Santos L (ed) (2023) Cultures of Silence: The Power of Untold Narratives. London and New York, Routledge. ISBN 978-1-032-07170-1

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This book is an ambitious attempt to provide insights into and the necessary context for the field of research on cultural practices where silence can be utilized as both a tool of oppression and an instrument of resistance. Such an approach to silence clearly distinguishes this work from earlier ones, in which silence is mostly considered either as a cultural/language practice (Crapanzano 2004; Hall 1959; Merleau-Ponty 1965) or as a consequence of trauma/suffering (Alexander 2004; Edkins 2003; Kidron 2020). By contrast, the volume's contributors examine the political dimension of silence—which first manifested itself in full force in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (Foucault 1965) and *Writing and Difference* (Derrida 1978)—viewing it through the prism of gender, body, race, nature, and art.

Among the volume's contributors are specialists in contemporary art, mental health, culture studies, queer studies, and gender studies. Each of them looks at the phenomenon of silence through the lens of their own knowledge and expertise. The outcome of this interdisciplinary fusion is presented in the form of 11 chapters organized into three sections: '(Embodied) Silence and memory,' '(Imposed) Silence and identity,' and '(Acts of) Silence and resistance,' with a preface and a conclusion.

In the preface, the book's editor, Luísa Santos, immerses the reader in the context of the study and provides necessary editorial comments on each chapter.

Part I of the book opens with a chapter entitled 'Artistic (self-) decoloniality and artistic (self-)empowerment' by Ana Fabíola Maurício. Through a critique of postcolonialism, the author shows that this well-meaning mode of discourse imposes on an individual from an oppressed group a kind of responsibility to be that group's voice and representative. Continuing this line of thought and building on Edward Said (1994), Maurício argues that an individual is first and foremost a unique human being, and only afterwards is she a representative of a group. As evidence, Maurício provides arguments she develops while analyzing works by the Angolan-Dutch artist Lola Keyezua. The artist's works, according to Maurício, are an important example of how an individual should speak on behalf of herself, overcoming silence, forming her own space of action and expression, and breaking with the imposed images and structures, through which power, culture, and society are only willing to conduct a dialogue by refusing to engage with the individual directly.

This approach allows one to uncover stories that would normally remain silenced, since postcolonialism, by imposing on an individual the

role of a group's representative, does not allow the cosmolocal world of that individual to open up, leaving it in the shadow of reticence. Maurício believes that by revealing the cosmolocal worlds and developing new methods of self-decolonialization, individuals will finally be able to go beyond the expectations of others, express themselves independently, and commence creating authentic decolonial art, thought, science, and similar. Working together and breaching silence, people will create a space of pluversality that will allow them to move forward by breaking down the stereotypes associated with certain groups. Moreover, they will be able to reinvent ways of dealing with trauma that do not stifle it but generate strength to overcome the traumatic experience.

Diana Gonçalves, in her chapter entitled 'The sound of silence in the age of man,' focuses on ecological aspects of silence. Concerned with environmental issues and the loss of sounds important to the planet's ecology, the author invites the reader to focus not on the 'human voices' represented in literature and art, but on voices in the direct sense of the word, that is, on how nature speaks and what it tells people—or rather, what its silence conveys. For this purpose, Gonçalves analyzes how people treat our planet as well as how they relate to each other and to their environment. Examining the documentary *Racing Extinction* (2015) by Louie Psihoyos, Gonçalves argues that nature's seeming silence is deceptive. Nature is not silent, it makes a great number of sounds at any given moment, but in the Anthropocene, humans stopped hearing them. This has been facilitated by the emergence of a 'culture of noise' that muffles the sounds of nature with noise from human activity. This is why people have not only stopped hearing nature but even become tonally deaf to it (Krause 2016). At the same time, with the ever-expanding phenomenon of species extinction, nature itself becomes 'deafeningly silent,' dramatically altering the experience of perceiving the same soundscapes over time. Gonçalves insists that the unwillingness to hear an increasingly silenced nature leads to disastrous consequences in the form of refusing to establish a dialogue with it, hear its cries of despair, and respond to these calls for help. Moreover, the author argues that a similar process is taking place among people: more and more communities and villages disappear; more and more human voices are fading into oblivion.

