

Epistemologies of Silence

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Abstract

This paper engages some of the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of silence, and its implications for teaching and learning both within and beyond educational settings. In this exploration, the authors draw on self-reflexive observations, woven throughout the paper as a series of vignettes, to explore questions of silence and its impacts on their respective teaching, research, and professional practice. Similarly, the authors apply this approach while taking into consideration different expressions and meanings of silence and how this can offer new understanding of culture and identity, including social and political issues, through arts, performance, and arts-based research.

Keywords: silence; epistemology; autoethnography; reflexivity; praxis

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“Speaking in and through stories then becomes a way to engage self-transformation, a kind of rite of passage.”

-Marie Battiste, *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Leaning Spirit*, 2013, p. 17

It is plausible that silence carries many implications for teaching and learning, within and beyond educational settings, while raising the following question: Who is or is not given the space or a platform to “speak,” and who is listening? Similarly, for those who may or may not choose to communicate through words, body language or other forms of expression, another question emerges: Are they still being heard? Invariably, the notion of silence is rather nuanced as it can serve or be used for political, social and cultural acts. Arguably, such acts of silence can potentially represent or enact forms of oppression or resistance. Therefore, how does the making of silence or the creation of sound perpetuate articulations of colonialism, and is it possible to subvert silence in a manner that it becomes a modality for resistance? Suffice it to say when considering these questions, it is crucial to understand what types of silence are being created, when and where, and what are the consequences or outcomes of these manifestations?

Silence or lack thereof does not necessarily imply that it will carry similar meanings across time and place, or situation even. Silence is forever subject to shift and change, regardless of context and circumstance. For instance, within the context of an artistic work and practice, the notion of silence could easily mean one thing to a composer or musician, while something entirely different to a playwright or performance artist. More specifically a combination of musical rests in a composer’s score would very likely have a different affect or meaning from that of an actor or storyteller’s use of dramatic pause in a play or reading. In turn this could have vastly different and varied affects upon an audience or group of listeners’ who are experiencing the work. Invariably, the implications of silence are also varied within the context of education and classrooms, where educators and learners may or may not easily navigate such pedagogical nuances.

In this paper, we engage in some of the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of silence, by respectively drawing on observations we have made in our individual careers and recurrent strands in our writing both through our respective reflexivity and our research projects. While engaging in questions pertaining to the epistemology of silence we also recognize that our experiences as academics/educators are inherently different, given that we bring our own worldviews, life experiences, knowledges and practices into this discussion. Furthermore, while drawing on these diverse and interconnected discourses we also examine the interplay and role of silence in relation to teaching and learning using self-reflexive strategies. Building on self-reflexive praxis, we weave together our individual voices, understandings and observations about notions of silence throughout this paper as a series of vignettes. Our use of self-reflexivity takes into consideration the relation between self and culture, and draws on Margaret Kovach’s (2009) notion of autoethnography, which she states that “autoethnography, an approach with its foundations in ethnographical research, brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography)” (p. 33). Through this form of narrative approach we attempt to tease out the broader questions and different meanings raised through the epistemologies of silence.

Reflective Silence

In this paper, we have come together to look at how silence can support or otherwise obstruct epistemological transformation in teaching and learning, within classrooms and real-world situations. To this effect we incorporate our own voices, as a means to position our respective identities and work as scholars. This enables us to speak to some of the nuances that are embedded within the themes of this paper, and to critically examine the interplay between dominant and marginalized narratives.

Spy:

