation) and ongoing development (not merely succession) of virtual emotions and thoughts, both as motivated by virtual situations in virtual worlds and as enriched by self-reflection. (Hatten, 2018, p. 17)

The spatial dimensions mentioned above are used to analytically express kinemes as specific configurations of tension and release. Additionally, because these tensions and releases suggest motion, we discuss the musical situation as a kinetic space. However, not all kinetic spaces involve the formation of kinemes; occasionally, we are dealing with articulating the material's kinetic energy as *Moi1* in the *Z*-model without the configuration of *Moi2* or its negation.

The musical situation as a kinetic space can be structurally separated into at least three types of spaces: a "point-like" space (Tarasti, 1994, p. 84) where we have positions of distinct sounds or pitches, which can be related to various hierarchical relationships based on the collection of pitches; a musical space that consists of transitions between these various "points", which Tarasti (1994) refers to as "musical vectors" or "lines"; and the third space as a whole field, including the distinction of the points and transitions, which are known as "articulated sonorous masses or timbres" (Tarasti, 1994, p. 85).

In summary, a musical situation as a kinetic space can be divided into at least three spaces, such as point-like, transitions, and articulated masses or timbres, ranging from the most general to the most specific. It can also be expressed in seven dimensions based on the inner and outer "micro-spaces" where the kinetic energy is realized: the inner "micro-spaces" are successivity, simultaneity, rhythmic duration, and figures; the outer "micro-spaces" are center/periphery, depth (the relationship between foreground and background), registers, metrics, and rhythmic structures.

The kinetic energy alone, without the formation of kinemes, constitutes the *Moi1/Soi4* in our model; the formation of kinemes implies *M2/S3*; the realization of kinetic energy or kinemes intrinsically related to their form over time is related to *M3/S2*; and, lastly, the memory of what was heard in relation to a more general musical spatial kinetic structure constitutes the realm of *M4/S1*. These

analytical articulations of the kinetic space enable me to comprehend the actions of the implied composers who follow the Z-model.

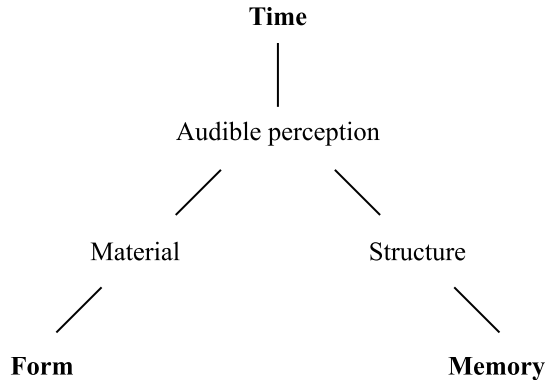
There is an inherent connection between the manifestation of the acoustic material that establishes a specific form or spatial materiality (through time) and the memory of what was heard, directly related to the existence or absence of a potential structure. Space and time cannot be thought of independently.

Music situations can be examined using an adapted model that sheds light on the inherent intersection between identity, artistic expression, and social-political implications, in addition to my model of triadic associations in the audible perception between material, form, structure, and memory.

In my previous master's studies in musical composition, I developed a diagram trying to show these relationships:

Figure 1

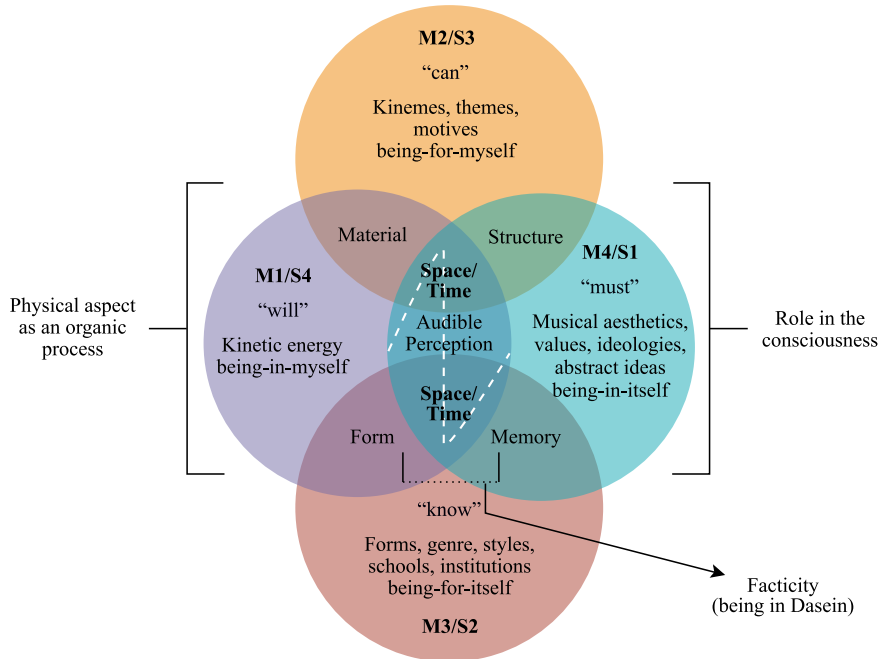
Diagram of Relationships in Musical Audible Perception



Note. Source: author's own elaboration (Nabón Hernández, 2024, p. 58).