Hannah Klaubert continues the ecological theme in her chapter called 'Ecocritical perspectives on nuclear silence. Listening across multiple scales,' where she offers a 'nuclear perspective' on silence. Klaubert's approach draws on Haig Khatchadourian's (2015) *How to Do Things with Silence*, in which the author criticizes the existing view on silence as anthropocentric. Khatchadourian insists that silence, according to this view, usually refers to something one cannot hear; it is thus perceived not only as anything that is outside the very limited perception of the human ear, but also as everything that is determined by one's perception and understanding of what silence is. Klaubert analyzes both this anthropocentric understanding of silence and the related politics of listening to what one understands by sound. To this end, she suggests looking at silence as a question, the possibility of listening as such,

which inevitably emerges when a listener discovers the existence of silence. In order to do so, Klaubert examines various artworks and literary texts dealing with nuclear issues, studying expressions of two instances within the chosen theoretical framework, namely: silence as a refusal to speak as well as the possibility of hearing the voices of others, and silence as a problem, in the context of the scale of humanly perceived sound. The author concludes that in order to prevent the world from becoming completely mute, which in the age of nuclear technology can only mean the onset of death, humankind needs to continuously listen to and interpret both the sounds and the silences that accompany them.

Part II, '(Imposed) Silence and identity,' starts with a chapter entitled 'Burning silence in the country house: On colonial torchères at Betlér Manor,' by Rado Ištok. In this text, Ištok examines a pair of torchères in the shape of life-sized African men and other representations of Black people in the former country house of the prosperous Andrássy family. The author investigates the cultural and historical background underlying their creation and analyzes this family's role in Austro-Hungarian society. Ištok notes that manors were traditionally seen as objects of material culture, but in recent years, influenced by what Sally-Anne Huxtable (2020) calls the 'Downton Abbey effect,' the attitude of visitors has changed: they have become increasingly interested in both the personal stories of these houses' residents and the events that took place in them. To break through decades of silence about the representation of the manor's colonial past and to create new narratives that can replace this silence, Ištok offers to examine artifacts through the lens of the 'Downton Abbey effect.' The author claims that since the creation of torchères, their installation in the manor, the theft of one of them in 2020, and the subsequent removal of the remaining torchère, these artefacts have been repeatedly resignified. The change in the position of the torchères in the manor clearly indicates, according to Ištok, that this resignification was carried out in response to changes in the political and social contexts. At the same time, the author insists that the removal of the torchère should by no means become part of the current agenda anchored in a policy of silencing Europe's colonial past: it requires the creation of a narrative that breaks through the silence about how colonialist and racist ideas were domesticated and materialized in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and became part of its history and everyday life.

Vlad Strukov, in his chapter 'Queer silences. Art, sexuality, and acoustic neuroma (the art of Samak Kosem),' argues that the processes of de-colonizing and de-Europeanizing requires an understanding of the presence of other centers of power and silencing. Therefore, to counter them more effectively, it is necessary, Strukov believes, to rethink the resistance project itself. In this regard, the author proposes to use radical contextualization, understood as a place of silence which helps create new varieties of thinking about humanity and freedom. To apply such contextualization, Strukov utilizes two complementary terms: geopolitical scotoma and acoustic neuroma. Geopolitical scotoma he understands as a situation when something

prevents a person from perceiving something else, and the person has no idea that this is the case. In turn, acoustic neuroma is a sudden realization that something is interfering with one's perception. The author uses these concepts to examine Samak Kosem's (2022) artworks set between social sciences and art. Kosem is a part of an (in)visible gay community in Thailand; their artworks are dedicated to studying the experience of being a queer Muslim in a Buddhist polygendered country. Throughout its history, this country has been influenced both by its own ideas of sexuality, formed over the centuries, and by the European colonial binary structure as well as the contemporary Western ideas about LGBTQ+.

To explore this phenomenon, Kosem uses what they call 'non-human ethnography'—looking at something through the eyes of other Others, the role of which the artist gives to stray sheep. Sheep (the unambiguously readable symbol of sacrifice that comes from Abrahamic religions) are both visible and invisible to villagers because they do not belong to anyone, and at the same time they are recognized by farmers as not being their own. More specifically, sheep are simultaneously visible in everyday situations and invisible to villagers because farmers do not care about their existence (geopolitical scotoma) until something has happened (acoustic neuroma). The use of 'non-human ethnography' allows, according to Strukov, to look at and understand human societies beyond the colonial framework of knowledge which, in its turn, helps break the silence around queer communities that otherwise remain entirely in its realm.

