

Original citation:

Crowther, T. C. (2009) Perceptual activity and the will. In: O'Brien, Lucy and Soteriou, Matthew , (eds.) Mental actions. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 173-191. ISBN 9780191570087

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Perceptual Activity and the Will¹

Thomas Crowther

Reflection on the nature of perceptual activity reveals a type of mental episode with both active and passive constituents. Where one listens to something, watches it, or looks at it, one perceives it. It is a familiar thought that in perception we are passive and at the mercy of our immediate environment. But perceptual goings on like listening and watching are also active. In this paper, I explore the nature of this neglected category of the mental through an attempt to understand the dual nature of episodes of this kind. I shall draw on a recent discussion of the role of the rational will in mental activity to offer an account of the structure and nature of a central case of perceptual activity, an account that can explain how active and passive elements are related to one another in this type of episode.

1. Agency and passivity in perceptual activity

Some perceptual goings on—amongst them listening, looking, observing, scrutinizing, and watching—are active, or ‘agential’. I shall set aside for present purposes questions about exactly how the notion of the agential is to be determined and how the boundaries of that category relate to the notion of ‘action’. In marking such occurrences out as agential I intend nothing more than that such goings on are things that agents do, rather than things like digestion or resuscitation that merely go on in agents or that merely happen to them. For one to listen to something, for

¹ I gratefully acknowledge much helpful discussion with Matthew Soteriou and Guy Longworth. Thanks also to an anonymous reader for O.U.P. for helpful comments.

example, is not merely for something to happen to one or for something to merely go on in one.² It is for one to do something. One may listen to something carefully, intently, painstakingly or methodically. That listening is agential does not imply that listening to something is necessarily an instance of ‘full-blooded action’, or an instance of mental process in which an agent’s active powers are exercised to the full.³ It may be that one listens to something absent-mindedly, or carelessly and without any great attention. Nevertheless, absent-mindedly listening to something, for example, is to be distinguished from something which merely happens to a subject just as much as something done with intention, heed or care. One can no more digest something absent-mindedly or unintentionally than one can digest it carefully.

Though perhaps not all perceptual activities do so, some perceptual activities entail the perception of the object of that activity. If one listened to the sound of someone talking throughout a period of time, for example, then necessarily one aurally perceived, heard, her. And if one watched a bee flying from plant to plant throughout a period of time, then one saw the bee flying. One could not have watched the bee during that time unless one had seen it.

But hearing something—and, quite generally—perceiving something, is not something agential: hearing something is not something that a perceiving agent does.

Different reasons have been offered in support of this claim. Generalizing to a different sense modality the thoughts about seeing offered in the course of the

² In this paper I concentrate discussion on the agential process of listening. Prior to further work, it would be a mistake to simply assume that the account offered of the nature of listening can be transplanted across the sense modalities to do service as an account of watching, looking, or of tactual exploration (feeling). Nevertheless it may be possible to think of the account of listening as a model and to leave it to further work to see how far such a model can be extended. I discuss watching in more detail in Crowther (forthcoming) and offer some further remarks about the relationship between listening and watching below.

³ My use of the term ‘agential’ here, and the distinction between full-blooded actions and less than full-blooded actions takes up the three-fold distinction between categories of goings-on suggested in Frankfurt (1988) and Velleman (1989), (1992), (1996).

discussion offered by Zeno Vendler (1957) we could note that one cannot answer the question: “What are you doing?” with “I am hearing O” in the way that one can answer that question with “I am listening to O.” In further support of this claim, Vendler notes that one can’t intelligibly qualify perception verbs with the ‘agential’ adverbial modifiers so readily taken by verbs like “watching” and “listening”. One can’t intelligibly describe someone as “hearing something carefully” nor “seeing something intently”.⁴ And we can take these observations about what we can and cannot intelligibly say to be manifestations of the truth about hearing (or seeing) themselves.

These observations place a burden of explanation on the theorist. Given that listening to something cannot be aural perception of (i.e. hearing of) that thing, on pain of its being both agential and non-agential, some explanation needs to be offered of how it can be that perceptual activities like listening to something, watching or listening to something entail the perception of their objects.⁵

2. An instrumental conception of active attending

In this section, I consider an attempt to explain this relation in which active attending is to be understood as instrumental in structure. Though this account fails to provide a general explanation of perceptual activity, appreciating the reasons why it does not deepens our understanding of perceptual activity by revealing a distinction between two different categories of perceptual activity. The nature of this distinction is determined by the ways that episodes of these distinct types occupy periods of time.

⁴ Vendler (1957) goes on to maintain that seeing (and by extension hearing) are not things that go on or unfold over time at all. They are states or conditions of the perceiving subject. Any such claim, though, I take to be a development of the thought that perception is not agential, and not something one is committed to simply by the observation that it is not possible to hear something carefully.

⁵ Brian O’Shaughnessy (1992), (2000) ch. 14, calls this the ‘Antitheticality Puzzle’. My discussion here is indebted to O’Shaughnessy’s treatment of this puzzle. See sections 3 and 4 below.

Focussing attention on this distinction will reveal a feature that a good account of the entailment in question will need to possess.

