

## **Hush... The Lights are Dimmed: A Case of Situational Silence**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is threefold. Firstly, the article attempts to use pragmatic analysis in the context of musical and other theatrical performances. Secondly, it offers further support for the typology the author has proposed in previous articles. Here he relates to the silence in live theatrical and musical performances, which, it is argued, are instances of situational silence. Thirdly, against the background of Goffman's frame analysis, in which the silence is regarded as a frame of the performance indicating that the performance is about to begin, and should not be regarded as part of the performers/audience interaction, the author argues that the silence is communicative for two major reasons: in certain registers of performances such as pop concerts silence does not occur at such junctures, and in musical performances, the silence of the audience and the performers may be considered part of the work.

## 1. Introduction

Live performances in the concert hall and the opera house, as well as in the theatre, begin with some introductory event that indicates to the audience that the performance is about to commence. The audience in many, if not in most, cases falls silent in readiness for the performance. The paper addresses the function of this silence, examining whether it may be regarded either as part of the performance or as part of the situation that exists before the performance, in other words whether or not the silence functions as the *frame* of the performance.

One of the basic meanings of the word "frame" relates to a physical object, usually made of wood, within which may be placed a painting or other objects to be displayed. A question that has arisen in the field of painting, for example, is the function of the physical frame in relation to the painting, whether it is external to the work of art, or whether it is part of the painting itself. If considered external, it does not seem to communicate in the usual meaning of the word, but it does silently signal the following situation to the observer: within the frame is a picture. If regarded as internal, that is if it is a part of the work of art, it is communicative – it may be interpreted in relation to the work itself. In that case, the frame is expressing something about the work it surrounds. The same question was dealt with by Kant in his discussion of the *parergon* in his *Critique of Judgment*, according to which the frame is outside the work of art. Derrida (1987), among others, however, has argued that it may be considered an integral part of the work. In his paper "The Silence Surrounding a Painting," Bernard Fibicher writes that the frame

is enhanced by one single device: the purpose of which is not just decorative. The edges of the frame are a boundary, the end of the picture. The most rectangular plane looks as if it were cut from something indefinitely larger, from something we can only *feel*. Similarly, each verse of a poem is separated from the following one by a blank space: a margin of silence. The less said in the poem, the bigger the white margin of silence grows. (1982: 14)

If this interpretation of the frame of a picture is acceptable, then, the frame is communicative, or, as we shall see, metacommunicative.

The concept of frame has been metaphorically extended to other phenomena – to auditory and articulatory acts, for example, as argued by Bateson (1972), who was one of the first in the field of discourse analysis to introduce the term "frame", a concept he considered metacommunicative, that is, an act of communication which says something about how to interpret the act itself. "Any message," he writes, "which either explicitly or implicitly defines a frame, *ipso facto* gives the receiver instructions included within the frame". This concept was adopted by Goffman in his *Frame Analysis* (1986 (1974)) and in other works, in which he argues that "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them" – this is frame" (1986: 10). In other words, the boundaries of an activity or event and limitations as to the contents of the activity are defined by the frame.

The question to be discussed in this paper, then, is whether silence functions as the frame in performances in the opera house or concert-hall. The idea that the frame of a picture may be considered some type of metaphorical silence may be reapplied with regard to real silence that functions as a metaphorical frame in musical performances.

In the second section, a typology of silence will be presented, which distinguishes four types of silence, one of which may be considered to be the silence in the specific situation under discussion, to be followed in section 3 by a discussion of frame in relation to live performances. Section 4 presents a survey of types of audience/performer interaction, while in section 5 the question will be asked whether pre-performance silence is a frame in its communicative or metacommunicative sense. A conclusion is presented in section 6.

The term "performance" in this paper is taken to refer to the proceedings that occur on stage (or in some similar functional area) in front of an audience, as defined by Beeman (2010: 119): "performance is purposeful enactment or display behavior carried out in front of audience". In other approaches, e.g. Schechner (1988), performance is used to cover the entire set of activities which includes people going

to the theatre, "ticket-taking, passing through gates, performing rituals" (1988: 169), as well as interacting in some form or another with the performers. The term "speech event" or simply "event" – used in discourse analysis and sociolinguistics – would adequately cover this series of activities.

