



# Silence as a Cognitive Tool to Comprehend the Environment

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## Abstract

This article presents silence as a cognitive tool to comprehend the environment. Two dimensions of silence are addressed: a natural mechanism and human beings' social and cultural construction. There is a link between these two dimensions because, on the one hand, agents' cognitive strategies based on silence influence how meanings and uses of silence have been constructed. The meanings of silence we use are contextual shapers of silence-based cognitive strategies. Silence is analyzed as a resource for coping with ambiguity: situations perceived as uncertain provoke doubt and confusion because they can be understood differently or suggest different interpretations. These situations can occur in the face of epistemic disruption. The consequence is a transfer of the ambiguity property of these situations to the usual ways of relating to the world and people. The cognitive approach is based here on a semiotic-hermeneutic interpretation of silence from a phenomenological perspective. This accounts for a paradox: even if silence does not exist (the world is acoustic), it is real. The silence experience is a non-inferential cognitive capacity located at the base of perception: a stimulus that suggests a particular gesture as an action different from the usual one to deal with the environment.

**Keywords** Silence · Cognitive tool · Semiotics · *Anbild* · *Fûdo* (風土) · Cosmovision

## 1 Introduction: Silent Silence

This article presents silence as a cognitive tool to comprehend the environment. Two dimensions of silence are addressed: a natural mechanism and human beings' social and cultural construction. It is shown that there is a link between these two dimensions because, on the one hand, agents' cognitive strategies based on silence influence how meanings and uses of silence have been constructed. On the other hand, these meanings and uses are contextual shapers of silence-based cognitive strategies. Silence is analyzed as a resource for coping with ambiguity: situations perceived as uncertain provoke doubt and confusion because they can be understood differently or suggest different interpretations. These situations can occur in the face of epistemic disruption (knowledge cannot catch up with lived

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experience, so the agent needs to *stop* and apply new strategies to handle the situation). Likewise, this situation also occurs when it is difficult to understand the words and behavior of people, which often leads to silencing individuals or groups.

In both cases, the direct consequence is a transfer of the ambiguity property of these situations to the usual ways of relating to the world and people. The cognitive approach is based here on a semiotic-hermeneutic interpretation of silence from a phenomenological perspective. This accounts a paradox: even if silence does not exist (the world is acoustic), it is real. On the other hand, silence is experienced without perception in the usual sense because there is no specific object with which to apply any criterion of resemblance.

Therefore, as long as it lasts, silence generates a cognitive niche<sup>1</sup> different from the usual one because sounds' total or partial cessation leaves a symbolic space to interact. In other words, what is phenomenologically experienced under the circumstances of silence leaves a trace that lasts even after it ceases. This trace is information obtained differently in the same context where the usual (acoustic) experience is given, thus holding the promise of complementing the vision of the world. In other words, the experience of silence is given in the totality of phenomenological consciousness that oscillates between both agent's biological-sociocultural dimensions and the transcendental one. In this sense, it is affirmed that an agent's interpretation to fulfill the promise constitutes an extension of his individual worldview and, in the long run, of the general cosmovision of the community to which he belongs.

While the *Umwelt* (surrounding world) is the first step that allows agents to understand their environment, individual worldviews (*Weltanschauungen*<sup>2</sup>) derive from the sociocultural cosmovision (the sociocultural framework that encompasses those of others as the *Lebenswelt*) and from different conceptualized information (the latter is, the agents' cosmovision) (see Magnani, et al., 2021; Sans Pinillos & Magnani, 2022). This characterization does not exhaust the horizon of the meaning of silence. However, it allows us to understand its experience as a non-inferential cognitive capacity located at the base of perception: a stimulus that suggests a particular gesture as an action different from the usual one to deal with the environment, the landscape, or the context.

The point of view of Peirce's pragmatic semiotics on the linguistic sign is taken in Sect. 2. In this way, the circumstance that silence is a kind of concept without a phenomenon can be addressed. Although there is no perceptible form that acts as a natural connector between the mental content and its referent, it can manifest itself as part of any phenomenon, given the circumstances. Using this semiotic model, Sect. 2.2 begins by postulating that silence is a symbol of multiple phenomena: silence is a cognitive tool that

<sup>1</sup> Those natural and sociocultural cognitive human behaviors that change the natural environment into a cognitive one are known as cognitive representations. They are cognitive strategies to comprehend and manage the outside world that the mind has created through the construction of so-called *cognitive niches*. Humans have developed many cognitive niches, hugely endowed with informational, cognitive, and, more recently, computational processes and countless artifacts (see Laland et al., 2001; Odling-Smee, et al., 2003).

<sup>2</sup> James' notion of *Weltanschauung* is taken as a "view of the world, [...] an intellectualized attitude towards life [...] [a] purpose, and temperament of intellect and will [...] conjugated toward life" (James, 1987: 987). There is an important difference to be noted between James' *Weltanschauung* and Dilthey's better-known one (Dilthey, 1911). While Dilthey refers to the cognitive, axiological, epistemic, sociocultural, etc., aspects of human experience, James only intends to point out—and this is crucial for what is defended in this work—the individual attitude of each of us, which can be considered as formed both by the information obtained by the biological particularities (*Umwelt*) and by the circumstances in which they have developed (organized by a particular sociocultural framework identified with the *Lebenswelt*).

human beings use to make sense of the world, insofar as knowing implies expanding the social and cultural cosmovision shared with the rest of the community from which each agent is researching.

In Sect. 2.3, the semiotic perspective of silence is complemented by Gadamer's hermeneutic theory of the beautiful. The relationship between the beautiful and silence is based on its symbolic character (*Anbild*), which allows us to equate the experience of silence with the feeling of the beautiful as a non-inferential cognitive capacity. The underlying epistemic foundation is that the aesthetic experience is given in particular cases that are understood as fragments of reality, so they also promise, on the one hand, to be able to integrate with the reality to which they belong and, on the other hand, that there is at least another fragment to be completed. Sections 2.4 and 2.4.1 deal with the hermeneutic-semiotic perception model, first of music and then of sound. Finally, a transition to the experience of silence is proposed. From this perspective, silence can be understood as a cognitive tool that emotionally empowers affordances, such as the values and meanings of perceived things, which offer us opportunities for action.

Section 3 delves into the tension arising from the comparison between sound phenomena (natural objects) and silence (non-natural object). In other words, silence is experienced without a definite perception of it. The central idea under discussion is that sociocultural patterns mediate semiotically with ways of knowing the world. In Sect. 3.1, the semiotic-hermeneutic theory is complemented with Watsuji's phenomenology of *fūdo*: there is an intimate link between climate and culture. The main thesis of this theory is that the landscape is constitutive of the body. So then, each agent's subjectivity is also the landscape's subjectivity (experience). In this particular sense, the landscape is a human beings' extension.

Section 4 comprises some anthropological examples to show how silence is a socio-culturally constructed perception that impacts both the community and nature. The proposed examples serve to analyze uncontrolled situations due to their unawareness, in which silence allows the application of a series of strategies to cope with the uncertainty caused by the ambiguity of the circumstances lived. These strategies serve as a response that do not need to conclude in knowledge. We also analyze the occasions in which silence falls on a small number of people in a community: when silence is imposed as a mechanism of discrimination causing invisibilization. In these contexts, silence offers an alternative template with which the agent can reenact himself in a habit broken situation. In other words, silence is a new frame of reference from which to re-signify oneself socioculturally and another way of defining an autobiography.

In the conclusions (Sect. 5), the idea that the natural environment is comprehended mainly from the agent's sociocultural dimension when silence occurs is reaffirmed. In this sense, silence generates a cognitive niche because sounds' total or partial cessation leaves a symbolic space to interact. This cognitive capacity is identified with the symbolic coating that modifies perception while silence lasts: a stimulus that suggests a particular gesture as a different action from the usual one to deal with the environment.

## 2 What is Silence? A Natural Reconstruction of Social Construction and Back

It could be said that the human being cannot experience silence. If a physical definition of the phenomenon of sound as waves (succession of pressure changes) caused by vibrations is adopted, then it can be affirmed that the world is constitutively noisy. This means that

the adaptation and evolution of organisms have taken place in an acoustic world (Dawood, et al., 2021). All living organisms interact in one way or another with acoustics, showing various ways of emitting and perceiving sound (Khait, et al., 2019). Even in total isolation from the rest of the world, living beings will always be with themselves. All the bodies make noises when they move: phototropic responses (Corlett & Westcott, 2013), intestinal gas, digestion, salivation, teeth clacking, the heart beating, and breathing are noises that accompany living beings. At least for humans, the memories and words that buzz in the head or emerge in strange shapes in dreams are sounds from which we cannot escape.

