

# Hallucination

## Philosophy and Psychology

Edited by Fiona Macpherson and Dimitris Platchias

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## 15 Hearing and Hallucinating Silence

Ian Phillips

Silence is the sound of time passing.

—Tom Stoppard

### Abstract

Tradition has it that although we experience darkness, we can neither hear nor hallucinate silence. At most, we hear *that* it is silent, in virtue of lacking auditory experience. This cognitive view is at odds with our ordinary thought and talk. Yet it is not easy to vouchsafe the perception of silence: Sorensen's recent account entails the implausible claim that the permanently and profoundly deaf are perpetually hallucinating silence. To better defend the view that we can genuinely hear and hallucinate silence, we must reject the austere picture of conscious experience that underpins the cognitive theory. According to that picture, conscious experience is a simple relation between subjects and objects. In the absence of an object, there is no relation, and so no experience. By enriching this picture, we can find room for the experience of silence. I explore this idea in two phases. First, I defend the thought that we can hear and hallucinate certain *forms* of silence, such as pauses, in virtue of experiencing contrastive sounds. Second, I draw on Moore's analysis of sensation to suggest that *simply* experiencing silence is a special form of objectless consciousness. I offer two ways of fleshing out this idea. According to the first, auditory experience possesses a temporal field within which the absence of sounds can be perceived. According to the second, purely Moorean account, it is our capacity to *listen* in the absence of sounds that underlies the phenomenon of experiencing silence.

### 1 Introduction

"You don't often hear silence in a city, but all of a sudden I could hear silence everywhere." So Philip Marlowe ruminates ominously.<sup>1</sup> Taken at face value, our ordinary thought and talk evince that we hear and, correlatively, hallucinate silence. Yet philosophers have

1. In Bill Morrison's 1978 BBC Radio dramatization of Chandler's *The Little Sister*. Thanks to Daniel Hill for bringing this to my attention.

traditionally insisted that appearances are deceptive, denying that in the auditory realm we can draw a distinction between experiencing silence and simply lacking auditory experience. This traditional view relegates hearing silence to the cognitive. At most, hearing silence is hearing *that* it is silent, in virtue of lacking auditory experience; and though generally not considered, the phenomenon of hallucinating silence is implicitly dismissed (sec. 2). Recently, Sorensen has attempted to defend the claim that we hear and hallucinate silence. Unfortunately his position ultimately commits him to the implausible claim that the permanently and profoundly deaf are perpetually hallucinating silence (sec. 3). Nonetheless Sorensen is right to try to make room for experience of silence. This essay explores how we might succeed.

Driving the traditional cognitive view is an austere picture of the structure of consciousness. If we liberate ourselves from this picture, we can secure room for the experience of silence without committing ourselves to implausible hallucinations in the deaf. I begin by arguing that we hear certain kinds of silence, such as pauses, in virtue of hearing contrastive sounds (sec. 4). I then turn to the idea that we can *simply* hear or hallucinate silence. Drawing on Moore's analysis of sensation, I suggest that experience of silence is a form of objectless consciousness (sec. 5). I offer two ways to flesh this thesis out. According to the first, auditory experience has a temporal field within which the absence of sounds can be perceived (sec. 6). According to the second, purely Moorean account, it is our capacity to *listen* that fundamentally accounts for the phenomenon of simply experiencing silence (sec. 7).

## 2 Cognitive Theories of Silence Perception

In 1398, John de Trevisa wrote, "Derknesse is iseye 3if noþinge is iseye and scyence is iknowe 3if no [sounne] is iherd."<sup>2</sup> Six hundred years later, Brian O'Shaughnessy propounds a view that emphasizes precisely this contrast: darkness is *seen*, silence merely *known*. According to O'Shaughnessy:

Even though seeing dark is seeing the look that signifies light-absence, seeing the dark look is not in itself the seeing of an absence, but is instead the seeing of a presence signifying an absence. By contrast, hearing silence is the experienced cognitive accompaniment of an absence of experience signifying a further absence: it is the accompaniment of a lack of hearing-experience that signifies an absence of shock waves in a medium. And it is itself no form of hearing. (2000, 334)

2. Bartholomaeus (1398/1975, 554). The quotation begins: "And fourme makeþ matiere iknowe; for matiere may neuere be iseye ne felid but by substancial fourme and accidental, but hit be [by] way of priuacioun," again echoing O'Shaughnessy's view described in the remainder of the paragraph. The text makes clear that this is the orthodox view. See also p. 1387 for the claim that sounds, and sounds alone, are the objects of hearing.

For Trevisa and O'Shaughnessy alike, "Hearing the silence ... is identical with, a sub-variety of hearing that it is silent" (O'Shaughnessy, 2000, 329). Hearing *that* it is silent "is a special case of coming-to-know of contemporary silence: namely, that in which one's knowledge arises immediately in an experience out of an absence of auditory experience which one knows to be a veridical perceptual reading" (329).

Trevisa and O'Shaughnessy are right that there is a contrast between seeing darkness and hearing silence: there is no sound of silence. But this does not establish that there is no such thing as the experience of silence. Taken at face value, our ordinary thought and talk suggest the opposite. Music criticism amply illustrates the point. The *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross writes, for example, of how the crescendo in the funeral march from Webern's Opus 6 "is among the loudest musical phenomena in history, but even louder is the ensuing silence, which smacks the ears like thunder" (2008, 69). Likewise Ross relates how the composer Morton Feldman "releases the expressive power of the space around the notes" (529). In Feldman's work, "The sounds animate the surrounding silence" (529).<sup>3</sup> More mundanely, the pianist Emanuel Ax invites our empathy when he laments, "I wish that applause would come just a bit later, when a piece like the Brahms Third Symphony comes to an end—it is so beautifully hushed that I feel like holding my breath in the silence of the end."<sup>4</sup>

These examples involve hearing certain kinds of silence: pauses, or cessations of sound. However, descriptions of subjects simply experiencing silence, not set in relief against any sound, also abound. Consider this passage from Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Interior of the Earth*:

It might have been, as I guessed, about ten at night. The first of my senses which came into play after this last bout was that of hearing. All at once I could hear; and it was a real exercise of the sense of hearing. I could hear the silence in the gallery after the din which for hours had stunned me. (2004, 208)

Note here how Verne emphasizes the reality of the hearing, despite the absence of auditory object.<sup>5</sup>

3. Another favorite passage comes from "The Art of Fantasy," *New Yorker*, March 17, 2003, in which Ross recounts a performance by Mitsuko Uchida thus: "It is one thing to get all the notes right; any number of unsocialized conservatory prodigies can do that. It is another thing to play the thoughts within the notes, the light around them, the darkness behind them, the silence at the end of the phrase. That is what inspires awe. ... Uchida played music on the edge of silence, and then, releasing the pedal a moment early, she played the silence itself."

4. Posted on his website, <http://emanuelax.com>.

5. A similar example comes in Ambrose Bierce's *An Inhabitant of Carcosa*: "Of fever I had no trace. I had, withal, a sense of exhilaration and vigour altogether unknown to me—a feeling of mental and physical exaltation. My senses seemed all alert; I could feel the air as a ponderous substance; I could hear the silence."

Such examples force the cognitive theorist onto the back foot, applying pressure to motivate the surprising claim that, strictly speaking, we do not hear silence. (See Sorensen, 2008, chap. 14, for a great deal more pressure.) These examples are not the last word. The cognitive theorist might provide us with compelling motivation and, in that light, convince us that our ordinary thought and talk are not to be taken at face value. The costs of this are not immediately clear. In particular, the cognitive theorist cannot be straightforwardly charged with conflating hearing silence and deafness: the deaf do not know that it is silent in virtue of their lack of auditory experience. This is one reason why the thought that we might hallucinate silence is probative.