Gilbert Ryle (1949) draws a distinction between “task” verbs and “achievement” verbs.⁶ Tasks are those things that subjects can be intentionally engaged in, and they are things that necessarily occupy periods of time. As instances of tasks (or activities or processes) he describes: looking for, searching, kicking, running, walking, climbing. In the category of achievements on the other hand are such things as scoring a goal, winning the race, reaching the summit, and finding one’s keys, but also seeing and hearing.⁷ Though they are occurrences, or events, achievements do not take up time in the way that tasks do: they are instantaneous or durationless happenings that consist in mere changes in, or of, something. In the case of scoring a goal or winning the race, those changes consist just of the termination of a task.

One might be tempted to take the bodily task and achievement pair “search” and “find” as a model for understanding the relation between perceptual task verbs on the one hand and what Ryle calls “verbs of perceptual success” or “perceptual detection verbs” on the other.⁸ In searching for something, one engages in a task or activity with an end or aim that provides its instrumental goal. With such instrumental goals, necessarily, the achievement of that goal, where the achievement of that goal is brought about in the right way by the performance of the task, provides a logical terminus for the task. Looking for one’s keys is an activity governed by the goal of finding one’s keys. The achievement of the end of that activity, finding one’s keys, is an instantaneous change, an occurrence that brings looking for one’s keys to a close.

⁶ See Ryle (1949), ch. V. For further related discussion see Ryle (1953) p. 93-109

⁷ In support of this claim about seeing, Ryle cites, approvingly, Aristotle, who he takes to have said that that “I can say I see it as soon as I can say I have seen it”. For discussion of this claim see Ackrill (1965).

⁸ See Ryle (1949), ch. VII, p. 225. See also (1953), p.102-5.

Correspondingly, the thought might go, a task like listening to something is an aural task which has hearing or aurally noticing (perhaps hearing a sound) as its end. The achievement of the end of that task, hearing a sound, necessarily brings such aural searches to an end. Successful aural searches are those perceptual tasks, tasks of listening for something, in which the instrumental end of the activity has been achieved. This modelling of active attendings on successful instrumental actions, when conjoined with Ryle's ontology of tasks and achievements, suggests an account of the entailment in question.

The suggestion is that actively attending to something entails perception, because actively attending to something is the successful performance of a task of actively attending, and perception is the instantaneous change in state that constitutes the achievement of the end of that activity.

Though there is much of interest in these suggestions they cannot provide a general model for perceptual activity.⁹ Listening to O, for example, is not a process that is, necessarily, terminated by hearing O. One generally hears O throughout a period of time during which one listens to it. Similarly, if one watches or looks at O one generally sees O throughout the time that one watches or looks at it.

The minimal point is not that perceptual searches are not agential perceptual activities. However precisely the details of such an account ought to be developed there are clearly instances of perceptual activity that have (at least something like)

⁹ There is also much to take issue with independently of concerns over whether the relation between an agential occurrence and perception in cases of perceptual activity can be understood instrumentally. In particular, the denial in Ryle (1949) that seeing and hearing are not processes or things with temporal duration at all (cf. here Vendler (1957)) but mere durationless startings or stoppings arguably confutes the fact that hearing is not something that a subject can do deliberately with the fact that hearing is not something that necessarily goes on through time or exists by unfolding over periods of time at all. The conflation here appears between agential process and process simpliciter.

instrumental structure; consequently, there are clearly occurrences that we can understand in terms of the success of such goings on. Rather, we ought to distinguish, *prima facie*, between instrumental perceptual goings on—looking for the book, watching out for the eagle, listening out for the bell—and the events which are successful episodes of such activity, and perceptual activities which lack such instrumental perceptual goals, watching the eagle, looking at the book, listening to the bell.

The ground of the distinction between these two categories of perceptual activity is the different ways that episodes of the relevant kinds occupy time. Within the framework of the Aristotelian verb classification offered by Zeno Vendler (1957), Susan Rothstein (2004) distinguishes between ‘telic’ and ‘atelic’ goings on. Occurrences are telic when they have “a natural stopping point” or when they are “movements towards an endpoint where the properties of the endpoint are determined by the description of the event”.¹⁰ Goings on are atelic, by contrast, when “once they have started, they can go on indefinitely, since the nature of the eventuality itself does not determine its endpoint”.¹¹ If John ran, then his running is not an occurrence which progresses towards a terminal point, as his building a house does. John’s running is an ‘activity’ or a ‘process’, while his building a house is an ‘accomplishment’.¹² A mark of this difference between kinds of occurring or occurrence is that atelic goings on are generally “homogeneous” and telic occurrences are not. According to Rothstein (2004), (assuming here that homogeneous goings on are the semantic values of homogeneous predicates) “if a predicate is homogeneous then x P-ed for y time

¹⁰ Rothstein (2004), p.7.

¹¹ Rothstein (2004), p.7.

¹² Vendler (1957), Kenny (1963).

