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GEOGRAPHIES OF SILENCE

*Bennett Hogg***Space and place, silence, and sound**

Since at least the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophers have tried to grasp how the particular and the general relate to one another in the fields of human perception and experience. There is a strong tradition that space exists as it were *a priori*, a three-dimensional emptiness that is subsequently filled with “places”. In a similar way, silence is understood as a background absence within which sounds can occur. In the following discussions I aim to first of all draw upon three different phenomenologically informed accounts of space and place in order to challenge the notion that space precedes place, and in so doing put in place a way of thinking about human experience more generally that is strongly phenomenological in orientation. I then will confront the phenomenologically problematic separation of seeing and hearing, arguing that our experience is profoundly transmodal, and that in our experience of place, seeing and hearing work together to generate a sense of place, to the extent that silence, rather than being an absolute quality analogous to conventional understandings of space, is something that can be perceived and even generated by looking. In this I shall draw on a range of different cultural materials, including literature and music, as well as my own experiences framed in terms of phenomenological enquiry.

In *Human Space* [1963], Bollnow notes that time has been philosophised more than space, a bias that comes down to the inescapably anthropocentric nature of knowledge: “Compared to time, which concerns the innermost centre of humanity, space seemed philosophically less rewarding, because it seemed to belong only to the outer environment of mankind” (Bollnow, 2011, p. 16). Bollnow is at pains to deconstruct this familiar Cartesian position, taking a phenomenological stance with respect to space, writing that we would be

expressing ourselves carelessly if we say that life takes place ‘in space’. Human beings are not present in space as an object ... is present in a box, and they are not related to space as though in the first place there could be anything like a subject without space. Rather, life consists originally in this relationship with space and can therefore not be separated from it even in thought ... space is [not] simply there, independent of the human being.

(Bollnow, 2011, pp. 23–24)

His distinction between “mathematical” and “experiential” space are both included in this relationship, but the latter names what we might call the phenomenological understanding of space, the former an understanding of space as an abstraction, leading to the notion of space as an empty, homogenous quality (Bollnow, 2011, pp. 15–25). A similarly positivist understanding of time as an empty and homogenous quality in which events simply accumulate is of course critiqued by Benjamin in his late *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (Benjamin, 1999 [1940], pp. 252–255).

In a more recent phenomenological account of space, Casey makes related observations where space is traditionally understood as an abstract quality, and place as something like Bollnow’s “experienced” space. For Casey, as for phenomenology in general, perception is “the crux in matters of place”. This is an understanding of place as a series of interconnected, specific, and experiential qualities, marked with meanings that may be mnemonic, culturally shared, imagined, or individual. Traditional metaphysics sets up a powerful (and still-influential) paradigm that place must emerge *from and within* space, where the latter stands for an absolute, transcendent substantiality which precedes any instance of place. Place, in this view, is a secondary, subjective quality superimposed upon space understood as abstract and objective. This, however, is far from being consistent with a phenomenological view; as phenomenologists we have, in short, “no choice but to begin with experience” (Casey, 1997, p. 16). This being the case, how can space pre-exist experience in any useful way? Does space, as an abstract quality, not emerge as secondary to the concrete experience of place? Space, then, is an abstracting *from experience*, rather than a transcendent, pre-existent, abstract quality. In Casey’s view place is general and space is a particular construction subsequent to place (Casey, 1997, pp. 16–17).

A third phenomenologically informed perspective helps to round this out. Ingold, as an anthropologist, questions the traditional, Enlightenment ideology that form arises as an abstract, mental idea that is then imposed onto inert, otherwise formless matter. This is emblematised in the “ancient inclination in Western thought” to think of cultural embodiment as “a movement of *inscription*, whereby some pre-existing pattern, template or programme ... is ‘realised’ in a substantive medium” (Ingold, 2000, p. 193). However, Ingold asserts that

the forms of artefacts are not given in advance but are rather generated in and through the practical movement of one or more skilled agents in their active, sensuous engagement with the material ... [artefacts] emerge ... within the relational contexts of the mutual involvement of people and their environments.