According to O'Shaughnessy, "a cognitive attitude, with silence figuring in its content, is a necessary condition of hearing silence" (2000, 329). But assuming that we can hallucinate silence, what cognitive attitude is occasioned by such hallucinations? Clearly not *knowing* that it is silent; nor believing or even being inclined to believe that it is. After all, one might well have good reason to believe that it is not in fact silent (see, for instance, the various cases described in sec. 3). Yet in the absence of a requisite cognitive attitude, the hallucination of silence can be *nothing* but a lack of auditory experience of which we are aware. In short, the cognitive theory must deny that there is any such distinctive phenomenon. In the next section, I discuss an example of Sorensen's that illustrates the implausibility of this verdict.

Once this is seen, it is no longer obvious that veridical cases of perceiving silence *can* be accounted for by the cognitive theory. Consider the following principle: if one's auditory system is fully and correctly functioning, and there is no sound heard, one hears silence. This principle is intuitive and attractive. But according to O'Shaughnessy, it is false. One must also come to *know* that there is no audible sound on the basis of one's experience. Thus, according to O'Shaughnessy (2000, 329), animals (and presumably infants) cannot hear silence, since they cannot have the complex cognitive attitude with silence figuring in its content that is a necessary condition of hearing that it is silent. If this is not already implausible enough, imagine a subject who has been given persuasive, but misleading, grounds for thinking that she will shortly go deaf. This subject is led, unwittingly, into a soundproof room. According to the foregoing intuitive principle, she hears the silence in the room despite being in no position to judge or know that it is silent given the false belief about her deafness that she is laboring under. Contrast O'Shaughnessy's account on which she does not hear the silence, since she does not come to know that it is silent.

A final difficulty for the cognitive theory is that we ordinarily think that audition makes room for auditory attention even when there are no sounds to be heard: we can listen to silence (a point I return to in sec. 7). Thus Hardy describes Geoffrey Day in *Under the Greenwood Tree* as a man whose "silence is wonderful to listen to." The

cognitive theory struggles to account for listening to silence, being forced to treat such cases as instances of *reflecting* on or attending *in thought* to silence.

These considerations fall far short of establishing the untenability of the cognitive view.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless they show that the theory is opposed to our ordinary conception. Our ordinary conception allows that we can hallucinate silence, that we can hear it even if we do not know that we are hearing it, and that we can listen to it. So we need to ask: what is it that motivates the cognitive theorist?

O'Shaughnessy begins his defense of the cognitive view as follows:

Silence ... is simply the absence of sound. Then being an absence, silence is nothing. Accordingly, hearing the silence cannot be the hearing of any sound, nor indeed of any thing, and is simply not a hearing. (2000, 329)

The move here from the claim that "hearing the silence cannot be the hearing of ... any thing" to the claim that it "is simply not a hearing" is grounded in a more fundamental thesis about perception only made explicit slightly later:

Perception is as such of objects, events, qualities, and relations. It is of phenomenal realities. It is of phenomenal realities, and thus invariably of what one might call "positivities." (332)

If we accept, as I propose for present purposes, that silence is not a "phenomenal reality" but simply the absence of sound, the crucial premise in O'Shaughnessy's argument is a principle with the following form. (I use the term "object" thinly, to include events, qualities, etc.)

If  $\Phi$  is not an experienced object, then there is no such thing as the experience of  $\Phi$ .<sup>7</sup>

6. For one, one might reject O'Shaughnessy's account of *hearing that*, instead construing it as a matter of *being in a position* to know. Construed suitably impersonally, this might help address some (but not all) of the foregoing criticisms.

7. This kind of principle is common in philosophical discussion of perception. Witness, for example, Reid, whose "principles taken for granted" include the claim that "most operations of the mind must have an object distinct from the operation itself. I can't see without seeing *something*. To see without having any object of sight is absurd" (1827, chap. 2, sec. 6). Likewise witness Stout's remark that "subjective states and activities cannot be conceived or described without reference to their objects. ... Experiences in general involve the presence of objects to the mind. We cannot perceive without perceiving something" (1932, 4–6). Reid defends his claim by noting that "the operations of our minds are denoted, in all languages, by active transitive verbs, which, from their construction in grammar, require not only a person or agent, but likewise an object of the operation" (4–6). However, this only establishes a conclusion about the structure of awareness, if we assume that all grammatical objects correspond to objects in the stronger, intended sense. The substantive "silence" is plausibly a counterexample to this assumption.

Assuming that sounds and auditory objects constituted by sounds (e.g., melodic phrases; see Matthen, 2010) are the only proper objects of audition, then the principle for audition is the following:<sup>8</sup>

If  $\Phi$  is neither a sound nor constituted by sounds, then there is no such thing as the experience of  $\Phi$ .

Call this the *object-exclusivity* principle.

The object-exclusivity principle captures a common attitude toward perceptual experience, one that may seem like common sense. However, if we want to make room for the experience of silence, we must reject or amend it. There are two ways to do this. First, we might grant that though all auditory experience is experience of sounds, experience of sounds can also be experience of silence, for one can perceive silence by perceiving sounds. Second, we might simply deny that all auditory experience is experience of sounds and hold that experience of silence is an instance of objectless auditory consciousness. If either of these possibilities is genuine, the cognitive theory can be diagnosed as falsely presupposing an overly restrictive conception of the structure of conscious experience. Before investigating these possibilities, however, I want to consider Sorensen's recent attempt to find room for hearing silence.

### 3 Sorensen on Hearing Silence

Sorensen (2008, chap. 14) agrees with O'Shaughnessy's first claim that silence is not a "positivity."

Hearing silence is the most negative of perceptions: there is nothing positive being sensed *and* no positive sensation representing that absence. (2008, 272)

Nonetheless Sorensen holds that we can hear silence as opposed to merely hearing that it is silent (268). Furthermore, he claims that we can have hallucinations of silence.

Consider a man who experiences auditory hallucinations as he drifts off to sleep. He "hears" his mother call out his name, then wait for a response, and then call again. The cycle of calls and silence repeats eerily. As it turns out, his mother has unexpectedly paid a late-night visit and is indeed calling out in a manner that coincidentally matches the spooky hallucination. (269)

Sorensen seems right in this; our ordinary conception of auditory experience does allow for hallucinations of silence in such cases.

8. In taking sounds to be the proper objects of audition, I assume that insofar as we hear sources, we hear them in virtue of the sounds they make (or perhaps fail to make). (Cf. the discussion of Crowther's view in sec. 7.1.) If, strictly speaking, we do hear sources, they should, of course, be included among the objects heard. But since sources are "positivities," this does not affect the basic form of the object-exclusivity principle.



Likewise Sorensen is with common sense in claiming that hearing silence has a qualitative aspect. To bring this out, Sorensen introduces us to Audrey.

Audrey ... lives in a noisy environment and so has never experienced silence. Audrey ... wants to experience silence and so constructs a soundproof chamber. When she enters the chamber, Audrey learns something: what it is like to hear silence. ... Audrey is introspecting an absence of auditory sensations while perceiving an absence of sound ... an auditory gap that originates through healthy hearing of an external state of silence. (271)

A number of claims need unpacking here. The first is that Audrey can successfully satisfy her desire to experience silence by constructing a soundproof chamber. Implicit in this claim is that there is something it is like to experience silence from the point of view of the subject of the experience. It is commonly held that an episode is conscious if and only if there is something that it is like to undergo it from its subject's point of view. Here we distinguish between what it is like (subjectively) to undergo the episode and what it is like (subjectively) *when* (i.e., at the time) one undergoes the episode. Only the former is relevant. Audrey specifically wants to know what *experiencing silence* is like, not what it is like to be her at a time when she is experiencing silence. Thus Sorensen appears to be claiming that we should acknowledge the existence of episodes of experiencing silence with distinctive phenomenal character.<sup>9</sup>

However, Sorensen's account is problematic. Consider deafness. According to Sorensen, deafness is introspectively indiscriminable from Audrey's experience in her soundproof chamber.