## **2. A Typology of Silence**

In Kurzon (2007a), a typology of silence was proposed consisting of four types of silence in social interaction. Firstly, we have conversational silence, which is the type of silence usually examined in discourse analysis. Here, we are referring to the silence of a person who does not respond when being addressed, or as Sacks et al. (1974) put it, the addressee is selected by the current speaker but does not take the floor. Conversational silence may also occur when an apparent participant in a conversation does not in fact take part. S/he is physically present, but psychologically non-present (Gurevich 1989; Kurzon 1998). Interestingly enough in this case, it is the person's silence that may draw the attention of other participants to him or her, making the silent person present.

The second type of silence, termed textual silence, occurs when a person or a group of people are reading a text in silence, for example, when a person in his or her living room is reading a book or newspaper, or when a class of schoolchildren have been told by their teacher to read a passage in silence. Thirdly, there is situational silence, which is similar to textual silence, but in this case, while a person or, more usually, a group of people are silent, they are not reading or reciting any particular text. This type of silence may be illustrated by the one- or two-minute silence during war remembrance ceremonies, and by silence in certain types of theatrical performance (see Kurzon 2007b, and this article). Lastly, we may talk of the silence of a speaker who does not relate to a particular topic or theme, termed thematic silence. A frequent case of this is the politician who does not speak about a topic that may embarrass him or her, or that may be tactless to speak about in the particular circumstances.

What the first three of these types of silence – conversational, textual and situational silence – have in common is that these types may be timed. We may talk of a silence of half a second in a conversation (usually called a pause), to the few minutes it may take to read a newspaper article, and perhaps to a lifetime in the case of a monk who has taken a vow of silence. Thematic silence, on the other hand, is in effect not silence. The speaker is speaking, and his or her silence about a certain topic may be glossed as “s/he is silent about” a topic. This is metaphorical silence. The word *silence* is used in everyday language to refer to this silence, too, even when speech is taking place. In many languages, by the way, e.g. French, Korean, Russian, the word for “silence” or “silent” is not used in such a case (see Kurzon 2009).

Jaworski (1997: 17) distinguishes a number of silences involved in a theatrical or musical performance. One is what he calls narrator’s, or performer’s, silence which is addressed to the audience in the “performance” frame, as opposed to the characters’ silence addressed to one another in the “inner” frame (for ‘frame’, see section 1 above and section 3 below), for example, the pauses and silences found in the drama of Chekhov, Beckett and Pinter. In this paper, the silence I shall be focusing on is that of an audience in an opera house or concert hall, and not on the silence that may occur on stage in the dialogue of the various characters in a play, which constitutes conversational silence.

The situation I will principally examine is the silence of the audience and performers in the opera house or concert hall before the performance begins. While I argue that this silence may be an instance of situational silence and is communicative, another approach using the concept of frames suggests that this silence may be considered to be metacommunicative.

### **3. Frame analysis and performances**

This section expands on Goffman's Frame Analysis (3.1) introduced in section 1, and discusses the concept of breaking the frame (3.2) in the context of theatrical/musical performances.

### 3.1 *The Frame*

In his discussion on the relationship or interaction between performer and audience, Goffman argues that

in considering legitimate stage performances, it is all too common to speak of interaction between performer and audience. That easy conclusion conceals the analysis that would be required to make sense out of this interaction, conceals the fact that participants in a conversation can be said to interact, too, conceals, indeed, the fact that the term "interaction" equally applies to everything one might want to distinguish. (1986: 127)

Goffman regards the audience in some way alienated from what is happening on stage:

During a performance it is only fellow performers who respond to each other in this direct way as inhabitants of the same realm; the audience indirectly, glancingly, following alongside, as it were, cheering on but not intercepting. (1986: 127)

Hence, Goffman searches for the frame to a performance, and this may be the silence of the audience before the performance begins, when the lights are dimmed. This silence is a frame and, Goffman argues, does not indicate performer/audience interaction.

