Absential Locations and the Figureless Ground

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When Sartre arrives late to meet Pierre at a local establishment, he discovers not merely *that* Pierre is absent, but Pierre's absence, where this depends, or so Sartre notoriously supposes, on a frustrated expectation that Pierre would be seen at that place. Many philosophers have railed against this view, taking it to entail a treatment of the ontology of absence that Richard Gale describes as 'attitudinal' – one whereby absences are thought to ontologically depend on psychological attitudes.[i] In this paper, I aim to make Sartre's intuition respectable. What Sartre perceives is an *absential location*, only the *boundaries* of which are circumscribed by what Sartre is doing at that place: meeting Pierre. I explain how this Sartrean view, though not specifically attributable to Sartre, nonetheless honours some of the phenomenological data described, if a little opaquely, in *Being and Nothingness*.

Keywords: absence perception, nothingness, individuation, boundaries.

The character of perceptual experience is elusive, at least insofar as it is hard to put into words what it's like. This being so, many theorists resort to quotation. The character of perceptual experience is 'what it's like' for some perceiver to be undergoing experience at a time, whatever that way of being 'like' is. The thought is that one should intuitively know. Suppose then that one *does* know – that the idiom succeeds in capturing something. And suppose too, as many do, that *absences* can be perceived - Pierre at the Café, for instance. We might then wonder: Can there be 'something it's like' to perceive absences? Emboldened by philosophical theory, the answer might seem plain: 'no'. If 'what it's like' is explained by adverting to the sensible properties represented in, or presented by experience, then the possibility of their being 'something it's like' to perceive absence seems foreclosed. If absences lack sensible properties, there isn't anything it's like. But how then can our awarenesss of them be genuinely *perceptual*?

To reify this puzzle, suppose, like many theorists do, that experience is 'transparent' or 'diaphanous'. This idiom is sometimes harnessed to undermine the thought that experiences, *qua* experiences, have intrinsic properties or qualities all of their own – peculiarly *experiential* qualities. The thought is that, in attempting to discover by introspection the presence of such qualities, one only ever manages to 'see through' the experience to the worldly things and features that one's experience is of. As such, the idiom of transparency is only metaphorical. In saying that the experience is 'transparent' it is not implied that there *is* some phenomenal individual that one in fact 'sees through' in the way that one sees through a chiffon garment say, at least in the visual case. Rather the fact that the introspecting perceiver finds *nothing* manifestly experiential to alight upon suggests just the reverse. In apparent cases of absence perception, then, this is a happy conclusion. For consider, *were* experience 'seen through' in a non-metaphorical sense - that is, were it the case that the mind-independent world is only mediately seen – then what kind of sensory 'stand in' could lead one to 'see through' the experience in a non-metaphorical sense to *absence*?

Suppose, then, it is assumed both that experiences are only metaphorically transparent and transparent, moreover, *without remainder* – that is to say, on introspection one finds *only* mind-independent properties and features.[ii] And suppose too that absences can be perceived. These assumptions, in tandem, spark a puzzle: There being *no sensible properties* for introspection to alight upon when absences are putatively perceived, can it be granted that there is, after all, 'something it's like' to perceive absence?

I address this question by way of rehabilitating an oft-maligned Sartrean take on perceiving absence. I suggest that there is 'something it's like' to perceive the absence of something at some place – one sees a figureless ground - but that making sense of 'what it's like' requires appeal to configurational features of the phenomenology of agentive perceptual experience. Accordingly, I argue that we should deny that experience is transparent without remainder. To begin, I draw on C.B. Martin's ontology of absence so as to generate some terminology that makes talk of nothingness more tractable. I set out the plan for the paper at the end of §1.