(Ingold, 2000, p. 88)

The notion of space as an abstract, pre-existent tabula rasa of inert substance waiting to be formed by imagined or reasoned design into “place” is then clearly not something a phenomenologically informed exploration could sustain. In one of the foundational texts of a phenomenological geography Tilley writes: “Space has no substantial essence in itself, but only has a relational significance, created through relations between people and places” (Tilley, p. 11). Space as a general and undifferentiated substrate that place is made *out of* – that which is left behind when you take place away, in a sense – cannot be accounted for in the work of either of the authors mentioned so far.

There is a metaphysical congruency between space and silence, insofar as both have traditionally been framed as Ur-conditions prior to the construction of place upon space, or the imposition of sound over silence. R. Murray Schafer, for example, writes of silence as “the great and beautiful backdrop over which our actions are sketched and without which they would be incomprehensible” (Schafer, 1994, p. 258). The hyperbole of this statement aside (actions as

incomprehensible without silence?), it marks out an almost ubiquitous conceptualisation of silence as background, as a primal state over which information is “sketched”, what is left behind when the sound stops. Space and silence seem like pre-ordained conditions, whereas place and sound seem like things *done*, figures against a ground, forms inscribed into inert substance. What if we reverse this logic, though, as Casey and Ingold have done with human relations to space/place?

If, as I have already implied, silence is *not* an absolute, general, and undifferentiated substance but a perceptual phenomenon, including silence within the continuum of the field of sound – rather than as its antithesis – is unproblematic. As we increase the frequency of an oscillator beyond about 18KHz, for example, a sonograph will show us that there are still sound waves, but we can no longer perceive them. The same situation pertains with amplitude, and the threshold of perceptual silence here is affected by the energy of the signal, the distance of the listener from the signal, and the physical state of medium through which the signal passes. The sound of a struck bell may seem to have died out until we place our ear closer, and even when “silent” sound can still be detected technologically.

Silence, then, marks the threshold of perception within the continuum of sound rather than its radical and absolute absence. In Ferneyhough’s *Second String Quartet* Fitch differentiates between “literal and ‘functional’ silence” where “the latter [permits] certain *glissando* sounds to filter through” (Fitch, 2014, p. 300). Unstable with respect to pitch, and played using bowing techniques such as *sul ponticello* and *col legno trattato* that destabilise the instruments’ familiar timbres, these *glissandi* seem like musical sounds that are already “eroded”, and on their way to silence. The poetic conceit that we are hearing them *through* silence, as it were, only serves to deepen the idea that silence is a phenomenon within the field of sound, not the antithesis of sound. This last point is crucial for my argument – it is not simply the case that we need to have sound in order to *differentiate* and thus bring into being silence. Silence, as I conceive it here, is both less absolute and more mutable than “literal” silence as, indeed, are the boundaries of such a literal silence as I have proposed above.

That silence is integral to music is, of course, nothing new. Cage identifies Satie and Webern as having had the insight that duration is the only parameter able to account for all of music because only duration can encompass silence; silence has no pitch, timbre, articulation, or dynamic (Cage, 1987, p. 63). This has tended to support notions that musical silence tends very strongly towards the temporal end of the space-time continuum. Indeed, silences in music very often determine rhythm, pacing, articulation, and so forth, predominantly temporal aspects of music. There is a danger, though, that the striking veracity of Cage’s insight forecloses alternative possibilities for silence: silence, contra Cage, *may* in fact include dynamics and timbre, if we shift the approach from an absolute to a relational one, and from one that sees sound and silence as mutual opposites towards one that understands them as contingencies within a continuum.

In the late 1940s, Schaeffer demonstrated, with his experiment of the *cloche coupée* (the “cut bell”) that the perceived timbre of a sound cannot be accounted for only with respect to the “vertical” organisation of its constituent harmonic partials, but is also determined by the way in which the sound is initiated. If one makes a recording of a bell, and then removes the initial attack, the resulting sound is more or less unrecognisable as a bell; a recording of a piano note treated this way sounds more like a flute than a piano. Perhaps the most significant development of Schaeffer’s discovery has been in the evolving ideas of Smalley, for whom spectromorphology, as a means for organising sound into music, brings into dynamic relations the physical and the temporal aspects of sounds (Smalley, 1986). Taking this a step further, I would argue that silences have timbre, not in the physical, spectral sense, but insofar as their effect is determined, like the timbre of physical sound, as much by how they are initiated and ended as by their “substance”.