Methodologically, I integrated this diagram with the Z-model of Tarasti, which I think can bring a clearer application to the music situation seen as a kinetic space (see Figure 2 on the next page).

Figure 2
Combined Model



Note. Source: author's own elaboration (Nabón Hernández, 2024, p. 59).

6. One Example: Oscar Bazán's *Del Silencio*

Music is considered a situation of kinetic space where the modalities are involved and can be replaced to interpret the implied composers' current or counter-current signs of acts regarding the analysis results. As an example, *Del Silencio*² is part of *Austeras* (1975–1977) by Oscar Bazán (1936–2005),³ a fifteen-piece cycle of free instrumentation that can be presented in any order, in its entirety, or performed in any partial selection.

The piece's outer spaces are fixed. The periphery in the tone "D" is an embroidery of a second interval, while the center in the tone "E" establishes the center/periphery relationship. The registers and depth relationship are fixed; the interpreter's choice must remain constant during the performance, even when the dynamics are not. Here, the chronometric density of the two notes "E" and "D"

² One can listen to this work at (Ivan Gabriel Perez Faccaro, 2020).

³ Argentinian composer, one of the most representative of Latin American Minimalism. More biographical information at Paraskevaïdis' analysis of *Austeras* at (Graciela Paraskevaïdis—Magma, n.d.).

as a foreground against a static “E” as the background—rather than the dynamics—marks the relationship between the foreground and background (Figure 3). The uncertain and limited inner temporal space of durations obscures the outward temporal space of metrics.

Figure 3

Del Silencio Score

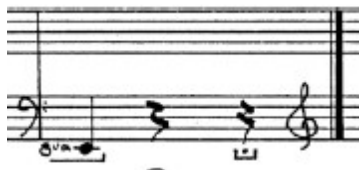
The image displays a musical score for 'Del Silencio' consisting of five systems of staves. Each system contains two staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings. The first four systems show a sequence of notes with increasing intervals and rests, while the fifth system shows a final, more complex rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a standard musical notation style with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature.

Note. Source: (Paraskevaïdis Aharonián Foundation Archive, n.d.).

The inner space of successivity shifts, creating a kineme that can be recognized as a melodic unit. This little motive begins to be broken up by increasingly frequent silences.

Silences that break up the kineme are replaced with the steady tone “E” in the background, which helps us recognize it. The silences that articulate and break the kineme with the background tone “E”, which replaces it in *Moi2*, have an intriguing relationship. The constant tone “E” is identified as silence, while the chrometric density of the motive gradually decreases due to the articulation of silences. This suggests, in my opinion, that silence is a fixed sound that surrounds.

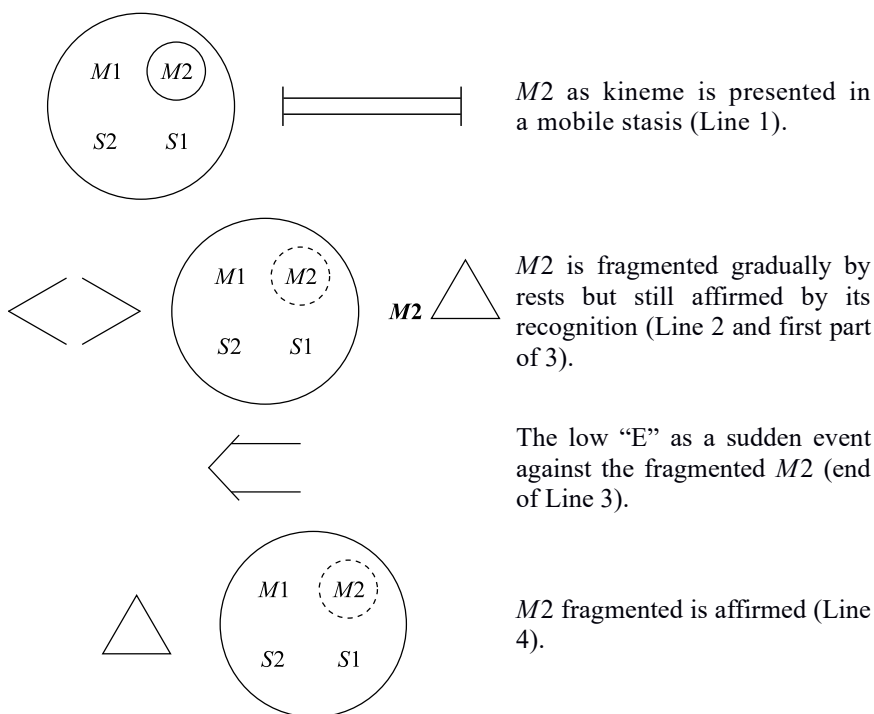
The arrival of a low “E”, which ends the continuous sound and produces a distinct silence, refutes this notion. Although its presence is phenomenologically distinct, it is represented in the score using the same symbols for its temporal articulation. Besides, the implied composer established a long wait in this silence after the low note (see Figure 4).