§1. *Absences and Absential Locations*

For C.B. Martin (2006), we should avoid any kind of reification of absences - absences or lacks or holes are not *things*. Still, we should not de-ontologise absences entirely. Consider some old-fashioned presences: pencils, boots and bicycles. The provision of the limits of the being of such presences requires, says Martin, the presence of absence outwith those limits – the presence of absence at places where those things are not.[iii]

Prima facie, it might be thought that part of Martin's motivation for denying, to absences, the status of thinghood is their lacking sensible properties. But Martin has something else in mind. Absences are spatiotemporal *states* - they are *ways* the world is at a particular locale, or more precisely, the way natural properties and relations are. On Martin's picture then, absences *do* have properties. Take a particular arctic snowdrift. By Martin's lights, the way the world is at the place at which the snowdrift is is such that penguins are absent at that place, where the absence of penguins at that place is constituted by snowy and drifty properties instantiated at that locale. As a preliminary, I sketch a distinct position, one that is broadly compatible with Martin's insight but which makes room for the intuitive thought that absences lack sensible properties and so cannot be supposed to ground there being 'anything it's like' to perceive them.

We often say of things and people that they 'are absent', 'gone' or 'missing': children, biscuits, screws. Such predications of absence are predications of an *absentee*, where the application of the predicatival complement to the grammatical subject (which picks out the absentee) is typically evaluated relative to a place. Call places at which the application of the predicate is evaluated as true *absential locations*.[iv] My proposal is that while the truth of an evaluation relative to a place is determined by the way the world is at that place, the *boundaries* of the region evaluated are determined by reference to the interests and intentions of the evaluator. As I show, this helps make compelling a rehabilitation of a peculiarly *Sartrean* take on absence perception, if not one that can be attributed in whole to Sartre. Sorensen complains of Sartre "who made human beings the arbiters of nonbeing?".[v] My project is not to absolve Sartre. Rather, I aim to show that we can excavate from *Being and Nothingness* the descriptive phenomenological resources that help frame a decidedly Sartrean account of absence perception which is itself absent in the literature, and which, as I see it, deserves consideration. Importantly, the Sartrean view that I sketch does *not* treat the ontology of absence as attitudinal – absences are not ontologically dependent on psychological attitudes. This is since predication of 'absence' of an absentee can be true or false when evaluated relative to a place. Nonetheless, attitudes are involved. They are involved to the extent that they set the *boundaries* of the region so evaluated, in a sense to be made plain. And, as I explain too, they are also relevant to an

explanation of 'what it is like' to apprehend absence at a place, or, better, an absential location. In line with Sartre's oblique phenomenology in *Being and Nothingnes*s, I suggest that, in apprehending an absential location, one can be said to see a *figureless ground*, even where that ground is plentitudinous (in ways also to made clear). But if this is right, experience is not transparent without remainder: experience is *configured* in a certain way.[vi] The remainder of the paper unfolds as follows: In §2, I outline Brian O'Shaughnessy's treatment of absence perception and I introduce the Sartrean alternative that I want to develop. In §3, I provide some descriptive phenomenology, garnered from *Being and Nothingness*, as a way of illustrating this alternative and I note the role that perceptual activity plays in partly grounding that phenomenology. In §4, I show how this treatment makes Sartre's position more respectable, and even, as I hope, compelling, by applying the proposal to a particular case.

§2. *Negation and Nothingness*

Sartre is late.

> "I look at the room, the patrons, and I say, "He is not here". Is there an intuition of Pierre's absence, or does negation indeed enter in only with judgment? At first sight it seems absurd to speak here of intuition since to be exact there could not be an intuition of nothing and since the absence of Pierre is this nothing. Popular consciousness, however, bears witness to this intuition. Do we not say, for example, "I suddenly saw that he was not there". Is this just a matter of misplacing (*déplacement*) the negation?"[vii]

I return to this enigmatic question below. Before that, consider a recent treatment of this dilemma.