When you become aware that you are ... deaf ... you are introspecting an absence of sensations. For you no longer perceive anything. Introspection is your only remaining means of detecting the absence. (271)

Sorensen (268) also provides a case that suggests that he thinks of the indiscriminability as symmetric. A soldier, shell-shocked by a blast, regains consciousness and can hear nothing. He wonders, unable to tell, "Have I gone deaf or I am engulfed in silence?" Such a case suggests that the following principle holds.

Mere reflection on her experiential situation alone is insufficient for Audrey to distinguish her experiential situation in the soundproof room from her experiential situation on being rendered profoundly deaf, and vice versa.

Now, if Sorensen is right that we can hallucinate silence, then Audrey can be introduced to the phenomenology of silence experience without leaving her noisy world. The criterion of success here is plausibly the following. If we so manipulate Audrey

9. Note that Sorensen insists that "there may be creatures that hear silence despite their total inability to introspect" (2008, 274). His reference to introspection here seems only to emphasize that "Audrey can *savour* silence because she can attend to the workings of her own mind" (274; italics mine).

(say, neurally) that her situation is subjectively indiscriminable from the perceptual situation that she would be in within her soundproof room, she will undergo a hallucinatory experience of silence. Here, in effect, I am deploying a claim defended by Mike Martin (2006, 363, claim II; see also his 2004), whose analogue in this context is the following:

The notion of an auditory experience of silence is that of a situation being indiscriminable through reflection from a veridical auditory perception of silence as such.

But something has gone wrong, for by the indiscriminability principle set out earlier, were Audrey to be rendered profoundly deaf, she would be in a situation that was subjectively indiscriminable from her experiential situation in the soundproof room. But by the criterion for experiencing just given, this means that rendering Audrey profoundly deaf is sufficient for her to be hallucinating silence. That cannot be right, however, since we are not at all inclined to regard the profoundly deaf as perpetually hallucinating silence. The objection can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Assumption: in a soundproof room, Audrey can undergo episodes of hearing silence, and there is something it is like (subjectively) to undergo such episodes.
  - (b) A sufficient criterion for having an experience of some kind, *K*, is being in a situation that is subjectively indiscriminable from a situation in which one is undergoing a veridical perceptual experience of some kind *K*.
  - (c) Audrey's experiential situation upon being rendered profoundly deaf is indiscriminable from her experiential situation in a soundproof room.
  - (d) Hence, upon being rendered profoundly deaf, Audrey enjoys an experience of the same kind that she enjoys when in the soundproof room (i.e., rendering Audrey profoundly deaf is sufficient for her to be having an experience of silence).
  - (e) The profoundly deaf do not perceive sounds or silence.
  - (f) Hence being profoundly deaf is a sufficient condition for hallucinating silence.
  - (g) The profoundly deaf are not perpetually hallucinating silence.
- Contradiction.

What is going on in Sorensen's discussion is an acceptance of the idea that we cannot distinguish between deafness and silence from the inside, that is, (c), combined with an attempt to allow for experiences of silence, that is, (a). Sorensen attempts to impose that distinction from the outside; what my argument spells out is how difficult that is to do. The simplest adjustment for Sorensen to make is, of course, to embrace the cognitive theory: really we don't hear silence; we merely hear *that* it is silent. However, as Sorensen put it to me, this would be repugnant to him given the central ambition of his book. In what follows, I avoid this "repugnant" conclusion by showing that we can, after all, find room for genuine experience of silence without committing ourselves to hallucinations in the permanently and profoundly deaf.

#### 4 That Eloquent Silence: Hallucinating Pauses

Sorensen's case of auditory hallucination seems amply to demonstrate that we sometimes hallucinate silence. However, an unremarked feature of the example is that it involves hallucinating silence between calls, that is, hallucinating *pauses* or *gaps*. A pause is a silence whose identity is determined by the sounds that frame it. This section develops the view that we can hear silences when they are, like pauses, silences whose experiential presence is parasitic on our experience of contrastive sound.<sup>10</sup> There is an important difference, according to this "contrast view," between hallucinating or hearing *pauses* and the supposed phenomenon of *simply* hallucinating or hearing silence. Even if *simply* experiencing silence is nothing more than lacking auditory experience (a view I dispute in secs. 5–7), we nonetheless sometimes hear silence in a way that goes beyond merely lacking auditory experience *in virtue of hearing sounds*.<sup>11</sup> According to the contrast view, pauses and gaps are heard in virtue of hearing temporally separated sounds. Other silences may be heard just in virtue of hearing a single sound cease, as when we enjoy the silence at the end of an orchestral performance. If we think of pauses as auditory "holes," we can think of such phenomena as auditory "edges" or "cliffs."<sup>12</sup>

The contrast view is obscured by a certain way of thinking about temporal experience that holds that we can analyze the stream of consciousness in terms of the momentary apprehension of momentary contents. If this "snapshot" conception were right, then we could not say that we heard pauses in virtue of hearing sounds. Our experiential condition at a moment of purported silence experience would be both independent of surrounding experience and, in itself, undistinguished from our condition when simply lacking auditory experience. However, adhering to the idea that experience can be analyzed down to instantaneous exposures deprives us of more than just experience of silence. Notoriously, Reid argues from the claims (a) that "the operations of both [sense and consciousness] are confined to the present point of time"

10. Something like this view is, in fact, suggested by remarks in Sorensen (2004).

11. Cf. Guardini: "Silence is in need of sound to manifest itself. Sound and silence belong together, they make the entity in which man lives. Just as the word decays if silence does not give depth to it, so does silence become dumbness if it cannot manifest itself in the spoken word" (quoted in Granacher, 1964, 81–82). It is also worth noting the work of Hughes et al. (2001) that demonstrates neural responses selective for the *non*-occurrence of expected tones in tone sequences.

12. Thanks to Fiona Macpherson for this analogy and discussion. We may also hear silence while hearing contemporaneous sounds; for example, we can hear silence from the cello section despite the playing of the rest of the string section. For simplicity's sake, I focus on cases of "pure" silence perception. Of course, the contrast view is an application of a much more general phenomenon concerning temporal experience.

and (b) that “there can be no succession in a point of time” to the conclusion that “strictly and philosophically” we cannot perceive change at all (1827, 169). Ultimately Reid’s “snapshot” picture threatens all temporal experience and with it all auditory experience.<sup>13</sup>

Reid is far from alone in defending a snapshot conception of experience. However, it is more common (and far more plausible) to react by abandoning some element of the view. Following Dainton (2008), we can divide reactions into two camps: those who agree with the snapshot theorist that the *operations* (i.e., acts) of sense and consciousness are confined to the present point of time, but deny that this prevents such acts from presenting successions (“retentionalists”); and those who deny that even the acts of sense and consciousness are confined to the instant (“extensionalists”).

According to the retentionalist, the *objects* of experience are extended in time, so that at some instant we can enjoy an experience of a stretch of time—“the specious present.” Nonetheless the *acts* of consciousness are momentary. This allows retentionalists to maintain the traditional view that the stream of consciousness can be analyzed in terms of what is true of the stream at particular moments or over tiny durations.<sup>14</sup> The extensionalist rejects this decomposition, holding that the metaphysically basic units of experience are extended in time.<sup>15</sup> For present purposes, it suffices to recognize that either way of rejecting the snapshot conception finds room for the contrast view. For the retentionalist, this is because the objects of any awareness are extended in time. Thus a pause can be apprehended in a momentary awareness, in virtue of that awareness being an awareness of two temporally separated sounds with a gap between them. For the extensionalist, this is because the character of our stream of consciousness at an instant is constitutively dependent on the nature of the stream over an extended period of time. Thus our experiential condition when hearing a pause is, in part, grounded in facts about our experiential condition over time, in particular our experience of two separated sounds.

