Silence

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**Introduction**

In this paper, we attempt to problematize the phenomena associated with the word “silence” (here onwards recalled as silence-phenomena), and their implications in the human search for wellbeing and happiness. We proceed with such reflections from by means of integrating perspectives in psychology, music, poetry and theology. Implications for counselling and work with youth are further addressed.

We argue for the need of fostering attention towards the realms of silence-phenomena, and in particular the search for inner-silence as a path to gain relational depth with oneself, and for those who establish spiritual connections with it, a possibility to embrace the spiritual realms of silence.

According to (Lazzari 2009), inner silence relates to the activation of the Narrating self. That is, follows the author, this inner-silence relates to psychic and physical dimensions that promote internal dialogue, and not just a focus on on one’s own feelings, thoughts and behaviors. This is also a value-driven process, since it is not just about training attention, but doing so with particular intentions and attitudes, that promote discernment and self-compassion (Shapiro et al. 2006).

Different literature emphasize the need for experiences of silence-phenomena in relation to —–

Yet, further research as well as empirical applications are needed. In this theoretical discussion we provide some intuitions for how to approach the topic.

# What is silence?

**Silence-phenomena: a brief introduction**

The word “silence” suggests a wide diversity of experiences (Colum 2011), so that we coin the term silence-phenomena (Lehmann 2018) to bring in the complexity of meanings and layers evoked in such a notion.  Silence-phenomena can thus be explored by a meta-categorization that acts as an umbrella, such as  (“Communicative Silences: East and West” 1988) and Orlandi (1995) understanding of silence, silences and silencing. Silence, refers to experiences of profound connection such as mystical and (or) aesthetic experiences, likely described as the temporal dissolution of the perception of time and space. Silences involve social aspects of integration such as turn taking in communication or spaces that regulate different practices, such as waiting rooms at hospitals. Silencing reflects power dynamics such as in the case of oppression, or rhetoric. Although these three notions are interconnected, we will mainly emphasize on the experiences of “silence” as a source to embrace relational depth with others or with ourselves. In particular, we coin the notion of inner silence, as a process that recalls two movements, one inwards and one outwards. The movement inwards is that of self-exploration, in order to tune into a dialogue with internal I-positions of the self. The movement outwards recalls the process of tuning into a dialogue with external I-positions, but also an act of de-positioning, or moving attention towards particular experience that captivate us such as nature, god, or pieces of art.   Thus,  inner silence is associated with concept of consciousness, which at the same time is in some cases assimilated with the one of soul. The soul, or the inner self, suggest possible implications between psychological and spiritual dimensions, but also the ethical idea of a possibility to tune one’s voice to what is genuine or wise in particular situations, if one listens properly. Thus, the idea of inner-silence as a possibility to tune one’s consciousness implies being aware, perceiving, thinking and analyzing the contents that show up in the consciousness, paying attention to them, altogether with our bodily functions.

 (Lanza and Berman 2009).  “Silent consciousness” may sound paradoxical to Western ears, but such reports are widespread in Asian, Western, Middle Eastern, and shamanic traditions. While contemplative practices are very diverse, “inner silence” is often taken to be a goal (Baars 2013).   Thus, we are evoking an inner silence that recalls a process of movement between the realms of self-exploration and those of existential encounters with others, where relational depth blossoms (Lehmann 2018) .

Furthermore, silence-phenomena recall acts of contrast in human everyday life. Namely, silence-phenomena suggest an interdependence with language, sound, noises and (or) movements (Kurzon 1998).  In relation with language, silence-phenomena evoke both signs that could be further analyzed in psychology as part of the investigation of human experiences, but point out as well the dilemmatic boundaries of language to express the qualities of human experience, such as intense emotions and feelings (Lehmann, 2017). In this sense, silence-phenomena need to gain a room in research, and their roles and effects in people’s everyday life needs to be further explored.