ENTAILS that at any time during y , x P-ed was true.”¹³ So, for example, the activity of pushing a cart is homogeneous, in that if John pushed a cart for y time then for any time during y , John (had) pushed a cart at that time. But it is not the case that if John wrote a letter for y time that entails that at any time during y , John (had) written a letter at that time. A second mark of the distinction between atelicity and telicity is that: “If P is an activity predicate (i.e. a predicate that has a semantic value that is an atelic going on), then x is (now) P-ing ENTAILS x has P-ed.” Telic occurrences yield the imperfective paradox in the progressive, but processes or activities, atelic occurrences, do not. If John is now pushing a cart then John has pushed a cart, whereas it is not the case that if John is now writing a letter he has written a letter.¹⁴

The distinction between the two kinds of perceptual activities distinguished above is a distinction between telic and atelic agential perceptual goings on. On the account of act-structure just considered, actively attending to O is understood as a telic ‘accomplishment’ that is not homogeneous. That S actively attended to something, in this sense, during t_1 - t_n , does not entail that S (had) actively attended to O at any time t during t_1 - t_n . If S turned his visual attention on the person behind him from t_1 - t_n , for example, there is a time t , during t_1 - t_n , for example, at which S is only half-way through turning his perceptual attention on the person behind him. But, there is a sense of “actively attends to” that is atelic. Listening to O , (like watching O or looking at O) does not involve a “progression towards a set terminus determined by

¹³ Rothstein (2004), p.14. See Vendler (1957), Kenny (1963), Dowty (1979), Taylor (1977).

¹⁴ A number of writers dispute that homogeneity and failure to instantiate the entailments distinctive of the imperfective paradox can be taken to be constitutive or explicative of the distinction between atelic processes and activities and telic accomplishments. Taylor (1977) and Dowty (1979) maintain that not all activities or processes are homogeneous. Some processes are only homogeneous down to minimal parts. The thought is that though walking is obviously an atelic activity, it is not the case that if S walked for time t , S walked is true at every time or period of time during t . There may be units of time during which S did not complete the cycle of activities necessary to have walked. I leave these complications aside here.

the nature of the eventuality itself'. Such goings on are homogeneous: if S listened to O throughout t1-tn then S (had) listened to O at any time throughout t1-tn.

3. O'Shaughnessy on the structure of listening

In an absorbing discussion of listening, Brian O'Shaughnessy (2000) identifies and engages with the issue that concerns us here, and makes some interesting suggestions about how listening can have both agential and passive components.

According to O'Shaughnessy (2000), perception cannot be agential.¹⁵ First, were perception agential, then it would be possible for there to be such a thing as rational hearing, and it would also be possible for us to say that we were engaged in hearing, or the process of hearing. But there is not such a thing as rational hearing, and it is unintelligible to suppose that hearing is something that one could be engaged in doing. Second, like belief, desire and emotion, the 'will status' of perception (i.e. whether it is agential or non-agential) is fixed by its type. If there are any examples of hearing that are non-agential, then every instance of the kind must be so. But there are undoubtedly non-agential hearings. For one can hear the door slamming non-agentially, or without that being something agentially done. So hearing must be non-agential. Third, hearing cannot be agential if it is to be a source of knowledge about the world.¹⁶ Were hearing agential then the activity of the episode will be explained in terms of causation by act-intentions and desires. But if hearing is to be a way of finding out about the world, the hearing itself cannot be caused by our states of mind, but must be caused by the objects heard. He writes: '(S)urely perception, of its nature and therefore universally, is a responding-to or suffering-of at the hands of its object,

¹⁵ O'Shaughnessy uses the term 'active' to something that is an expression of agency. I continue to use 'agential' for the sake of continuity.

¹⁶ See Williams (1973), Wittgenstein (1980), 79, 91- 94. See Baldwin (2003) for discussion.

howsoever much this may be intentionally engineered by the being who suffers such self-engineered experience'.¹⁷

But, according to O'Shaughnessy, the relation between listening and hearing cannot be understood as the kind of relations obtaining between the elements of a piece of instrumental action (i.e. the kinds of relations that obtain between perceptual activity and perception in the Rylean model discussed above). While there are elements of the structure of the activity of listening which have analogues in the case of bodily action; in both listening and raising one's arm there is a 'willed event' (hearing in one case and arm rising in the other) and an 'event of willing' ('trying', 'striving' or 'willing to listen' and 'trying to move one's arm') which in cases of successful action are, he claims, constituents of the same event, listening does not involve the activation of a mechanism by which, in successful action, one event brings about the other. In the case of listening, unlike the case of bodily action, there is 'no gap to be mechanistically bridged'¹⁸. According to O'Shaughnessy, one can try to raise one's arm and yet fail to do so because of the failure of an otherwise extremely reliable mechanism that relates the willing of bodily movement and the willed bodily movement. But by contrast one cannot make sense of trying and yet failing to listen to something. In discussion, O'Shaughnessy turns to the example of attending to a bodily sensation:

“We shall suppose that the project is directing one's attention onto a medium-sized sensation of contact, sited on the heel of one's left foot, for the span of a few seconds. And so one turn's one's attention onto this psychological object, and of course succeeds, and instantaneously. Might a mental mechanism

¹⁷ O'Shaughnessy (2000), p. 389-90.

¹⁸ O'Shaughnessy (2000), p.385.

connect these two events? Might a mechanism link the event of turning the attention onto or towards, and the event of noticing or making attentive contact with this object?”¹⁹

For it to be intelligible that there is such a mechanistic relationship, he maintains, it must be possible, however unlikely in fact, for failure to occur, where failure is an unsuccessful attempt to do something and not a simple omission to do. But there is, O’Shaughnessy argues, no possibility of the relevant kind of failure in the case of the kind of mental action in question. One may fail to attend to a bodily sensation through “changes or abandonment of project or boredom, or sheer forgetfulness. Each of these causal influences might lead, not to the unsuccessfulness of the project, but its termination.”²⁰ But that is not failure as an unsuccessful attempt to do something. However, can’t one try to listen to something, and yet fail, if, say, there is too much interfering noise? “It is true that we sometimes mean by “trying to listen” trying to keep one’s mind on the task of trying to listen, trying for example, to keep one’s mind of the deflecting power of alternative attractions, and here of course one can fail- but they are not in question here.”²¹ Failure in such cases ought to be understood as a failure of trying to try to listen, not a failure of one’s trying to listen.