I am an artist and an academic with Anishnaabe ancestry. I originally grew up in northeastern Ontario in the same region as some of my ancestors, and have always held a deep appreciation for the Arts. Increasingly, through my work I have encountered and witnessed moments in which aesthetic experience has presented new possibilities for decolonizing hegemonic discourses of knowledge and epistemology. Although I have trained and practiced in the Arts for several years now, I have progressively developed a self-reflexive practice built around the ontology of Indigenous knowledge, drawing on my years of work in multimedia, theatre, opera, and performance. In this manner, I have often found myself grappling with decolonization methodologies through performance (Dénommmé-Welch & Montero, 2014), aesthetics and expression. Similarly, what is often categorically described as forms of interdisciplinarity within some academic circles is in fact a process by which I have used to (re)examine ways of developing Indigenous autonomy and forms of reclamation through the intersections of art, Indigenous ontology and knowledge systems. Consequently, my work is a culmination of life experience and artistic practice that builds on multiple art forms and epistemologies, which in part aims to disrupt colonial histories and hegemonic discourses, which are all too often prevalent in the Arts and systems of education. However, not only does this process conceivably present the space(s) to disrupt colonialism, but it also can become a mode used to re-examine the implications of silence and its part in suppressing Indigenous knowledges, histories, and expressions of autonomy. Throughout this paper I hope to share some of these articulations, alongside my colleague, Jennifer Rowsell, and speak to the overlapping observations we have made about silence through our respective work, experience and histories. Finally, through my work I strive to investigate ways of (un)/(re)learning new forms of resistance, and to examine and understand the nuances of silence and its impact on different expressions of knowing and being.

Jennifer:

I am a white female Canadian professor, of third generation Scottish and British descent who comes from a long line of educators. I grew up in Toronto, in my Grandmother's house, and although I have very few memories of her, I do have a faint memory of a towering, intimidating figure who was a strong advocate for education. When I was five she passed away, nonetheless I continued to feel and sense her strong, silent presence in the house. This silence is all the more poignant now because our family home was demolished last year and a new, modern house constructed in its stead. These moments of silence might appear small and perhaps opaque to readers, but silence resonates in people's lives in subtle and varied ways – in spaces, in speech, in photographs, and in lived, felt

experiences and as such they are idiosyncratic and not necessarily in need of exposing vulnerabilities – silence shapes shifts around our identities. Silence has become a recurrent motif in my life because, like all of us, I carry with me silent stories and I am fascinated by the silent stories research participants have shared with me over the years. Silent stories are memories that play out during our everyday lives and that drive ways of thinking and being in the world.

I began my graduate work focusing on traces of identities, beliefs, values and epistemologies within literature and gradually moved into photographs, films and digital worlds. As a researcher, I frequently ask: Is there a story within this text? Are there traces of identities embedded in its materiality? What is the story of the text's production?

Keenly interested in how identity, culture, beliefs, and interests shape and influence meaning making, I take an ethnographic account of meaning making by documenting how subjectivities, contextual factors and social practices become embedded in texts. I examine objects and material worlds closely, as traces of identity. Silence plays a role in my work through the ways that I take account of what is absent, silenced, or lost over time and across spaces. To me, as MacNaughton (2005) notes, "If we know what has been lost from history, we can change how we see and understand our relationships with each other now" (p. 152). Locating what has been lost, silenced, hidden, or removed traces absences of the past in the present and helps to excavate silenced thoughts, beliefs and hopes. With Spy, we speak to the overlapping observations we have made about silence through our respective work, experience and histories.

Sharing our stories throws into relief some of our differences, yet we are both equally fascinated by the mercurial nature of silence. Silence can be positively and negatively construed. One can be silenced and rendered invisible. Or, one can be thoughtful and reflective in silence. Silence can be steeped in culture, social practices, and religion. In the following sections, we weave together theoretical questions and methodologies through a series of vignettes, used to underscore and frame the complexities and nuances of silence, which is particularly helpful in guiding our analysis of different epistemological meanings of silence.

Silence as a form of Violence, or How Violent is Silence?

Undoubtedly, Western North American culture has been preoccupied with its own language, political discourse, social norms and cultural values, despite it often being imposed upon others through forms of colonization. For instance, the impacts of silence were especially felt through the Indian residential school system, as thousands of Indigenous children, over generations, were stripped of their culture, and were forbidden to speak their native mother tongues. Consequently, generations of Indigenous people, families, and communities in Canada as well as in the United States suffered the isolation and near annihilation of their own languages through such racist forms of systemic silencing. As such, throughout its colonial history the voice of European settler society in North America has been vastly privileged and rewarded over those of Indigenous peoples and other minoritized peoples. Western culture has placed great emphasis on the notion of speech/voice, in quite literal and figurative ways, either by emphasizing or demarcating separation between "dominant" and "minoritized" voices. This has directly and indirectly contributed to forms of oppression and the subjugation of Indigenous and racialized voices,