Goffman reflects, too, the traditional approach to the role of the audience at a performance, as maintained by Susan Sontag (1969: 8):

Elites presuppose masses. So far as the best art defines itself by essentially "priestly" aims, it presupposes and confirms the existence of a relatively passive, never fully initiated, voyeuristic laity that is regularly convoked to watch, listen, read, or hear—and then sent away.

This suggests a substantial distance between the performers and the performance, on the one hand, and the audience, on the other. Sontag's approach seems to indicate that in a given situation, e.g. at a theatre performance, silence is the rule. The members of the audience are external to what is happening on stage; they are not considered participants.

The audience, writes Anna Danielewicz-Betz (1998), who adopts Goffman's frame analysis of musical performance, "has neither the right nor the obligation to

participate directly in the dramatic action” onstage, although the audience may show appreciation (1998: 183). She sees this silence as a phenomenon which is related to the silence in ritual contexts, where the "silence may be the only form in which the event’s communicative goals can be achieved. Silent reverence is typically equated with religion" (1998: 185), which is similar to Sontag's concept of the performance. Danielewicz-Betz adds that there "is nothing more impressive than the silence that originates from keeping silence on the part of a large group of people" (1998: 187). She relates specifically to the silence of the audience when the lights are dimmed, calling it “pre-performance silence” (1998: 191), which sets up an expectancy within the audience. But she then maintains that “the deeper the silence, the closer the contact between the performer and the audience” (1998: 191). Such a suggestion, however, seems to contradict Goffman’s view that this silence is a frame and not part of interaction. On the other hand, Danielewicz-Betz, referring to audience reaction after the performance (“post-performance silence”), which would be considered the end frame in Goffman’s approach, quite rightly notes cultural differences – from the resounding applause (“rudely”) in western concert halls, to the silence after the performance of Hindu sacred music (1998: 191).

### ***3.2 Breaking the Frame***

If the pre-performance silence, in Danielewicz-Betz’s terms, is to be considered the opening frame of the performance, then the instances in which the audience reacts to what is taking place on stage would be instances of breaking the frame. Goffman describes the situation in the following way:

On just coming onstage, a well-known actor may be applauded, the applause being addressed not to the character he will project but to himself qua actor. He responds in that role by a show of pleasure or by holding up the action for a moment while freezing in his part. [...] During a production a particularly deft piece of work may also be applauded, the theatergoers addressing themselves not to the unfolding inner drama but to the skill of the actors. Opera institutionalizes much more of this “breaking” of frame by audiences. (Goffman 1986: 129)

“Interestingly, here, too”, continues Goffman, “there have been marked changes in conventions through time” (1986: 129). The examples in section 4 below illustrate in part the audience breaking the frame especially in the concert hall. But performers may also break the frame in that they may cease at a specific moment being performers and turn into private people again. An example of the performers not following the conventions of an artistic performance is the occasion when on February 22, 1968, country singer Johnny Cash proposed marriage to his co-singer June Carter on stage in the middle of a performance in London, Ontario. This scene was the climax in the 2005 film *Walk the Line*.

#### **4. Silence of the Audience in the Theatre**

Unlike the approach relating to Frame Analysis discussed in section 3 above, however, one may consider the audience as a participant in an interaction with the performers. The audience need not remain silent during the performance, and the performers may cease performing at any given moment during the performance.

These two possibilities may be illustrated in the following way: There are occasions when audiences react to what is occurring on stage, either positively or negatively. After an aria in an opera, the audience may disturb the flow of music and express their appreciation. This would be a positive reaction to the performance, although the silence of the audience is broken. Audience silence is not sacrosanct, as Sontag (1969) would have it. On the other hand, a bad performance or aspects of the performance that do not appeal to the audience may lead them to boo and catcall, and may even bring the performance itself to a standstill. A well-publicized instance was the performance of Verdi's *Nabucco* at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin 2002 when the chorus came on stage dressed as bumblebees. Audience reaction stopped the performance (see, e.g., Kurzon 2007b).