13. See Prichard (1950) for the claim (made on Reidian grounds) that it is, strictly speaking, impossible to hear sounds.

14. This is a claim that Descartes relies on in the *Meditations*, where he avers, “A lifetime can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now” (1986, 33; see also 88). It is a claim that contemporary neo-Humeans continue to propound.

15. See Phillips (2009, forthcoming), where I argue for extensionalism on the ground that experiencing something temporally extended as such (e.g., motion or sound), at an isolated instant, is revealed to be incoherent when we reflect on our experience. For an excellent introduction to the area, see Dainton (2000, 2008).

The contrast view nicely accounts for Sorensen's case of hallucinating silence. According to the contrast view, we can legitimately attribute hallucinations of silence to a subject in cases where the subject *also* has hallucinations (or normal perceptual experiences) of separated sounds. To distinguish hallucinating silence from the mere absence of experience, the view appeals to the experience of surrounding sounds. In virtue of these sounds, we can hear or hallucinate the interleaved silence. The contrast view does not provide room for hearing or hallucinating silence over long periods or for *simply* experiencing silence. On both retentionalist and extensionalist accounts, the basic units of time perceived are of a certain limited duration. As a toy model, we can think of these basic durations of experience as temporal windows of limited width. If the window has a width  $W$ , then one will only be able to hear silences in virtue of a sound or sounds occurring within  $W$  of the perceived silence. In traditional terms, one can only hear silences in virtue of a sound or sounds occurring within the same specious present.

If pauses (and their kin) are the *only* silences that we can hear, the success criterion for giving Audrey a hallucination employed in the argument against Sorensen must be modified. We will succeed in giving Audrey a hallucination of silence only if she cannot discriminate her experiential situation from a situation in which she is perceiving a pause or auditory edge. Clearly this criterion does not commit us to claiming that the deaf permanently hallucinate silence, for the deaf are not permanently hearing pauses or auditory edges. Nor is hearing a pause experientially akin to brief deafness. For both the retentionalist and the extensionalist, the basic contents of experience are extended in time, so it is legitimate to appeal to facts about these extended contents in saying what experiential condition a subject is in at a moment. This allows us to ground a genuine difference between our experiential situation when we hear a pause and our situation where we simply lack auditory experience. Only in the former case are we then *experiencing* two separated sounds.

According to the contrast view, reflection on hallucination helps us get clear about the following argument.

- (i) If we hear, we hear sounds. (Or equivalently: all auditory experiences are experiences of sounds.)
- (ii) Silence is the absence of sounds.
- (iii) Thus we cannot hear silence.

Sorensen rejects (i) on the basis that we hear silence. The contrast view need not deny (i); instead the argument can be declared invalid; (i) does not preclude our hearing silence. We can hear certain silences, such as pauses, in virtue of hearing sounds. That leaves it open whether we ever *simply* hear silence, and whether there is anything *experiential* to distinguish that supposed phenomenon from deafness. But for all that

has been said so far, O'Shaughnessy may be right: there can be no negative *perceptions*.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless we can perceive silence as part of a positive perception. Thus the contrast view might be seen as an attractive compromise: a way of acknowledging much of the cognitive view's motivation while holding on to the idea that there are at least some cases of experiencing silence. Nonetheless, in the rest of this paper, I want to suggest that it is possible to take a bolder view, one that allows for simply experiencing silence.

## 5 Objectless Consciousness

### 5.1 Moore on the Structure of Sensation

G. E. Moore's "The Refutation of Idealism" is often cited as the source for the contemporary doctrine of transparency. Moore's own analysis of perceptual experience ("sensation") is, regrettably, rarely discussed.<sup>17</sup> His analysis is highly relevant in the current context. Here are the two passages standardly quoted from Moore.

In general, that which makes a sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue (Moore, 1903, 446)

When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as it were diaphanous. (450)

These passages are often put forward as statements of Moore's own view.<sup>18</sup> Yet if we put the remarks in context, we discover that such passages quite misrepresent his considered opinion. Here are both quotations in their proper contexts.

16. O'Shaughnessy (2000, 333, n. 6) denies that holes are strictly absences, and hence allows that they can be perceived. A hole, according to O'Shaughnessy, is not a thing but "a spatial quality of its owner" and as such is not an irreducible absence, for the owner can be described without mentioning any absence as such. In other words, "Seeing a hole is a certain way of seeing part of an object's shape." O'Shaughnessy does not extend this account to pauses. But it seems to me that he might be persuaded to do so and thereby endorse the basic claim of the contrast view. That said, I think O'Shaughnessy is wrong about holes. To see this, however, we need to turn to the discussion of the visual field and, in particular, to Martin's claims about spatial awareness discussed hereafter. To anticipate: O'Shaughnessy's claim about holes fails to make room for the experiential difference between seeing an object with a hole (and the empty space within) and *feeling* that object's shape (where we have no awareness of the empty space itself).

17. Some recent work bucks this trend. See esp. Hellie (2007), as well as Campbell (2009, sec. 37.2), Gendler and Hawthorne (2006, 2, n. 4), Martin (2002, 378, n. 3) and Stoljar (2004).

18. As is often done, Kriegel (2009, 371, n. 27) stitches the two quotations together, assuring the reader that this involves no misrepresentation of Moore's text. See also Tye (2002, 139).

When we refer to introspection and try to discover what the sensation of blue is, it is very easy to suppose that we have before us only a single term. The term “blue” is easy enough to distinguish, but the other element which I have called “consciousness”—that which sensation of blue has in common with sensation of green—is extremely difficult to fix. That many people fail to distinguish it at all is sufficiently shown by the fact that there are materialists. And, in general, that which makes the sensation of blue a mental fact seems to escape us: it seems, if I may use a metaphor, to be transparent—we look through it and see nothing but the blue; we may be convinced that there *is something* but what it is no philosopher, I think, has yet clearly recognised. (446)

Though philosophers have recognised that *something* distinct is meant by consciousness, they have never yet had a clear conception of *what* that something is. They have not been able to hold *it* and *blue* before their minds and to compare them, in the same way in which they can compare *blue* and *green*. And this for the reason I gave above: namely that the moment we try to fix our attention upon consciousness and to see what, distinctly, it is, it seems to vanish: it seems as if we had before us a mere emptiness. When we try to introspect the sensation of blue, all we can see is the blue: the other element is as if it were diaphanous. Yet it can be distinguished if we look enough, and if we know that there is something to look for. My main object in this paragraph has been to try to make the reader *see* it; but I fear I shall have succeeded very ill. (450)

Moore was quite right in this last remark; he did not succeed in getting all his readers to see it. Many have ignored his idea of this distinct element in all conscious experience, namely, the relation of conscious awareness itself. And it is ironic that many now think that they are following Moore when they declare that the nature of conscious experience is exhausted by its objects, and have consequently presumed that if we fail to focus our attention on the objects of experience, we find before us “a mere emptiness.”<sup>19</sup>

Moore’s actual view is that “the sensation of blue includes in its analysis, beside blue, *both* a unique element ‘awareness’ *and* a unique relation of this element to blue” (450). This element of awareness, Moore tells us, is uniquely involved in the analysis of every single experience (452). So while Moore is entirely content with the view that in describing our experience itself, we *do* turn to its objects, he rejects the stronger view that listing the objects of experience (and their interrelations) *suffices* to characterize experience. For Moore, we must also consider our consciousness *and* its relation to the objects in question (if any).

