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Withdrawn from use: silence, listening and undoing.

Abstract

Steven Connor's book, *Giving Way*, begins with a list of unappreciated qualities, the first of which is a capitalised, 'SILENCE'. Shyness, reserve, withdrawal and holding back accompany silence in a long sentence of qualities, which 'tend to be marked with disapproval, sympathy or revulsion', and some of which are, as Connor notes, 'characterized as a mental disorder, in the form of social anxiety or social phobia' (Connor 2019: 1). Silence is often *seen* as a lack of agency, an anti-social and suspect unwillingness to participate. But as a sound artist working with field-recording, I am aware that silence, withdrawal and holding back can also be a form or *method* of practice and participation. Since 2004, my creative practice has included a series of physical and imagined silent releases. This article draws on these works and their documentation to explore silence as a potential, shared and communal space; an immediate composition that invites both listener and non-listener into its congress. Listening in on the conversation of telephone pauses and the closed paragraphs of library shelves, silence can be heard undoing purposeful agency, shyly engaging us in the anti-social practice of inaction, so that we might *not* participate, together.

[Silence]

FIRST VOICE [Very softly] ¹

Shh. Shush. Hush. Shtum. Silence is often something imposed, an instruction to refrain, to not participate, something we leave behind when we hold our tongue and keep mum. It seems appropriate that many of the silencing verbs, which are primarily directed toward a silencing of speech, are onomatopoeic in origin; pre-verbal imitations of sounds that hold voice back from language. Even the physical action of the verbs' pronunciation requires a narrowing of the mouth, a gesture which in the *mumble* of closed lips and shushed tittle-tattle of tongue

¹ Thomas 2015: unpaginated

against teeth, mimes the physical restraint of utterance. But the refrain of silence need not be a negative imposition, it might be a positive choice, an elective and possibly *selective* withdrawal from presence. Steven Connor writes:

Most academic writing about silence, in common with writing about refraining, restraint and holding back of all kinds, tends to assume that the imposing of silence is an impediment or violation, meaning that silence should ideally in all circumstances be broken. (Connor 2019: 115)

Citing the anthropologist Peter H. Stephenson who suggests that ‘the ability to keep silence may literally have [...] been a matter of life or death for early humans’, Connor states:

The development of a system of inhibition that could override the [vocal] impulses promoted by the limbic system may have allowed for the silencing of the spontaneous cries that would announce one’s presence to a predator. (ibid.: 116)

However evolutionarily beneficial, such silence remains an act of concealment, something is being hidden or unsaid. But silence is also an inherent component of speech, it speaks in the commas of our breath and the rhythm of the sentence we string together. In conversation we share silence with others, we *participate* in a silence that for a moment, becomes *our* silence. This communal silence is perhaps most apparent in the spectral landscape of the telephone, where voice arrives, flayed of tone and ‘desiccated by distance, yet warm and damp with the [unformed] breath that lingers and trembles in [it]’ (Connor 2004). On the phone voice has the volume of conversation, but the position of whispers, we hold it close, so close we can hear language as it is inhaled. Between the receivers we figure a dynamic and spatial silence, our being *there* immediately reliant upon the rhythms of our words and pauses. *Here*, we are ‘between silence and murmur’ (Bachelard 1988: 30) and there is always the possibility that we might disappear, that we may, unannounced, return to the silence from whence we came: ‘Wherever phones are ringing, a ghost resides in the receiver’ (Kittler 1999: 75).

[Fig. 1]

When my elderly mum was alive, I would phone her every day. Our conversations had little in the way of direction. At times she would forget her words, her place within them. “Where was I?” opens a silence *into* which she wanders in search of what it was she was saying. The sound work, *Duet for radio* (2004), is based on a covert recording of one of our conversations.² In this duet I have removed my own voice and replaced it with the noisy quiet of telephonic communication. My mother’s voice, now bereft of reply, is isolated and widowed. Re-composing the silence *between* us, extending or reducing its duration, augments her vulnerability. At times she is left talking to herself, at times she disappears ‘into the silence of her own forgetting’ (Hegarty 2002: 25). Listening in on this soliloquy of pauses, the audience is implicated in a *lack* of reply. As the listener listens in on voice and its absence, they are also listened *for*. ‘Silence is [always] listening’ (Picard 1952: 25).

Silence:

Voice: Erm...Oh I’ve forgotten what I was going to tell ya...Oh bloody hell.