Figure 4*Fragment of the Score (Ending of the 3rd Line)*

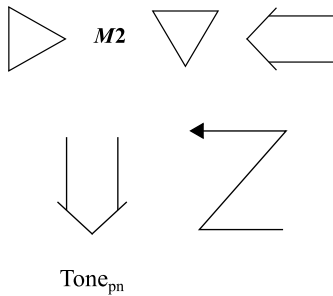
Note. (Paraskevaïdis Aharonián Foundation Archive, n.d.).

The abrupt cessation of the continuous sound associated with the earlier silences is viewed as a significant shift in auditory perception; it may be interpreted as the discovery of a new silence.

The Zemic analysis⁴ can be as follows:



⁴ For the extension and scope of this paper, further exploration on the graphics for the analysis is not explained here; for this, see (Nabon, 2024, pp. 59–67).



M2 is destroyed with the presence of rests and the last event of the low “E” (Lines 5 and 6).

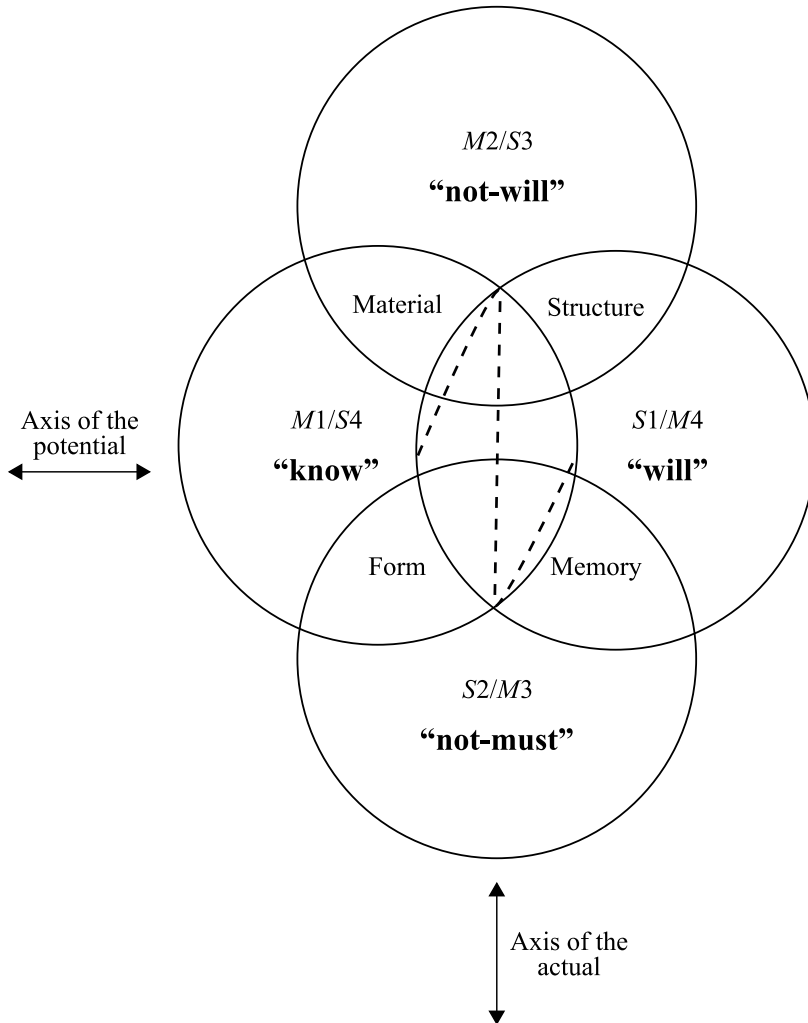
The gradually listening guidance in the experience can be interpreted as an act of trans-descent and embodiment; from the abstract situation of the kineme as a motive to its disintegration in an actual silence.