It is not hard to see how this relates to silence. If experience can entirely be analyzed in terms of its objects, then where there is no object, there is no experience, merely an absence of such, “a mere emptiness.” In the auditory case: no sound, no experience.

19. For that common view, see Carruthers, who insists that “there is nothing to your experience over and above the way it represents the world as being” (2005, 40), and “there are no non-relational properties of experience qua experience” (47). See also Tye (2002, 141–142), Harman (1990, 39), and Byrne (2006, 223–224).

On the other hand, if we accept Moore's actual analysis, then where there is no object, we might think that there could still be *awareness* itself. Thus we can distinguish between true deafness and the experience of silence precisely by invoking the presence of conscious awareness. Those experiencing silence, unlike the truly deaf, are subjects of a conscious awareness, but one in the peculiar condition of being unrelated to any object. If this is right, the object-exclusivity principle set out earlier must be rejected (or at least qualified). Sorensen and O'Shaughnessy, then, receive Moore's diagnosis. They have not introspected hard enough and so have failed to distinguish this element of experience.

## 5.2 Complications

As it stands, this Moorean picture certainly seems to allow that there can be something it is like, subjectively, to undergo auditory experience even where it lacks an object. Nonetheless this account faces a number of potential problems. Indeed, as discussed hereafter, Moore himself would likely have denied the possibility of silence experience that I take his more basic, "Moorean" position to allow for.

The first difficulty is what the account should say about the subjective perspective of the *newly* deaf. For the account to mark a difference between deafness and the experience of silence, it must insist that the deaf lack an auditory stream of consciousness. The problem with saying this is that, at least sometimes, the newly deaf are unable to discover by reflection on their own stream of consciousness that they are deaf. Thus Jonathan Rée relates the story of John Kitto, a twelve-year-old Cornish boy who fell off a roof.

He was carried home, and lay motionless for several days, surrounded by his anxious family. As he regained consciousness, Kitto saw his relatives talking to each other over his sickbed, and at first was grateful for their quietness. "I thought," he recalled, "that out of regard to my feeble condition, they spoke in whispers, because I heard them not." As he regained strength, though, their considerateness began to irk him, and he started to wish for conversation. "Why do you not speak?" he cried out impatiently. In reply, they wrote upon a slate the awful words, "YOU ARE DEAF." (1999, 37)

This case, as with Sorensen's shell-shocked soldier, presents a challenge to the Moorean analysis that holds that there *is* an experiential difference between someone deaf and someone engulfed in silence, namely, the presence of conscious awareness in the latter case.

The Moorean might at this point insist that such subjects really *can* distinguish their conditions; it is just that they, like us, fail to introspect hard enough. It is hardly implausible to diagnose a lack of careful introspective attention in a shell-shocked soldier or a severely injured young boy. However, fictional examples are less easily dismissed. Inside her chamber, Audrey is provided with a red and a blue pill. One pill



does nothing; the other will render her briefly and completely deaf after a few moments. She does not know which is which, only that neither pill has any long-term ill effects. In the chamber, Audrey swallows one of the pills and calmly wonders: “Am I deaf or am I still just experiencing the silence?” Sorensen’s verdict (and I submit that of our untutored intuition) is that Audrey will not be able to tell. If that is right, does it not undermine the Moorean proposal? After all, introspective indiscriminability was supposed to suffice for *experiential* identity.

To respond to this objection, the Moorean should first note that we mark a difference between being *blindfolded* and being blind. It is widely accepted that the blind do not literally inhabit a world of darkness, and that donning a blindfold does not replicate what it is like to be blind. Nonetheless it is unclear what it is like *suddenly* to go blind. Does one suddenly lose one’s visual world, or does one pass through a state of darkness, of blindfoldedness, first? It seems plausible that some cases do take this indirect route.<sup>20</sup> If so, this raises the question of whether we should admit a concept of being *deaf-folded*, where deaf-folding is the loss of hearing but not of auditory consciousness itself.<sup>21</sup>

The concept of deaf-folding is important, since the Moorean can respond to the objection at hand by proposing that the newly deaf may at first become deaf-folded. This would explain the inability to distinguish between being deaf and hearing silence, since when deaf-folded one is, by the considerations adduced in sec. 3, hallucinating silence. However, as with blindness, subjects who become deaf-folded will eventually lose this objectless auditory consciousness and so cease to hallucinate silence. This allows the Moorean to maintain that long-term deafness is the total absence of auditory consciousness, and in particular that the long-term deaf do not hallucinate silence.<sup>22</sup>

20. There is a fascinating and extremely diverse literature on what happens to one’s inner life after one has been blind for some time. See, for example, Hull (1990) on the progression to “deep blindness.” However, I have been unable to find, perhaps for obvious reasons, any systematic investigation of what it is like to lose one’s sight suddenly.

21. One might argue that the absence of such a concept indicates something about the auditory case in contrast to the visual. That said, it seems easy enough to introduce such a concept. Indeed, I have found at least two lighthearted coinages in chat room discussions following a quick Google search. I’m grateful to Mike Martin for encouraging me to think about deaf-folding, as well as for discussion more generally.

22. The details here are an empirical matter, of course. There are also a number of further complications. For example, how should we think of the auditory hallucinations that can occur in the deafened, if not in those deaf from birth or a very early age? The most obvious thing to say is that they involve the reemergence of an auditory stream. But it might be suggested that they evidence its presence more generally in such subjects.

A second concern with the Moorean view is that none of us can ever strictly hear silence because of the design of our auditory system.<sup>23</sup> First, any environment in which one is realistically likely to find oneself contains enough air vibration to stimulate auditory receptors to some degree. Moreover, an absence of environmental sound typically increases the sensitivity of these mechanisms, so that one becomes sensitive to the slightest whisper of wind. Second, even if one blocks one's ears, each ear becomes sensitive to the constant background of internal sounds such as our heart-beat, blood flow, and digestive noises. Finally, the sensory receptors (hair cells) in the cochlea themselves produce sounds (otoacoustic emissions)—sounds that can be heard by putting a sensitive microphone into someone else's ear canal. Thus even in a situation where the external apparatus of the ear is completely muted, an intact cochlea will always yield some residual, continual stimulation of the auditory system.

A number of responses can be made to this objection. First, it might be granted that *empirically* we can't experience silence, but denied that this alters the terms of the debate. The debate is, after all, a conceptual question about the structure of auditory awareness, so even if it isn't possible for our actual auditory systems to hear total silence, the conceptual question of whether audition *allows* for such experience remains open. Second, it is highly plausible that "silence" and "hearing silence" are context-sensitive expressions. Thus it is perfectly appropriate in certain contexts to disregard certain sounds, for example, extremely low-level noise.<sup>24</sup> Within such contexts, the question of whether awareness of silence might be anything more than a lack of auditory experience remains. Third, hearing sounds is quite compatible with hearing particular (perhaps localized) silences.<sup>25</sup> These too can be used to generate the concep-

23. This is a common objection, but for pressing me forcefully on this point, I'm grateful to Hanna Pickard and, through her, for comments from Ben Willmore, which I draw on in this paragraph. It is also worth noting a further common objection, namely, that even people whose auditory nerve has been completely destroyed are capable of hearing, since they can still detect vibrations through their fingers and feet. (This is an experience much emphasized by Helen Keller in her writings, and a reason that Jonathan Rée suggests may explain John Kitto's failure to realize his deafness.) However, we should not assume that the perception of low-frequency vibrations is necessarily *hearing*. More plausibly these are cases of *feeling* vibrations that one knows to correlate with the presence of sound. If so, the objection fails to get started. The writer David Wright (quoted in Rée, 1999, 37), suggests in this relation that "it is not necessary to be able to hear in order to hear." The contradiction can be avoided if we gloss Wright as claiming, rather more banally, that it is not necessary to be able to hear to detect the presence of sounds.