² I began recording my mother’s voice when I was about 17. Mam also participated in several of my performances, videos and installations, proclaiming the experience to be “almost as good as bingo”. In the video *Second Listening* (fig. 1). I watch (and listen) with my mother as she listens back (through headphones) to a recording of her own voice telling stories of her nights out in Manchester as a teenager. Extracts from this video and *Duet for Radio*, feature in *It’s just where I put my words* (2013), a sound portrait of mam for BBC Radio 3 (produced by Chris Ledgard), exploring memory, voice and our years of recording together.

Silence:

Voice: Been rainin' on and off here all day...oh, did I tell ya...sounds as if someone's breakin' in...

Silence:

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Our duet closes without goodbye, mum simply ceases speaking, quietly disappearing into the silence, as she listens to the rain we cannot hear. Max Picard writes, 'When language ceases, silence begins. But it does not begin *because* language ceases. The absence of language simply makes the presence of Silence more apparent' (Picard 1952: 15).

[Silence]⁴

In *Sound Poetics*, Seán Street notes that 'the first word in Dylan Thomas's script for his play for voices, *Under Milk Wood*, is "Silence"' (Street 2017: 15). This silence is not an instruction to refrain, but a place from which voice may arrive, the moment *before* voice. Street writes: 'In the 1952 radio production by Douglas Cleverdon, there then follows about seven seconds of stillness before the first words of the First Voice' (Street 2019: 91). Although in performance, the scripted '[Silence]' is 'open to interpretation' (ibid.), it will always have a set and *staged* duration. On the written page, the unspoken bracketed '[Silence]' is not held to time nor enclosed behind muted lips, it is what Gaston Bachelard might call an 'open silence [...] a silence that breathes' (Bachelard 1988: 242). A silence unbracketed, limitless and audible, which we simultaneously, read, imagine and thereby compose. The *First Voice* that emerges softly *italicised* from our composition, asks that we '*Hush*' (Thomas 2015: unpaginated) so as not to disturb the sleeping silence which it now narrates. We are participant as a listening and potentially *sounding*, presence. In his phenomenology of sound, Don Ihde writes: 'Listening begins with the ordinary, by proximately working its way into what is yet unheard' (Ihde 1973: 49). As we hush away and refrain from sounding, *First Voice* tilts our ear toward, not only the unheard, but also the invisible and inaudible details of the muffled 'night moving in the streets'. 'Listen [...] You can hear the dew falling' (Thomas 2015: 3).

[Fig. 2]

[One distant bell-note, faintly reverberating on.]⁵

To begin at the end. It is the autumn of 2004, and this will be my last packet of cigarettes. The fag-ends of this habit coincide with a move to a new house, requiring me to find an external location for the morning drag. Although enclosed, the front doorstep is uncomfortably conspicuous and social. The small back garden offers a more secluded and suitably unsociable retreat. I have always welcomed the anti-social nature of smoking, it provides an excuse to leave, to be apart and socially distant. Even in the loneliness of my studio, a cigarette offers the solitude of a ritualised, meditative interval, a moment *away* from doing and purpose.⁶

In the garden, the seclusion of my morning cigarette focuses attention on the sensory details of the habit's gesture; the match struck gently away from the body, the prayer like cupping of

³ From a personal transcript of the sound work: *Duet for radio* (2004)

⁴ Thomas 2015: unpaginated.

⁵ Thomas 2015: 18

⁶ The affiliation between smoking and meditation extends to both its rituals and paraphernalia. In his book, *For the Birds*, John Cage focuses on an *ashtray* to meditate on listening and composition. He does not want to strike the ashtray (like a bell) to make sound happen, but 'to listen to its inner life' (Cage 1981: 220-210).

hands to protect the moment of ignition. The rhythm of my breathing slows as the air is taken...held...exhaled...the air...held...exhaled...the air...held. As I inhale, I hear the cigarette paper kindle and the occasional minute explosions of Saltpetre. The focus of my listening is exhaled with the tobacco smoke, out into the landscape. I breath in a dawn chorus of magpies, falling leaves, occasional coughs, church chimes and the ubiquitous combustion hum of traffic. Of conspicuous note is the range of bells reverberating faintly on as the hour-hand strikes. At the centre of this spatial array are the bells of Winchester Cathedral, although the mercantile peal of the *Brookes Shopping Centre* clock, offers appropriately brassy competition. According to R. Murray Schafer the 'church bell is a centripetal sound; it attracts and unifies the community in a social sense, just as it draws man and God together' (Schafer 1994: 54). Whilst the clocks count down the day, the church chimes out a perimeter, bringing all those who can hear into the congregation of its audible parish. The bells are all slightly out of time, chiming a quiet cannon over the city. At 8 in the evening, a curfew bell, first rung in 1361, continues to ring, but no one now listens to the nightly embargo it chimes.⁷