This circumstance may be increased in the face of symptoms such as the conscious perception of an auditory sensation in the absence of a corresponding external stimulus caused by *tinnitus* (Baguley, et al., 2013) or auditory–verbal hallucinations (hearing voices) caused by schizophrenia (Gaser, et al., 2004). In this regard, it is interesting to consider the sound-verbal hallucinations of deaf people with schizophrenia. Investigations show that, although it is complicated to reconcile anatomical evidence with patients' experiences, their statements have opened up new questions about what it means to hear (Atkinson, 2006). Internal sensations such as the described above plus others like joint pops, vibrations, pressure when writing, and hand movement when speaking with signs may be the basis for what deaf people report as hearing (DuFeu & McKenna, 1999). Given the multiple ways of interacting with acoustic inputs and outputs, the idea that reality is essentially aural is further reinforced.

Nevertheless, although it may seem paradoxical, it is also correct and accurate to say that human beings experience all the silences they claim. In this work, silence is understood as a constitutive part of the sociocultural cosmovision that every agent shares with other people. It becomes part of their worldview: the interpretation of the world resulting from conceptualizing human beings' actions in a community. Therefore, the community's cosmovision encompasses and endows the agent's worldview: the interpretation of the environment (*Weltanschauung*) based on their biological perception capacity (*Umwelt*) and its conditions of conceptualization (cosmovision) (Magnani, et al., 2021).

The conceptualization of the environment is the process of endowing meaning to biological perceptions (the sensory uptake of immediate information from the environment) that arises from two crucial factors:

1. From the automatic and not-sentential enactment that each agent maintains with a shared environment.
2. From the deep understanding of the world that arises with language and its sophistication through education.

Silence would be placed in the second point. As has been said, silence cannot be experienced as a specific object, so it cannot be considered a mere perception. This is because silence is a concept without a definite phenomenon. In other words, there would be no such thing as a perceptible form that acts as a natural connector between the mental content and its referent. This circumstance can be analyzed by taking advantage of the problem of the reference of silence. It is interesting to take here Peirce's pragmatic semiotic point of view on the linguistic sign because it allows distinguishing between what is represented as a sign (representamen) and the act or relation of representing (representation) (c.f., Peirce, 1958: CP 2.273).

The relevance of taking this perspective is that it allows us to work with a linguistically constituted object (representamen or sign) through an instant of consciousness

of something. This instant can come from many different sources of information and always becomes an indefinite and complete form that can be identified as the sensation of quality. In the same way, but not in the same vein, determination of this sensation does not require an object that establishes a relation by correspondence, but a manifestation of any object is needed. This signified process is another object that could be interpreted in different ways by an interpreter. It is better to characterize the elements involved in the semiotic process to concretize this abstract explanation.

## 2.1 An Overview of Peircean Semiotics

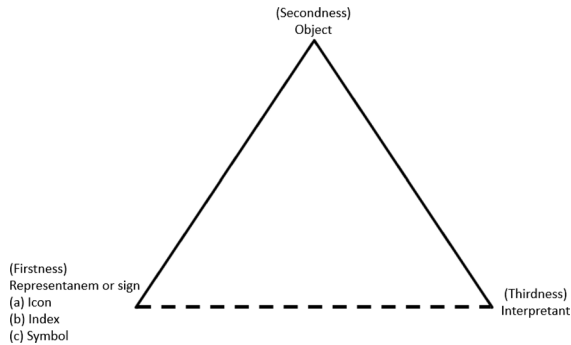
Peircean semiosis is a phenomenologically based (phanerological) process of signification and communication that deals with the totality of phenomena as mental contents (phaerons). As is known, this perspective establishes a 'genuine triadic relation from the sign (First) to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object' (Peirce, 1958: CP 2.274). It is important to emphasize that the totality of the semiotic process defines the sign or representamen to avoid confusion. Therefore, according to its contextual situation, the phenomenological and semiological categories correspond to stages in which the same sign can be both object and interpreter. Likewise, the sign can be of three kinds:

1. A sign can be an icon (which maintains a resemblance relationship between the interpreter and the object, such as a map or model).
2. A sign can be an index (which maintains a cause-effect relationship between the interpreter and the object, such as laughter or smoke).
3. A sign can be a symbol (which maintains an arbitrary or conventional relationship between the interpreter and the object, such as cultural, spiritual symbols, etc.) (c.f., Peirce, 1958: CP 2. 281).

Following Peirce's words quoted above, this *genuine triadic relation* is articulated through three phenomenological categories that classify the elements that operate cognitively: firstness, secondness, and thirdness. On the one hand, firstness would be something like a *feeling of an idea*. It is an unactualized set of possibilities which, as Merrell wonderfully expresses:

[...] in its complete form everything is always already there. It composes an unimaginably massive, continuous collage of compatible and incompatible, consistent and inconsistent, and complementary and contradictory, non-essences. In this sphere of pure chance, spontaneity, and infinitely diluted *vagueness*, nothing is (yet) specified and everything is at one with everything else: there are as yet no cuts, no borders, no taxonomies (Merrell, 1997: 34).

On the other hand, secondness is one of the possible actualizations of the quality "felt" in the firstness that occurs in a manifestation of an object situated in the frame of experience indefinitely and its result will always be another object which will be interpreted. For example, "cold" can be related to "snow", but also to —the desire for— a campfire for warmth (both are cases of secondness). Finally, thirdness is the experience conceptualized



**Fig. 1** Semiotic triangle

under the mantle of the sociocultural cosmovision semiotically shared with the community in which one lives (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

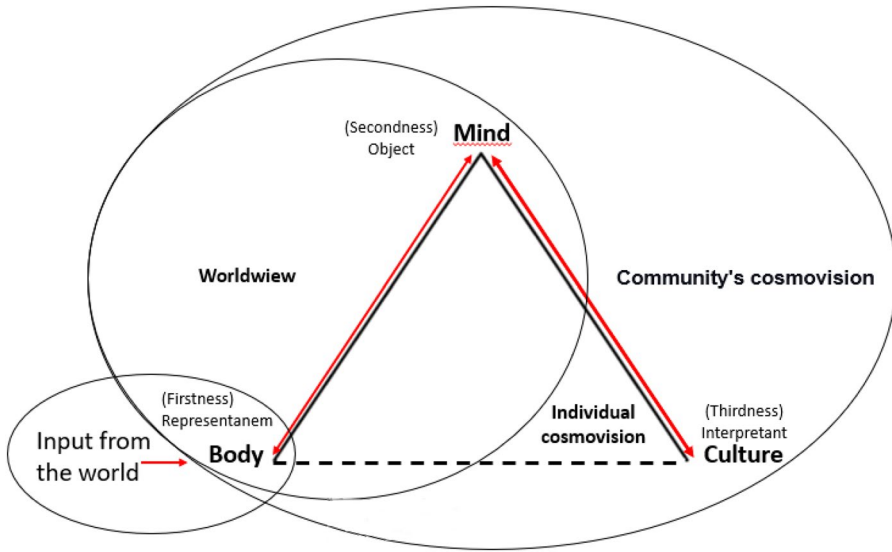
First, the fractal<sup>4</sup> mediation between firstness and secondness through thought and its manifestations and representational processes such as language, models (cognitive and artifactual), and the different activities (the set of practices that are carried out during the manipulation and interaction with these artifacts and people in a specific context) happen. Then, in thirdness, thought defines the cognitive strategies with which agents know the world within the horizon of meaning granted by the cosmological framework to which they belong. In other words, thirdness can be understood as the habit of culturalized thinking. Thus, the object "snow" can trigger other objects that will be interpreted through the cosmologically conceptualized experience as, for example: "it will snow," "Christmas," "presents," "Christmas tree," "Nativity scene," such as "the Cold War," "flu," "death of a loved one," etc.

One way of understanding the semiotic and phenomenological relationship and mediation is abductive based on the categorization of sensitivity data in diagrams that potentially infer an explanatory representamen (Caterina, et al., 2023). In this regard, abduction can be understood as the process by which a hypothesis is generated and evaluated in action, extra-theoretical and extra-sentential, aimed at integrating the novelties of (micro)variations through their integration by manipulating the environment and, with it, appropriating the lived context (cf., *Manipulative abduction* in Magnani, 2017: 213).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The indirect relation between the sign of firstness and the object as an interpreter of thirdness is taken from Odgen's and Richards' semiotic triangle (1923: 11) in order to emphasize, on the one hand, that firstness becomes effective under the conditions of secondness. Secondly, there is mediation between the first two phenomenological categories of semiosis because it is in thirdness.