24. Cf. Price (1933, 39, n. 1): "When I say, 'There was silence' I mean something like 'My auditory data were of faint intensity and no one of them differed greatly from any other.'" Sorenson (2008, 270) briefly criticizes this passage but seems to miss a contextualist view of the matter (though see Sorenson, 2004, 478).

25. Cf. Chandler, "There was a silence [at the end of the line]. I could hear voices in the background and the clack of a typewriter" (1983, 458). On particular silences, see Sorenson (2008, 273).

tual question at issue.<sup>26</sup> Finally, one might focus exclusively on hallucinations of silence, since auditory hallucinations can plausibly occur in someone lacking the capacity to hear actual sounds (thus finessing the previously mentioned difficulties). The question, then, would be: is there any difference between hallucinating silence and simply lacking auditory experience?

A third objection to the Moorean picture is perhaps the most serious. It can be put as follows: “You say that hearing silence is the *presence* of consciousness in the *absence* of auditory object. But apart from its objects, what makes the consciousness *auditory*? If nothing does, in what sense is it *silence* that is being heard or hallucinated when we enjoy this objectless consciousness?”<sup>27</sup> Here we have another way of understanding the motivation for the object-exclusivity principle invoked earlier. A traditional picture of the senses involves their being differentiated in terms of their proper objects. If an act of awareness lacks any object, then, on this picture, it is hard to see how it could count as a modality-specific act of awareness. Indeed, this seems to be Moore’s view. As Campbell puts it, for Moore, “there is no such thing as a particular type of awareness without the object being there to differentiate that exercise of awareness from any other” (Campbell, 2009, 654).<sup>28</sup> Of course, there are familiar objections to the idea that the senses can be individuated in terms of their proper objects. However, the idea that sounds are the proper objects of audition is independently compelling, even if one denies that all the senses are marked out in terms of proper objects.

Nonetheless soundless consciousness might be *auditory* if such consciousness remains a sensitivity to sound. In what follows, I explore two ways of making sense of this idea. In the broadest of terms, the two avenues diverge with respect to whether they allow that soundless auditory consciousness can obtain on its own, without *any* kind of object. According to the first avenue (sec. 6), it is the structure or form of awareness that helps secure the auditory nature of soundless consciousness. The structure of auditory awareness itself forms part of the content of experience. This is what occurs in the visual case. In vision, space does not merely provide an ordering of perceived objects; space itself, as a potential location for objects, forms part of the

26. The issues here are complex. Some writers deny there are any particular silences (e.g., O’Shaughnessy, 2000, 329), and as I note hereafter, the idea of localization is problematic with respect to audition.

27. I’m grateful to Matt Soteriou for pressing me on this point.

28. For his part, Campbell does not endorse Moore but rather seeks to elaborate a three-place picture of conscious experience involving subjects, “standpoints,” and objects. We are also told that “to describe [someone’s] standpoint explicitly, we have to say which sensory modality is involved” (2009, 658). In relation to Moore, one might compare Chalmers, who is tempted by the idea of a generic “sense of self,” as he puts it, “a kind of background hum ... that is somehow fundamental to consciousness and that is there even when the other components are not” (1996, 10).

content of our experience. It is controversial whether audition possesses a spatial field. However, the contrast view discussed earlier suggests that audition does possess a *temporal* field. Given this, experience of silence can be thought of as awareness of a temporal (or, if one thinks audition also possesses a spatial field, spatiotemporal) region as lacking in sound, but nonetheless as the potential occasion (and perhaps location) for sound.

According to the second, purely Moorean avenue (sec. 7), experience of silence does not require an object of any kind. It can be thought of as a case of *pure* form without content. To respond to the current objection, what we need to recognize is that objectless awareness can count as auditory just if it is a mode of awareness that enables *listening*. If we are not profoundly deaf, we can listen even in the absence of sound. In enabling listening, understood in this context as the opening of our attention to the presence of sound, the genuinely auditory character of objectless awareness is secured. Though distinct, these two avenues need not be treated as mutually exclusive. Indeed, one might ultimately conclude that soundless consciousness counts as auditory (and so as experience of silence) only insofar as it involves awareness of a period of time throughout which one could listen for sounds. In other words, one might conclude that both ideas are required to vouchsafe experience of silence.

## 6 Form as Content: The Auditory Field

### 6.1 Spatial Fields

M. G. F. Martin's investigation of the differences between sight and touch leads him to emphasize a structural feature of our visual awareness, its possession of a visual field, absent from the case of bodily sensation that he takes to be constitutive of touch. Martin (1992, 1993) argues that in vision we see not only spatially related objects but also space itself as a potential location for objects. To illustrate this idea, he first draws our attention to our experience of a Polo mint, viewed head-on.

One experiences not only the white parts of the mint, but also the hole in the middle and the area around its outer edge. In order to see the mint as a ring-shape, one needs to distinguish the figure from the ground, but the ground here need be no more than the empty space around the object. (1993, 214)

Martin contrasts how we might be aware of our outstretched arms as a certain distance apart but not of the space between them.

Martin further argues that we are not merely aware of empty space in relation to particular objects; we are aware that our visual experience has a fieldlike character because we are aware of our own visual limitations as such. Think of the visual field as a truncated cone extending as far as we can see out from its frustum, where our

eyes are. Clearly we are not aware of the cone's lateral surface as we are aware of the surfaces of objects. Rather, our awareness of the cone consists in our being aware that the space we can see is not all there is to see. The structure of visual experience involves a division of the world into a region where things can now be seen, and a region that, while visible, is beyond our current visual limits. In other words, the cone's surface is determined by our sensory limitations.<sup>29</sup>

With this conception of the visual field in play, we can make sense of the idea of visual consciousness without objects in terms of our being conscious of having a perspective on a world potentially, but not in fact, filled with visible things.<sup>30</sup> We can differentiate this from a lack of consciousness by contrasting our relation to locations beyond the visual field with our relation to locations within it. In the latter case, we have awareness (since sensitive to the presence of objects), in the other not. To see empty space on this picture is to be aware of a region of space as the potential location for visible objects, but as currently empty of such objects.

If there were a spatial auditory field, then in possessing auditory consciousness, we would be aware of a region of space as a subregion of a larger space where audible sounds might be located despite not being within current earshot. We would be aware, that is, of our auditory limitations. A profoundly deaf person, in contrast, would lack any form of consciousness so structured. Such a person would not inhabit an auditory world. If this were right, we could respond to the objection "What makes soundless consciousness auditory?" by appealing to the fieldlike structure of audition to provide content in the absence of an object. Hearing silence would be being aware of a certain region of space as lacking in audible sounds. However, it is a notoriously vexed question whether there *is* a direct analogue of the visual field in audition.<sup>31</sup> Rather than pursue that issue here, I want to suggest a different way in which audition has a fieldlike structure, one that will serve the present purpose even if we are skeptical about audition possessing a spatial field.

29. It is not clear what we should say about the base of the cone. As the visual field extends, the kinds of objects that are visible change, so we might think of the visual field itself becoming "thinner," as what it is a field of diminishes. Indeed, we might think of the field as more like a net with increasingly large holes. Consequently it is not clear whether there is a determinate base to the visual cone as there are (more or less) determinate sides.

30. For a development of just such an account, as well as insightful discussion of Martin's distinctive conception of a visual field, see Richardson (2010).