Listening to the sound of a bell leads us 'from the material world into the world of silence without a break, without a seam' (Harvey cited Street 2014: 45). Substance can be heard disappearing into thin air. John Hull describes how listening to the bells causes the distinction between his body and the chiming air, to evaporate: 'My head seemed to be ringing [and] the very air I was breathing was bell-shaped' (Hull 1997: 168-169). The fading bell '[moves] us from the physically heard sound to a point where we search our hearing for the disappearing tone in the air and then in our imagination' (Street 2019: 1). As I listen and inhale the soundscape, the bells, sometimes near, sometimes distant, are also taking breath. Occasionally they completely disappear: the time tells me they are chiming yet my ears do not ring. Perhaps this silence is weather related; the direction of the breeze or atmospheric conditions. Or perhaps I am listening to a silence I imagine not hearing.

[A long silence.]⁸

A year from here (2004-2005) was a prolonged sound project that attempted to "soun[d] silence" (Hooker cited Street 2014.: 38) by recording the occurrence and disappearance of the bells chiming in the Winchester soundscape. The regulated occasion of the bells (and their absence) was used as a position from which to collect silence on the axis of every hour of different days over a twelve-month period. Recording from the lughole of my bedroom window, provided a secluded and fixed site from which to eavesdrop on the landscape (fig. 2). Together, the recordings (which I called, *soundings*) formed a *spontaneous* archive, indexing the silence gathered. The soundings taken, are as short as cigarettes, beginning two minutes before the hour and ending a few minutes after. Over days, weeks and months, this listening habit reveals silent rhythms hidden in the familiarity of the local landscape; quiet calendars of seasonal, religious, social and personal consequence and insignificance.

[Fig. 3]

⁷ It was King Alfred (whose statue stands at the top of Winchester High Street), who first ordered that the nightly curfew be announced by the ringing of a bell (Wood & Peshall 1773: 177). The Curfew Bell provided an acoustic signal to withdraw, to close the city gates, end the busyness of day, and quiet down (or cover) the fire. As its chime enclosed listeners in the social shush of nightfall, it also sounded a withdrawal into solitude. This signalled retreat from the social to the solitary, can be heard tolling in Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*:

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way.
And leaves the world to darkness and to me. (Gray 1861: 5)

⁸ Thomas 2015: 50

Recorded on minidisc using a cheap unprofessional microphone, the quality is poor and although all the soundings have been notated and catalogued, they have not since been listened to. Nor have they realised an audible or composed outcome: sound has *escaped* use. The useless waste of time that the archive constitutes, resonates with the uselessness of my attempt to record the absence of sound, to listen to what I do not hear. The archive of minidisks gives mute physical form to my failure, offering a tangible, material silence that endures, a silence that *keeps* shtum, quietly collecting dust as it whiles away toward obsolescence. The archive still has the potential to sound but remains unheard (fig. 3). This *loss* of hearing establishes an 'action of inaction, of refraining from doing [...]' (Connor 2019: 95) through which the possibility of silence sounds.

*Time passes. Listen. Time passes.
Come closer now*⁹

Remembering Silence

The silence of the archive is a shy and solitary undoing, but silence can also be a *collective* act of inaction. This is perhaps most prominently evident in the universally popular two-minute pause of commemoration. Steven Connor writes, 'We are used to thinking of doing things together as a signal of human affiliation [...] But human beings are also very drawn to not doing things together and drawn together through them.' Connor calls this 'holding together in holding back *cohibition*' (Connor 2019: 95). Sometimes confused with the word *cohabit*, *cohibition* appropriately withdrew from use in 1882, when it was last seen cited by the OED 'in a lexicon of science and medicine' (ibid.: 96).

In Britain, it was Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, who in 1919, first suggested that a silent pause could be a way of commemorating the memory of those who died in the first world war, or perhaps more accurately to keep them from being forgotten: 'for there is a dread [...] that those who have gone will not always be foremost in the thoughts of all' (Sir Percy Fitzpatrick cited Gregory 1994: 9). Such a silence would bring the nation together in a common *act of inaction*. Whilst each individual would hold their own intensely private silence, they would be keeping silent together in a synchronised public moment of mute *cohibition*.