resulting in the fragmentation of the ontologies of diverse knowledge systems. Such fragmentation can and does present challenges with accessing knowledge and better understanding of our collective histories within and beyond Canada. However, this exposes the knowledge gaps among its citizens, as well as the violent nature of colonialism wherein select Euro-colonial narratives and knowledge systems have prevailed and contributed to the mythology of today's Canada. Building on the notion of fragmentation, and the potentiality for disrupting mythology, together we weave vignettes – snippets and pieces of knowledge – to form a type of narrative of voiced silence, and examine how our combination of vignettes function as a kind of monograph to underscore notions of silence.

Studying Silence

Our approach to probing silence involved a series of meetings where we talked through our common and divergent thinking about silence and discussed possible approaches to writing on this topic, including the use of self-reflexivity. Then, we drew on our respective pedagogical approaches and research to analyze how silence circulates and meanders through our work as a strong, recurrent theme. Our writing therefore involved observational fieldwork, interview data with young people, and action research methods. To interpret and analyze silence as a theme and recurrent motif, we use constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) across various research studies. In the paper, there are excerpts of pedagogical moments and research studies that serve as vignettes of silence – telling instances of silence enacted or felt as a presence.

Silence in Research

Researchers sometimes hide in the shadows of their sites and ethnographic researchers, in particular, often hide in the shadows of contexts to document people, actions, movements, places and spaces, and the stuff or objects that represent the focus of research studies. Conducting research can be and so often is silent in nature with threads and connections coming together in fieldnotes as a mapping of moments. There have been many moments over the course of research studies when Jennifer sat in silence observing and documenting what she sees across different contexts, but equally, there have many research moments filled with interaction, collaboration and co-research with silence playing a role as she concentrated with children and young people to make things.

Fieldwork is not simply a transcription of actions, contexts, people, and artefacts, but it involves, quite centrally, a re-representation of and engagements with these events – a negotiation of meaning between what actually happens and observations in silence. There have been times when Jennifer has felt and acknowledged the silence of her role as a researcher. Although relationships have been forged and dialogues and sharing have taken place, there is scripting and rescripting of “the truth” that happens when anyone observes people living their lives. At times, Jennifer has felt uncomfortable about this silence, but much of the time there is a naturalness to the seeming silence of a researcher watching embodied actions and stories unfold that develops into a relational process. For Jennifer, there have been so many moments of connection and collaboration with co-researchers. When she felt outside of the research, there was an uncomfortableness to her silence in contexts and she felt more like a distant, almost omniscient observer. When she felt inside

of the research, any silence was shared by co-researchers. She is far more at ease with being in the web of activity and taking part in the research. This is where the “naturalness” comes from – a sense of being a part of the whole experience and immersed in the culture and context. It is documenting stories that enriches the silence and that mutually constitutes the research. In the next few sections Jennifer details varied perspectives on the topic of silence that she has experienced in her work.

Like Jennifer, Spy’s encounters and interactions with silence in research have been complex, which often raises philosophical questions. For instance, as an educator and scholar, Spy has often grappled with the implications of research, particularly being a person with Indigenous ancestry who is keenly aware of the historical paradigms and structures of power responsible for the displacement and subjugation of Indigenous peoples’ identity and culture and their relationship to their lands and histories. Such forms of oppression have indeed impacted the ways in which research has engaged with and silenced Indigenous peoples’ worldviews and knowledge systems. Linda Smith (1999) argues: “The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful” (p. 1). Undoubtedly, the idea that research “stirs up silence” is a powerful marker of just how delicate the line is when engaging with Indigenous communities that have historically been traumatized by the effects of colonization, imperialism, and various forms of unethical treatment.