Precisely, in order to further understand the implications of silence-phenomena for affective processes, musical systems become a useful metaphor, since silences are crucial elements of the structure of musical systems. Nonetheless, music is such an important cultural resource to embrace feelings and emotions, even in their ambiguity. Musical theories incorporate silences in their notation systems, to give account of the crucial role that these “intervals” have for the harmony of a musical piece. This, learning from music, reflects the fact that for the harmony in our everyday lives, we need silence-phenomena as spaces in between where meanings, decisions and values can blossom as well (Lehmann, 2016).   The harmony in music is probably a better example, as very few, if any at all, think about the numbers and ratios that lie behind the harmonious music. The structural complexity is not hearable, but it is there, and the deeper one may go into it, the more details appear.   The American musician John Cage problematized this understanding in music. His most famous composition is likely the one entitled, “4,33”, which refers to 4 minutes and 33 seconds of “no-sounds”. The purpose of the composition is to demonstrate that absolute silence-phenomena  in terms of complete emptiness is an ideal. “In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot” (Cage 1939/2009, p. 8). He deepens this by referring to his experiences with having visited an anechoic chamber, i.e. a specially constructed chamber in which the echo is reduced to almost zero. Cage tells that he actually heard two sounds, and he continues: “When I described them to the engineer in charge, he informed me that the high one was my nervous system in operation, the low one my blood in circulation” (loc.cit.). To be silent, therefore, is not to exclude sound, but rather to open up for and listen to sounds we normally are not fully aware of.  As part of her doctoral research, (Lehmann 2018) created a silent time at a course for masters’ students, where they explore the meanings and effects of silence-phenomena, mainly experienced through artistic stimuli. One of the activities was to watch a musical video of a performance of “4,33”.  In two of the case studies, the narratives indicated different layers of tension, evoking the contrast between expectations and reality, as well as the embodiment of uncertainty. This tension implies a value to be embraced, such as assuming that silent experiences are valuable, while in reality experiencing some discomfort, uncertainty, and shift of attention. Some of the values referred in one of the cases, indicate self-knowledge, the awareness of mental activity, which might be perceived as uncomfortable noise. These values of self-knowledge, awareness, attention, as we further discuss, are associated with happiness and well-being.

This points to Cage’s idea, namely that there are a lot of details that we do not hear and therefore appear as silences. However, these spaces in-between are full of significance, as they build up the tension that is necessary for the harmony to take place. In parallel to this, in our everyday lives, silence-phenomena are breaks that open up our consciousness for the simultaneous coexistence of associations, affective arousals, voices from diverse I-positions that are essential in our processes of meaning-making, decision-making and value-adding (Lehmann 2018). This pause opens up for a question: What is going to happen now? Does the music stop here, or does it continue? In other words, this pause is not empty at all. It brings up, not only the question about what is next, but also all the possible outcomes the listener may come up with. An abundance of alternatives fills up the pause. All the alternatives can only exist when it is still silent. Once the musical theme starts up again, there is no space for other options. In this sense, the pause is filled up with much more than the actual music can contain.

# Inner-silence and the perception of well-being

Experiences of silence-phenomena have the potential of relieving tension in the body after few minutes of exposure (Bernardi, Porta, and Sleight 2006).  For instance, lower levels of sensory input -such as walking in nature- can restore cognitive resources  (Kaplan 1995).  Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized environmental noise as harmful pollution that threatens human health and indicate that it may be important for the public’s health to update existing noise-related policies (Kim et al. 2012). Yet, the implications of noise and sound have also a metaphorical significance in terms of human experience as a dialogical realm. That is, engaging in constant inner or external noise can affect our capacity of embracing inner silence.

What happens when one is in silence, dominant thoughts, feelings, when one is alone and where are they connecting to whom. what happens in this state. Express one self.  Counseling.

# Eudaimonia, blessedness, inner-silence and stillness

Eudaimonia (εὐδαιμονία) consists of the two words *eu*(good) and *daimon*(spirit). Blessedness. Thus, Aristotle’s idea of happiness is more related with