Held on the anniversary of the armistice, at the precise time the noise of war ceased-fire, the first two-minute silence, was an abrupt, complete and utter[less] pause in doing: buses pulled over and stopped their engines, 'people halted in their walks, chatter ceased as if by magic, traffic stopped and the rumbling note of industry stayed' (ibid.: 13). The *silence*, signalled most commonly by bells, but also by maroons and artillery, created a 'sudden hush', so loud 'it could almost be felt' (*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 Nov. 1919 cited Gregory 1994: 13). The *Silence touched* the nation and proved so popular it was capitalised. Adrian Gregory suggests, that it was the fusing of private and public continued commemoration that was central to its impact (ibid.). The *Silence* offered an opportunity to shy away from others, to be socially distant and not participate, together.

For over a decade, the broadcasting of the two-minute *Silence* was obstructed by the Home Office. Perhaps it was the poetic absurdity of transmitting silence, which caused such bureaucratic resistance, but radio and silence have history. According to David Toop, 'All silences are uncanny' (Toop 2010: 182), but in the dead air of radio, silence is conspicuous, and its estrangement tinged with threat. *On air* silence is everywhere and nowhere, a *place* suspended between the real and imagined, between then, there, then and now. The very origins of wireless transmission are built on the suspect reception of three morse code dots transmitted in 1901 from Marconi's Poldhu wireless station in Cornwall to Signal Hill, Newfoundland. The di-di-dit of Marconi's test signal, which Marconi *heard* arriving through the ether from Poldhu, physics and mathematics now calculate he *imagined* (Margolis 2011). In

⁹ Thomas 2015: 4

his later years, Marconi was convinced wireless communication would enable contact with the other world, believing his radio signals might pick up 'the sounds of long-dead men who had drowned in the Atlantic' (Hoare 2014).¹⁰ In the susurrations of radio silence, something is in the air, the known and tangible give way to the hidden, unfamiliar and [im]possible. The broadcast of the two-minute silence has of course never been completely silent, but silence propagates in its potential to be broken and the occasional 'bickering of sparrows [and] creasing of pigeons wings as they take flight' (Gregory 1994: 135), only serve to make the ghost of silence more apparent.

Mo[nu]ment

On Wednesday the 5th January 2005 a three-minute silence was held across Europe in memory of the 150,000 people who had lost their lives in the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. The silence took place toward the end of the project, *a year from here*, and was one of the final recordings made. Recorded from the same window, using the same cheap microphone, the quality of the sound remained predictably poor. The silent three-minute memorial took place at 12pm on a busy weekday, but unlike the first armistice *Silence*, industry did not stop: the consistent rumble of combustion and consumption, continued to smother the soundscape. However, my intention was to listen to the *moment* of silence and record its absence, the quality and content of the sound was therefore unimportant. I had no expectation of the recording having any audible trace of the silence held. But as the cathedral bells chimed midday, a distant dull explosion detonated the air. Silence had begun. Three minutes later, another insubstantial blast sounded its end. The origin of these ballistic apparitions remains unknown.

[Fig. 4]

As part of an on-going series of silent *releases*, *Mo[nu]ment* (2006 – 2008) cuts and presses this recorded moment as a limited edition of ten 7" single-sided vinyl records. The ephemerality of silence, lost in the act of recording, is lost again by being duplicated and preserved in material form. And yet in becoming substance, silence is open to imperfection and damage. Each record of this memorial edition becomes another moment, a *particular* silence, vulnerable to harm and therefore subject to change. The authorship of harm was handed over to the Royal Mail, with each record being stamped and sent to an unknowing recipient, without the protection of an envelope. The records were labelled with instructions for the receiver to, play, record and return the silence. Recordings were to be made at 12pm (preferably by microphone) and the record returned with details of where the recording was made. Canadian artist, Matt Rogalsky did not have a turntable, so he created his own phonograph, 'using a battery-operated fan, and a paper cup with a pin glued in. The direction of spin [was] contrary to normal and at a much higher speed'¹¹ (fig. 4). The resulting silence is shifted in pitch and compressed in time (reduced from 4 minutes to 42 seconds). Filmmaker, Guy Sherwin recorded the record with his young son over two sides of a cassette. With the tape left running, the silence records: 'Guy and Kai playing with quacky duck, hitting [the Tape] recorder [and] picking up vinyl.'¹² Each participant recomposes and remeasures silence, adding their own acoustic and temporal layer, whilst underneath, the slow accidental damage of postal transit writes over and erases the original silence. Of the 10 records pressed, four remain silent: one has been kept un-sent and un-played and three were posted but not returned. Missing presumed lost, silence may never have arrived, or perhaps it persists somewhere, unused, forgotten, but unsounding still.