O’Shaughnessy proposes that listening is to be identified with the agential phenomenon of ‘striving-to-listen’ or ‘willing-to-listen’. Though listening is agential, listening has hearing as a constituent. The hearing (more correctly, given that hearing may go on after listening has stopped, that part of hearing) that is part of listening is to be identified with that part of hearing that is causally explained by the striving to listen. If hearing is to be a way of knowing about the world, then hearing itself cannot

¹⁹ O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 385-6.

²⁰ O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 386.

²¹ O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 386.

be caused by the act-intentions or act-desires of the agent. Listening, or striving to listen, is to be understood as an agential occurrence which is directed at a sound object, which has the causal power to cause it to be the case that such and such a sound object causes hearing of that sound. In listening one sets oneself up to be causally influenced by particular sounds, and the structure of listening is completed by hearing these sounds.

“The causal power of a 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 the 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. In this regard, the act is not unlike an instrumental act—though strangely in reverse. Thus, we actually enlist the timbre of the sound as an external cause of timbre-hearing, through specifically ‘grooming’ any possible hearing for timbre-affectedness. This trying, that the attention be thus influenced, is the continuous inner creation of a causally influential internal mould; and as the desired effect of this continuous mental work occurs, which is to say a hearing of the desired kind, an act-edifice is completed, namely listening to the heard feature of the sound.”²²

According to O’Shaughnessy, listening is agential, because listening is striving to listen, or willing to listen, and striving to listen or willing to listen is something that one does. Hearing is not agential. It is not possible to hear rationally, there are some

²² O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 397-8.

non-agential hearings, and hearing plays an epistemic role. Listening entails hearing because to listen to something is for one to strive to listen to a sound and for one's striving to listen to a sound to cause one's being caused to hear sounds by the presence of those sounds.

4. Difficulties for this account

There is a good deal in the discussion of O'Shaughnessy (2000) that we should see our way to preserving and further explaining. But what I want to concentrate on here are some worries with that account that emerge when we consider whether what is presented there is a unitary conception of the act-structure of listening.

In the first instance, the notion of agential perceptual events manifested in the discussion of the direction of attention onto bodily sensations quoted above appears to be instrumental, or at least capable of being glossed in terms of mechanical explanation. O'Shaughnessy argues that there is no way to make sense of the idea of an unsuccessful attempt to direct one's attention onto a bodily sensation. There cannot be a mechanistic connection, he writes, between the 'event of turning one's attention towards a bodily sensation' and the 'event of noticing or making attentive contact with it'. But that is by no means obvious. It may be that one turns one's attention towards a bodily sensation, perhaps in response to a request to concentrate on the feeling of one's foot resting on the floor, but that before one notices the feeling or makes attentive contact with it, the sensation is not available to be attended to as a result of the action of some fast acting anaesthetic the administration of which is caused by changes in the locus or disposition of one's bodily attention. Here it seems that failure to make attentive contact with a bodily sensation is not simply an abandonment of the perceptual project or an omission. If the example is indeed a

model for the relationship between an event of willing and an event that is willed in the case of an event of listening to a sound, then failure to listen is conceivable for related reasons. One may be instructed to listen to the sound that the neighbours are making, but before one notices or makes attentive contact with that sound, the sound is no longer available to be perceived. There is a clear sense here in which we can make sense of the possibility that a subject engages in willing to listen to a sound but nevertheless fails to make aural contact with any such sound. This conception of listening, though, is subject to the worries about conceiving of the act-structure of listening as instrumental or telic set out in the previous section.²³

Elsewhere, though, O'Shaughnessy suggests a different picture of the relation between perceptual activity and perception. "The situation is like this. A sound exists, or perhaps a sensation, of which we are already aware, and for some reason we choose to actively attend to it. And so a will-to-listen takes place, that proves to be a successful listening, in relation to which the sound is at once immediate material object and immediate unrationalized part-cause of the hearing-sector of the same listening.." ((2000), p.392.) Suppose instead we take the conception of the relations between the event of willing and the event which is willed manifested here as our model for understanding the process of listening and its relation to hearing. Given this conception, 'awareness of the sound' or awareness of a sensation is a condition of

²³ Another aspect of the account presented in the discussion of active attending in O'Shaughnessy (2000) that encourages a view of listening as instrumental are the schematic diagrams (pp. 390, 392) of the preferred theory of the act-structure of listening. The diagrams suggest that at least for some events of listening, there is an initial period of time during which the agent strives to listen but does not hear. If that is a possibility, then singling out a particular event as an event of the type striving to listen does not entail that it is an event of the type hearing. But then it remains to be seen how, within such views about the agential process of striving to listen, one could avoid thinking of listening instrumental; as a successful attempt to hear or to produce hearing. (It is consistent with this that singling out a particular event that is a successful striving to listen, i.e. a listening, as an instance of the type successful striving to listen, or as an instance of the type listening, entails that such an event is also, necessarily a hearing, and not a hearing in virtue of an instrumental or merely productive relationship between that event and a hearing event.)

listening taking place at all (or beginning to take place) and taking ‘awareness of a sound’ to be (or at least to entail) the occurrence of an event of hearing a sound, here it is a necessary condition for the agential phenomenon, striving to listen, to take place, that the event of hearing already goes on.²⁴ The image apt for perceptual activities like listening here is that of the concentration or focussing of the beam of the attentive spotlight to a greater degree of intensity onto something that is already an object of awareness.