The modern tradition of an audience sitting quietly during the performance of a play, and especially of an opera or concert, emerged in the nineteenth century with Wagner's appearance on the world stage of opera. In the classical period, audiences



would applause after each movement of a symphony, and movements were not only applauded but even encored. For example, in Haydn's London concerts, the composer put in *forte* chords at the end of soft slow movements in order to ensure applause, e.g. his Symphony in C major, No. 97 (Ricks 1995: 67). Cone in his "The Picture and the Frame" (1968: 16) writes:

The modish demand for silence between movements not only inhibits spontaneous demonstrations of enjoyment, but also often imposes such a strain on the listener that he cannot attend properly to the latter half of a long symphony.

The lack of applause, then, is Wagnerian in origin. He imposed it on the audience at his annual opera festival at Bayreuth. They sat in darkness "to ensure [their] quiet attention", which the British writer, George Bernard Shaw called "the Bayreuth hush" (cited by Ricks 1995: 70). In 1882, at Bayreuth during the Wagner festival, the composer came on stage during a performance of the opera *Parsifal*, and

begged the public not to applaud again as they had *during* the course of the performance. So the second performance passed with a calm and reverent silence. This called for another speech from the Master [Wagner]. He must explain, he said, that it was only during the performance itself that he objected to applause; but the appreciation due to the singers at the fall of the curtain was quite a different matter. So, at the next performances, the people expressed their enthusiasm at the close of each of the acts. (Hartford 1980: 129; emphasis in original)

The American writer, Mark Twain, who visited Bayreuth in 1891 after Wagner's death, describes the silence inside the opera house as if one sits "with the dead in the gloom of a tomb" (Twain 1891). It took some years before this silence spread to other concert halls and opera houses. Twain compares the situation at Bayreuth with the Metropolitan in New York: there at Bayreuth, he writes,

the Wagner audience dress as they please, and sit in the dark and worship in silence. At the Metropolitan in New York they sit in a glare, and wear their showiest harness; they hum airs, they squeak fans, they titter, and they gabble all the time. In some of the boxes the conversation and laughter are so loud as to divide the attention of the house with the stage. (Twain 1891)

A programme note of the cycle of the *Ring of the Nibelungs* in Chicago alluded to the same phenomenon: “The audience is respectfully but urgently requested not to interrupt the music with applause” (quoted by Ricks 1995: 66).

Even well into the twentieth century, performers would not have minded that audiences revert to the behaviour of audiences in the early nineteenth century. The violinist, Jozsef Szigeti, wrote about one of his performances with Richard Strauss, who was conducting:

At one playing of a Mozart concerto [...] when we met with polite and stony silence instead, Strauss turned to me and muttered in his thick Bavarian dialect: “The so-and-so newspaper scribblers and commentators! This is their work – making people skeered [=scared] to clap when I know they feel like doing it.” (Szigeti 1947: 195, quoted in Ricks 1995: 67-8)

Despite the generally held “Wagnerian” rule, there are circumstances in which audiences – by convention – do not remain silent, for example at the Last Night of the Promenade Concerts, held every summer in the Royal Albert Hall in London. At the last night of the 2008 proms, for example, after a number of traditional classical works such as opera arias (by Verdi, Wagner and Puccini), Beethoven’s *Choral Fantasy*, and various commissioned works, the concert continued with Elgar’s *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1 with the jingoistic song “Land of Hope and Glory” written by A.C. Benson especially for Elgar’s music. During the performance of this work, the audience is traditionally expected to participate, and sing the song, which they do enthusiastically. This happens, too, with the subsequent works in the programme: Thomas Arne’s “Rule Britannia” and Charles Parry’s “Jerusalem” set to music by Edward Elgar, not to forget to mention the National Anthem at the end of the proceedings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These may be viewed on internet websites: *Pomp and Circumstance* No.1 from 2006 Proms <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECUpC71b3js&feature=related>; “Rule Britannia” from 2008 Proms on [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_cWz9MrHskk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cWz9MrHskk); “Jerusalem” also from 2008 Proms on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7geFBbda-g&feature=related>, and the British National Anthem from the 2009 Proms on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUTeRGigUjU&feature=related> (all accessed June 14, 2010).