For Spy, this raises many challenging questions, and like many other Indigenous scholars and artists has compelled him to problematize these spaces and parameters. Invariably, Spy’s research draws on the implications of silence as a means to interrogate the positionality and intersections of knowledge, while querying notions of privilege. As a scholar who often works with archival materials, using auto-ethnography and self-reflexive approaches, Spy has had to consider the ethical questions relating to his own interactions with research, taking into account the ways in which his own experience is affected by the materiality and ontological scope of knowledge. Consequently, he has had to examine his own perceptions, understandings, and interpretations of “silent” knowledge, in order to make meaning out of the narratives that emerge from archives and oppressed histories, waiting to be (re)told or (re)written. As such his understanding and encounters with notions of silence and performativity are evocative not only as an educator but also an artist. Understandably, one’s silent experiences of the world, or experiences of silence within it, occurs in varied and unique ways. So, arguably, the role and purpose of silence carries many implications for understanding and connecting with the surrounding environment.

For instance, one might silently encounter different learning styles through his/her own teaching experiences within various educational settings. More specifically, educators and artist practitioners have to often contend with the complexities of space and identity in his/her own practice, while questioning such things as: who gets to speak, when and where, and how precisely are such voicings taken up, or else silenced? Similarly, what occurs when attempting to break down and examine these parameters, say for instance when looking at the dynamics of a classroom and how some individuals feel more compelled or freer to speak than others, versus what happens in the moments where silence takes hold? Does someone’s silence necessarily suggest a form of shyness, or thoughtlessness, or

resistance? What manifests in the learning process when an entire group chooses not to speak, or when silence is imposed?

Silent Interests

The silence that Jennifer discusses in this vignette is a different kind of silence. The vignette features a student who is rendered silent at school, who is at times overlooked and who would prefer not to be silent. Some students want to be silent, perhaps even garner strength and power through silence. Such is not the case for the young man in this vignette.

As Director of a tutoring centre for three years, Jennifer has encountered many children and teenagers who struggle with literacy at school. More often than not these students have low grades in school literacy, but nevertheless they have rich and eclectic interests that are silenced if not absent at school. There is one young man who stands out for Jennifer because of the stark contrast between Cole (pseudonyms are used throughout) at school and Cole in the tutoring centre. David Kirkland (2013) talks about “an unknown story” that is rarely told about Black males and indeed Jennifer has noted a similar degree of silence around young men in middle and high school in terms of their ruling passions (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) and burning interests. By looking ethnographically at how young people engage in their everyday textual interactions it soon becomes clear that there are such rich, manifold literacy engagements that they have that are silenced in formal schooling. Composing music, designing architectural worlds in Minecraft (Rowsell & Simon, 2017), writing stories (Rowsell, 2014a), making films (Rowsell, 2014b), there are so many interests that are not present within more regulatory, formalized learning environments and their absence is thrown into relief when you see them come alive in other contexts. Cole is a poignant example because he has so many interests from science and technology, to gaming, to cadets and he exhibits such passion when he talks about them.

Over the course of doing research studies with Cole as a participant, Jennifer had many opportunities to speak with Cole’s Mum who gave us some wise advice about him, “find a subject that peaks his interest and he cooperates and will find different ways to seek out information.” After receiving this advice, we asked Cole about new things that he has learned and without fail, he would extemporize on his topic de jour. The whole research team worked with Cole and we all witnessed his love of information and curating facts. Cole is upfront and ebullient about his aptitude for information gathering and research skills:

I do research and projects on my iPad – anything that crosses my mind I research. For instance, today I looked up – what is energy? Everything is energy, but on the website that I was on, it said that energy is an object that is everything. The cosmos is another word for everything and the world. Our planet is an asteroid – everything has its own energy (personal communication, March 10th, 2015)

But, Cole’s account of school life does not align with the lively Cole we witnessed in the tutoring centre. Cole and his Mum talk about how he struggles with schoolwork and with formal learning. Cole feels marginalized at school and not often stimulated by school content and this is borne out in his grades. Cole predominantly associates disinterest, even failure with school. How might the story of Cole and formal schooling be different if his interests are louder, more present at school?

Silent Tensions

Tension as a form of silence can have a profound impact on a person's mental, physical, spiritual and emotional state. Patsy Rodenburg, who is a voice coach and theatre director, states: "Not all tension is useless; some tension is very useful. Without tension as part of the framework, as in, say, a suspension bridge or a skyscraper, our bodies would collapse into a heap on the floor" (1992, p. 120). Spy's observations of silent tension in teaching has often presented itself in a myriad of ways, and depending on the circumstance and context, can introduce new understandings of ourselves, our interactions with the world, our use of voice, and our interactions with silence. Rodenburg (1992) argues that "so much of the tension that blocks our voice is used unnecessarily. [...] Healthy and appropriate tension, like the fight and flight tension required to survive an event like shock, is necessary for survival" (p. 120).