Taking the perception of a sound to be a necessary condition for listening to a sound, or for an event of listening to a sound to begin, certainly makes it more difficult to make sense of failed attempts to listen, where a failed attempt to listen is the occurrence of an event of striving to listen in the absence of the willed event of hearing. But if the relation between agential perceptual activity and perception is understood in this way it is now more difficult to keep clearly in sight the sense in which, as O’Shaughnessy says, the ‘aim of listening’ is ‘the production of hearing’, or that the function of listening is ‘the generation of hearing’.²⁵ How could the function of listening be the production or generation of hearing if being in a position in which the event the occurrence of which is the object of such a function (the event the occurrence of which is the object of the ‘act-desires’ or ‘intentions’ with which

²⁴ It might be objected to the tack that I have adopted above on O’Shaughnessy’s quote about attending to bodily sensation that some such view must be supposed there also. For it is incoherent to suppose that one could have a bodily sensation without being aware that one has it or without already being in ‘attentive contact with it’. I agree that there may be no such a thing as directing the attention onto a bodily sensation without the agent already being aware of that sensation. But this point shows nothing more than that the case of attention to bodily sensation may not be the best way to illuminate a perceptual activity such as listening, where such a distinction, (between directing the attention onto a sound, and noticing a sound or making attentive contact with a sound) can be made intelligible. In discussion above I simply take at face value that the example is intended to provide a concrete illustration of a type of act-structure that is present in an activity like listening, an act-structure that includes as constituents an event of willing (an event of ‘directing the attention onto’ *x*) and a willed event (an event of ‘*noticing*’ or ‘*making attentive contact with*’ *x*). Of course, there are other, far more basic reasons, centring on the difficulty in accounting for bodily sensation in terms of perception of sensation, for being cautious about using an example involving bodily sensation to shed light on specifically *perceptual* activity.

²⁵ O’Shaughnessy (2000), p. 395.

listening is engaged) is a condition for the occurrence or onset of the agential process itself?

These features of O'Shaughnessy's discussion help us to focus the following question: if an activity like listening is not to be understood in terms of a successful attempt to notice a sound or to make attentive contact with (i.e. come to hear) a sound, and if hearing a sound is a condition for the onset of listening, what remains of the intuition that the role of listening in the mental economy is to produce hearing?

4. Listening and the structure of active attending

In this section I present an account of listening and show how it helps us to explain the relation between agential and passive components of perceptual activity. Though related to a position suggested by discussion in O'Shaughnessy (2000) in the course of his treatment of listening, the account offered here differs in certain crucial respects.

In his account of listening, O'Shaughnessy (2000) takes the basic active phenomenon to be investigated to be 'listening to a sound S'. But one could not listen to a sound S without listening to the producer or the source of the sound; without listening to what makes that sound. One could not, for example, listen to the sound of talking without listening to the producer of that sound. The producer of a sound may be a familiar material object, a collection of such objects, or it may not be a material object at all. If one listens to the sound of thunder, one listens to a storm-cloud producing thunder. In general, though, one could not listen to sound S unless one were listening to the producer of the sound S, call it O, making that sound. Listening to a producer of sound is basic in this sense with respect to 'listening to a sound S'.

To listen to the producer of a sound, O, is a process of agentially maintaining aural perceptual contact with (i.e. hearing of) O with the aim of knowing what sound O is producing. Let me treat the different elements of this account in turn.

Listening to a sound-producer O is a process as opposed to an accomplishment or a time-occupying perfective event; it is an atelic time-occupier. First, listening to O is homogeneous. If one listens to O from t_1 - t_n , then one listened to O at any time throughout t_1 - t_n . Second, listening to O exhibits the pattern of entailments that distinguishes it from accomplishments or time-occupying perfective occurrences with respect to the imperfectivity paradox. If S stopped listening to O at t , then S had listened to O.

For one to listen to O throughout a period of time involves one maintaining aural perceptual contact with (hearing of) O throughout that time. For a process to involve the maintenance of aural contact with a producer of sound is a kind of occurrence or going on that plays a preservative role with respect to the perceptual state or condition of hearing the producer of sound throughout a period of time. It is a process of maintaining or sustaining the hearing of O through that time. For listening to be a process of maintaining or sustaining hearing is not analysable in instrumental terms. Listening to O is not a process that causes or brings about the preservation of a state of aural perceptual contact with sound-producer O throughout a period of time. For one to listen to O throughout some relevant period of time is for one to be doing something such that it is in virtue of doing that that one maintains such a state of aural contact with O. In the same way that the steady emission of energy of a certain object throughout a period of time does not cause or bring about the fact that the object is in a condition of radioactivity throughout that time so, I propose, does listening to an

object involve the maintenance of a condition of aural contact with O. I shall return to some of the complications that surround this claim presently.