These unconventional moments in the opera house or concert hall where the audience is not silent may be considered, if the frame analysis approach is accepted, as instances of breaking the frame, as discussed in 3.2 above.

### **5. Communication or Metacommunication?**

The argument, then, is between the following two positions. One may either ask whether we view the silence just before the performance as a frame which indicates, metacommunicatively, that the performance is about to begin. Alternatively, the silence is part of the performer/audience interaction, and may be labeled – not conversational silence, since nothing is happening on stage – but situational silence. It may be considered a silence that is conventionally accepted in specific circumstances, i.e. according to the situation. It has the characteristics of situational silence briefly presented in section 2 above. Situational silence in this case is usually several seconds long (although it could be much longer depending on what is going on behind the curtain), the entire audience is silent, and no text is being read or recited (which rules out textual silence).

In the following two subsections, the claim that we are dealing with situational silence will be illustrated by musical performances (5.1) and by situations in legal contexts (5.2), by way of comparison. The analysis of one specific performance will not exemplify the variety of situations in which it may be shown whether silence may or may not function as a frame to the performance; nor will the analysis of one performance illustrate those cases in which silence is not maintained.

#### **5.1 Musical Illustrations**

Unlike the situation in which the audience is silent while a performance is taking place on stage (an instance of conversational silence), a complete performance may be considered to be an instance of situational silence when both the performer(s) and audience are silent. A performance of John Cage's well-known – if not notorious – *4'33"* would be such a case. In the first performance, the pianist, David Tudor, sat by

the piano and apart from lifting and putting down the piano cover and turning some pages, did nothing. He did not play any music. The audience was also silent, as they conventionally are during a performance (see Kahn 1997). Noise from the audience may be heard when members of the audience do not yet realize that nothing is to be played or when they realize what the nature of the piece is, and this is what Cage wanted his audience to know.<sup>2</sup> The difference between a performance of Cage's *4'33"* and, say, Beckett's *Act without Words*, is that while in Beckett's play or mime action is taking place on stage, albeit in silence, in Cage's work nothing is happening on stage.

Our principal interest here, however, is on more frequent occurrences of situational silence – not throughout a work – but before the performance begins. We now have to ask whether this case of situational silence is a frame, thereby metacommunicative, or whether it is communicative, and therefore not a frame. Support for this latter contention comes from two sources: (1) cases in which silence is not “observed” at such junctures, and (2) cases in which the silence is considered to be part of the work performed. The reason why any one of these cases would constitute a criterion to decide on the function of this silence is based on a basic tenet of communication and meaning. If there is a choice between silence and non-silence in a given situation, then the silence is communicative. As Lyons (among others) wrote some time ago, “‘having meaning’ implies choice” (1968: 413).

The first type of occasion at which the audience is not silent in the seconds or minutes before the performance is at a pop concert. At such concerts, the audience does not seem to be quiet at all. When the lights go down, and the musicians are coming on to the stage, they are welcomed by applause, shouts and other encouraging

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<sup>2</sup> There are a number of YouTube renditions on internet of this piece, e.g. with a small ensemble ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04F22C\\_u658&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04F22C_u658&feature=related)), with David Tudor (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HypmW4Yd7SY&feature=related>), and with an orchestra (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUJagb7hL0E>) (all accessed June 14, 2010). In the last example, a televised concert by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the audience behaves conventionally between movements by coughing, and the conductor by wiping his brow with a handkerchief.