Over the years, Spy's encounters of working in the theatre hall as an artist and the classroom as an educator have presented many moments of tension, necessary and unnecessary. Yet such moments, whether seemingly trivial or mundane, have often illustrated how tension can be the catalyst for unsuspecting change. For Spy, these moments of silent tensions have opened up new, and often more substantial moments for epistemological interventions through teaching and learning, through art making and production. Surprisingly or not, such moments have emerged in the most ordinary ways, such as through the simple listening or viewing a musical composition or a guided theatre warm-up exercise or a guiding seminar question. Invariably, these moments are intrinsically linked to an individual's learning process, or experience of the world, where deeper meanings are made in moments of silent self-reflection, or in the moments where we are either challenged by our own belief systems and worldviews, or by those of others' which confront our own boundaries of knowledge and experience.

Spy has witnessed many such moments, notably a seminar he led where learners invoked new or different ways of thinking, reflecting, and experiencing aesthetics and education. Spy introduced the group to John Cage's (1952) composition *4'33*, and the ensuing seminar activities opened up some interesting and fascinating responses from some who, accepting Spy's invitation to challenge or build on the themes of Cage's composition, led everyone through an engaging one-hour activity in silence. It was evident to Spy that many were first puzzled by this activity, and the tension was palpable. All participated in this collective moment of silence, which was only sporadically interrupted by the sound of chalk on a chalkboard or marker on paper. The seminar activity leaders would write instructions on the board, and as the group engaged in a sequence of reflective activities, the tension seemed to dissipate, and increasingly the entire class seemed to come to accept this new experience. The group adjusted or adapted to these new rules of silence (i.e., the primary rule imposed by the seminar leaders was that no one was allowed to speak during the exercise), and caused Spy to consider the implications or meaning of adapting to, accepting, or following directions through silence. Moreover, he was taken by how the initial tension that existed from being asked to stay silent, eventually faded when everyone was left to their own thoughts, possible daydreaming, or boredom, comfort or discomfort of sitting for an hour in silence. The rupturing effect of enacting silence steadily increased, until it was disrupted by an individual, seated at a piano who struck a key on the keyboard. While the note breaking silence was momentarily disruptive, it evoked another disruption,

a breaking of the universal rules, and a sense of the interplay of necessary and unnecessary tension. Ultimately, such actions illustrate the ongoing need to challenge the tension of silence and epistemology.

Silence in Movement

Susan Sontag (1969) claims that “the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence” (p. 11). Over the course of her research examining representational dimensions of literacy, Jennifer has done movement work with elementary students (Rowsell & McQueen-Fuentes, 2017) and she has observed how movement offers a generative, fecund silence in line with Sontag’s enriching notion of silence. Watching children complete movement exercises and create tableaux offers a kind of powerful silence because bodies become channels of meaning (i.e. there is a complete absence of and role for language). As a part of a SSHRC-funded research project, Jennifer and Glenys McQueen-Fuentes completed movement exercises with grade 5 students as a part of their science unit. There was a specific day during the movement work that stands out:

We asked them, when you find your centre stay there – how do you feel when you do this?

A few students said ... “I feel weird” And Glenys asked ... Weird good or weird bad – “Weird Good!!” they said.

It is one of the only times that we used silence in our movement work and we had no idea that it would have such an impact.

(fieldnote, March 27, 2014)

For Jennifer, the day stood out because she devoted the afternoon to mindful meditation work. The one activity that students responded to most is called “centring.” In the photograph there is some sense of the calmness and equanimity that the exercise imbued in students.



Figure 1. Centring in silence.

Most of the movement work that was completed involved sound and gesture, but the silent work was enriching and eloquent. What was intriguing about the centring exercise was the insistence on silence, which took a few minutes to get used to, but once they were silent – they appeared to not want to come out of it. It is a literal sense of silence that stood out for Jennifer and Glenys.