<sup>4</sup> I thank anonymous reviewer 2 for the valuable contribution of this notion to the whole investigation. Indeed, the semiotic fractality of firstness -in its mediations with secondness- is crucial to understand silence's phenomenal multiplicity.

<sup>5</sup> Abductive inference/reasoning is a powerful conceptual tool that can contribute to completing the present silence theory. Abduction is reasoning to hypotheses in human and non-human animal cognition (Magnani, 2017). It is possible to classify two kinds of abduction from the cognitive point of view: 1. Abduction as conjectures can derive from the selection from a collection of the hypothetical knowledge background (as occurred, for instance, in medical diagnosis), and 2. the novelty production (for example, in scientific discovery) (Magnani, 2001). In this regard, on the one hand, abduction, as a mechanism for confrontation in situations of uncertainty, can shed light on the examples of the uses of silence in the face of confusing situations explained in Sect. 4. On the other hand, as explained throughout the article, the symbolization of silence does not endure or sustain itself in the same way as, for example, sound, so its significance could be understood as highly hypothetical. Finally, the experience of silence (which is not the same as experiencing



**Fig. 2** Semiotic interconnection between body, mind, and culture. In Fig. 3, below, the relationship between body, mind, and culture is identified as phenomenological consciousness. This circumstance is crucial for an investigation into silence, as there is a blurring of the line between subject and object enhanced by the socioculturally defined lived environment. I am very grateful to anonymous reviewers 1 and 4 for showing the importance of pointing out and highlighting this topic

These examples help to highlight some fundamental ideas (Fig. 2)<sup>6</sup>:

1. Semiosis is structured in the praxis of each agent, in the uses that they give to words as they are used.
2. The uses that each agent adopts define his or her individual cosmovision. In other words, the spectrum of possibilities and limits in semiosis is determined by how the habit of thought is culturalized and the habit of culturalized thought that defines the cosmovision.
3. Culturalization is mediated by the particular relation of each agent to the general social and cultural cosmovision shared with the rest of the people.

Footnote 5 (continued)

in silence) is as suggestive on a personal level as it is tentative as far as other people are concerned. The author is working on this abductive characterization of silence and hopes to publish it soon.

<sup>6</sup> Figure 2 Danesi's graph is used as a starting point to represent the interconnection between body, mind, and culture (2004: 18). The incorporation of the semiotic triangle allows us to contemplate the transformation from the biological interpretation of the environment based on the perception (worldview) to the social and cultural information that an agent conceptualizes (individual cosmovision) influenced by the social and cultural cosmovision that he shares with the rest of the community to which he belongs.

## 2.2 Semiotic Perspective of Silence

If one remembers, at the beginning of the previous section, it was said that silence *seems to be a kind of concept without phenomena*. Now, using the semiotic model that has been presented, it is possible to say that *silence is a symbol of multiple phenomena*. As has been said, a sign can be an icon, an index, and a symbol. Considering that silence has no specific object, it seems easy to conclude that it cannot be an icon. A bit more complicated is to affirm that silence is not an index. Even if the world is mainly acoustic, there seems to be a direct correspondence between the diminution or total cessation of one or several sounds and silence. However, the presence of silence is a purely social and cultural fact. Although a global meaning of silence (absence of sound) can be assumed, it acquires the nuances of the cosmovision in which the agents use it. Let us take the global meaning of silence as the absence of sound for a moment.

One important thing to keep in mind is that this general meaning of silence as the absence of sound forces us to reduce the acoustic world from which this article starts to the phonic world, which is restricted to those entities capable of sensing sounds (codified or a relatively pleasant) and noises (uncodified or annoying). For example, an agent may want to live in the "silence of the forest." In that case, silence is an absence of urban noises, which are replaced by others such as the wind rubbing the leaves of an oak tree, the hoot of an owl at night, and the buzzing of bees around flowers. Then, more than wanting silence, it seems that "songs from the wood" are desired.

It may be that this agent's desire is aimed at mitigating his stress. At this respect, although the sound level is one of the most critical stressors, other properties of sound cause stress, such as speech and noise. These three factors produce physiological (cortisol and noradrenaline concentrations in plasma, heart rate variability, and blood pressure) and psychological (fatigue, discomfort, etc.) variations in the organism (Radun, et al., 2021). In this sense, silence is to be understood as a *sound condition*. Silence as a *reduction of external stimuli* can indeed promote relaxation and mood enhancement. Moreover, it also influences the perception of time: it is accelerated when one manages to think pleasantly about oneself or one's thoughts and slows down when it produces boredom (Heidegger, 1995; Pfeifer & Wittmann, 2020).

These preliminary findings allow us to reinforce the idea that the perception of silence is based on the reduction or cessation of some sounds while others persist in their sonority. Therefore, 'silence is not simply the absence of noise' (Corbin, 2021: 1), even on the physiological and psychological scale of perception. For example, there is what is called *mental silence* that can be achieved with the exercise of meditation: "a physiological state of demonstrated reduced metabolic activity" (Hernandez, 2018). The experience of this cognitive state is related to the absence of mental content, such as thoughts and images. In these cases, silence is synonymous with stillness pointing to experiences without content, usually identified with the eidetic notions of pure consciousness or consciousness itself (Woods, et al., 2020).<sup>7</sup>

This circumstance establishes a distance between sound and silence because it is impossible to establish the biological basis for the perception of silence. For example, some studies demonstrate how the liking for specific sounds (i.e., consonant and dissonant sounds)

<sup>7</sup> Although, as has been mentioned, pure consciousness or consciousness itself can be understood within the phenomenological consciousness, the current investigation stage still needs to address this topic concerning silence, which remains to be dealt with in future work.



has a biological basis (Masataka, 2006; Trainor et al., 2002), which humans share with "our phylogenetically closest relatives" (Sugimoto et al., 2010), whose experimental basis is inapplicable as far as an investigation of silence is concerned. However, in the introduction, it has been said that this article also discusses the natural dimension of silence. It has to be kept in mind that the human being belonging to a community always knows the world from his cosmovision (see Fig. 2), so knowing will always imply its ampliation.

The nature of silence as a symbol without a specific object permits us to consider it an enabling element for expanding the cosmovision beyond mere description. In order to introduce all of this, it will first be necessary to explain the relationship between sound and silence within the framework offered by the *social reality*: the resulting product of the relationship between personal worlds (microscopic) and social structures (macroscopic) (Brewer, 2004). In this way, it can be understood that *existing* sounds are determined also by social and cultural factors and elements, among which silence is one of the most important.

First of all, it may be assumed that any entity capable of hearing a sound is also capable of noticing its diminution or cessation. However, it is not to be expected that any sound can meet this fate. The environment in which one lives is saturated with sounds that make up the sound dimension of the ambience that the agents perceive and constitute with their actions. As with other sources of information, acoustics is passively perceived and influences social and cultural contextualization by giving meaning to the activities carried out by agents sharing the same environment (Uimonen, 2011). Consequently, although there is an active biological basis for auditory perception, the sounds of a place are defined by the community that inhabits it.

A very illustrative example is the debate on the bells' total or partial silencing (during the hours of rest). In particular, the case of the bells chiming on the Santa Maria dels Turers church in the city of Banyoles (Catalonia, Spain) is taken here. Briefly, the case is that the church's bells were silenced in response to complaints from tourists. The reaction of the citizens against this decision was overwhelming, to the point that the bells are now chiming again and have even been declared a *Cultural Asset of Local Interest* (in Catalan language, *Bé Cultural d'Interès Local*), so they can no longer be silenced. The citizens of Banyoles live the phenomenon of the chimes as if it were natural and unavoidable. As one of its residents said: 'It's tradition. Without the bells, I can't sleep' (Kassam, 2021). This statement allows us to contemplate both the inactive and active dimensions of missing a sound. First, when the agent is dismissed because the habit of hearing the bells chime has been broken. Second, when the expectation of hearing their chiming is not fulfilled.

The situation described allows us to conceptualize the habit beyond repetitive actions and place it at the very basis of perception. In this sense, listening can be understood as a pre-communicative phenomenon based on intersubjective agreements manifested in practice (Muntanyola, 2015; Muntayola, 2016). The basic auditory rhythm perception processes are shaped by experience, which is culturally constituted (Iversenm & Patel, 2008) through semiotic relations with habits (Cannizzaro & Anderson, 2016). Therefore, silence as a cession of a sound is perceived within socially acquired cultural patterns. In other words, in an acoustic environment, there are sounds whose cessation breaks the habit and others that do not, and the reason for this is that the sounds people live are not the totality of sounds that are in their environment, but the one that constitutes the social and cultural cosmovision that they share with the rest of agents.