Listening to O is an agential process of maintaining aural perceptual awareness of O. Not every aural occurrence that involves the maintenance of the state of hearing O throughout a certain period of time is agential, is something that the subject does, or can be said to do. If I heard the fireworks exploding for a time then a process went on in me that preserved in me the state of hearing the fireworks, or hearing the fireworks exploding. Nevertheless, if I heard the fireworks exploding for a time my so hearing them is not something I could have done with care, deliberation or absent-mindedly (though if I listened to them that is certainly something that I could be capable of doing carefully, deliberately or absent-mindedly).

Where a perceiving agent, S, listens to a producer of a sound, the aim of that process of maintaining awareness of the producer of the sound O is to provide that agent with knowledge of what sound the producer of the sound is making; to put S in a position in which he knows what sound O is making. For S to know what sound O is making where that state realizes the aim of listening is for S to know that p, where “p” is the answer to the question: “What sound is O making?”. The aim of listening is realized where S aurally perceptually monitors O with the aim of knowing what O is doing, and S is in a state of knowing what sound O is making in virtue of the process of aurally monitoring the sound producer O that he is engaged in. It may be, for example, that the aim of listening to O is realized in the knowledge that O is singing, or that O is not making a sound at all. Where the aim of listening is realized in S’s knowledge, at t, that p (where “p” is an answer to the question: “What is O doing?”) and where this state of knowledge is a state that the subject is in, at t, in virtue of the

fact that at t he is engaged in aurally monitoring O, we can characterize that condition as one in which S can *hear what* sound O is making, where to hear what O is doing is to *hear that* p, where “p” is an answer to the relevant question about what O is doing.²⁶ The aim of listening to O, then, is to hear that p, in this sense.

S may listen to O throughout a period of time even though the aim of that process is not realized, or not realized to any interesting or significant degree. If S listens to what sound O is making, it is not necessarily the case that S is in a position to hear what O is doing, at least where that knowledge is anything more than that O is producing *that* sound or that O is making *some kind* of sound. S may have no grasp on the kind of sound that O is producing. S may not know, for example, that O is producing a C, because he does not know what a C sounds like (at least, not where knowing what a C sounds like is understood as knowing that a C sounds like *that*). Alternatively, though S is listening to O, it may be that contingent constraints produced by the circumstances prevent S from knowing, for the majority of sounds that O is producing, that O is making that sound (in virtue of maintaining aural awareness of the producer of that sound). If the agent is genuinely listening to the producer of the sound, though, 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. One who listens to someone who can be seen, through the walls of a transparent sound-proofed room, may not be able to hear that he is screaming, but is able to listen to him, for example, because he can hear his feet tapping on a stretch of floor that is not sound-proofed.

²⁶ I do not assume here that if S listens to what O is doing, S himself is necessarily in a position to answer the question: “What is O doing?”. S may be a creature that does not have the ability to speak, and, hence, which does not have the capacity to raise and settle questions about what O is doing.

Where a perceiver listens to a producer of a sound, what puts that agent in a position to know what sound the producer of the sound is making is the agent's hearing the sound-producer Φ -ing (where " Φ ing" can be an answer to the question: "What sound is O making?") Listening to O is the kind of process the aim of which may be realized in knowledge of what sound O is making because for as long as an agent listens to O, that agent can hear O Φ -ing.²⁷ We have noted the thought that the knowledge-generating function of certain aspects of our mental lives is inconsistent with the operation of those functions being subject to the will. But there are no such problems in thinking that listening—or active attending in general—is unsuitable for playing a knowledge-generating role (a role that I take it to be essential to its functioning). For while listening is an active agential project, what one is in a position to know via listening (i.e. what one is in a position to hear is the case) is determined by whether one hears O, for example, Φ -ing or Ψ -ing.²⁸ And that is not subject to the will.

On this account, then, listening to a sound-producer is agential: it is something that the agent does. But hearing O is not agential. Here, we can agree with both Vendler (1957) and O'Shaughnessy (2000) as we distinguish between different senses of 'hearing O'. On the one hand, we might take 'hearing O' to be the name of a state or condition of a subject, a way that the subject can be. Hearing O in this sense is not

²⁷ The account offers a number of ways to make sense of *listening to O Φ ing*, (for example, listening to O producing a sound or making a sound). A natural suggestion is that listening to O Φ -ing is what occurs when an agent listens to O, that is, maintains hearing of O with the aim of knowing what sound O is producing, and where the agent hears O Φ ing in virtue of maintaining that contact. Alternatively, it may be that an agent listens to O Φ ing in the sense that it is the Φ ing itself that is listened to and is the object of that activity. Here, an agent listens to O Φ ing if it is O's *Φ ing* that he agentially maintains aural awareness of throughout a period of time.

²⁸ I think that this is how we should make best sense of O'Shaughnessy's claim that "hearing completes the act-structure of listening". Hearing does not complete the act-structure of agential monitoring because it is a conceptual truth that hearing is entailed by the agential maintenance of aural perceptual contact with O throughout some period of time. However, what is true is that merely aurally apprehending O Φ -ing, as one listens, completes the act-structure of listening in the sense that it puts one in the position to realize the aim of the activity of listening, i.e. knowing what O is doing in virtue of hearing O (i.e. hearing what O is doing).

something that can be done because states or conditions do not have the right temporal shape to be done. One can no more do or engage in hearing that one can engage in red. On the other hand, ‘hearing O’ might be understood as a perceptual occurrence. In this sense, we take hearing to be a processive constituent of the stream of consciousness. To distinguish it from the stative notion we might refer to such a process as ‘aurally apprehending O’ or the ‘aural apprehension of O’. Aurally apprehending the fireworks exploding is not a state but a processive occurrence that unfolds over time. But it is not something that can be done. One cannot aurally apprehend the fireworks carefully or deliberately, or absent-mindedly. Neither is one’s aurally apprehending the fireworks something that can be described as something intentional, as something that one tries to do, or something that one wills to do.