Can we separate a silence from its initiation? Isn't it true that *qualities* of silence are as determined – and here I speak phenomenologically – by how they are arrived at? Two silences of exactly the same duration and sound pressure levels will “sound” different if one is the result of a sudden extinction of a sound wave, the other arrived at after a slow fading of the sound. Not only will the subjective experience of their duration be affected by how these silences are initiated, but the emotional and associative factors of the silences will be quite dramatically different – a sudden silence may sound aggressive, or stunned, whereas a silence arrived at after a fading of the sound could be melancholic, valedictory, or even just musically “right”. Just as every sound has a starting transient that is part of its characteristic spectromorphology, so too do silences. If sound is an ecosystem rather than a string of dissociated and discrete events, every sound leaves behind *its own silence* when it ends; to philosophise an ontology of silences, they are *plural* qualities rather than portions of an absolute quantity, and they arise with and are part of the world of sounds. Ontologically, they are presences rather than absences.

In his famous experiment in search of silence in the anechoic chamber, Cage can hear his blood and nervous system sounding, and he arrives from this experience at the impossibility of silence. Voegelin, though, finds the embodied experience of silence leads her to the tantalizing suggestion that silence opens up a form of dialogue. Alone, indoors, in a snow-covered landscape, she finds that her listening is “a generative process not of noises external to me, but from inside, from the body, where my subjectivity is at the centre of the sound production, audible to myself”. For Voegelin, this experience suggests that “Silence is not the absence of sound but the beginning of listening”, and she draws a strong distinction between her experience and Cage's account of the anechoic chamber. Rather than a sonic “vacuum” that “denies external sounds a path to the ear and the sound of blood pumping through the body and the tingling of the nervous system starts to be audible ... the external sounds are so small ... that they come to play with my body, close up and intimate” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 83). This stimulates a kind of close, attentive listening through which the inside of the body re-emerges as a sound source, evoking something like an improvisation between internal bodily sounds and tiny sounds in the external world, driven by a particular sense of silence.

Silence is also clearly a spatial as well as a temporal phenomenon, both metaphorically and literally. Voegelin's silence is already geographical, situating insides and outsides, engaging with climatic conditions, architecture, and subjective, embodied consciousness. The dialogue she points towards is reminiscent of musical improvising, and it is suggestive too that we often talk about “making space” or “placing” sounds in improvised – but also in composed – music. To make space, musically, we often fall silent, or are instructed by the notation to fall silent. In polyphonic music these spaces we make are located rather than absolute, relative spaces, emplaced silences, within a texture that may in fact be constantly sounding. If I am singing the bass part in a madrigal, a rest in the notation of the bass part “causes” a silent place in the music to emerge, a place that is metaphorical in the temporal dimension, but concrete in the spatial dimension; there is a silence, momentarily, in the physical place where I am standing that is surrounded by sound, and which is maintained until I start singing again. We tend to talk about there being a silence here or there, rather than now or then. I have heard conductors, for example, say “there is a silence here in the tenor line”, here rather than a silence “now”, partially because of notation (the conductor might point to a place in her score), but also because the silence *is* here, not *now*; there is still sound in the “now” but not in the “here”, the space, real (where the tenors are standing) or virtual (the space in the music), where the silence is located. The other voices continue to sound around the silence left by the tenor. That silence is spatial in a more complex sense than that elucidated by Cage, follows from this.

Spatial silence(s)

Ann Rosén and Sten-Olof Hellström's *Rumslige Tystnader/Spatial Silence* (2005) is an interactive sound installation that developed from research at KTH, Stockholm between 2001 and 2003.¹ The project began from speculation into the practical application of the phenomenon whereby silence can be theoretically generated by wave cancellation, the generation of inversions of soundwaves present in a particular place which then cancel out those soundwaves and produce temporary zones of silence. The complexity of sound waves, and their almost constant mutability, means that actually achieving this under everyday conditions is currently an impossibility, but Hellström and Rosén developed a free-standing installation in which small pockets of "silence" could be discovered by the inquisitive and patient listener.