well-being, the true goal of human being, has been tragically reduced to ‘happiness‘ and its meanings lost (Newby 2011).   Eudaimonia recalls the man’s search for meaning in relation to the experience of values and the creation of valuable experiences for others or ourselves  as well as with our attitude towards impending suffering (Frankl 2014). Thus, the search for coherence is closely related to the search for meaning, which at the same time contribute to the eudemonic happiness, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world (Wong, 2011).  In connection with this, another important component is the sense of Otherness (Freeman 2013). Indeed,  a component for this embracement of happiness or well-being is the experience of relational depth with others or with ourselves. In positioning terms, moments of relational depth can involve either I-Thou or I-I encounters respectively (Cooper 2004) .Relational depth denotes the quality of relationships, in intense moments of connectedness, vulnerability and transformation (Mearns and Cooper 2005) (Schmid, 2013).  Furthermore, the notion of relational depth, as an expression of our dialogical nature (Schmid, 2013) suggest the movements between the immersion and experience of the Self and Otherness as a whole, as well as the detachment into different positionings. A rhythmic balance between such movements of connection and detachment within I-positionings and the person as a whole, is necessary for the experience of wellbeing and happiness. In practice, it is common to experience moments of disconnection that affect the quality of the dialogues between people, and discourage relational depth (Cooper 2012).  Thus, human beings are on a journey of longing genuine dialogues and the permanence of moments of relational depth, while facing the uncertainty and tension of realizing it is impossible to reach this permanently (Lehmann, forthcoming).

This has to do with (“Communicative Silences: East and West” 1988) description of silence, one of the realms of what (Lehmann 2018) identifies as silence-phenomena, as instants of profound connection with ourselves or with others, sometimes described mystical, aesthetic or dialogical encounters. This notion points at two aspects we are to highlight in this paper. One of them with possible connections with spirituality, and the other one, with inner silence as a source of establishing relational depth with one self.  Considering the role of the silence in the context of happiness, wellbeing and blessedness, the notion of *stillness* should also be emphasized. In the early monastic tradition it was extremely important to distinguish silence and stillness (Sarah and Diat 2017). Stillness is not absence. On the contrary, stillness is greatest possible concentration but in the contemplation. Stillness is very dynamic process within inner self, within person.

In addition, the idea of inner silence as a path for eudaimonia can pave an understanding of spirituality (but not necessairly).  Silence is an important part of the spiritual tradition of the East and the West from ancient to modern times. (Newby 2011) supports SBNR (Spirituality But not Religious) conception and post-religious spirituality where is the central idea *development of the psyche* and finding or losing oneself, and winning or losing in the arena of living. However, when seen as an explicit religious approach, this can lead to questions such as: Can those who do not know silence ever attain truth, beauty, or love?  Do not wisdom, artistic vision, and devotion spring from silence, where the voice of God is heard in the depths of the human heart? (Sarah and Diat 2017). From a secular perspective, one could say that silence is a relational phenomena, a realm for dialogue (Lehmann 2018).  The notion of dialogue is a bridge between humanistic and existential psychology, and Dialogical Self Theory. Actually, both perspectives of psychology are inspired by (Buber 1950) notions of I-Thou and I-It relationships. Dialogues, in contrast to other forms of interaction, manifest themselves as dialectic, dynamic and innovative, fostering genuineness and transformation among their participants (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010; Hermans and Gieser 2012). From a dialogical perspective, the experience of relational depth recalls both our relationship with the Other (Mearns and Cooper 2005) and with ourselves (Cooper 2004). A topic of special important in relation to Dialogical Self Theory, is that the moments of positioning I-I (Cooper 2004).

From the psychology of religion point of view for the prayer the silence is necessary for stillness because through the absence of ambient noise the prayer could focus on the presence and voice of the God.  This kind of stillness is termed in Greek *hesychia.*

The most widespread spiritualities in early Christianity from fourth century which fosters the importance of silence was *hesychasm*, which came from a Greek word *esychía* ([isiˈçia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA/Greek)) meaning quite, silence and [isiˈxazo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:IPA/Greek) to be still, to keep stillness. Hesychasts involve and describe two types of consciousness: ego-centered and ego-transcendent. Ego centered is a state dominated by attachments to the senses, emotions, intellect, and imagination whereas ego transcendent involves detachment from those faculties. The shift from ego-centered to ego-transcendent consciousness is called *metanoia* in Greek (Liester 2000). In the context of physical asceticism,silence refers to the avoidance of unnecessary talking but from the perspective of the ego, inner silence feels like death.