Thus, it seems plausible to affirm that silence is a tacit cognitive tool that human beings use to make sense of the world, to the extent that knowing implies extending the social and cultural cosmovision shared with the rest of the community from which each agent

investigates.<sup>8</sup> It offers the possibility of adding an element to both (1) make sense of natural events and (2) articulate situations that are perceived as anomalous or broken. Before, however, it is necessary to address three fundamental questions: How the experience of silence is given, how silence is recognized, and, finally, how silence is known. To this end, a hermeneutical analysis of silence is presented in the following section.

### 2.3 A Hermeneutic-Semiotic Approach to the Symbol

This section discusses the characterization of silence as a symbol of multiple phenomena. However, before discussing the different uses of silence (the different information it offers), it is necessary to answer the three fundamental questions mentioned above. The starting point is Gadamer's study of the actuality of the beautiful (*Schönen*). It is important to note that one of the most important Gadamer's contributions was in the area of hermeneutics, a branch of phenomenology,<sup>9</sup> so his goals were not different from many of the questions being investigated in cognitive science today (i. e., Dreyfus, 1972; Varela, et al., 2017). More importantly, the number of relations that can be made between this concept and silence is extraordinary.

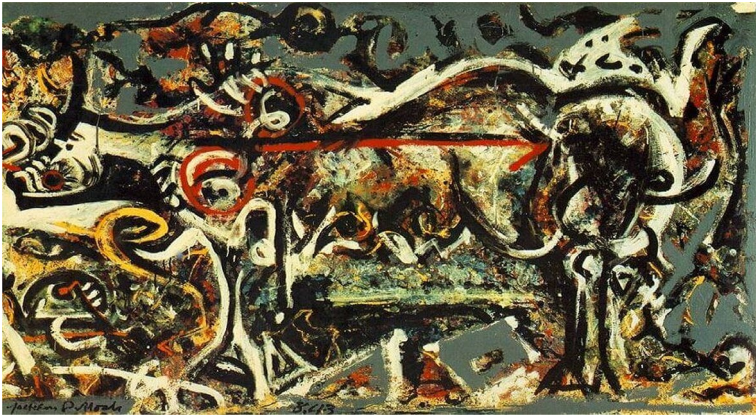
The relationship between the beautiful and the silence is based on their symbolic character, which makes it possible to equate the experience of silence with the feeling of the beautiful as a non-inferential cognitive capacity. The opportunity of speaking of feeling as sensation makes it possible to ground the perceptual basis of the beautiful and of silence. In this way, both the natural and social dimensions are connected. In the case of aesthetic experience, as long as it lasts, the agent can *contemplate* the totality of the world (Gadamer, 1998: 32–33). The epistemic basis lies in the fact that aesthetic experience happens in particular cases that are understood as fragments of reality, so that they also *promise*, on the one hand, to be able to integrate with the reality to which they belong and, on the other hand, that there is at least another fragment to complete (*ibidem*).

Therefore, Gadamer's conception of the symbolic refers to the experience of contemplating the totality of the world, which offers an *immediate* (Gadamer, 1998: 32) and *indeterminate* (Gadamer, 1998: 31) frame of reference that is superimposed on habitual experience and allows us to understand the particular from the perspective of a generality, whose possibility lies in the fact that it can be thought and understood. The value of this experience is that it does not refer to the object that is perceived but to its meaning. It must be kept in mind that Gadamer is addressing the question of the justification of art, particularly since 1900 onwards, in which exponents such as cubism, surrealism, and dadaism challenged the notion of reference. In this context, the form of the represented figure became more critical (Gadamer, 1998: 8).

Gadamer calls this figure *Anbild*: 'the vision (*Anblick*) of the image and the image (*Bild*) itself' (Gadamer, 1998: 17–18). The reflection behind the concept of *Anbild* is that the aesthetic experience is based on *alterity*: that is, there are as many images as there are interpreters, and all of them are equally valid and acceptable fragments of reality. The assumed validity of each *Anbild* is because *the aspect structure of the interpretation (Die Aspekthaftigkeit der Interpretation)* is socially conditioned (Bohnsack, 1999). In this sense,

<sup>8</sup> See Sect. 4.

<sup>9</sup> One of Gadamer's most exciting contributions to Hermeneutics was not to consider it a mere method but a form of experience, that is, without expertise (see Gadamer 2006; Mishara 2010: 607–19n).



**Fig. 3** Jackson Pollock, 1943, *The She-Wolf*. Recovered from <https://www.wikiart.org/en/jackson-pollock/the-she-wolf>

the *Anbild* captures the idea that, during the process of aesthetic experience, the image is extracted along with what each one figures through it (Gadamer, 1998: 14). Thus, the characteristic gap of aesthetic interpretation is the reaction to art between the experience of the agent, the object, and reality.

This circumstance can be better understood through a semiotic interpretation of the hermeneutic experience of art.<sup>10</sup> This step is essential to characterize what silence means and how it is experienced and known. First of all, it is important to remember that the limits of semiotically characterizing art as an icon and as a sign which maintain a resemblance relationship between the interpreter and the object, such as a map or model, are not unknown (see Eco, 1979: § 3.5). For this reason, the risky decision is taken here to consider the work of art as a symbol. This means considering that art is not the finished work but its experience. From the semiotic point of view, a distinction must be made between the immediateness of perception and the mediatedness of interpretation (Rudner, 1951).

In this sense, the symbolic can be understood as the cognitive dimension (emotions, feelings, etc.) present during the aesthetic experience (see Langer, 1954). Take the painting *The She-Wolf* by Jackson Pollock (Fig. 3). One way to explain the understanding of a work of abstract art is to consider that the work (*Anbild*) is understood through the sociocultural symbols present in the way each agent is affected by the art.

Then, all interpretations will be *de facto* correct representations of the symbology that composes each socially and culturally shared cosmivision. An example is the difference between the patterns that each people have used to draw constellations (Karimova, et al., 2012). This perspective allows transforming the referential gap between the experience and the object into an opportunity. This opportunity can be understood from two poles that are not necessarily separated. On the one hand, the (mediated) interpretation complements the (immediate) perception of the sociocultural patterns of the cosmivision to which the agent belongs. In this sense, the opportunity is to bridge the gap between the new experience and the others that make up an agent's inner life. Likewise, the gap between experiences

<sup>10</sup> Although the path was chosen for the argument in the context of the interpretation of art, it must be kept in mind that *aesthetics* also encompasses the descriptive and qualitative dimensions of sensible perception.

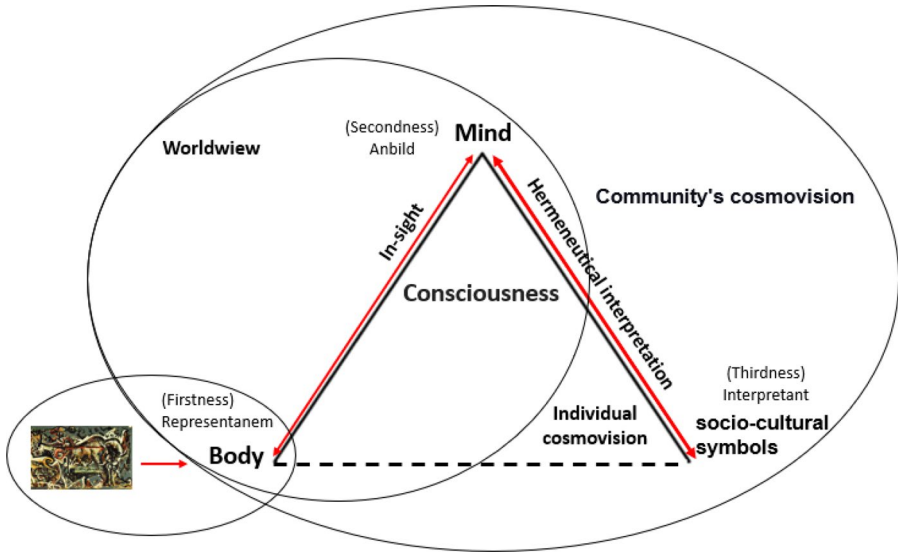


Fig. 4 Hermeneutic-semiotic model of visual perception

sometimes turns the opportunity into a new way of interpretation during the bridging process (Fig. 4).

## 2.4 The Hermeneutic-Semiotic Implementation to the Symbology of the Music and the Sound

One of the most relevant advantages of considering the object of aesthetic experience as a symbol is that the resemblance criterion (iconicity) can be dispensed with, which leads to the possibility of analyzing experiences without defined references. Abstract art has been the example taken above. Furthermore, the observation of nature can be considered: the understanding of which often involves conceptualizing it through the *sociocultural* patterns of the cosmivision from which it is thought and lived. Another advantage of this perspective is that it allows approaching perception from other senses where reference is a secondary matter, such as hearing. This section approaches the hermeneutic-semiotic model of perception, first of music and then of sound in general. Finally, a transition to the experimentation of silence is proposed.