Ten loudspeakers are attached to a scaffolding cube. In another part of the room a large bass speaker emits a constant, low-frequency drone. A microphone in the room monitors this sound and, via a Max/MSP patch, informs the generation of a sound wave designed to cancel out the drone, emitted by the scaffolding speakers. However, room acoustics and reflection means that a mathematically "perfect" cancellation is not possible, but small "pockets" of silence are formed inside the cube of loudspeakers at points where complete phase cancellation occurs. The listener must move around inside of the cube searching for these "spatial silences". A sudden drop in the amplitude of the drone indicates the proximity of one of these spots, and the listener can find themselves drawn into a place no more than 30 or 40 centimetres wide where for a moment the constant drone disappears.

These silent places, as I imagine them, are reminiscent of the silent places I have mentioned above in connection with polyphonic music. There is a distinction, though, in the way in which Hellström and Rosén's silences are experienced by the listener. It is unremarkable to be in a room filled with sound, and for that sound to stop momentarily. It is a very different experience when one's own movement and intention uncovers silence and can then move in and out of the silence more or less at will. The knowledge that the sound continues *outside* of the pocket of silence, as it were, is confirmed by a slight movement of the head that proves its continuity exterior to the silent space within the installation.

In his autobiographical writing published posthumously as *Outline* in 1949, the British painter Paul Nash exemplifies the ways in which movement in a landscape can go hand in hand with the experience of spatial silence. Walking home as a child, he writes how crossing a stile into woodland after open fields is an entry into a silent and listening world.

Whereas in the open fields [the path] seemed to run unhindered at top speed ... it now appeared to falter and creep along in the twilight of the wood. ... I, too, was influenced by the atmosphere of the wood. Here I trod more circumspectly, glancing from side to side. It was very quiet and still. Outside, the fields and sky, on a fine day, might be shouting at the tops of their voices, but in the wood everything seemed to be listening. (Nash, 1949, p. 40)

Earlier in his childhood he recalls being taken to Kensington Gardens by his nurse, where after an everyday life in which everything was circumscribed and controlled "[w]ith a shout and a sudden turn of speed you had broken through the invisible barrier ... [Kensington] Gardens were my first taste of the country. Here I became aware of trees, felt the grass for the first time, saw an expanse of water, *listened to a new kind of silence*" (Nash, 1949, p. 34, emphasis added). Nash's writing makes it clear – "a new kind of silence" – that silence is a relational quality, coloured by the transition from one place to another, by the embodied experience of crossing

thresholds, and by changes to his personal, subjective disposition consequent on this movement out of which the experience of “silence” emerges. In the case of Walser’s short story, *The Walk*, the silence of a woodland sets off hyperbolic imaginings in which silence is “inhaled ... and whose virtues I drank and quaffed with due ceremony”, suggesting that “all kinds of inaudible voices echo and sound” along with “music out of the primeval world” (Walser, 2013, pp. 71–72). I suggest that this is not *just* poetic expression (though that is part of it) but that the reports of such experiences of silence point towards its transmodality.

Transmodal silence

I have been gradually steering away, throughout this chapter, from the notion that silence is a straightforward absence of sound waves towards a phenomenologically informed position in which silence is a factor within the ecosystem of our worldly experience, a geographical factor which, along with multiple others, serves as the material from which we have life worlds and selves, selves with which we experience our worlds. Having already outlined ways in which movement and intentionality are, under certain conditions, indispensable to silence, I would now like to focus explicitly on the transmodal aspects of our geographical experience of silence.

Though the technologies that most of us live with on a daily basis have played a major role in separating vision and hearing (radio, recordings, personal stereos, etc.) it is important to resist ideologies that seek to consolidate and reify such separations.² Taking the interconnectedness of seeing, hearing, and the other senses into account leads me to the inescapable conclusion that just as our experience of sound is transmodal, so is our experience of silence. Tanizaki, for example, illustrates this in his classic *In Praise of Shadows* where he discusses the sense of presence created by something as simple as a tastefully positioned alcove in a traditional Japanese house. A simple, empty space draws light in such a way that shadows form in the emptiness.

There is nothing more. And yet, when we gaze into the darkness that gathers behind the cross beam, around the flower vase, beneath the shelves, though we know perfectly well it is mere shadow, we are overcome with the feeling that in this small corner of the atmosphere there reigns complete and utter silence; that here in the darkness immutable tranquillity holds sway. The “mysterious Orient” of which Westerners speak probably refers to the uncanny silence of these dark places.