noises from the audience. I would like to illustrate this from a pop concert, which was a reunion of a group that had been disbanded many years previously. This is the concert given by the British pop group Genesis in Rome's Circo Massimo on July 14, 2007, called "Genesis - When in Rome".<sup>3</sup> After an introduction of 20 seconds, the next one minute of the video film of this concert consists of visual effects while the audience are cheering and clapping. This is followed by the band warming up, repeating over and over again the same notes; this takes another four minutes and twenty seconds. Finally, after five minutes forty seconds from the beginning of the video, the singer, Phil Collins, comes to the front of the stage and begins to sing the first song.<sup>4</sup> A similar example may be seen at another pop concert which also celebrated the reunion of a disbanded group: the Led Zeppelin concert at the O2 Arena in London on December 11, 2007.<sup>5</sup> Because of such cases, we may argue that there is here a choice between silence and non-silence. The frame is not the silence – although it is often concurrent with the silence. The frame of a performance may be considered the dimming of the lights; it is the darkness which metacommunicatively indicates to the audience that the performance is beginning, and therefore different modes of behaviour are called for. Even at more conventional or traditional theatrical or musical performances, dimming of the lights – indicating the beginning frame of the performance – may not lead automatically to audience silence. This may be achieved by other members of the audience hushing the talkers, or by the stage lights being turned on, or by the conductor walking out to the podium.

The second set of cases in which the situational silence may not be considered a frame occurs when the silence is considered part of the work itself. This may be illustrated by the example of Cage's *4'33"*, discussed above, since the performer or performers go through the usual ritual though the performer or the conductor of an

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<sup>3</sup> This was viewed by the author on a flight from Tel Aviv to Frankfurt on September 7, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> This was the largest concert since the group reunited "after more of a decade of silence", reads a website devoted to Genesis (<http://www.genesis-news.com/forum/european-tour-2007/525-genesis-concert-july-14-rome.html>); accessed June 14, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbA7bVouieI&feature=related> (accessed August 4, 2008; no longer available).

orchestra does nothing. But Cage's work is not a typical instance of a concert piece. A more conventional example is called for. The conductor/pianist, Daniel Barenboim, in the BBC Reith lectures of 2006, spoke of this initial silence as part of the work. In the first lecture<sup>6</sup>, he spoke of "the physical aspect that we notice first":

sound does not exist by itself, but has a permanent constant and unavoidable relation with silence. And therefore the music does not start from the first note and goes onto the second note, etc., etc., but the first note already determines the music itself, because it comes out of the silence that precedes it.

Barenboim, in this lecture, illustrated this point by playing on the piano, among other works, the beginning of the Prelude to Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. He states that "the music is not from the A to the F, but from the *silence* to the A" (my emphasis). The Prelude, says Barenboim, "is built on the use of silence as a means of expression". Needless to say, the orchestral score of the Prelude does not begin with a rest but with a quaver in A. But, in a video recording of this work, Barenboim may be clearly seen conducting – moving his hands holding the baton – before any music is heard. Hence Barenboim's interpretation includes the silence. This is also true for several other video clips available, e.g. Leopold Stokowski, Zubin Mehta and Simon Rattle as conductors. Stokowski's silence is far shorter than the others, but it may still be noticed.

Jaworski (1997), in his analysis of silence in Laurie Anderson's "Violin solo", also argues that silence may be part of a work in its initial stage, and does not function as the frame of the work. The role of the silence, he writes, is not "to give the listener time to anticipate a piece which is about to begin or to contemplate its reception when it is finished". Rather, "sound defines silence as much as silence defines sound" (1997: 22).

An audience's silence, which may be both situational and conversational silence, may occur in performances which take place in a place of worship. While a

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2006/lectures.shtml#lecture1> (accessed August 4, 2008). The video is no longer available, but the printed text appears on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/print/radio4/reith2006/lecture1.shtml?print> (accessed June 14, 2010).