Irene Flunser Pimentel's chapter 'Silence as a weapon of power within the context of the Portuguese dictatorship' shows how the systems of censorship and propaganda were evolving during the 48 years of the Portuguese dictatorship. The author demonstrates how, through the imposition of silence, the authorities were able to maintain power for decades. The dictatorship not only paid great attention to direct ideological indoctrination of the population but also tried to remove from the zone of possible discussion those topics and those people with whom the authorities could not cope directly. Silence allowed for the imposition of passivity on Portuguese society and erased from its horizon the appearance of any possible alternative to the ruling regime. Without democratic sources of legitimacy at their disposal, the group that had seized power in the country saw censorship as a tool for legitimizing their actions, being guided, in the author's words, by the principle 'that which seems—is.' Through such 'visibility,' the dictatorship sought to shape for the people the kind of reality that representatives of the dictatorship themselves wished to see.

However, as Flunser Pimentel shows, during all the years of the dictatorship, the authorities failed to do so. Other political ideas and social phenomena constantly seeped into the visible spectrum, and the authorities began to combat them with tools of silence, by forbidding public mentions of certain words, names, and events, as if they simply did not exist. To combat these manifestations, the dictatorship used political police, who also made extensive use of silencing, but in a different sense from the censorship

bodies. The police tried to be proactive and to silence those whom they considered guilty of causing visible social and political problems, and for this purpose they widely used various kinds of repression and torture. Returning home, the representatives of the opposition did not wish to talk about what had happened to them and extended the regime of silence to others. In this hybrid way, through censorship and political police, Flunser Pimentel concludes, the dictatorship imposed silence on the citizens of Portugal.

The next chapter, entitled '[Inaudible]. The politics of silence in the work of Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Gabrielle Goliath,' by Sven Christian, looks at publications of the indicated authors through Edward Said's discussion of the silences of those who cannot represent themselves because they have already been represented by someone else—someone who dares to speak on their behalf. According to Christian, Said's anti-representational logic points to the existence of a space where there is a critical imbalance of power for political agency. The author examines Gabrielle Goliath's (2019) essay 'A different kind of inhabitance: Invocation and the politics of mourning in the performance work of Tracey Rose and Donna Kukama,' pointing out the impossibility of agency construction based on the principle of 'comprehensible trauma,' that is, the idea that traumatic experiences of those who were directly traumatized can be understood as well as taken on and shared by those who did not directly experience them. According to Christian, the 'comprehensible trauma' principle leads to trauma being appropriated, and, as a result, the conditional right to 'speak on behalf of the other' is seized by those who have not had the trauma.

However, Christian says that the incomprehensibility of trauma makes it possible to produce work on the permanent self-construction of subjectivity, which is the necessary basis for the emergence of political agency. At the same time, and this conclusion is reached by the author after examining Abu Hamdan's (2017) PhD thesis entitled *Aural Contract: Investigations at the Threshold of Audibility*, this construction of agency, through forcing the subject to talk about the comprehension of trauma, can itself at any moment become an act of violence. However (here the author returns to the discussion of Said), silence can become a factor that will not incline the subject to violent identification and representation, but itself will become something that speaks about the presence of traumatic experience and thus helps the subject produce work on self-construction of subjectivity.

Part III of the book, entitled '(Acts of) Silence and resistance,' opens with the chapter 'Undoing language. Gender dissent and the disquiet of silence,' where Athena Athanasiou seeks, through the study of politics and performances of Žene u Crnom (ŽuC) (the Serbian wing of the anti-militarist Women in Black movement), to demonstrate how sexual-specific silence can undo the state's political language. Members of ŽuC hold regular actions, silently gathering in public spaces, grieving for the victims of the Serbian state, including the acknowledged external enemies. According to Athanasiou, through these actions they deconstruct mourning, manifested through catachrestic silence and stereotypically associated with women,

family, and nationality, and show that behind silence, there is a huge amount of the unspoken that cannot be expressed in such a familiar but highly politicized language filled with conventional idioms. Athanasiou thus demonstrates that silence has an extremely destructive performative power capable of exposing and revealing what language either tries to hide or simply cannot express.