(Tanizaki, 2001, pp. 32–33)

Without the careful design of the house to draw shadows into such an alcove – and through this to evoke silence and tranquillity – the alcove would be “a mere void”. That it is *not* a void is because shadows and silence fill it with presence, mediating but also engendering one another.

The absence of shadow, or indeed any other visual references, in the disorientation of a white-out blizzard in the Cairngorm Mountains, makes “[s]cale and distance impossible to discern” for Robert Macfarlane. He does not mention sound in describing this experience, but the transmodal dimension to any instance of vision extends here into the near negation of proprioception through the elision of normal vision: in the blizzard “[s]pace is depthless. Even gravity’s hold feels loosened: slope and fall lines can only be inferred by the tilt of blood in the skull. It felt, for that astonishing hour up on Ben a’ Bhuid, as if we were all flying in white space” (Macfarlane, 2016, p. 67). If effects of vision can seem to negate the effects of gravity, and to fill alcoves

with a tangible presence of silence via seeing shadows, it would seem that they offer productive places from which to investigate silence and space.

Silence – or near silence – is experienced transmodally in W. G. Sebald's *Vertigo*. Lying awake in the early evening by the shores of Lake Garda the massive presence of the mountains diminishes the loud sounds of the bars in the town over the lake to "a mere dull pulsation, ... a negligible disturbance measured against the huge bulk of the mountain that towered so high and steep above the quivering lights of the town" (Sebald, 2002 [1990], p. 92). Though this is not a silence, as such, the mediating effect of the visible – almost tangible – presence of the mountain is able to transmodally dwarf the otherwise insistent, loud music of the lakefront. More acutely, emerging from a long winter walk in a forest back near the author's home in Bavaria, "as the whitish-grey snow fell, its silence completely extinguishing what little pallid colour there was in those wet deserted fields" (Sebald, 2002 [1990], p. 178), verges on the synaesthetic; it is the *silence* of the snow that bleaches out the colour from the landscape.

The wooded valley of the River Wansbeck runs along fields near to where I live in Morpeth, Northumberland. Walking there on a windy day in November the fields to my right had recently been ploughed, and lay a dull greyish-brown under overcast, blustery skies. On my left, as I walked, the steep valley, filled with almost leafless trees, surged and roared in the wind coming from the North East, off the sea some six miles away. I stood still for a moment, and closed my eyes to surrender to what I knew would be the immersive sound of the seething woodlands, and for a few moments I felt the immersive, multidirectional power of the loud, broad band of noise. When I opened my eyes, though, I experienced something of a jolt; though the wind continued to roar on my left side, to my right the open, barren fields were silent, and I was suddenly aware that I could *see* their silence, not in any hallucinogenic or synaesthetic sense, but simply that rejoining sight to listening revealed to me the silence of the fields in contrast to the roar of the woods.

Descending the valley sides, I made my way to the wide path that runs alongside the edge of the river itself, a long, straight tunnel through closely packed and overhanging trees that in Summer obscures the sky above almost totally. To my right was the sound of the river water rushing towards me and onwards behind me over shallow rapids. Above, and around, the wind continued its attack on the trees, and again, I closed my eyes, experienced the immersive, omnidirectional surge of noise and then, on opening them again, *saw* the tunnel of silence in front of me, looked into the open space between the trees for sounds, and found none. Closing my eyes again I managed to maintain – or I imagined that I maintained – the sense of the silence in front of me, but turning once or twice around was again immersed in sound, only to find the tangible silence stretching out before me when I opened my eyes again, and looked once more down the path. I have since tried this with friends while out walking, and once it is pointed out to them, they too have experienced some personal version of this phenomenon.

Grimshaw, who among other things has worked extensively with virtual reality gaming environments, and who is thus strongly engaged with the issues around the interactions of seeing and hearing, notes that "sound is the means not to locate objects in a world but rather to locate our selves in relation to other objects" (Grimshaw, 2015, p. 96).

We ... place (rather than find) sounds somewhere within the system of which the mind is comprised. ... This locating of sound is learned and develops through early childhood into an automatic act of placement and it explains the close and cross-modal relationship to vision as we, while babies, cast around, looking for the source of a sound wave, beginning to learn the associations between movement, size, and material and sound waves.