Silence is a necessary precondition for contemplation and spiritual growth in both the Orthodox and medieval Catholic traditions. A documentary film Into Great Silence (German: Die große Stille) shows intimate portrayal of the everyday lives of Carthusian monks of the Grande Chartreuse, a monastery high in the French Alps (Gröning 2005). Located in the remote regions of the French Alps, the Grande Chartreuse is the top monastery of the Carthusian order where the silence play the central role in everyday spiritual life.  Contemplation within the feeling of silence and timelessness they have communion with God and rejection the material world. The Carthusian order was founded by Saint Bruno of Cologne (1030 - 1181) in 1084 as a most ascetic order of the the Catholic Church. The film ends with a spiritual quotation that conveys the heart of the monastic life and importance of silence: “I am the ONE who is.” Silence is not only reserved for selected monks but is intended for everyone, lay people who live a daily life in the world. They also have the need for silence. In the BBC documentary film, Abbot Christopher Jamison, a Benedictine monk, believes that he can teach five ordinary people the value of silent meditation, as practised by monks in monasteries, so they can make it part of their everyday lives (“The Big Silence”, n.d.). He sets up a three-month experiment to test out whether the ancient Christian tradition of silence can become part of modern lives.

The progression from *lectio* to *contemplation* could be done with techiques of centering prayer. It is designed to reduce obstacles to contemplation and intimacy with God by establishing *interior silence*, which enables us to become aware of our spiritual level of being separate from the superficial false self (Nelson 2009). The method was developed by the Cistercian monk Thomas Keating, but it draws on materials from both the Orthodox and medieval Catholic traditions.

Contemplation through the silence for the genuine prayer is confrontation with our *false self*and a discovery of our *true self* (Nelson 2009). True person is the real person hidden under false exterior.  The path to the genuine prayer, true self and God in the silence is not easy because we cover it with daily affairs, fantasies, and thoughts about self. Silence is not a matter of selfishness or state where we try to find only ourself. The genuine prayer in some East tradition is a *prayer of the heart*or *pure prayer.*The heart must be understood as deepest self or true self and that is the center of the person. The most famous work that teaches prayer of the heart is The Way of a Pilgrim where mendicant pilgrim who practicing the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner) walk from Russia to the Jerusalem (Anonymous 2001). Why is so important to achieve a inner stillness and release our thoughts in the context of psychology of religion and spirituality? The terms mind and intellect translates the Greek term *nous*. The hesychast tradition therefore invites us to *stand before God with the mind in the heart,*to offer Him intercession, thanksgiving, praise and glorification day and night, without ceasing (Breck 2005). In the quiet place mind and heart will be focus on God’s presence but the intellect cannot be still unless the body is still. Silence and stillness is golden rule for Eastern orthodox tradition what is best expressed in the Philokalia which is famous collection of early monastic psychological and spiritual experience (Nikodimos and Makarios 1983). Stillness is precondition for the prayer.

Prayer is at the center of most spirituality and prayer is important to many people’s psychological well-being (Gubi 2007). Peter Madsen Gubi argues that prayer plays an important part of counsellors wellbeing and, with caution and considered ethical awareness, prayer can be integrated ethically into counselling

when working with people of faith. Counseling has its roots in spirituality and religion: ‘psyche’ meaning ‘soul’ or ‘breath of life’, and ‘ therapeia’ meaning ‘attendant’, are Greek words at the root of the word ‘psychotherapy’ (Gubi 2007). Thus, we have identified at least three tools related to silence and inner silence:  prayer, for those who follow a particular religion, meditation, associated with secular mindfulness practices and religious meditations, and contemplation, as part of spiritual practices, or daily moments of appreciation, which are recognized as poetic instants.

**Implications for counseling**

in the Dictionary of Counselling, the silence defined as the temporary absence of any overt verbal or paraverbal communication between counselor and client within sessions (Feltham and Dryden 2004). The meaning of quietness and silence during counseling process were discussed among researchers and practitioners. An interaction between client and counselors is a very dynamic process and silence time could be challenging or disturbing communication. The beginners in counseling process perceive the quietness time as a weakness but not all time of quietness are frustrating and irritating for client and counselor. (Yildirim 2012) showed that 40% of all causes of quietness were regarding perceived personality traits such as lack of social skills (%14.4), fear of being evaluated negatively (%9.6), not being able to speak unless asked (%8.2), and excitement (%7.7).