¹⁰ The day following Marconi's death In July 1937, transmitters across the world fell silent, broadcasting no signals for two-minutes in a commemorative inaction of radio silence.

¹¹ Personal correspondence with Matt Rogalsky.

¹² Personal correspondence with Guy Sherwin.

Silence Lost

[Pause.]

HAMM: Open the window.
CLOV: What for?
HAMM: I want to hear the sea.
CLOV: You wouldn't hear it.
HAMM: Even if you opened the window?
CLOV: No.
HAMM: Then it's not worthwhile opening it?
CLOV: No.
HAMM: Then open it! [...] Have you opened it?
CLOV: Yes.
[Pause.]
HAMM: You swear you've opened it?
CLOV: Yes.

[Pause.]¹³

In his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, Charles Babbage proposed that: 'The pulsations of air, once set in motion by the human voice, cease not to exist with the sounds to which they give rise' (Babbage 1838: 108). He continues: 'The waves of air thus raised, perambulate the earth and ocean's surface, and in less than twenty hours every atom of its atmosphere takes up the altered movement' (ibid.: 109). Having disturbed the air, every utterance, although 'inaudible to human ears' (ibid.: 110) remains unforgotten: sound persists in silence.

The air itself is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said and woman whispered. There, in their mutable but unerring characters, mixed with the earliest, as well as with latest sighs of mortality, stand for ever recorded, vows unredeemed, promises unfulfilled, perpetuating in the united movements of each particle, the testimony of man's changeful will. (ibid.: 112)

The silence of the things we did not do, the unredeemed vows and promises unkept are also implicated in our airy record. According to Babbage, these mnemonic qualities are elemental, shared by air, earth and ocean:

The momentary waves raised by the passing breeze, apparently born but to die on the spot which saw their birth, leave behind them an endless progeny, which, reviving with diminished energy in other seas, visiting a thousand shores, reflected from each and perhaps again partially concentrated, will pursue their ceaseless course till ocean be itself annihilated. (ibid.: 114)

Although in 'endless transmission' the waves do not disclose their 'testimonies' (Picker 2003: 39) to even the 'acutest ear' (Babbage 110), but they may break their silence on the shore of the imagination. The ear, 'an organ at once external and internal [offers] a link between different worlds (real and imaginary) and different registers (physical and mental)' (Chion 2016: 18). Holding a shell to the whorled labyrinth of our own shell-like, we can listen to the tidal estuaries of these physical and imagined worlds. The acoustics of wave mechanics and auscultations of blood circulation combine with the ghostly swell and disembodied shush of the '[o]ceanic other' (Helmreich 2012: 24).

¹³ Beckett 2009: 39.

*Shell of the bright sea-waves!
What is it, that we hear in thy sad moan?
Is this unceasing music all thine own?
Lute of the ocean-waves!*

*Or does some spirit dwell
In the deep windings of thy chambers dim,
Breathing forever, in its mournful hymn,
Of Ocean's anthem swell?*

(Welby 1845 cited *ibid.*: 23)

Like all water, the wet 'substantial nothingness' (Bachelard 1983: 92) of the sea is 'full of reminiscences and prescient reveries' (*ibid.*: 89): the earliest mingles with the latest. R. Murray Schafer answers his own primordial question of listening: 'What was the first sound heard?' with an oceanic 'caress': 'As the ear of the fetus turns in its amniotic fluid it [...] is tuned to the lap and gurgle of water', a sound that is itself a reverie of oceans: a 'submarine resonance of the sea' (Schafer 1994: 15). Listening to the rhythmic ebb and flow of waves 'has the ability to render duration unreal, making it escape linear time' (Chion 2016: 40). When we listen to the sea, we hear time and substance undoing.