(Grimshaw, 2015, p. 96)

He cites the McGurk Effect, in which identical phonemes are heard differently when they are lipsynched to film of speakers, pronouncing related but different sounds. As examples of this “cross-modal effect of multi-modal stimuli ... being perceived as one event ... the ability to locate sounds other than where their sound wave sources are” (Grimshaw, 2015, p. 92) he also cites the way voices in the cinema or on television appear to originate from the mouths of the actors, even though no such sound source is actually located there. The ability, then, developed since infancy for vision to mediate and even to over-ride hearing is reasonably unproblematic to accept, and so the idea that silence is something one can see and, on the basis of that, can locate within an otherwise full sound world is similarly uncontroversial. Saying that, though, does not really mitigate the sense of shock and of wonder I felt on experiencing it in actuality for the first time.

Though several authors have made an excellent case for reclaiming sound, and sonic experience, for philosophy (Voegelin, 2010; Idhe, 2007 [1976]; Attali, 1985; Schafer, 1994 [1977]) the value of this work is best appreciated as a dramatic expansion of thinking about how we inhabit our worlds, rather than as “revenge” against the undeniable dominance of the visual in modern, Western cultures. As Ingold puts it separating out the sonic from the visual may have “served a useful rhetorical purpose in drawing attention to a sensory register that had been neglected relative to sight”, but such an approach has now “outlived its usefulness” (Ingold, 2007, p. 10).

Taken as self-contained projects, perhaps, the work of the authors just mentioned may have sought to tip the balance between sound and image, but none of them make consistent claims for their separation. Idhe, for example, as one of the first commentators to make the case for taking sound (and voice) seriously on their own philosophical terms, notes how “[s]ilence seems revealed at first through a visual category” (the box of paperclips he can see on his desk is “mute”) (Idhe, 2007 [1976], p. 50). Though “[s]ilence is the horizon of sound, yet the mute object is silently *present*” just as Tanizaki’s shadowed alcove is filled with a silence that is experienced as a presence (Idhe, 2007 [1976], p. 50). The muteness of objects disappears as they move. A fly buzzes past Idhe as he stares at the box of paperclips, prompting him to remark that “[v]isualistically’ sound ‘overlaps’ with moving beings” (Idhe, p. 50). The silences I experienced walking beside the Wansbeck were indeed silences of immobility against swathes of noise generated by trees and water in motion, but they were also *visually generated* silences, suggesting that the “visualistic”, as Idhe calls it, is not limited to motion that generates sound. Silence is also “visualistic”, as his own remarks about the mute object whose silence appears to originate in the visual testify. Ultimately Idhe’s call for a recalibration between the visual and the sonic is one in which their inter-determination is re-emphasised, rather than that one dominant phenomenon replaces another.

Idhe’s point about the sonic overlapping visualistically with movement puts another personal experience of spatial silence into a useful context. In July 2014, I was involved in a project with Deniz Peters, of the Kunst Universität, Graz, and Sabine Vogel, a flautist with whom I have worked for several years as part of Landscape Quartet. I suffer quite badly from arthritis in my knees, and having once climbed the rough forest track to Schweizeben, the area of high Alpine pastures at the top of Weitenthal near to Brück-an-der-Mur in eastern Austria, I was reluctant to do so again and so while Sabine and Deniz took “the scenic route” I walked the Macadamised forest road alone. The route was actually no less scenic than the one the others were walking, but it was considerably more even under foot.

The weather was hot, and bright sunshine accompanied the first hour or so up the track. As it is in the mountains, though, the weather began to quickly turn, and following the smooth arrival of a heavy bank of low-lying grey cloud, the wind dropped to nothing, and, as happens when storms are in the vicinity, the birds fell quickly silent. The track up to Schweizeben is

broad, and so at many points the expanse of open space that Weithenthal contains fills one's vision. As the wind, the trees, and the birds all fell silent I found myself the only moving object in an expanse of woodland, trailing along beside myself the crunch of my boots on the Macadam. In the stifling humidity, and muffled silence, I had the experience that I was walking inside of a narrow tunnel created by the sound of my own footsteps. There was literally not another sound to be heard, and the experience, despite the openness of the spaces around me, was actually claustrophobic.