31. For the suggestion that audition does have a spatial field, see Broad (1923, 307) and Ihde (1976). For the claim that auditory experience lacks intrinsic spatial significance, see Strawson (1959) and Nudds (2001). The considerations that Nudds adduces in favor of Strawson's claim do not seem to me conclusive. However, the same must be said of arguments in favor of a spatial auditory field, since these fail to establish that audition has intrinsic spatial significance independent of awareness of our own bodies.

## 6.2 Temporal Fields

The foregoing discussion of pause perception suggests that we should countenance *temporal* auditory objects, analogous to Martin's Polo mint. Thus consider Mancini's theme from *The Pink Panther*, and in particular the brief breaths between the ascending slurred pairs of notes with which it opens. Naively, we are happy to acknowledge that we can hear phrases like these as such and attend to them as temporal wholes.<sup>32</sup> Thus we can think of the whole phrase (i.e., the two pairs of slurred notes) on analogy with the mint. Echoing Martin, we might suggest that one experiences not only the pitched parts of the phrase (the notes) but also the brief breath in the middle and the silence surrounding it. To hear the phrase with the auditory shape it has, one needs to distinguish it as such from its temporal surrounds, but the surroundings here need be no more than the silence around the phrase.

Pursuing the analogy, I suggest that we are aware not only of sounds in time but also of the period of time that they occupy.<sup>33</sup> Of course, the visuospatial field is three-dimensional, and its auditory temporal analogue is only one-dimensional. But the essential analogy remains: we not only hear sounds as temporally related but are also aware of periods of time themselves as potential occasions for sound. As a result, we have a way of making sense of experience of silence, for we can hear periods of time as either filled with or lacking in audible sound.<sup>34</sup>

Audition cannot be distinguished from other senses in terms of its possession of a temporal field. Our experience in other modalities is also experience of time as such: we can feel rhythmic taps in a way that corresponds to the *Pink Panther* case above; likewise a fading and glowing light; perhaps we can even taste and smell periods of time as lacking in tastes and smells (think of a wind intermittently wafting in the salt

32. As Tenney and Polansky aver, "For the musician, a piece of music does not consist merely of an inarticulate stream of elementary sounds, but a hierarchically ordered network of sounds, motives, phases, passages, sections, movements, etc.—i.e., time-spans whose perceptual boundaries are largely determined by the nature of the sounds and sound configurations occurring within them" (1980, 205). Likewise, Nudds (2009, 81) notes, "When we hear a melody we hear a sequence of sounds *as a sequence*." See also Ihde (1976, 88). Phillips (2010) discusses some of the theoretical difficulties here.

33. See Broad (1923, chap. 10) for discussion of the temporal field. Ihde offers a pioneering discussion of the auditory field. In the temporal case, he talks of a "'region' in which the surging of time is dramatically present" (1976, 56). Contemporaneous work by Soteriou (2011) develops a closely related account of silence perception as involving a temporal field. Soteriou's paper goes on to explore how differences in the temporal and spatial structuring of our perceptual experience might account for differences in our naive conception of time and space themselves.

34. Note that how much we build into "audible" here will turn in part on whether we think that there is a spatial field to audition—if so, we can hear spatiotemporal regions as lacking in audible sound. If not, we will need an understanding of audible on which distant sounds are not audible. Clearly, in one sense, distant sounds *are* audible even if not audible to me.

smell of the sea, for example).<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, although audition is not *the* temporal sense, its possession of a temporal field opens the way to hold that hearing silence is a matter of being aware of a period of time *as the merely potential occasion for audible sound*. Just as we can see a region of space as crowded or empty, so we can hear a period of time as noise filled or quiet or silent. On this view, the object-exclusivity principle only excludes hearing silence if it is interpreted too narrowly. By recognizing the structural fact that audition possesses a temporal field, we can correct for this and allow for experience of silence.

In the final section of this essay, I turn to a second, though potentially complementary, way of holding that soundless consciousness can be genuinely auditory, and so genuinely experience of silence. I do so by appeal to the fact that we can *listen* to silence.

## 7 Listening to Silence

Our ordinary conception happily allows for listening to silence. Witness this passage from Jack London's *White Fang*:

White Fang trembled with fear, and though the impulse came to crawl out of his hiding place, he resisted it. After a time the voices died away, and sometime after that he crept out to enjoy the success of his undertaking. Darkness was coming on, and for a while he played about among the trees, pleasuring in his freedom. Then, and quite suddenly, he became aware of loneliness. He sat down to consider, listening to the silence of the forest and perturbed by it. (1992, 141)

Listening is a form of attention. According to Alan White, all attention concepts are "object-demanding": "attention ... must have an object" (1964, 1). If silence is the absence of sound, silence provides a counterexample (and likewise to other claims that White makes about attention concepts).

My purpose in this final section is not to defend a particular analysis of listening. My twofold purpose is more limited. First, I dispute accounts of listening insofar as they deny that we can listen to silence. Second, I explore the idea that listening offers a way of defending a purely Moorean treatment of our experience of silence as pure awareness in the absence of content. I focus on two recent treatments of listening, those of Crowther (2009) and O'Shaughnessy (2000), both of which deny that we can listen to silence.

### 7.1 Crowther on Listening

According to Crowther's illuminating account of listening,

Listening to an object is an agential process in which a condition of aural perceptual relatedness to some object is preserved or maintained with the aim of putting the subject in a position in

35. Here compare Broad's remark that "the *special* sensible fields of the various senses form part of a single *general* sensible field, so far as temporal characteristics are concerned" (1923, 360).

which he knows what sound that object is making. For a subject to listen to an object requires that they hear it, else there is nothing that has been maintained. (Crowther, 2009, 190)<sup>36</sup>

This account immediately raises a possibility that needs exploring. Where there are no sounds, there may still be sources. Thus where there is silence, there may still be objects to hear and so to listen to. We might accordingly expect Crowther to accommodate listening to silence by treating it as listening to a silent source (cf. 184). Crowther does indeed allow for listening to fallings silent and pauses in a manner closely akin to the contrast view discussed earlier (189–190). However, Crowther explicitly rules out *simply* listening to silence: “One cannot listen to some producer of sound throughout a period of time without having heard that thing” (189); and likewise:

If the agent is genuinely listening to the producer of the sound ... the process must put him in a position to know what sound O is making for at least some sound that the producer of that sound makes. (184)

What is unclear is why this ruling is laid down. Why can we not be counted as listening to a source even though the source is making no sounds? It will do no good to insist that hearing some sound made by a source is a necessary condition of being in “aural perceptual contact” with the source. This just begs the question. Why can we not be counted as in aural contact with a source precisely because we are auditorily aware of the source’s silence? Consequently, I suggest, if we accept Crowther’s basic account, we should excise the restriction just imposed and allow that listening to silence is listening to a source that is making no sound.<sup>37</sup>

Crowther’s analysis of listening depends on the claim that source listening is basic: “One could not listen to a sound S unless one were listening to the producer of the sound S. ... Listening to a producer of sound is basic in this sense with respect to ‘listening to a sound S’” (183). This claim is problematic for at least three reasons. First, as Nudds (2001, 221) notes, “It is possible to hear a sound without hearing its source.” The example Nudds gives involves an echo that he takes to be “an example of a sound existing even after the event which produced it ceases (we may suppose)

36. This account extends to all noninstrumental listening *to*: in Crowther’s terms to all atelic, homogeneous listening, as opposed to telic, nonhomogeneous listening, such as listening *for*. Crowther is happy to say that we can listen for sounds even while there are none to be heard. What he denies is that we can listen *to* silence.