[Fig. 5]

On Saturday the 4th May 2019 a final silence was lost to the sea off the coast of Holy Island, Anglesey. One of four such disappearances, this closing silence sank beneath the waves of the Irish Sea on a bright spring day in plain sight of the *South Stack Lighthouse* (fig. 5). The Metadata of a photograph taken at the time positions its disappearance with the global coordinates of: Latitude: 53,18.1428N / Longitude: 4,41.3708W. This loss was part of the quartet, *Silence Lost* (2015-2019) which consists (or consisted) of four single-sided 10" records, each cut with a silent groove and lost to the seas surrounding the UK over a period of four years. Without input or original signal, the records are not *recordings* of silence, but rather a period of space and time during which *nothing* was recorded. Like an unwritten message in a bottle, each record is labelled with a return address: *c/o The British Library Sound Archive*. The disappearance is not documented directly. A small announcement hidden amongst the births, marriages and deaths of *The Times* newspaper classifieds, publicises and dates the location of loss (fig. 6). Published on the day of disappearance, the ad operates as both premonition and proof.

Newspapers are not just daily, they make for the occurrence of days, turning days into dates. Indeed, for this very reason, newspapers can be used as timepieces, as when victims of kidnappings are photographed holding up a newspaper as proof that they are still alive or were at the time the photograph was taken. (Connor 2011)

The broadsheet proof of *being here now*, quickly becomes proof of *having been there, then*. For Connor, in their daily passing newspapers are underwritten with loss: 'Such sad stuff, newspaper, sad with the sadness of the lost, the missed, the all but all over' (*ibid.*).

[Fig. 6]

The announcement in the *Times*, together with a black and white photograph of the sea into which it disappeared and an empty grey archival sleeve, bare dumb and dubious witness to silence ever being and ever *having been* lost. Although the circumstances of this evidence may call it back to memory, *Silence Lost* sinks into the unknown, set adrift from substance and truth, its existence and disappearance are always in question - a ghost of sound that

cannot even cease to exist. Written out by time and tide it may survive like memories survive, in the imaginative reconstruction of remembering. But ultimately it will return to the silence which occurs and continues without you or me. A silence unlimited by human ear, which, like an unspoken 'syllable thrown into the [sea] may go on [un]reverberating through illimitable space for ever and for ever' (Dickens cited Picker 2003: 17).

Silence on loan

A cool of books
will sometimes lead the mind to libraries
of a hot afternoon, if books can be found
cool to the sense to lead the mind away.

For there is a wind or ghost of a wind
in all books echoing the life
there, a high wind that fill the tubes
of the ear until we think we hear a wind,
actual .¹⁴

Silence concentrates in libraries. Shelved books full of closed words being unread, rustle up silence in our hands as pages turn sentences quietly in our head. The *Library That Was*, tells us that the pulp of books carries in its cells the shushed 'language of trees':

[M]essages remain in the physicality of the books and resonate on a level few can hear and many benefit from. The monks and nuns in book-filled monasteries were enlightened by the whispers of these messages. The librarians are encouraging silence with shhh! So they might one day hear them.

What are the books saying beside that which is written on the page?

They are calling us, to be idle [...] to cease productivity to be absorbed in other dimensions entirely. They are inviting us to their worlds and knowledge. (Lamara, Niazi and Nordin 2017: unpaginated)

The *silence* of a library is also a library of *silences*: a collective landscape of immersive quiet, where the ghosts of unbreathed syllables conspire with the acoustic paragraphs and chemical sentences of shrubs. So full of wetted breath the atmosphere here is fragile and vulnerable to changes in the weather. The environment is constantly monitored to check moisture levels and ensure a stable climate of stasis. The silence is of course never complete. Just as the crease of pigeon wings breaks the ceremonial two-minute pause, so too the digital pecking of keyboards and soft chiffchaff of fabric provide sonic peeks which only serve to make silence more present.