In *Consciousness and the World*, O'Shaughnessy (2000) insists that perception is only ever of positivities, of things that have, in his terminology, 'phenomenal reality' or phenomenal appearance.[viii] For example, darkness, though a privation, has an appearance – it is black or close enough depending on the time of day. Moreover, that darkness appears that way is contingent; it could have had some other appearance. Silence, in contrast, while also a privation, lacks phenomenal reality – silence could not have sounded any other way. Hence, while darkness is *perceived*, one only ever 'perceives' *that* it is silent, the 'that' here denoting the fact that a cognitive attitude also obtains. O'Shaughnessy's treatment of silence 'perception', then, is attitudinal. Importantly, it involves conceptual content of a rather sophisticated sort. One is said to 'hear' that '*no* sound is heard', where this cognitive state is occasioned by one's introspective awareness of *a failure to experience anything auditorily*, a failure which one *knows* to be a veridical perceptual reading. The content of such an attitude hence involves *formal* conceptual content – negation – figuring in the content. Still, it is not the case that a failure to experience *any* phenomenal realities at a time is, for O'Shaughnessy, a *requirement* on 'perceiving' absence. Take a different parade case - an unsigned letter. When one 'perceives' the absence of a signature, says O'Shaughnessy, it is not the case that one introspects the failure to see anything. Rather, one sees a blank, white expanse – the unwritten paper. And it is the perceiving of this expanse that occasions the 'perceiving' *that* a signature is absent. Here what the quotation marks *enclose* becomes paramount: Though 'perceiving' *that* is attitudinal insofar as it involves a cognitive attitude, it nonetheless involves, not the introspection of the absence of perceptual experience, but the perception of the presence of those phenomenal realities that occasion, or cause, the attitude to be entertained. As he explains:

"That is, the experience of absence is consequent upon the seeing of white in the context of an expectation of seeing a name….the visual experience causes the experience of absence, which is in addition directly given as arising out of the visual experience. The experience of seeing the absence of X is the experience of coming-to-know-of-the-absence-of-*X*-(directly given as arising out of a present visual experience of what shows no x)." (ibid.)

This parenthesis requires some gloss.

Visual experience is of a letter that shows no *X* because no *X* is there – the letter is unsigned, and this is a matter of how the world is in Martin's sense. But visual experience is not *of* there being no *X* for there being no *X* is not the kind of thing that *visual* experience can, for O'Shaughnessy, show. To be clear then, O'Shaughnessy grants the existence or presence, in the world, of absences (in an unreconstructed sense – he does not sort among absentees and absential locations). What he denies, however, is that we *intuit* those absences, at least so long as those absences lack phenomenal reality.

Return to Sartre's enigma above, and in particular the leading question that rounds the passage off. Sartre supposes that our ways of talking suggest that we *can* intuit absence and he asks whether in such cases what is involved is a (mis)placing or *moving (déplacement)* of negation from one place to another. This may be understood in the following sense (which, note, may or not be *Sartre's*): It may be asked whether popular consciousness puts negation or nothingness into the world where it rightly belongs only in a judgment.[ix] That is, does popular consciousness take it that we *perceive* no thing *in the world*, when in fact the relevant apprehension is *cognitive* and involves negation *in the content*? To begin addressing this question, it is illustrative to isolate the comparative commitments of O'Shaughnessy's account.

O'Shaughnessy maintains that only thoughts can agree or disagree with reality.[x] Hence, negation can only be located in the context of a thought. Even so, he grants the reality of absences or, to use Sartre's term, *nothingnesses* at places. What he denies, however, and what Sartre propounds, is that absences are intuitable or perceivable. So where do our theorists diverge?

For O'Shaughnessy, perception is only of positivities, of phenomenal realities. Sartre, however, emphasizes a distinct feature of perceptual experience. In perception, he writes, "there is always the construction of a figure on a ground"[xi], where, notably, the ground is seen "in addition" to the figure.[xii] But, critically, this also marks perception out from thought. Thoughts lack such a figure-ground configuration. In thought there is nothing apprehended, or more appropriately grasped, in addition to the content thought. There is nothing against which that content, grasped as a whole, *stands out*.[xiii] This insight suggests the resources for beginning to account for the *perceptual* nature of absence perception along Sartrean lines. I suggest that Sartre's position may be read as follows:

In absence perception, one intuits *only* the ground, *which may well be plenitudinous* – indeed Sartre lists mirrors, patrons, as well as rattling saucers as filling the café *qua* ground. But since one intuits *only* the ground and no figure, it might thereby be supposed that *one intuits the absence of something at that place*. Importantly, on this Sartrean position, the intuition is *perceptual* because of its configuration – one perceives that which is in addition to the figure – viz. the ground - *without* perceiving that which it is in addition to – the figure or in Sartre's case Pierre. But this makes sense too of the explanatory relation that Sartre likewise affirms between absence-perception and negative judgment. The former conditions and supports (*conditionné et soutenu*) the latter. Hence, like O'Shaughnessy, the judgment is understood to be occasioned by perception, albeit this time the perception is understood to be not merely of phenomenal realities, but of phenomenal realities that are apprehended as configured in a certain way. And they are configured in that way, as I explain, because of what Sartre is *doing* at that place: he is there to meet Pierre. That Sartre is there to meet Pierre e*xplains* why he is looking for him

at that place, where Sartre's looking for him at that place contributes, as I urge below, to what it is like to see the café as an absential location - a ground against which Pierre fails to materialize.

§3. *The figureless ground*

In a number of notorious passages in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's descriptive phenomenology exploits the Gestalt idiom of figure and ground:

> "When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear. This organization of the café as the ground is an original nihilation. Each element of the setting, a person, a table, a chair, attempts to isolate itself, to lift itself upon the ground constituted by the totality of other objects, only to fall back once more into the undifferentiation of this ground; it melts into the ground. For the ground is that which is seen only in addition, that which is the object of a purely marginal attention"[xiv]

> So what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness, it is the nothingness of the ground, the nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure, and it is the figure – the nothingness which slips as a *nothing* to the surface of the ground." (ibid.)[xv]

Here the entire café is apprehended *merely* as a ground since no figure, in this case Pierre, is apprehended as 'standing out' *in addition* to the ground, which is thereby an object of "purely marginal attention". This explains in what sense the ground is conceived as 'nihilated'. It is conceived as 'nihilated' since its figure, Pierre, is wanting. The idiom of nihilation recalls O'Shaughnessy. O'Shaughnessy urges that when we see the white expanse of the writing paper, we experience the visual object *as* a presence endowed with a negative property, where this endowment flows from the co-obtaining of a mental attitude with negation featuring in the content. For Sartre, however – at least as I choose to read him - although perception may <u>occasion</u> negative judgment – an evaluation relative to a place - what imbues the ground with nothingness or negativity is its seeming failure to present a figure whose appearance at that place would otherwise have explained *what Sartre is doing there*: he is at the café in order to meet Pierre.

The role that perceptual activity plays in determining the phenomenology can now be spelled out. The bounds of the region at which Pierre is found to be absent are circumscribed attitudinally – Sartre intended to meet Pierre *at the café*. Further, that Sartre's looking *for Pierre* at the café - that is, his perceptual activity there - partly determines the character of his experience. In particular, all other potential figures for Sartre's attention 'melt' into the ground:

> "I am witness to the successive disappearance of all the objects which I look at – in particular of all the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?), and which as quickly decompose precisely because they "are not" the face of Pierre" (ibid.)

The character of Sartre's experience then - the 'decompositional' quality that attends his experience as he searches for Pierre – is explained by Sartre's perceptual activity in that place (the place where he intended to meet Pierre). But since *all* the sub-regions of the café are so apprehended,

their teeming positivity notwithstanding (patrons and rattling saucers), the *entire café* is apprehended *in the same way*, as housing or presenting "not" Pierre. As Sartre emphasizes:

> "This does not mean that I discover his absence in some precise spot in the establishment. In fact Pierre is absent from the whole café; his absence fixes the café in its evanescence; the café remains ground; it persists in offering itself as a undifferentiated totality to my only marginal attention…" (ibid.)

I spell this thought out in a little more detail.