37. Crowther (personal communication) agrees that we can hear silence but nonetheless resists the idea that listening to the silence is anything more than listening *out for* sounds or sources and not, strictly, a form of listening *to* anything.



to exist" (222).<sup>38</sup> Here Crowther must either resist Nudds's claim that we can hear sounds without hearing their sources, or allow that there are sounds that we can hear but are unable to listen to. Neither seems an attractive position. Second, it is hard to see how Crowther can provide a satisfactory account of our attentional engagement with music. In a typical case, we listen to the music itself—the complex of sounds involved—as opposed to the sources making the music. Indeed, the creation of a musical sound-world, divorced from the mundane world of material sources, is often precisely the aim of composer and performer. In line with this idea, we often wish wholly to absorb ourselves in music. If successful, we are precisely not attending to its source. (On these issues, see Scruton 1997, 2009.) Third, and finally, although listening to *particular* silences can be accommodated within Crowther's picture, experience of silence in general requires sourceless listening. We can hear silence in empty space. Moreover, as I have urged, if we can hear it, we can listen to it. Yet such silence has no source.

For these three reasons, I suggest that Crowther's account is unsatisfactory. As a result, we must look elsewhere to make sense of listening to silence. It cannot fundamentally be a matter of listening to a source that is making no sound.

## 7.2 O'Shaughnessy on Listening

I now turn to O'Shaughnessy's account of listening. (For further discussion, see Crowther, 2009, secs. 3–4.) O'Shaughnessy's key concern is with what he calls the "antitheticality puzzle" (2000, 401), to wit: if hearing is the passive perceptual recording of reality, how can it be responsive to the will in the way that it appears to be through the mental activity of listening? In discussing this puzzle, O'Shaughnessy makes a number of claims about the relationship between hearing and listening.

It is absurd to suppose that listening and hearing are two and distinct. They cannot ... be identical, but equally as certainly they cannot be held apart. There can be no doubt that listening *involves*, but is not actually to be identified with, the hearing that is guaranteed by its occurrence. (390)

In particular, O'Shaughnessy holds that "there can be no doubt that one hears at each instant in which one listens" (384).

To make sense of the relation between hearing and listening in such a way as to allow for the passivity of hearing, O'Shaughnessy argues that listening is the causing

38. Martin (2012) argues that recorded sounds provide another example. In the light of such cases, it is tempting to conclude that sound perception is basic, and that insofar as we hear sources, we hear them through hearing the sounds they make (or perhaps their silence). Nudds (2001) concurs but argues for a distinctive *cross-modal* way in which we can experience the *production* of sounds. For an excellent introduction to issues concerning sound and source perception, see the editors' introduction to Nudds and O'Callaghan (2009).

of a sound to cause a hearing of that sound. On this account, trivially, there can be no listening that does not involve the hearing of a sound.

Listening in the absence of part-causation at the hands of the sound proves to be nothing more than a failed striving to listen. ... It actually *completes itself* through external assistance. (394)

O'Shaughnessy's account thus denies that we can listen to silence. This is unsurprising, given his commitment to object-exclusivity reaffirmed in the same discussion: "Perception, of its nature and therefore universally, is a responding-to or suffering-of at the hands of its object" (389). As I argued earlier, we must reject this idea; we can suffer in silence. Nonetheless, if we insist that hearing and listening to silence are both possible, we need not reject everything that O'Shaughnessy says about listening. An alternative, which I now explore, is to amend or *enrich* his account of auditory attention to allow for listening to silence.

The crucial emendation required is, of course, the rejection of object-exclusivity. Once that assumption is rejected, we can reconsider O'Shaughnessy's conception of listening and, in particular, the idea that we can listen to silence. Two of O'Shaughnessy's metaphors help us toward this goal.

The causal power of the will-to-listen ... is in the nature of an *attractive power*, and its presence is determined by choice. Freely selecting whichever feature interests us, say the timbre of the sound, we overtly *open the door* to timbre's causal influence upon the attention. And we actively do so. We actively make the attention *open to influence* at the hands of timbre. We do what deflects any occurrent hearing in this direction, thereby ensuring that the attention tends to light upon timbre. (397)

Listening, for O'Shaughnessy, is the opening of one's attention to the influence of sound or some aspect of sound. O'Shaughnessy thinks of this as selecting and enlisting a *particular* sound or sound quality as the external cause of hearing. However, it is not clear that we cannot open the attention in a more general way than this. Indeed, when first immersed in silence and so without sounds to hear, one is likely to open up the lens of attention as much as possible, listening as hard as one can to the silence, perhaps in the hope of discerning a sound, but perhaps in rare delight. In pure silence, there are no sounds to cause to cause themselves to be heard. But a lens can be opened up to let more light in, even in utter darkness.

A little later, O'Shaughnessy offers a second metaphor: "The causal role open to the will-to-listen is akin to the creation of a kind of vacuum in the attention, which is apt to be filled uniquely by a particular sound" (403). Again the metaphor suggests a broader role for the will-to-listen: the creation of "a vacuum in the attention" apt to be filled *generically* as opposed to by some particular sound, by whatever sound is present, rather than by some unique and already heard sound. Similarly, O'Shaughnessy analyzes "striving-to-listen-to-sound-s" (= listening-to-a-sound-s) as "a doing that is specifically apt for generating s's causing hearing-of-s" (403). We might moot a more

general phenomenon, *striving-to-listen* simpliciter (= listening), which we might analyze as *a doing that is specifically apt for generating sound to cause hearing of itself*. A doing that is *apt* for something need not always result in that something eventuating. (Unwanted pregnancy would be a much greater problem if that were so.) Consequently, listening in general need not eventuate in hearing sound. There may be no sounds to hear, in which case we can listen only to the silence. O'Shaughnessy's account is thus naturally enriched to allow for this possibility.

### 7.3 Listening and Objectless Consciousness

The challenge we faced at the end of section 5 was to vouchsafe the genuinely auditory nature of objectless consciousness, such that it could count as hearing silence. The same challenge arises in relation to listening: what makes attention *listening* when there is no sound listened to? The answer here is that listening is the activity of opening the attention to the influence of sound. In O'Shaughnessy's metaphor, a vacuum is created in the attention *suitable* to be filled by sound. No sound is needed to create such a vacuum, only to fill it. We can redeploy this answer to answer the challenge to hearing silence. One's awareness can be thought of as genuinely auditory, even when there is no sound present, because it is a mode of awareness within which listening can occur. On this account, it is the ability to listen that distinguishes between those with and those without an auditory stream of consciousness. Having an auditory stream of consciousness is not the same as being able to hear. The deaf-folded can listen to apparent silence although they cannot hear. The deaf, once they have ceased to be deaf-folded, lack any stream of auditory consciousness and cannot even listen. Listening thereby allows us to distinguish objectless consciousness as genuinely auditory and so vitalize a purely Moorean treatment of hearing and hallucinating silence.

## 8 Conclusions

How should we diagnose the denial that we can hear, hallucinate, and listen to silence? At its root is an overly restrictive conception of the structure of conscious experience. According to this conception, experience is a simple relation between subjects and objects; auditory experience, a simple relation between subjects and sounds. Under the spell of this picture, soundless auditory experience appears a contradiction in terms.

In fact, even if we accept such a picture, room remains to accommodate the experience of *certain* silences, such as pauses. However, the picture is not obligatory. First, I suggested that the temporal structure of auditory experience might itself enter into the content of our experience. Given this, experience of silence can be thought of as experience of periods of time lacking in, but nonetheless being the potential occasions for, audible sounds. Second, I suggested that experience of silence might be an instance

of pure awareness without object. Such experience can nonetheless count as genuinely auditory in virtue of affording listening. Either way, cognitive accounts of silence perception are ill motivated. Nothing stands in the way of accepting the ordinary view that we can both hear and hallucinate silence.

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