Given the account of listening offered here, listening entails hearing because to listen to O is to agentially maintain aural perceptual contact with (i.e. hearing of) O throughout a period of time with the aim of knowing what it is doing. But a subject cannot have engaged in a process of preserving or maintaining perceptual contact with O throughout some period of time without there being some condition of hearing being maintained.²⁹ In contrast to the account of structure that O’Shaughnessy (2000) offers, on the account suggested here, there’s no *productive* relationship between

²⁹ In virtue of the fact that listening to O entails that there is a state of hearing O being preserved, then it also follows that if S listened to O then S heard O in the sense, now, of a perceptual occurrence: that of aurally apprehending O. For if S was in the condition of hearing O throughout a period of time, it follows that S aurally apprehended O throughout that period of time. Hearing O is a condition that the perceiving subject can only be in, in virtue of the fact that a process of aurally apprehending O goes on in him.

Here is not the place to defend this claim in detail. But I agree with a strategy pursued by O’Shaughnessy (2000, p.43) here. The relations are manifested in the impossibility of hearing in conditions of a total ‘mental freeze’ a condition involving the complete absence of any mental activity or processive mental functioning. It is quite possible that one could continue to know certain facts or believe things in such conditions. But in the absence of mental process one could not be in the state of hearing.

listening and hearing. Listening does not produce the occurrence of an event of hearing or the unfolding of a process of hearing; listening is not the *production* of hearing. Listening entails hearing because listening is the agential preservation or maintenance of hearing.

The relationship between listening to O and hearing O is distinguished from the instrumental conception of their relationship discussed in sections 2, though. Listening does not entail hearing because listening to O is an accomplishment, a time-occupying event that has an end or aim which is its telic point, that is, an occurrence that necessarily constitutes the point of termination of such a going on, and listening involves the successfully bringing about, i.e. causing, of such an occurrence. Generally one hears O throughout the time that one listens to O. Hearing O, therefore, cannot bring a listening to O to an end.³⁰ By contrast, listening out for O is a telic occurrence that has hearing O as a telic point. Necessarily (barring certain failures of knowledge, self-knowledge and rationality) if one comes to hear O one cannot continue to listen out for O. Characteristically, listening out for O can be a failure. One can listen out for O throughout a period of time, and yet one's listening is a failure because one failed to hear O, one failed to achieve, through one's efforts, the telic point of that kind of perceptual activity. By contrast, if one listens to O throughout a period of time, one's listening to O cannot be a failure in the sense that it is a failure to bring about some occurrence that constitutes its telic point.

One's listening to O may be a failure in the sense that one may fail, in one's listening to O, to realize the aim of the process of listening to something. One may listen to O

³⁰ It is clear that any such idea would end paradoxically in listening not being able to begin. Given that listening to O is to sustain a condition of perceptual contact with O, starting to sustain such a condition entails one is in it. Were hearing the telic point of the process, a necessary condition for the onset of the process would be a sufficient condition for its termination.

and, for whatever reason, fail to know what O is doing. But again, and for reasons related to those I have just presented, S's failure to come to know what O is doing is to be distinguished from a failure to achieve the telic point of such a process. Generally, at least in those well-placed and in good environmental and mental conditions, one knows what O is doing and knows what O is doing in virtue of the fact that one listens to O, throughout the time that one listens to it. The event which is the acquisition of such knowledge cannot be the necessary point of termination of listening to O, in the way that coming to know that the PM is resigned is the necessary point of termination for one's listening out for information from the report on the radio about whether the PM has resigned. One's failure to realize the aim of the process of listening is also to be distinguished from one's failure to listen. If one agentially preserves aural contact with O with the aim of knowing what O is doing, then one listens to O, whether that aim is realized or not.

Here is not the place to take up the question of how this account of the structure of listening generalizes to other cases of perceptual activity. It is plausible, though, that a good explanation can be given of a central core of the varieties of perceptual activity in terms of the kind of account of listening offered here. Elsewhere, I have argued that we ought to understand watching O as a case of watching what O is doing, where watching what O is doing is visually agentially monitoring O with the aim of knowing what O is doing.³¹ Interesting distinctions, I suggest, will be found amongst varieties of perceptual activity, where those varieties of perceptual activity are distinguished by their different epistemic aims. I think it is plausible, for example, that looking at an object or scrutinizing an object is not to look at what that object is doing, but to monitor that object with the aim of knowing (at least standardly) what F that object is

³¹ I offer arguments for this in more detail elsewhere. See Crowther (forthcoming).

(what colour?, what shape?, what kind?). Those, however, are issues to be treated more fully elsewhere.

5. Atelicity and the aims of agential processes of perceptual monitoring

In this section I want to draw attention to some things that I think stand in the way of a satisfying grasp of the structure of active attending.