I realise that silence in libraries has come to be seen as an authoritative, hostile and deathly quiet. So much so that its presence is now segregated and prescribed: restricted to quiet zones or available for rent in study rooms. Silence is considered anti-social, creating exclusive, unproductive and inactive environments. In order to be doing, and we must always be doing (something), we need to *produce* noise. Even thinking is now measured by the noise it produces. In some university libraries, the engagement of 'learners' is monitored (and reported upon) by the digital noise produced when they log on to the catalogue or search the internet. If a student wanders into a library to stray the stacks in aimless pursuit of the unknown, or if

¹⁴ Williams and MacGowan 1995.: 96.

they sit and read what they have chanced upon, this will not be measurable, and they will *not* have participated in learning. In his book, *Shy Radicals*, Hamja Ahsan establishes (paradoxically in CAPITALS) the 'SHY PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF ASPERGISTAN' (Ahsan 2020: 14). The constitution of this homeland for the 'oppressed Shy, Introvert, and Autistic Spectrum peoples' (ibid.), guarantees twenty-four-hour access to public libraries, whilst Article 22 states that the national flag will be black and 'punctured thusly "...". The ellipsis will be represented as three dark blue circles symbolising silence and the depths of the ocean. The flag will never be publicly hoisted' (ibid.: 22). Article 24 states:

The national anthem is the sound of a seashell, which may be accessed on a twenty-four basis by citizens via the holding of the shell to the ear. Non-citizens outside the current territory of Aspergistan may also access the anthem in this manner. (ibid.: 23)

Where loud sound 'consumes' space, silence 'creates acoustic arenas as a common resource' (Blessner and Salter 2009: 32). The arena of silence is both common and *communal*.

[Fig. 7]

At the end of January 2019, a silent vinyl record was slipped into the *Artists' Book Collection*, at Winchester School of Art Library (fig. 7). As I entered the WSA library, I was conscious of the sounds (and silent record) which I brought with me. Immediately inclined to whispers, I felt myself withdrawing from acoustic presence in order not to intrude upon the quiet of others. In the library we are tacit participants in the immediate and communal composition of silence. The latest edition in my series of silent releases, *Silence on Loan* (Hegarty 2019) is an artists' book, published in the form of a single-sided 10" vinyl or *dubplate*. As part of the music mastering and publishing process, a *dubplate* is a one-off test pressing, produced to check quality and gauge audience response. Originally pressed in soft acetone rather than vinyl, this advanced, provisional copy was an intentionally impermanent record, its fidelity limited to 1000 plays. The *dub* in dubplate refers to the dubbing or doubling of an original sound: 'When you double, or dub, you replicate' (Toop 1995: 115). But *Silence on loan* has no sound to *dub*. Cut with a silent groove, it is not a record or replication of silence, it *is* a silence. Shelved without dust jacket or sleeve, silence is continually rewritten as accidental harm and particles of dust leave audible traces on the spiralled pagination of its surface. Left on the shelf, it holds back from sounding, adding its injured and accumulating hush to the silence present.

Closed stacks

As the publisher of *Silence on Loan* (ISBN: 978-1-5272-3880-0), I am obliged under the *Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003*, to deposit a copy of the publication with the British Library and *The Agency for the Legal Deposit Libraries*, which includes; *The Bodleian Libraries of the University of Oxford*, *The National Library of Scotland*, *Cambridge University Library*, *Trinity College Library, Dublin*, and *The National Library of Wales*. The copies must be 'of the same quality as the best copies which, at the time of delivery, have been produced for publication in the United Kingdom' (*Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003* c28 s4). The Act applies to printed publications, but specifically excludes sound recordings. The absence of sound etched into the vinyl, sets a mark upon on a surface and may therefore be called a *print* (but not a reproduction) of silence. And without an original sound source, the publication is not a sound recording and therefore it is subject to the Act. But submitting a 'copy' for legal deposit, still poses questions. At the time of publication only one 'copy' had been produced, although of course this was not a copy and to duplicate its sound would create a 'sound recording', paradoxically excluding itself from the obligations of the Act. It would also *fix* silence as *this* silence, undermining the unrecorded open silence published. Sleeveless, *Silence on loan* is also in a state of continuous reprint; rewritten moment by moment through the

scratched plosions and fricatives that bare materiality affords. In order to provide legal deposit 'copies' of *Silence on loan*, whilst maintaining these qualities essential to it, I reproduced the process of production, publishing six *other* silent grooves: six *ghosts* of *Silence on Loan*. The traditional library procedures of the rubber stamp were used to visually *mimic* likeness and establish difference. The application of pressure and subtle displacements of ink creating unique traces on the centre label of each record stamped.