The semiotic approach to music tries to study and characterize the system of distribution of the message to the code (Dunsby, 1983: 36). Considering that the code of musical articulation is of great complexity (*ibid.*: 28), this article focuses exclusively on semiotics as the study of the totality of symbolic associations: the virtual structure (the complete musical work) and the perceived structure (*ibid.*: 42). This point of departure allows us to distance ourselves from the more specialized inquiry of musical semiotics. This strategy is reasonable because it is only necessary to define the agents' perception of music for the main objective of this work. For this reason, it is possible to apply to this case the same guiding principle of this work: music is an acoustic phenomenon that is perceived within socially acquired cultural patterns.

Assuming that the world is primarily acoustic, some sounds are conceived as music, and others are not. As has been said, although there are natural reasons to explain tonal preferences and to perceive rhythm, its crystallization is social and cultural. Without this dimension, it would be impossible to explain the classification of these sounds like music. Therefore, it is necessary to go a step further than the study based on the relationship between cultural norms and conventions with the nature of structuralist inquiries in ethnomusicology (Dunsby, 1983: 23) and characterize the influence of sociocultural patterns on perception.

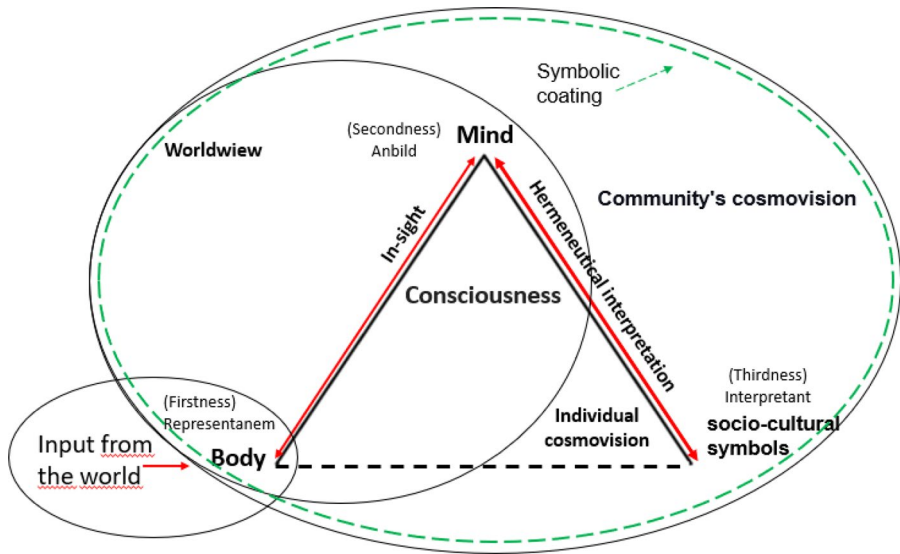
From a hermeneutic perspective, the symbolic can be understood as the cognitive dimension affected by the sociocultural patterns of the cosmovision in which the agent lives. However, this assertion would be highly complicated to defend in a work in which the object would be the music, since the arbitrariness of symbolic relations seems to go against a characterization of a code (Monelle, 1992: 30). On the contrary, it is excellent for approaching the perspective of an agent's experience of listening to music.

### 2.4.1 Music Sounding as a Constant-Open *Anbild*

One way to explain the experience and understanding of music is to consider the musical work as a *constant-open Anbild* that is interpreted through the sociocultural symbols present in how each agent is affected. The reason for characterizing the *Anbild* as *constantly open* is that the ability to generate content in the consciousness of music is based on its "nothingness" or, in other words, on its absence of meaning (Monelle, 1992: 21). It is about a circumstance inherent to music perception and its interpretation. Therefore, the claim is that the content does not come from the music but from what the music suggests in the particular circumstance in which it is perceived.

In other words, music affects the perception of the environment. For example, if one walks down the street listening to Tchaikovsky's *The Year 1812, Solemn Overture, Op. 49*, it is quite possible that one can feel the same emotions one has when watching the end of the film *V for Vendetta* (McTeigue, 2005). This circumstance affects perception to the extent that it also affects the movements and interaction of the environment in general. When people map the environment as they listen to music, 'the body and mind enter a 'motor resonance' state with the stimulus, encoding a perception of 'motor intention'.' (Raposo, et al., 2021). Within an ecologically situated conception of cognition, it can be seen that the conceptualization of the environment occurs through the manipulation of artifacts and devices and the interaction with other agents. The result of these relationships is the context, which is understood as open because it is transformed to the extent that one lives (interacts) in it.

From this perspective, music can be understood as a cognitive tool that emotionally enhances affordances, such as the values and meanings of the things people perceive, which offer us opportunities for action in terms of *ecological facts* (Magnani & Bardone, 2010): human cognitive behaviors that transform the natural environment into a cognitive one with delegations of cognitive representations (see footnote 1). These emotions semiotically both signify (symbolize) and are signified (symbolized) during perception, giving rise to new experiences. This circumstance can be characterized without much trouble with the semiotic proliferation of signification: while the music sounds, perception acquires a *symbolic coating* that signifies the experiences from the emotions (Fig. 5). In other words, music qualitatively symbolizes experiences through an influence on perception. Thus, there is a relationship between music listening and movement, which provides a biological basis for arguing a link between acoustics, movements, and emotions (Reybrouck, 2013).



**Fig. 5** Music listening influences sensory perception through emotional modification (mood, feelings, etc.)

It should be clear that this is an influence stripped of referent, in which the associated images recede and fade away, giving way to those accompanying new experiences. It must be taken into account that the auditory experience may be accompanied by others, such as the visual, even in situations of attention focused on what is heard. For this reason, two fragments of the same piece of music may provoke goosebumps in totally different situations. The example mentioned above from the dystopian political action movie and a simple trip to buy bread are experiences that have left a memorable mark thanks to the emotional meaning. This means that this influence lasts as long as the music sounds until it decreases and finally ceases.

The musical experience (*Anbild*) is presented as an opportunity. As introduced at the end of the previous section, (mediated) interpretation adds to the (immediate) perception of the sociocultural patterns of the cosmivision to which the agent belongs. On the one hand, mediation is one of the main functions of this mechanism and consists in bridging the gap between the current experience and the others that make up the agent's life. For example, it is quite possible that whenever one listens to *1812 Overture* (in present time), sensations associated with the memory of the time one walked to buy bread and some image of the scene of the movie will occur. On the other hand, the evocative character of this mechanism constitutes the experience resulting from immediate (current) musical perception as a novelty.

The musical perception can generate an experience partly based on an evoked memory, and, on the other hand, this evoked memory will be reinterpreted during the everyday experience. This process of re-signification can be situated in episodic memory: a (neurocognitive) memory system that allows humans to recall and recognize past events in the present (Tulving, 2002). Memory is constructed, but this does not mean we construct it. Instead, it is biologically based and tends to be goal-directed for specific purposes (Fivush, 2010). This capacity can also be understood as a cognitive strategy that tends to



be repeated throughout life, placing in memory relevant markers (episodes) for constructing each agent's biography.

Of course, this circumstance does not occur exclusively with music listening but is extensible to any sound that has the evocative force explained by the musical examples. One of the examples proposed has been the sound of bells, but others are even more personal, contributing to generalizing the agent's personal life. For example, some sounds evoke intimate experiences (episodes), such as the *bubble* of a soup on the fire, which evokes an entire situation: the grandmother cooking, the smell, the wind, the rays of the sun passing through the glass, etc. Also, if an agent has this experience in a restaurant, the food likely tastes much better than in other circumstances, even if it is not the same as what *your* grandmother was cooking. Therefore, this capacity to re-signify a current experience also influences the context in which it occurs.

Thus, music and sounds can come to influence agents without actually sounding. By the simple fact of being remembered, the evocation can affect bodily movements that try to adapt to a rhythm that is not sounding. This form of influencing must be considered symbolic because it only has a presence through an acquired form of evoking and living the memory in the present. Therefore, although it can be stated that there is a practically infinite horizon of interpretations based on the adaptation of the immediate and mediate experiences of an agent's life, this, in turn, is limited by the natural determinations and the *sociocultural* patterns of the human being. Both, possibility and limit, define the cognitive niche through the actions of agents within the particular environment.

For this reason, certain sounds define an environment and others do not. Although it can be said that the human being perceives, to some extent, the totality of the constant flow of information that surrounds them, the experience crystallizes over many other processes, which finally define what is called *reality*.