The next chapter, by Sofia Ana Elise Steinvorth, has the intriguing title 'Rest as resistance. From self-care to decolonial narratives' and offers an unusual perspective on rest. Analyzing Tricia Hersey's art project *The Nap Ministry* (2016—ongoing), in which activists, through the organization of various performances, show that sleep disorders among racialized people in the USA are historically linked to the economic and cultural domination of whites, Steinvorth says that it has formed a generational trauma associated with the attitude to work and rest when sleep began to be associated with idleness. To remedy this situation, the author proposes the concept of self-care as a tool of decolonization and resistance. For this purpose, she invites individuals from racialized groups to take a break and think, in the turbulent flow of days, about themselves and their place in the here and now. The author believes that by depriving marginalized and oppressed groups of time for themselves, contemporary capitalism deprives them of the very possibility of imagining their possible futures, offering them only the path that capitalism itself has chosen for them. Continuing the line of thinking about imagination, Steinvorth examines Daniel Godínez Nivón's art project *Oneiric Propaedeutic* (2015—2017), which aims at refuting the dominant Western narrative of rationality as the only valid type of knowledge. For this, Nivón organizes collective dreaming sessions where participants share their dream experiences, which they then try to combine with the experiences of others in order to incorporate dreams into their daily lives. In her text, Steinvorth tries to combine the ideological messages of both projects and speaks of rest as a tool that not only effectively opposes the dominant Western discourse but also enables the construction of alternative discourses that listen to an individual's internal, subjective world.

The final chapter, entitled 'Gender-based violence and COVID-19 pandemic: Addressing a pervasive public health issue through an upstream multi-systems approach,' is a shortened version of the report on the study that Nazilla Khanlou, Luz Maria Vazquez and Soheila Pashang conducted in 2020. Its focus is gender-based violence (GBV): violence against women, those who feel they belong to them, and those who identify with them. In modern times, the greatest outbreak of GBV occurred during the current COVID-19 pandemic, when many women lost their right to freedom of movement and found themselves forced to spend most of their time at home. Looking at the situation through the lens of intersections of gender, race, socio-cultural factors, nationality, and sexual orientation, which create a unique experience (including a unique experience of oppression) for an individual, the authors designed measures aimed at breaking the veil of silence surrounding this topic and helping the aforementioned vulnerable

group affected by the pandemic and its consequences as well as by the epidemic of gender violence that intensified in the background.

In the conclusion, entitled 'On the subject of silence,' Tânia Ganito provides a brief overview of five topics that are present in the research literature on silence. In 'Silence as a cultural construction,' she considers how silence is deployed to react to different kinds of situations such as communication, body movements, and affect conditions. 'Silence as silencing' examines memory studies literature, focusing on how power authorities, witnesses and participants of historical events, and other memory agents impose silence on their audiences. By doing this, they can control power narratives and prevent the emergence of alternative modes of memory that could potentially challenge dominant narratives. In 'Silence as trauma,' Ganito surveys the Freudian tradition's influence on trauma studies. According to this tradition, trauma, before it manifests itself, has a period of latency when subjects keep their traumatic experiences in silence. This silence is a defensive reaction to trauma; it does not only mark certain memories as unpleasant but also permanently changes the subject's identity by anticipating future manifestations of trauma and the negative mental states associated with it. The examination of the psychological side of silence continues in the next section, 'Silence as mourning.' Here, Ganito focuses on silence as a reaction to the memory of loss or pain, examining how, through silence, one can share one's grief with others and how it might become the basis for developing collective mourning commemorative practices. Finally, in the last section of the text, Ganito examines works dedicated to studying silence in art practices. She finds that silence is used in art not just as a mere pause between compositions, but as an invitation to engage in experiencing artworks. Such experiences may evoke personal and collective memory and trauma that can affect the subject's agency.

By combining different approaches, this book's authors contribute to forming a new interdisciplinary research field where silence is seen as both a tool of oppression and an instrument of resistance. In this regard, the volume will be of interest not only to specialists in cultural, art, queer, or gender studies, but also to philosophers, historians, psychologists, and sociologists, who can find in the texts fresh ideas and new approaches to the study of the phenomenon of silence, which, despite its comprehensive nature, has not yet been adequately reflected in the research literature.

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