Silence in Images

In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Barthes (1980) talks about photography as an “advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity” (p. 12). In her photographic work with youth, Jennifer and Peter Vietgen (Rowsell & Vietgen, 2017) ask young people to actively project their identities, interests, thoughts and beliefs in conceptual photographs. Such images demonstrate more of a photographic association with identity – the antithesis of Barthes’ conception of a photograph as a dissociation of consciousness. But, at the same time, Barthes talks about connecting with sensorial, phenomenological worlds and this resonates strongly with what Jennifer witnessed over the course of her photography projects with secondary school students. Barthes describes photography as a wound that “I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think” (p. 26). As teenagers involved in Jennifer and Peter’s research developed and storyboarded photographs, they spoke at length about emotions and making their photographs emotionally laden. There were many moments throughout Jennifer and Peter’s photography projects when she saw what Barthes calls *punctum* in photographs. Within the silence and shadows of many of the photographs that teenagers produced over the course of their six-week research study, there were wounds, pricks that pierced through photos. Thinking about silence in relation to conceptual photographs that secondary students shot, there were many photos that exploited the impact of muted lighting, soft colours, filter effects, artefacts and clothing to create silence in photos. They did this in order to display what Barthes calls *punctum* in photos. *Punctum* is a detail “i.e., a partial object” (p. 43). *Punctum* has the power of expansion. According to Barthes, *studium* is the impact of photo – what it says to the viewer, where *punctum* is the prick or pop in the photo. Barthes claims that the *studium* is coded, but the *punctum* is not coded – it is sudden, spontaneous and pricks out to the viewer (p. 47).

Secondary students involved in the photography project had their own way about moving from silence to *punctum* in photos that they produced, as became clear in the reflections of Heather:

.... like one main part that stands out amongst the rest of it like a photograph I took of a kitchen with a chair pulled out ... it was the pulled out chair that stood out. (personal communication, 2014).

This was also demonstrated in the comments of the photography teacher, Lesley: and she’s great at portraying textures and she would do these portraits of people, she did a whole series in a retirement home because she volunteered in a retirement home and she had a lot of people with ... great texture on their faces and she has an ability to focus on the texture of faces as a focal point where the eye goes (personal communication, 2014).

To illustrate the juxtaposition of silence in photographs next to a prick, or punctum to use Barthes' term of meaning and emotion, there are two photographs featured in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 is entitled *Madness* and there is punctum in the shadow of the head silhouetted on the dirty sheet with writing on it. As if there is another figure appearing behind the young woman, she sits catatonic with her gaze fixed on something in the distance. There is silence in the darkness surrounding the figure and then a burst of light filtered onto a gowned figure. The darker areas around the corners of the photograph represent more silent, quieter elements and the suffusion of light in the middle represents the prick of life and energy.

In Figure 3, the young woman who captured this image talked about taking hours to set up the shot perfectly. The sepia tone, the blood on the walls, the dimmed light serve as an ideal backdrop against the woman's piercing eyes and fixed gaze. Photographic elements sit in silence like the light in the back, but what pricks the viewer are the translucent eyes staring out at the viewer. There is tremendous, powerful movement in her stance. The punctum is in her eyes and in the fixed gaze. Punctum is most present in the hand with fingers gripping the carpet.



Figure 2. Silence and Punctum in Madness.



Figure 3. Silence and Punctum in Jade's Photograph.

Silence as Island

"An artist has to understand silence

An artist has to create a space for silence to enter his work

Silence is like an island in the middle of a turbulent ocean"