Some sounds requalify the environment precisely because they are present for an agent. Therefore, they are sounds that tend to modify the cognitive niche. For this reason, the notion of *symbolic coating* has been introduced: the perception of these sounds generates a *subenvironment of the environment*. The following section attempts to reproduce and adapt this hermeneutic-semiotic perspective applied to musical perception to the *symbolized perception of silence*. The main objective is to show how sound and silence act as cognitive tools for activating strategies to understand the environment. The crucial difference addressed in the following section is that silence has no natural object, so its symbolization could be understood as a genuine form of cosmovision expansion.

### 3 Symbolized Perception of Silence

Silence is experienced without perception in the usual sense. As already introduced, there is no object with which to apply any resemblance criterion. This circumstance may well be explained through the sociocultural patterns that intervene semiotically in the agents' interpretation of the environment. The central tension of comparing sounds with silence is that the latter has no "natural object." However, this theoretical and general statement seems to contradict the personal experience of silence. This is the paradox this article began: even if silence does not exist (the world is acoustic), it is real. The characterization of silence as *Anbild* has served precisely to identify and speak of silence without, on the one hand, falling into an apophatic discourse and, on the other hand, relaxing the problem of characterizing the perception of this phenomenon. The *Anbild*, the interpretation of the object as

the very object of experience, shows that there is no symbol without interpretation and that interpretation is always a symbol.

With the example of the controversy surrounding the chiming of bells, it has been seen that the sounds that define an environment are part of the community's cosmovision because they signify part of their lives. This means that sociocultural patterns semiotically mediate the ways of knowing the world. The symbolic dimension has been introduced from hermeneutics to explain how the cognitive dimension is affected by these patterns. In this sense, the recognition (conscious or unconscious) of other elements (sounds, objects, etc.) means an increase in each agent's individual cosmovision. On the contrary, their silence or disappearance does not imply a decrease. The affectation of the sociocultural patterns that define the community's cosmovision occurs during the different activities that the agents carry out in their environment. Therefore, the cessation or disappearance of something leaves a symbolic space with which one interacts.

In some of these situations, a silence arises spontaneously in the face of the cessation of a sound that was being perceived. There are also situations of disengagement (for example, breaking a habit, an expectation, etc.), which provoke silence. Similarly, silence has been postulated as a requirement, mechanism, or way to acquire knowledge of different kinds. Likewise, there are situations in which silence is a way of communicating a message. Finally, some silences are imposed for different reasons and circumstances. All this leads to the conclusion that silence is a cognitive tool over which we do not always have control, although it can certainly be a sought-after resource. And the reason for this is that through silence, genuine cognitive strategies are activated to understand the environment to the extent that our cosmovision expands. It will be considered that silence is also a natural resource of the human being to distinguish this circumstance, which is explained in the following section through the *phenomenology of the landscape*.

### 3.1 The Phenomenological Analysis of Silence from the Notion of *Fûdo*

The phenomenology of the landscape is the anthropological approach of the Japanese philosopher *Tetsuro Watsuji* (和辻 哲郎). The central thesis of this theory is that there is an intimate union of climate and culture, which is ideal for the approach of the notion of silence offered here. Watsuji calls this circumstance *fûdo* (風土),<sup>11</sup> and it is because climate and culture are closely linked to the fact that human life occurs within the framework of certain territories surrounding each agent. These territories (landscapes) could be understood as a natural habitat that is environmentally determined. In this sense, the environment is understood as the set of phenomena produced by the influences of practical activities and biological affectations (Watsuji, 2016: 23).

This perspective can be integrated into an externalist theory of cognition with some nuances. Watsuji takes the Heideggerian meaning of existing (*ex-sistere*), *Dasein* (being-there) in a way that allows understanding consciousness as a fundamental structure of human cognition (c.f., Watsuji, 2016: 26–27). In other words, consciousness is world-oriented because agents do not experience in isolation but are always linked to geography

<sup>11</sup> In this work, the translation of *Fûdo* as landscape suggested in the Spanish translation (supervised by Watsuji's disciple, Yasuo Yuasa) is taken. "Fûdo" is composed of two ideograms: "wind" and "earth," which designate climate and culture (see Watsuji, 2016: 9–14). In this sense, when landscape is mentioned in the text, the climate (the environment), and culture (the socially and culturally modulated and mediated behaviors) are also contemplated factors.



and climate (Watsuji, 2016: 28). Therefore, the changes that each of us produces in our environment, in turn, also affect and modify us. One of the fundamental forms of affectation is implicit in our actions: the culture mediated through the society we come from that crystallizes in the autobiography of each of us. In this sense, all these dimensions are added to the experience.

On the one hand, knowing implies applying categories, models, strategies, etc., to capture and conceptualize the environment. On the other hand, during these processes, we also feel, for example, we get excited, we enjoy, or we have a bad time. Both cases complement each other and define the human experience, which, besides being affected by what surrounds it, also complements the landscape (*fûdo*) in which each one lives and shares with the rest of human beings. The example proposed by Watsuji is the cold, which *is not only felt but we are also in it*. For this perspective to be articulated, it is necessary to assume intentionality in mental states. Thus, the experience of cold is not separated from its cause, but the sensation places the agent in the coldness of the environment. In other words, one exists in the cold.

In this sense, *fûdo* complements the three phenomenological categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness. As stated, these categories articulate the triadic semiotic relation and, in particular in this paper, symbolization as *Anbild* (hermeneutics). Watsuji's meaning of Dasein can easily be identified as the condition for firstness to occur: the felt quality in which the agent exists. Then, secondness, understood as the possible actualizations of this felt quality manifested in another object situated in the frame of experience that will give rise to another object, would correspond to landscape. Finally, thirdness understood as the experience conceptualized under the mantle of the sociocultural cosmovision semiotically shared with the community in which one lives would correspond to culture.

The advantage of introducing the notion of *fûdo* can be better understood through the case of cold. Strictly, cold does not exist but is the sensation of the absence of heat. However, human beings do exist in the cold as a quality that is felt (firstness) on different objects (secondness) determined by the cultural framework (thirdness). Therefore, to consider that cold is a component of the climate that defines a landscape, it is necessary to understand that its subjective sensation is culturally defined. In other words, the subjective sensation is mediated intersubjectively with the rest of the community which, in turn, is defined by each of the interpretations of each of the agents. The similarity between both is culturally based and shows two fundamental facts: (1) the environment is lived historically, and (2) the body is part of the environment it inhabits.

On the one hand, this means that the landscape is constitutive of the body in the sense that the subjectivity of each agent is also the subjectivity (experience) of the landscape. For example, the climate is an extension of the human body, which, for example, is cold. On the other hand, the landscape is also constitutive of human life. The cultural ways of meaning and living in the cold are conditioned by its natural way of happening, which forces human beings to build a life around the climatic circumstances that define the landscape (cf., Watsuji, 2016: 34–35). For example, building structures make the Nature habitable (Prieto, 2019). Likewise, the degree to which these landscape circumstances occur defines how the climate is lived (understood).

Reference is made to history in a broad sense that incorporates the intimacy of traditions, religions (beliefs in general), and myths that influence the habits that finally structure societies. In other words, the line between object and subject is blurred, thus highlighting the intimate relationship between the subjective experience of the agent and his environment since both are shaped by past events and current circumstances, which, in the end,

propose possible futures. This circumstance, which could be defined in a single word with the word *exist*, is the agent's worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

The cold influences the designs of buildings, clothing, and the rest of the artifacts with which human beings survive. Likewise, the —cold— landscape defines routines and the way of interacting with the environment. Eating habits, the way of relating to others (what is considered near or far, where are the rivers, pastures, etc.), the basic knowledge one must have to develop a life in the cold, etc., are also examples of the influence of the environment on human life. In the same way, all the actions and strategies that human beings carry out define the environment as their surroundings and, finally, as part of their history (in a broad sense of the term). In other words, there are no natural and cultural phenomena; climate and culture are interrelated and mediated by humans inhabiting a particular landscape (environment) (c.f., Watsuji, 2016: 31).

In presenting Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, it has been explained through Pollock's picture that, on the one hand, there are as many interpretations as there are images (experiences). On the other hand, the legitimacy of these experiences comes from the generally shared sociocultural framework (the cosmovision). It has also been said that there is a semantic gap in interpretation in relation (and reaction) to the agent's object experience and reality. This gap distinguishes the perception of the immediate, indeterminate frame of reference that is superimposed on habitual experience and subsequent interpretation (mediation). This theory is fruitful for the present work because it allows placing the meaning as the focus of the —aesthetic— experience and not the object (work of art). It is to be expected that all experience is real. This "expectation" comes from the fact that experiences "promise" integration with the agent's cosmovision through its "working" in it. So, it is reasonable for the agent to consider that their experiences complete at least a piece of reality.