And then suddenly it began to rain, huge, languid drops of rain plopping to the earth and spluttering through leaves, and in an instant the claustrophobia lifted, and the space of Weithenthal opened up again, finding a congruence between the visual and the sonic that had been suspended as I walked through the sonic tunnel of my own making. A similar, though not identical, experience happened to me in a large stand of Scots Pine inside of Thrunton Woods, Northumberland. Draughts of high breezes could be heard threading their way through the surrounding mixed woodland, approaching, veering off in other directions, but often swishing through the pines and setting up an almost oppressive high-frequency whispering above my head. At such points the intensity of the sound blocked out all other sounds, and the effect was, as on the way to Schweizeben, almost claustrophobic. But as the breeze above passed on, and the sound subsided, the bleating of the sheep I could see in fields almost a mile away, a lone car speeding along the distant A697, and the barking of a dog, invisible, on the other side of the hill were suddenly audible, accompanied by a tangible sensation of space physically opening up again, just as the sound of rain had opened up the space of Weithenthal. Silences mediate a phenomenological geography, then, by mediation of the visual sense as well as the aural, affording an experience of geographical space and place that defies straightforward ascription to one or the other senses.

The mutability of geographic silence

Edward Thomas, poet and nature writer, died in April 1917 near Arras in northern France. His connection with landscape, and with the spatial experience of landscape through walking, is amply testified to in his published poetry and prose, as well as in Macfarlane's *The Old Ways* in which Thomas figures prominently (Macfarlane, 2012). After his death a collection of writings were issued in 1928 entitled *The Last Sheaf*, and in this collection is a short autobiographic description called "Insomnia". In the early hours of the morning Thomas wakes up, unable to sleep again, as a robin begins to sing alone outside in the garden. "Beyond him the wind made a moan in the little fir-copse as of a forest in a space magically enclosed and silent, and in the intervals of his song silence fell about him like a cloak which the wind could not penetrate" (Thomas, 2011, pp. 28–29). This is not a literal silence, though, as Thomas notes a little later. That the moaning of the wind in the fir trees continues *during* the "silence" of the robin's singing is underlined as daylight begins to arrive, and "the song in the enclosed hush, and the sound of the trees beyond it, remained the same" (Thomas, 2011, p. 29). The image this evokes is of another kind of geographic, transmodal silence. The "hush" surrounding the robin seems almost like a bubble of silence within the moaning soundscape of the wind through the trees. When the bird breaks off from singing, this "hush" closes in around it like a cloak, so we can imagine that when the bird sings, the cloak of silence is pushed away again and this opening and closing of the silence takes on an almost respiring, plastic quality, an expanding and contracting envelope of "silence" situated *inside of* the continual drone of the wind, but which the wind "could not penetrate". The "cloak" acts as a garment against the force of the wind, but also against its sound in a tight concatenation of metaphors. Voegelin also invokes the image of a cloak of silence, a

“transparent cloak that bares what it covers is silence as the call to listen to the world and to myself, as things in the world” (Voegelin, 2010, p. 93). Cloak here is not *only* a metaphor but seems to have an agency of its own, something that as it covers, renders bare that which is covered. The mutable, breathing cloak of silence that surrounds Thomas’s robin singing before the dawn seems the perfect exemplification of this idea.

Silence, then, considered as an element of geographic space/place marks not only places where sound is absent, but places where sound can be *seen* to be absent. I have tried to show not only the transmodal aspects of silence when experienced in different ways, and in different emplacements, but also how cultural materials such as literature and music can inform and condition the experience of silence. In exploring the situatedness of silence, I have also tried to outline ways that we might think past some of the received wisdom concerning silence *per se*, that it is without timbre or dynamic, for example, as Cage proposed, and that it is an exclusively sonic phenomenon. Drawing on personal experiences of silence in landscapes, and on accounts of others’ experiences, I hope to have opened up some space within which to consider, from different perspectives, both silence and place as lived elements within a wider, geographical phenomenology.

Notes

- 1 see <http://cid.nada.kth.se/tystljud/engindex.html>
- 2 Perhaps the most vigorous and persuasive arguments for resisting such separations of the sense come from Ingold, see Ingold, 2000, pp. 243–287 and Ingold, 2007.

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