[Fig. 8]

The vinyl 'copies' were sent accompanied only by a letter typed on an old *Brother* typewriter, documented and duplicated in triplicate using two sheets of carbon paper. The materiality of this correspondence was further reinforced by communicating only with physical address (no mobile number, no email). At the post office, silence was weighed, measured and sent *recorded* delivery to the Deposit Office of the British Library and The Agency for the Legal Deposit Libraries (fig. 8). Signed for and lurking 'off site' in 'closed stacks', the deposits of *Silence on loan* form a dispersed and lonely cohibition: all six records withholding their silence together, whilst apart. 'Preserved for the *use* of future generations', and now 'part of the nation's heritage' (My emphasis, British Library n.d.) silence remains being securely forgotten.

Record to Erase

[Fig. 9]

On Friday the 31st January 2020, I arrived at *Winchester School of Art Library* to find a table 'reserved for activity'. It had been one year and one day since *Silence on Loan* was added to the *Artists' Book Collection* at the Library. Wedged alphabetically between the hardbacks at 741.64 HEG, this mute slither of vinyl is easily overlooked, but once a year it is taken from the shelf and placed on the platter of a portable turntable. [Re]turning at thirty-three and a third revolutions per minute the activity of the needle pronounces the damage done: the silence that this year has lost. Once played it is gently put back on the shelf, where it is left unsounding for another year.

As a performance this annual audition is rather disappointing, nothing much happens for slightly more than nine minutes (fig. 9). Those who are here to hear (and those library visitors who's listening the silence borrows) listen to silence being both broken and unheard. Perhaps the tables are turned, and it is the listeners who perform the silence rather than the revolving groove and stylus. For many of those who came, this is a *return* to silence, having been here last year when *Silence on Loan* was performed at the moment of its inclusion into the library stock. Silence returning, gathers like wax in the ears of those who come to listen and remember having listened last year. Everyone who was there to [not] hear silence again, received a souvenir in the form of a *Silence on Loan 2020* pin-badge, whilst the festival detritus of a paper wristband and UV handstamp, confirmed presence and implied participation. Those library users who were *not* there to listen, were also offered these souvenirs as acknowledgement of their tacit listening participation and contribution to the silence composed.

[Fig. 10]

I had been inclined to record each performance, so that I might document and measure the audible change time brings. But such calculating permanence would surely confine silence in sound, completing and fixing still, that which is essentially incomplete and fugitive. The physical failure of documentation could however allow the potential of silence to be caught in the [in] act[ion] of *being* unheard. The performance was therefore documented in mono on an

audiocassette using an old portable recorder (fig. 10). Such obsolete media is characterised by a distinct lack of [hi] fidelity, recording its own imperfections and imposing its own magnetic patina upon the sound it records. This failure to create a faithful document is further enhanced by the recording not being monitored - the tape is seen slowly winding from left to right, but no lights or needles visibly meter the volume of signal. The condition, fidelity and very existence of the recording is physically apparent but audibly unknown. The quantity of tape used does measure the duration of silence, transcribing [no] sound and time into a spatial length. But, paused at a distance, silence remains *being* unheard, waiting here another year, in order to be rewound, recorded over and erased again.

Silent Rut

The *run-off* or *run-out* groove is that point on a record where the track ends and the needle locks into the rut of the moment *after* sound. With a silent groove there is little distinction between the track and this moment after, silence just continues locked in its loop until the needle is lifted out its routine. Returned to the shelf *Silence on Loan* remains unheard: quietly and pathetically adding silence to silence. Each year it will be performed, recorded and erased again. Another pointless routine, which will continue until the damage sustained or the innate obsolescence of the vinyl medium, results in the record itself becoming unplayable and dumb. Or perhaps until, through a complete lack of interest, silence is withdrawn from use.

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Illustration captions

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Fig. 1. *At times she disappears 'into the silence of her own forgetting'.*

Second Listening (2001) Video Still.

Fig. 2. *A year from here* (2004-2005).

Fig. 3. *A year from here*. Sound archive (detail).

Fig. 4. *Mo[nu]ment* (2006-2008).

Returned record: Edition 0002 ssv7 (2:4) (Matt Rogalsky).

Fig. 5. *Silence lost* in the Irish Sea (2019).

Fig. 6. *Silence lost* in *The Times* classifieds, Saturday 4th May 2019.

Fig. 7. *Silence on Loan* slipped into the *Artists' Book Collection* at WSA Library.

Fig. 8. *Silence on loan*. Legal deposits, weighed, measured and sent recorded delivery.

Fig. 9. *Silence on Loan*. Prelude to performance: 30th January 2019 (WSA Library).

Fig. 10. *Silence on Loan*. Documentation of performance. 31st January 2020 (WSA Library).