These two factors have made it possible to relate Gadamer's reflections on the beautiful as a symbolic experience to the research on silence. By characterizing the experience of silence as symbolic, it is possible to understand it as a sensation (c.f., Corbin, 2021: 18). This characterization does not exhaust the horizon of the meaning of silence. However, it does make it possible to understand the experience of silence as a non-inferential cognitive capacity situated at the basis of perception. This cognitive capacity is identified with the symbolic coating that modifies perception as long as the silence lasts. *Fûdo* theory complements this perspective allowing us to understand silence as a *coating landscape*<sup>12</sup> that acts as a cognitive tool of sociocultural appropriation of the environment.

During the experimentation in silence, it happens that an exclusively cultural phenomenon symbolizes the environment in a different way than usual. In other words, for a given duration, the agent imposes on the environment the cosmological dimension from which it comes. Like the wave of the sea that spreads out and wets the sand and then returns to its usual course, when the silence ceases, it leaves an imprint on the agent: the fragment of reality that, among other things, promises to be able to complement the vision of the world. In this trace or fragment, I identify the semantic gap from which the agent offers an interpretation that expands the cosmovision.

<sup>12</sup> Corbin refers to silence as an *ambiance* (2021: 20).

## 4 Silence as an Interaction Cognitive Tool

With what has been said so far, it is much more evident how perception is a process of situated information so that the environment plays a determining role in how we perceive. Not only because cognitive processes are mainly distributed but also because living in an environment means being part of the final conception we have of it (the landscape). The three perspectives used in this paper (semiotics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology) defend the same general thesis: There is a relevance of agents' actions in the context of the cognitive process of experiencing.

As introduced, silence can play an essential role in dealing with situations that have gotten out of control: situations of unawareness in which silence serves as a response that does not claim any knowledge. In other words, silence allows the application of a series of strategies to cope with the uncertainty caused by the ambiguity of the circumstances experienced. The situations mentioned are those that 1) are lived in uncertainty and 2) are solved in uncertainty. Therefore, their solution does not provide any explanation for the ambiguity.

In this sense, there are two factors to take into account. First, that silence can be used as a tool means that there is a form of learning. Second, the fact that more than one use and similar applications contain variations marked by cultural traits indicates that none of these practices exhausts their possibilities. This paper proposes the tacit knowledge of living together in a community to learn the uses of silence in the intuitive sense, expressed by Polanyi with the ingenious sentence: We can know more than we can tell (Polanyi, 2009: 4). In this sense, it has been considered a quasi-automatic mechanism: it is triggered as an instinct but, as a reaction acquired as a habit to breaking another habit, it can be voluntarily stopped.

As has been said, silence is a strictly cultural element, so we must start from a cultural understanding of it. The sociocultural framework that influences the subject is how silence becomes a cognitive tool or resource. Likewise, silence as a tool of modulation of social reality can also be considered a tool of axiologization of society:

[...] is a moral system of value-commitments that delineate which actions are prohibited, and which actions are necessary for specific tasks. [...] it also delineates a sense of life and world, provides perceptions. [...] The analysis of narratives that substantiate a collective axiology provides the criteria for individuating all the threats and their permissible responses, to punish group members that deviate, and to react against out-group challenges of (good or bad) actions and events (Magnani, 2011: 139).

This means that, apart from the fact that sounds can cease (or cease to be perceived), silence operates according to social rules that directly influence agents' narratives and, therefore, it is a phenomenon that plays a fundamental role in the formation of consciousness and autobiographical memory (Nelson & Fivush, 2020). As noted, memory is a biological construct over which we agents have no control and tends to be directed to particular targets in particular situations. Conversely, narratives are culturally established linguistic forms that modulate the argumentation of lived events.

That is, narratives provide a sequence superimposed on the course of events within the folk psychology that imbricates the actions of subjects with human thoughts, motivations, and emotions (Fivush, 2010: 89) under the spectrum of the same sociocultural framework. In other words, a narrative provides an account of what happened from the personal point of view (meaning and evaluation) of the particular agent to whom it belongs. The product

of both factors is what has been referred to here as a social reality. From this perspective, just as it has been stated that the sounds that are an integral part of an environment are determined by strictly social and cultural factors and elements, it can also be said that the silences are constitutive of the notion of landscape introduced.

In terms of interaction between agents in a community, silence is usually the absence of verbal communication. This strategy is associated with situations in which the status of the participants is ambiguous. In this regard, it is essential to distinguish between being silent and being silenced. In a general sense, silencing acquires the same nuances as silence when it emerges as a resource for incorporating natural phenomena into the cosmovision through the agents' signification. Applied to social interactions, silence here is concerned with managing the circumstances of ambiguity produced by the breaking of a habit.

Six exemplary cases of habit-breaking management through silence from the Apache community recompiled by Basso (1970) are taken to explain this meaning of silence: (1) meeting strangers, (2) courtship, (3) 'Children, coming home,' (4) when a member of the community mistreats others because he is angry, (5) to deal with sad people and, finally, (6) as a ritualistic "ingredient" for the cure of soul diseases. These situations are anomalous and are addressed with silence to deal with them in one way or another. It is interesting to note that each use of silence is an expression of the meaning that this phenomenon acquires within the cosmovision of a community.

The first case (Basso, 1970: 217–218), presents the interaction with strangers as an anomalous situation that is coped with through silence. Assuming that verbal communication is a social component, silence acts as a provisional strategy while observing the stranger. The courtship ritual is analyzed in the second case (*ibid.*: 218–219). In these situations, silence is a resource for managing shyness in the face of unfamiliarity. Silence is a provisional tool that acts in the early stages of getting to know the other. In the third case (*ibid.*: 219–221), silence is analyzed as a management of the children's return to the community for school vacations. In these cases, the children are expected to talk while the elders observe the impact and influence that institutional education has exerted on their children. In the fourth case (*ibid.*: 221–224), the breaking of the habit of interacting with angry people is discussed. In these cases, silence is a helpful resource while waiting until the person calms down and can be talked to again. The fifth case (*ibid.*: 222–224) is silence as a way of being with people saddened by someone's death. In these situations, silence is a provisional attitude as long as the sad person does not show signs that he or she is ready to return to the community. Finally, in the sixth case (*ibid.*: 224–225), silence is an ingredient in ceremonies to cure someone who has been disrespectful to a source (natural elements or phenomena, dangerous objects or taboos). Only the healer can communicate as long as the person suffers from this evil.

All the above cases are anomalous situations that are managed with silence due to their ambiguity.<sup>13</sup> This resource is used as a temporary patch organized based on the community's social dynamics, in which it is applied to normalize the situation. For example, the case of silence accompanying a person in mourning is based on the assumption that saying

<sup>13</sup> However, there is a distinction in the way this silence is given that the anonymous reviewer 5 has brought to my attention. An intimate silence could be affirmed as a gesture in front of an anomalous situation that has no response, as the most profound sense of mourning can be equated to the inordinate amazement that sometimes happens at the sight of a sunrise. At the same time, mourning is a socioculturally defined ritual in which silence is reasonable as a matter of manners (sometimes oriented to the good development of an activity, as in the case of libraries).

something is out of place. Likewise, cases such as that of the children when they return home show how silence serves to introduce, share and even broaden the cosmivision of the parents who, to evaluate and speak again, need to understand what they hear. Finally, silence as a temporary strategy to manage abnormal attitudes is also a way to avoid the dangers that some anomalous behaviors may imply. Silence is triggered as a resource for its redefinition and adaptation to the sociocultural framework when a conflict arises in the usual chain of events. Societies are a dynamic construction in which culture flows together with narratives that imbricate subjects' actions with human thoughts, motivations, and emotions. This flow occurs between agents and their personal lives. In this sense, every action is a social manifestation of cultural baggage. Thus, narratives define the memory and autobiography of the agents.

However, there are occasions when this circumstance occurs only among a small number of people in a community: when silence is imposed as a mechanism of invisibilization. This refers to silencing, caused by one or more forms of elitist and racist discrimination consisting of ethnocentric attitudes that act as mechanisms of power that, while cohesionizing one group of the community, segregate another (Magnani, 2016: §4.2). Then, narratives are the expressions that structure *the life scripts* (forms of life) (Fivush, 2010: 94–95). In this sense, narratives are carriers of assumptions and biases that come from the form of life. Concerning to the dominant form of life, it is easy to see how its narratives can end up silencing other minority narratives precisely because of the prejudices and assumptions that come with being considered dominant. In other words, the *expression* of a form of life, of identity, is avoided.