That perceptual activity can contribute to phenomenal character is argued by Crowther (2010). He offers a datum for consideration. 'What it's like' for a perceiver to visually attend to the colour of a piece clay over an interval of time is distinct from what it would be like for that same perceiver to attend instead to its shape. The same datum holds of perceptual activities that aim towards some goal:

> "To look for something is to scan one's visual field with the aim noticing or finding out where something is. The aims with which such activities take place involve their own contribution to determining phenomenal character. What it is like for a viewer to perceptually look over the clutter around him on his desk for his memory stick is different from what it is like for the same viewer to merely look over just the same pattern of clutter around him on the desk without such an aim. But this difference does not seem to be manifested, necessarily, in what objects and properties are present to him, nor in how the various items scattered around him on the desk are represented as being, in having those experiences"[xvi]

Taking Sartre's 'decompositional' phenomenology seriously, one aspect of the relevant difference gestured at above might now be advanced: Aimless looking involves an openness to one's attention being captured by *any* element of the clutter presented to one (for why otherwise would one be *looking*). Purposeful looking, in contrast, lacks such openness and the clutter remains undifferentiated, at least so long as the looked-for element is not among the clutter looked-over. Still, in both cases, as Crowther notes, the attendant difference in phenomenology need not correspond to a difference in the properties represented by or presented in the experience. But from the point of view of an exploration of the *perceptual* apprehension of absence (viz. the apprehension of the presence of the absence of something at some place or an absential location), this is suggestive. For consider: if a change in phenomenology can occur without a change in the properties presented, a change in phenomenology can occur even in the absence of the presence of *any* properties to mark that difference. In the case of absence perception, I am proposing that the relevant difference pertains to the *configuration* of phenomenal experience: Sartre perceives the café – a phenomenal plenitude – *merely as a ground* – that is as an undifferentiated neutrality - as a result of *his* looking for *Pierre* <u>at that place</u>. But, if so, this explains why there can, after all, be 'something it's like' to perceive the absence of something somewhere. 'What it's like' flows from the way experience is configured as a result of the perceiver's activity at place, where that activity is part of a larger action that has itself a calculative order. Importantly, this position is consistent with a *non-attitudinal* treatment of the *ontology* of absences. It can be granted that absences are ways the world is. Nonetheless, it is insisted that what Sartre perceives is not an absence, but an *absential location*, the bounds of which are circumscribed attitudinally – by reference to Sartre's interests and intentions. Sartre intended to meet his friend at the café.

§4. *The Sartrean insight rehabilitated*

I have proposed that Sartre treats perceptual experience as having certain configurational features – it involves the presentation of a figure on a ground. And I have suggested that this makes sense of Sartre's supposition that one can *perceive* nothingness; thoughts lack such a configuration. But, as such, this involves a denial that experience is transparent *without remainder* - there is more to the phenomenology of experience than is given only by the objects, properties and relations that one's experience is of. Echoing Sartre, "no one object, no group of objects is especially designed to be organized as specifically either ground or figure". But this makes plain why there is 'something it's like' to perceptually apprehend absence without there being any thing present to ground that phenomenology. The relevant difference is configurational (or here 'ab-figurative', see fn. vi).

This insight is, I contend, Sartrean in spirit if not to the letter. What's more, it is explanatorily productive. Take the circles below. Taylor (1952) supposes that just as one directly and non-inferentially perceives the presence of the dot in the left-hand circle below, one directly and non-inferentially perceives the *absence* of the dot in the circle on the right. Molnar (2000) disagrees. There is nothing to ground the inference as to the dot's presence in the left-hand case, for one simply sees it, but in the right-hand case "there *is* something from which we can infer the circle's being empty of dots…namely the perception of the circle and the failure to perceive the dot" (p. 80).
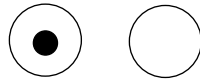
The Sartrean account can steer a conciliatory path between these two.

In line with Martin, the circle on the right is absent of a dot and this is just a matter of how the world – there is an absence of a dot at that region. Hence, in seeing the region one sees a region *at which it is true that a dot is absent there* and this is so without one necessarily seeing *that* a dot is absent. So, with Taylor, we can allow that one's experience of the region does not involve inference. Like O'Shaughnessy's letter it involves, not a failure of experience, but a positive perceptual experience of a blank, white expanse. With Molnar however, we can acknowledge that such an experience is not one that represents, or is of the *dot's* absence, for what one apprehends is simply an absential location. Even so, the phenomenological datum is that one apprehends the absence *of the dot*. So, need it be the case that one thereby *infers*, as Molnar urges, the absence of a dot? That is, need it be the case that one merely 'perceives', in O'Shaughnessy's attenuated sense, the absence of the dot? Again, the Sartrean picture suggests an alternative.