At the heart of the argument in this paper has been a distinction between atelic processes and telic occurrences. But it is of some note that on very many of those occasions in which one or other of such mental activities goes on, we find instances of the other activity going on, too. The subject who spends the five seconds after the hooter listening out for the sound of the nearby tower-block being detonated then goes on to listen closely to the tower-block collapsing. This, combined with the fact that we are inclined to describe both of the distinct kinds of mental activity going on here—listening to and listening out for—as “listening” can tempt the assimilation of the different ways that these goings on have to be explained to one another. But we ought to resist that temptation, for reasons I have argued for.

Similarly, the proximity of these different types of going on to one another can prevent one from being properly sensitive to the differences between these two activities on the score of their productive role. The denial that there is a causal or productive relation between what perceptual activity one engages in agentially, and the maintenance of perceptual contact with that object throughout a period of time can seem odd. Suppose one is indoors with the curtains closed listening to some fireworks going off intermittently. Suppose also that the fireworks are being let off a long way away, so that they are only faintly audible, and that one has to concentrate hard to

distinguish the fireworks from the sound of the television. Imagine that after the first faintly audible bang, one comes to listen to those fireworks for a period of time, and that during the time one listens to the fireworks one hears them bang faintly, say, ten times. Given these circumstances, the thought may go, it cannot be that there isn't a productive relationship between listening to the fireworks and hearing the fireworks. Suppose that after the initial faint bang (i.e. the initial aural apprehending of the fireworks) that attracted one's attention and which constituted the onset of listening, one hears a second bang. The fact that the TV is blaring and that the fireworks only make a faint sound entails that one would not have heard the second firework bang unless one had been listening to the fireworks. But that is just for one's listening to the fireworks to have brought one to hear, or to come to hear the firework banging. This second event of hearing (like the other eight) is brought about or produced by one's listening, by the fact that one has trained one's aural attention in such a way that one was not, say, distracted by the gunshots on the television. So one's hearing of the fireworks is, apparently, produced by one's listening to them.

The objection might continue that this is not only a feature of active attending in the aural modality, but processes of monitoring across other sense-modalities. Think about visually tracking the sparrowhawk that darts through the dense wood one walks through. As one watches the bird dart along, quickly changing its direction and height in flight one sees it intermittently as it passes behind the birches. But one's glimpses of the bird as it comes out into the open are surely glimpses caused (brought about, produced) by the way that one is training one's visual attention in watching it. It is one's watching of the bird that causes the glimpses of the bird, and given that one's coming to see the bird again is to maintain contact with the bird, one's maintenance of visual contact with the bird is surely caused by one's watching it.

But this line of argument ought to be resisted. The examples show a number of things. What they show, first, is not that hearing can be brought about by listening to O, but that hearing can be produced by *listening out for O*. Where one came to hear the second bang of the fireworks one came to hear it because one was listening out for the firework banging, one was doing something that involved a training of one's attention in such a way as to make sure that one notices the fireworks if they continue to go off. But that is not to listen to the firework banging. What the example shows, secondly, is that in some kinds of circumstances, for S to listen to O throughout a certain period of time entails that S listened out for it during periods of that time. Let me explain. It was an assumption of the examples that S listened to the fireworks throughout t1-t10. For S to listen to the fireworks throughout that time is for S to agentially maintain perceptual contact with the fireworks throughout that time. That is correct, for the following reason. In the case discussed, S did agentially maintain aural perceptual contact with the fireworks throughout that period of time because though there was a period of time during t1-t10 in which S could not hear the fireworks, he nevertheless heard the fireworks banging throughout that period of time, in virtue of the fact that that period of time is a sub-interval of time during which he heard the fireworks banging. In these circumstances, (i.e. circumstances in which the object of the activity goes out of range of the relevant perceptual faculty for periods of time) the fact that an atelic process of agentially maintaining contact with O goes on throughout a period of time entails that during that time a telic event, an accomplishment (successfully listening out for the fireworks) also occurred.³² It is not one's listening to the object throughout some period of time that brings about the hearing of it, or produces the hearing of it. One's listening to it is to maintain such contact with it throughout the

³² The same goes for the case of watching, too: one watched the bird throughout the relevant period of time, and given that one did then one successfully watched or looked out for it, during periods of time, too.

relevant period of time. But that one did listen to an object in such a way can entail that one also throughout that time successfully listened out for it, an accomplishment that apparently needs to be understood in terms of the causation of an occurrence by an instrumental attempt to do something.

What the examples show, thirdly, is that though one cannot listen to some producer of sound throughout a period of time without having heard that thing, it does not follow that one necessarily heard it throughout that period of time. For during the period of time when the fireworks were banging intermittently, there was a period of time during which one could not hear the fireworks (though one throughout that time heard them banging intermittently). In general, for a perceiving agent to have heard O Φ ing throughout a period of time does not entail the agent heard O throughout that time. One may listen to O throughout a period of time although throughout it one hears O falling silent, or hears O pausing between notes, or hears O not making any sound at all.

Though there are cases in which atelic processes of listening to producers of sounds entails successful aural telic accomplishments, we ought to remain sensitive to the distinction between these two categories.

6. Conclusion

The agential and passive aspects of an activity like listening are integrated in the fact that 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 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 (even if that does not entail that a subject who listened to O throughout a period of time heard it throughout the entirety of that time). This leaves a good deal about the nature of perceptual activity yet to be settled. It remains to be seen how perceptual agency itself is to be explained and understood. But there is no structural problem about how a mental activity can be something perceptual and something agential.

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