The Latin American minimalist style is best exemplified by Bazán’s *Del Silencio*, which uses silence as a structural and symbolic element. The interaction of internal and external forces gives the piece its frenetic energy. The piece’s fragmented interior temporal spaces, whose successivity shifts to generate kinemes interrupted by silences, contrast with its static outer spaces anchored in the tone “E” as a permanent background. The silences, expressed through pauses and rest motifs, are dynamic relational spaces reorganizing the listener’s engagement rather than being absent.

These silences serve as spaces of trans-descent that represent resistance and rebirth when viewed through the existential semiotic lens. The composition leads the listener to a new level of auditory awareness as the broken kineme dissipates into extended silences. According to phenomenology, the “low E” event represents a rupture—an existential turning point where silence transforms into presence, and its semiotic power is revealed.

In light of the analysis, it is possible to further understand the inner musical occurrences in relation to their connections with more fundamental semantic elements by substituting the modalities (see Figure 5) when attempting to fit them into the material.

Figure 5
Replacement of Modalities



Note. Source: author's own elaboration (Nabón Hernández, 2024, p. 97).

The implied composer establishes the musical situation with an austere use of elements that require a strong knowledge of techniques and their historical features to position themselves as a particular modality of listening. This allows a personal generative path for the composition modeling the kinetic energy, which is why *M1/S4* (being-in-myself) appears as “know” instead of “will”.

S1/M4 (being-in-itself) appears as a “will” rather than a “must” along the same axis of potentiality but in the domain of abstract ideas, ideologies, and aesthetics. This is because the individual is recognized as a member of the same community and adheres to a corpus of aesthetic ideas, such as austerity, dispossession, and silence.

In both instances, the modalities gain a different placement and denial as the embodiment process, and the sublimation process faces the facticity. We have a withdrawal, a “not-will”, which is portrayed in the context of music as movements against the construction of a subject or the fragmentation of the subject, specifically the various techniques against discursiveness in the music and the anti-teleological motions, in the category where the *Moi* is more represented as an individual, as a differentiation from the common identity.

This “not-will”, or “no-intention”, clashes with the “not-must”, which substitutes for “know” in *S2/M3* (being-for-itself). The kinetic energy is articulated in a familiar musical scenario by the inherent interplay of the withdrawal. The issue is in the desire to liberate hearing from historical norms, which must not be followed in a specific manner; adhering to the guidelines of what has been deemed the process of creating a new idiolect is not required. Presenting a personal answer while maintaining a semiotic tension with regard to what and how it is acknowledged as music is possible through the decision to withdraw or negate the will.

By considering silence as an expressive semiotic act that is primarily represented by a strong process of an embodiment of two main metaphors of silence as a cultural symbol, namely austerity and dispossession, minimalist composers have integrated silence into their aesthetic identities through an existential choice of the negation and transformed this negation into affirmation.

Although this transcendental path can be seen in a more general historical context, the uniqueness of the Latin American minimalism context lies in the development of a new idiolect that is incomprehensible to the dominant discourse and in the transformation of silencing—the main tool of the power dynamic between the dominant and the dominated—into its primary characteristic of resistance.

The semiotic act of merely providing a context in which the implied listener is given control over the musical situation is interpreted as a retreat of the implied composer’s voice, leaving room for new possibilities to arise and forcing the listener into a new musical experience. In this way, silence is a performative act that invites new kinds of signification and serves as a metaphor for emptiness.

7. Final Remarks

When presented as an existential semiotic method, listening goes beyond its traditional limits and can be used for existential and phenomenological investigation. This essay illustrates how listening involves relational interactions that result in layered meanings through a semiotic musical analysis methodology, as well as that listening is an active process of meaning formation rather than

a passive reception. The dynamics of soundscapes and their existential implications require a grasp of silence's relational and semiotic nature.

As a crucial part of this process, silence subverts the conventional divisions of sound and a void, presence, and absence. The works of minimalist composers exemplify how silence may be a tool for creativity rather than a meaningless space. What is more, in minimalist compositions, silence functions as a generative and relational entity, highlighting the transformational power of listening.

This concept of listening confirms its significance as an essential act of being and interpretation. By integrating it into the larger semiotic framework, we go beyond traditional ideas of absence to acknowledge silence's function as a relational and productive force. This method pushes us to re-evaluate the limits of sound, silence, and meaning and improve our understanding of auditory events. Through the profound interaction of sound and silence, listening thus becomes a transforming discipline that allows us to reconsider our relationship with the environment and each other.

At last, rethinking listening broadens its conceptual scope and provides fresh methods for interaction. This study pushes us to re-evaluate how sound and silence influence human comprehension and interaction by fusing semiotic frameworks. As a result, listening becomes a transforming activity that encourages us to explore the profound, frequently unsaid aspects of auditory experience while strengthening our bonds with one another and our surroundings.

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