performance of, say, Bach's B minor Mass may be regarded for all intents and purposes as a concert – with the audience becoming silent after the conductor and solo singers are settled on stage, a performance in a church may be treated as a religious ritual, though tickets are sold to the public while publicizing the performance as a concert. After all, to attend mass or any other religious service in a church does not usually entail buying a ticket. Traditionally, the audience in such a situation does not applaud before the performance and does not show appreciation afterwards. On the other hand, a concert may take place in a building that has served in the past as a church, and indications of this are visible, but such a concert is treated in the same way as a concert in a concert hall – with the audience observing silence – situational silence before the conductor begins his or her work, and conversational silence during the performance. But before the “pre-performance silence” (Danielewicz-Betz, 1998), and after the performance, the audience reacts by applauding the performers. Here, I have to be anecdotal, since I am relating to two experiences I have had. The first, in the late 1960s in a Sheffield church, where Handel's *Messiah* was performed; there were total pre-, post-performance and conversational silences. On the other hand, at a concert of sacred music by Pergolesi (including his *Stabat Mater*) at the Church of Notre Dame in Abu Gosh, just outside Jerusalem, Israel, on June 6, 2008, the fact that the building does not seem to function any longer as a church may have led to it being treated as a regular concert hall. Fashion, however, may be changing. At a concert on April 12, 2008, at St. George's Bloomsbury Church in London, which is still functioning as a church, the audience did applaud the two singers (singing “Evening Prayer” from Humperdink's opera *Hansel und Gretel*).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> [http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_wG8Jb3z0Ok](http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=_wG8Jb3z0Ok) (accessed June 14, 2010).

## 5.2 *Non-musical Illustrations*

In discussing the Miranda warning – the warning American police officers give persons who have just been arrested<sup>8</sup> – Marianne Constable (2005: 167), citing the original Supreme Court decision,<sup>9</sup> argues that

the utterance of the warning marks the formal entry of the accused into the legal process: it occurs at “the outset” of interrogation or at a moment when significant deprivation of the subject’s “freedom of action” begins.

She continues,

The warning tells the accused of the risk that what he is about to say has different import than what he is used to insofar as it will be used “against” him. (2005: 167)

In this case, too, it is the warning about the right of silence that constitutes a frame. However, the suspect’s silence in not answering questions addressed to him or her is a straightforward example of conversation silence (see 2 above).

On the other hand, in another legal situation, the court bailiff’s “silence in court” when the judge is about to enter the courtroom may constitute the frame, but the silence that follows is situational silence. Any conversation that takes place is among the performers – the judge, the lawyers and witnesses. The public present in a courtroom is not in the same position as the audience in the theatre. There, they may disturb the proceedings if in their eyes the situation calls for such a disturbance – the acting or playing is poor, for example. The public have paid money to see the performance and they demand their money’s worth. In the courtroom, on the other hand, if the public do not agree with the proceedings, any disturbance – any breaking of situational silence – will not end the performance, but the public will be ordered to leave, so the legal proceedings can continue without an audience. In Goffman’s terms (1986: 125-6), the opera house or concert hall performance may be considered “pure” in that in normal circumstances (not in rehearsal, for example) when the audience

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<sup>8</sup> "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney present during questioning. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you."

<sup>9</sup> *Miranda v. Arizona*, 384 U.S. 436, 86 S.Ct. 1602 (1966)



walk out in the middle of a performance, the performance comes to an end. The courtroom proceedings, on the other hand, constitute an “impure” performance, “where viewers openly watch persons at work who openly show no regard or concern for the dramatic elements of their labor” (1986: 126). The performance goes on even when there is no audience.

## **6. Conclusion**

One solution to the question as to what constitutes the frame to a performance, or in our context, whether silence is the frame or part of the frame, or is not a frame at all, is to speak of dialects of silence. Here, however, we cannot speak of phonological, morphological or lexical features that distinguish dialects of silence, but differing functions of silence according to the context in which the silence occurs. So, in the pop music concert "dialect", there is no silence that may be considered the frame of the concert, while at a symphony concert the silence may be considered part of the frame.

However, this solution does not seem to hold if we regard the concept of silence as part of the artistic work, and not as part of the frame. If we return for a moment to the literal frame and the painting in it, we may say that the frame is not equivalent to silence. It metacommunicates that within the border is a painting. The blank spaces in the painting may be considered to be silence. Likewise, in the opera house, concert hall or theatre, the silence is regarded as part of the interaction between the audience and the performers. So, given types of performances in which audience silence does not occur, e.g. in pop concerts, the frame of performance must be seen elsewhere – in the dimming of the lights. Audience reaction to this situation, the dimming of the lights in the hall, may lead to their silence, which is part of the subsequent performance.

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