When one perceives the circle on the right, one perceives an absential location – a place which it is true that there is no dot. But when the circle on the right is presented alongside the circle on the left, as it is in the stimulus, then arguably the white expanse in the circle on the right is apt to strike one in a certain way. The way it is apt to strike one is, I propose, as *merely a ground*, one that, in Sartrean idiom, is apprehended as 'nihilated', the "nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure".[xvii] Importantly, this apprehension is *perceptual*, not cognitive, because of its configuration. What more, we can easily imagine an explanatory role for perceptual activity in making sense of this apprehension.

Though one can see both circles at a glance, arguably the scene is parsed in such a way that one can attend to the differences *between* the circles.[xviii] This case, however, is not like that of Sartre, whose intention to meet his friend for a coffee explains what he is doing in the café. Instead, low-level implicit expectations are likely to govern explanatorily relevant patterns of perceptual activity. The treatment of absence perception set out by Farennikova (2013) helps make sense of this.[xix]

For Farennikova, visual perceptions of absences (in an unreconstructed sense) are best explained by what she calls a mismatch model. This is spelt out as follows: When something is expected at some place, the visual system, subject to cues, activates visual templates of entities predicted to be at that place or in that environment. For example, seeing a kitchen (the cue) activates visual templates of items predicted to be found there, a fridge say. Such templates are then projected and 'matched' against incoming sensory input. Where a discrepancy occurs, a predictive error is registered and "resolved as a mismatch between the predicted state of the world and what is actually observed".[xx] The proposal is that absence perception involves 'mismatch' in this sense. It involves the violation of expectation in failed visual searches - that is, those that fail to find their target - while the 'expectation' that is violated involves the cued 'projection' of visual templates at a scene.

Such a view differs from the picture this paper draws along two dimensions. First, it appeals to the nature of the visual template involved in mismatch to explain the *visual* nature of seeing absence - the visual template is of the sort conserved and manipulated in visual working memory. As such, the account appeals to the nature of the representations involved *in generating mismatch*. In contrast, the Sartrean account sketched here appeals instead to the nature of perceptual experience – not its phenomenal nature, but rather the fact that perceptual experience is configured or shaped by interests and intentions, where this has consequences for perceptual phenomenology. Second, it is argued by Farennikova that absences are seen. The proposal made here is weaker – one only perceives *absential locations* the bounds of which are circumscribed by reference to attitudes and intentions.

Despite these differences however, the mismatch model remains rich and suggestive. In particular, what the mismatch model teaches is that the boundaries of absential locations can sometimes be circumscribed *implicitly* - with respect to cue-based visual processing in one individual at some place, where this processing notably subserves visual searches.[xxi] But this, I propose, suggests a way of accommodating the missing dot.

Suppose a visual template of a dot is cued by one's perceptual apprehension of the circle on the left. The seeing of the white expanse in the circle on the right as *merely a ground* may be partly explained by the mechanism of mismatch. The seeing of the circle cues the template and the seeing of the expanse yields mismatch. Still, if the view sketched here is correct, what explains the *perceptual* nature of the apprehension is the seeing of *a ground* without a figure, and this is so even if it is nonetheless allowed that the mismatch model, or something like it, can help capture and explain a distinct but related feature of this phenomenology, one that I have so far left untheorised.