Therefore, only a narrative is silenced and not a form of life, so silencing always generates a "silenced narrative." Even if a form of life ceases to have the capacity for expression, it continues to exist in the cosmivision that makes it invisible from a distance, the disaffection and, often, the dissidence that its marginalization forces. For this reason, silence can constitute a critical element when people uses it: people who may be silenced in some contexts may acquire a voice in others. In other words, showing silence can explain the injustice of silencing in the sense that "gaps define form" (Braham, 1995). As mentioned, narratives define the memory and autobiography of agents: a conflict with the usual chain of events or dominant discourse will trigger a recourse to silence as a strategy to redefine narratives from dissent. There is a relationship between what we remember (memory) and how we remember it (narrative) (Fivush, 2010: 96). In this sense, both dimensions of remembering provide the agent with a frame of reference to explain and evaluate the linearity in which events occur. In the process of knowing the facts, actions are mixed with ways of perceiving and ordering the environment (usually based on casual patterns). The narration adds what happened from an interpersonal perspective, even though *I am* not directly involved in the event being explained.

To explain this phenomenon, we take as a starting point the influence of the imagined collective on the narratives of the agents. It is possible to understand the link between biography, history, society and its structures, and the relationship between the public and the private from a sociological point of view (Sans Pinillos, 2023). The aforementioned social reality is the combination of these factors. These social factors give rise to a unique memory through multiple complex cognitive processes. For example, the agent presents himself from different perspectives through his autobiographical consciousness and autobiographical memory (Nelson & Fivush, 2020). This section has addressed the cases in which the anomalous behavior breaks the usual chain of events of the "people with a voice" in the community and the cases in which the "silenced people" use silence to generate dissident

narratives to have representation in the community. Both cases are managing social habits, either restoring or breaking them.

Thus, the anonymous relationship to a habit cannot be considered an absolute fact. Although the experience of ambiguity indicates that the situation is becoming confused, this signal begins to manifest itself within a context that, although particular, is entirely understandable within the usual chain of events. Within this gradual process, silence is activated at some point precisely so that the confusion is not total. The primary function is to seal off the experience so that it is perceived and confronted as anomalous. These situations are triggered when expectations lose their anticipatory force and, consequently, the illusion of predictability in interactions is lost. Without knowing very well what will happen, a provisional control strategy is applied that blocks the critical moment prior to the need for its strategy and lasts so long as long as the confusion is reduced.

Thus, there are good reasons to consider that habit-breaking is understandable and that strategies to manage it are like "second-order habits" applied as tacitly learned rules based on conventional common knowledge (cf. Lewis, 2002). In conclusion, ambiguity is a familiar social phenomenon that is potentially assumed in most activities. Taking Aumann's agreement theorem (Aumann, 1976) as a reference, it could be said that the experience of silence plays a constitutive sociocultural role. This can be better understood by taking the example of bells, artifacts technologically designed to make noise that is not experienced as such in the host community. Conversely, many outsiders may need technological methods to isolate the carving of the bells and remain in a silent space according to the inherent patterns of their community. In other words, silence not only signifies an experience but conditions people's practices according to their sociocultural use, determining even factors that seem as distant as the technological development and design of habitable environments.

This mechanism is highly contextual. On the one hand, silence will only be activated when the situation requires it, and, on the other hand, its detonation implies a new context: an anomalous one. In this article, it has been considered valid to characterize silence as a strategy for handling ambiguous situations using Mead's concept of *gesture*: as the initial phase of a social act of communication that acts as a stimulus (Odin, 1996: 365). From this perspective, the response to the stimulus would mean the gesture. The final consequence is that discrimination ends up being part of the cosmovision of the silenced collective precisely because that discrimination is part of the general cosmovision of society. Therefore, the experiences of a member of this group are based on the discrimination of being silenced. The narrative allows us to define (in the present) the silenced voice as a voice that *should* be heard (future) and should never have been silenced (past).

When this occurs, silenced voices break the dominant cosmovision, and the first seeds of change germinate. Silence offers an alternative template with which the agents can reenact with themselves in the face of a habit-breaking situation. It is important to note that, without going into the topic of their justice, minorities are often silenced because the majority sees them as the cause of breaking their habits (*status quo*). In this sense, silencing can be understood as an anomaly management strategy for cases of ambiguity management among the voiced and the silenced who struggle to have a voice, for example, when silence becomes a gesture to show the injustice suffered. From this perspective, silence is a new frame of reference from which to resignify oneself socioculturally and another way of defining an autobiography.

The fundamental role of perception can be understood from silence using the idea that our actions determine the environment. In both situations, the silence before the experience of the rupture of the usual chain of events and the experience from the silenced narrative,

silence acts as a provisional cognitive strategy to manage the anomalies. During this process, the agents know the environment in a different way than usual, being able to understand what surrounds them from a purely sociocultural dimension. In short, from silence, the natural environment is understood from the sociocultural cosmovision that defines the agents' modes of experience.

## 5 Conclusions: Silence is a Sociocultural-Based Cognitive Tool to Comprehend the Environment

As has been said, silence is experienced without perception in the usual sense because there is no specific object with which to apply any resemblance criteria. This circumstance may well be explained through the sociocultural patterns that intervene semiotically in the agents' interpretation of the environment. The characterization of silence as *Anbild* (the interpretation of the object as the very object of experience) has shown that there is no symbol without interpretation and that interpretation is always a symbol. This topic has been approached from the hermeneutic conception of the symbolic dimension in order to explain how cognition is affected by these patterns. In this sense, the conscious or unconscious perception of silence affects these sociocultural patterns, which define the community's cosmovision through the agents' activities in their immediate environment. Therefore, as long as it lasts, silence generates a cognitive niche different from the usual one. This is because the total or partial cessation of sounds leaves a symbolic space with which to interact.

Let us take the typical case of abandoned places and ruins in which 'the specific quality of the silence of the ruins (...) is sufficient in itself to trigger an immersion in the past that they keep alive' (Corbin, 2021: 38). The silence perceived in these places goes hand in hand with the current sociocultural value we place on them. In a figurative sense, it could be said that it is the structure that imbues us with silence:

It managed in fact to emerge from every object within his range of vision, as if it — the silence— meant to supplant all things tangible. Hence it assailed not only his ears but his eyes; as he stood by inert TV set he experienced the silence as visible and, in its own way, alive. Alive! He had often felt its austere approach before; when it came it burst in without subtlety, evidently unable to wait (Dick, 1988: 15).

Fear, concern, veneration, respect, and even uncertainty propitiate that silence becomes a strategic tool to manage the lived experience. Indeed, understanding the environment is more profound than simply contemplating half-ruined structures (c.f., Corbin, 2021: 39). Consider, for example, sacred places or places of respect. Let us take the following paragraph from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg*) to introduce these cases:

[...] he seemed to smell the cool, earthy air of the cult of St. Michael's or Saint Katharine's; the breath of regions where one went hat in hand, the head reverently bowed, walking weavingly on the tips of one's toes; seemed, too, to hear the remote and set-apart hush of those echoing places. Religious feeling mingled in his mind with thoughts of death and a sense of history, as he listened to the somber syllable; he received therefrom an ineffable gratification (Mann, 1969: 24).



The landscape (context) is an extension of the human body. This means that the context (landscape) is constitutive of the body in the sense that each agent's subjectivity is also the context's subjectivity (experience), while the context is constitutive of human life. The cultural forms of meaning and living in silence are *prima facie* determined by their natural way of occurring, but it is modulated by the cultural meaning given to them. This characterization does not exhaust the horizon of the meaning of silence but allows us to understand its experience as a non-inferential cognitive capacity located at the base of perception. This cognitive capacity is identified with the symbolic coating that modifies perception while silence lasts: a stimulus that suggests a particular gesture as a different action from the usual one to deal with the environment, the landscape, or the context.

All this leads to the conclusion that silence is a cognitive tool over which we do not always have control, although it can be a sought-after resource. Through silence, authentic cognitive strategies are activated to understand the environment to the extent that the cosmovision is expanded. For this reason, it has been considered that the phenomenon of silence constitutes a natural resource of cultural basis through which the human being can symbolize the environment. What is experienced under the circumstances of silence leaves a trace that lasts even after it ceases. This trace is information obtained differently in the same context where the usual (acoustic) experience is given, thus holding the promise of complementing the cosmovision. In this sense, each agent interpretation is some way to fulfill the promise to be able to integrate the silence experienced with the reality to which they belong. In conclusion, it constitutes an extension of their individual cosmovision and, in the long run, of the general cosmovision of the community to which they belong.

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