The person-centered counselor needs to be prepared to listen to silences as well as words, recognizing that the silence may help the client focus and counselor silence provided the space for the client to slow down and hear himself (Mearns 2003). Quietness and silences during counseling incorrectly interpreted that I am not helping the client. (Conte 2009) emphases silence in counseling process where is very important the time when a person is on his own and when he or she has sat there with his or her thoughts and reflections. Quietness should not be seen as an absence of interaction, it should be seen as a part of it. During silence client in counseling process had time to think how he feels and to make a sense of his feelings. Counselors should accept this period as a vital flow of the process and allow for it because results indicated significantly higher amounts of silence during minutes rated as very high in rapport those rates as low in rapport (Sharpley, Munro, and Elly 2005). For a client, silence also means the deep acceptance. Suggestions are made for the integration of these findings into counselor training courses where trainees often report anxiety regarding the occurrence of silence (Sharpley 1997). This finding suggests that silence had contributed to rapport and anxiety levels and must be integrated into counselor training programmes and supervisions.

Counselors break the silence in order to figure out client’s situation and they generally ask a client for his cause to be quiet and there are no standard patterns for a length of silence (Ladany et al. 2004). In this study, the qualitative analysis revealed that interviewed therapist perceived themselves as using silence to express empathy, enhance and facilitate reflection, challenge the client to take responsibility and facilitate expression of feelings. The silence must be studied from an in-depth qualitative interview.

There is also some direction for counselors who work with religious clients. (Thorne 2012)  highlights the importance of silence for Jesus who use the language with effortless artistry and also knew the compelling power of silence. He describes the Jesus as one who is open to the masculine and the feminine sides of his personality. For (Thorne 2012) is very important to take into practice some form of the daily period of meditative silence in which the body is allowed to speak its language without fear of interruption and also to be deeply respectful of the body’s wisdom and to attend to its messages. Counselors and therapists view the silence as an important phenomenon that enhanced the counseling process, reduce anxiety, conveying empathy, strengthens the relationship, examine feelings and thoughts and it all together improve the quality of daily life.

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has time to think how he feels and to make a sense of his feelings. Counselors should accept this period as a vital flow of the process and allow for it (Sharpley, Munro, & Elly, 2005).

Prayer

Meditation

Contemplation and poetic instants.

Open up a room for the person in counselling to engage with uncertainty,

To embrace it outdoors. To embrace the tension between  the values of silence-phenomena, and the actual contrast between expectations and reality.

In Lehmann (2018) reseach, even if not a counseling practice but

Initiated silences

**Conclusion**

The tension. This is also a musical term.

The recharging of batteries.

Theses about silence-phenomena: Silence-phenomena are dialogical, Silence-phenomena and self-exploration, Shifts from attention

Necessity of silence-phenomena for achieving a kind of happiness, and wellbeing.

Silence, understood as a source for self-exploration, but also for relational depth with others, ourselves, god, nature…. Is a necessary condition for experiencing happiness and wellbeing.

Silences, as a contrast necessary in communication and to emphasize the content of what is being expressed, has particular outcomes for quality of human relationships.  Necessary for dialogical flow. Meaning implies changes. A process. Through time.

For clarifying, for being immersed, detached, processed, recharged energy to put into other places or activities afterwards.

If there are no breaks, then there are no  meaning. Interruptions are break they make changes, they open up possibilities, they make dialogicality and integration, communion, grasping points possible. TO deepen the possibilities of genuine dialogues, or profound experiences. By this attentional shifts they immerse us into.

If no silences, no innovation nor creativity, was possible, or no movement towards the other, or towards .

If a stream of one sound lasted forever, meaningless it would be… for in the silences, sequences  that breaks or silences its meaning or interpretations are empowered or unfolded.  Also emotional intensities unfold (suspiration)…. The peak, the poetic instants, intense

Annoyed, as opposed to happiness, such as if one sound lasted forever. We need uncertainty, creativity.

A space. With no silences no interruptions and thus no –meaning.

Music is a parallel of the human condition, Vygotsky would argue, as it recalls the tension that is part of existence.

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