As I have been insisting, in absence perception one sees *merely* a ground, where this in turn explains why there is 'something it's like' to perceive the absence of something at some place, the puzzle with which I opened. For Sartre, however, the mere seeing of the ground has a peculiar phenomenology; one apprehends a "flickering" of nothingness, where the nihilation of the ground "summons and demands the appearance of the figure". Elsewhere he writes:

> "Pierre's absence haunts the café and is the condition of its self-nihilating organization as ground".[xxii]

The mismatch model suggests the resources to account for this metaphorically cast phenomenological 'flicker' or haunting character, supposing that visual templates can somehow pervade phenomenology. In this paper, however, I have only sought to explain only what Sartre *perceives*. I have argued that Sartre perceives an absential location the bounds of which are circumscribed by reference to Sartre's interests and intentions, with consequences for his perceptual phenomenology. What Sartre perceives are, as O'Shaughnessy puts it, phenomenal realities – mirrors, rattling saucers, waiters - that are configured in a certain way, where the way they are configured is explained by what Sartre is intentionally doing at that place – looking for Pierre.[xxiii] And this explains,

finally, why there is 'something it is like' for Sartre to perceive Pierre's absence. What Sartre perceives is a café-sized absential location the bounds of which are circumscribed attitudinally and which, despite its teeming positivity – those cups and rattling saucers - is apprehended by Sartre merely as a ground, one which Pierre, to give Sartre the last word, haunts.

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[i] Richard M. Gale, 'Negation and Non-being' *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Monograph 10 (London: William Clowes & Sons, 1976)

[ii] See Soteriou (2011) for a distinction between weak and strong formulations of the transparency thesis – strong formulations insist that experience is transparent without remainder. Matthew Soteriou, 'The Perception of Absence, Space and Time', in *Perception, Causation, and Objectivity*, eds. Naomi Eilan, Hemdat Lerman, and Johannes Roessler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 181-206.

[iii] Martin's idea is that negative existential statements are made true by the way the world is, however I leave questions of truth-making aside here. C.B. Martin, 'How it is: Entities, Absences and Voids' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* no.74(1) (2006): 57-65. See also Molnar (2000) and Kukso (2006) for discussion. Boris Kukso, 'The Reality of Absences', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 84(1)(2006): 21-37. George Molnar, 'Truthmakers for Negative Truths', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 78(1)(2000): 72-86.

[iv] The thought that absentees have absential locations is developed in the Indian philosophical tradition known as *Vaiśesika*. An absence has an absentee and also a location and time. Hence '*x* does not occur in *y* at time *t*' is recast as 'an absence-of-*x* occurs in *y* at time *t*' (see Ganeri 2001, p. 82). See also Matilal (1985, p. 145). Jonardon Ganeri, *Philosophy in Classical India: Proper Work of Reason.* (London: Routledge, 2001). Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). The position advanced here, though it harnesses this insight, is not a commentary on that position.

[v] Roy Sorensen. *Seeing Dark Things.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), here 248.

[vi] Instead of configured, the case I describe might be cast, if convolutedly, as ab-figured (where the prefix here recognises the absence of a figure on a ground).

[vii] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 2003), here 33. See also Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1943. *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique.* Paris: Gallimard.

[viii] Brian O'Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), here 332.

[ix] In fact, the French 'déplacement', unlike the English 'misplace' carries no connotation of mistake.

[x] O'Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the Word,* 328).

[xi] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 33-34

[xii] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 34

[xiii] Compare the idea that perception has structure in this sense, with the structural treatment of absence perception advanced by Richardson (2010), and Soteriou (2011).

[xiv] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 33-34

[xv] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 34

[xvi] Crowther, Thomas, 'The Agential Profile of Perceptual Experience', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society,* no. 110 (2010): 219-242, here 222.

[xvii] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 34

[xviii] Compare the configuration that one's perceptual activity would have were the circles apprehended as winking eyes say.

[xix] Anya Farennikova, 'Seeing Absence', *Philosophical Studies* no. 166 (2013): 429-454

[xx] Farennikova, 'Seeing Absence', 441.

[xxi] Note this is so even if the content of those 'expectations' (viz. the templates) are individuated widely.

[xxii] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 34

[xxiii] Sartre has non-observational knowledge of what he is doing at the café. He is meeting Pierre. He knows what he is doing there – 'meeting Pierre' - even if Pierre isn't there. For discussion of non-observational knowledge, see G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957)