- Marina Abramovic, *Walk Through Wall*, 2016, p. 308

Arguably, silence plays a vital role in the life and work of some artists, as well as for some educators, which has been important to the intersectionalities of Spy's work. In this manner, Spy has found that the implications of silence can be multi-fold, all depending on the circumstances, context, and situation which operates and exists. Still, the notion of silence will exist and function in varying and differing ways, but moreover it will always be interpreted in discriminating ways, such as "minoritized" silence wherein imposed through forms of self-determination or systematic oppression could be viewed as a type of radicalization of silence. For instance, what occurs in moments when or where an individual from a "non-dominant" group or culture chooses to not speak, or is silenced out of a conversation? Similarly, how are they "read" in moments where they must step out of a room, and what is assumed about these actions, regardless of it being for something as innocent as stepping out to use the washroom or to answer an important phone call? It

seems such moments of “disruption” of silence – like tiny islands - invokes notions of dissent that challenges dominant spaces that exists much like the turbulent ocean that artist Marina Abramovic describes. Why not the other way? Why must silence exist as an island and not an ocean? Why must there be turbulence? Conceivably, the turbulent ocean enacts forms of oppression, much like a symphony of voices talking at a board meeting, where voices continue to talk over each other, only marginally listening to one another or obeying their own notion of Robert’s Rules of Order (Robert, 1915). Who is Robert anyway? Why “his” rules and order? Moreover, who ultimately constructs these ideas of behaviour, and who follows them unquestioningly?

Silence invites all kinds of misunderstandings and misassumptions, but then again it also has the potential for self-reflection wherein one’s own judgement or biases are called into question. For instance, why does one assume that the “minoritized” voice only speaks when needed or necessary, such as in moments where it is seen as necessary to address or redress forms of social inequity or injustice? Is it proper to assume that only certain voices can speak to certain issues, and only at certain times? Needless to say, silence can conceivably trigger new methods for deconstructing notions of sound, voice, and dominant discourses and hegemony. Then, of course, what occurs when the rules of silence are broken, assuming there are any rules to begin with?

Conclusion

In writing this paper, we have both had occasion to “rescript” what we think of as the meaning of silence. While silence raises many possibilities for critical analysis and discourse, it also brings to the forefront some of the deeper questions and meanings of knowledge production, asking what voices are heard over those that are marginalized. Brown and Strega (2005) deconstruct these very notions, arguing that research and practice often results in “only certain information, generated by certain people in certain ways” as being accepted or qualified as “truth” (p. 7). Through our discursive analysis of our research, teaching and practice, we have drawn attention to a myriad of ways that silence can be used to greatly effect different understandings of the self and culture. We examined how silence operates in different artistic practice and forms, including movement, theatre, music, and images. Moreover, while incorporating autoethnographic strategies we also discussed some of our own experiences and encounters with silence, thus bringing to the fore multiple layers of meaning that take into account different forms of knowledge production. In these layers we encounter different ways that knowledge is created, carried, acknowledged, and understood. In some cases, silence is remembered in memory, other times it dwells in the body, building (if not storing) an archive of knowledge. Indigenous actor, writer and educator Monique Mojica (2009) also writes about the body as being an organic site of stored knowledge, and whether it is silent or has been silenced, it is “an endless resource, a giant database of stories. Some we lived, some were passed on, some dreamt, some forgotten, some we are unaware of, dormant, awaiting the key that will release them” (p. 97).

When we talked through the paper we agreed that silence is as much compelling as it is inscrutable. The mercurial nature of silence invites many reactions – peace, fear, joy, frustration, concentration – and the list goes on, but we wanted in this paper to go some way in unraveling ways of knowing within silence. One way into ways of knowing with

silence is focusing on forms of representation such as images, music, space, and movement, which is one way that we chose to disentangle silence. Within the featured vignettes there were individuals who were silenced or at least felt silenced like Cole. Being silenced moves one to the margins and in many ways subjugates someone. At school, Cole never feels like he can indulge his desire to talk about the topics that interest him with teachers or peers.

Spy considered silence in relation to space and his praxis. He offers a rich instructional moment when a classroom environment shifted with the introduction of silence – moving from a space rife with tension eventually to one at ease, even in congruence with silence. Silence is used here as a deliberative practice to change the ethos of the class. Similarly, Jennifer profiles a moment during a research study on movement when silence slows down the pace of the schooling context, adjusting the rhythm and energy to a meditative pace/mood. As a coda, the second last vignette is a more ambivalent rendition of silence in images. Akin more to Cole and his sense of being silenced, the featured photos have opaque, liminal elements that fade into the background next to the punctum. But, does that render them silenced? Or, does it make them part of the visual narrative?

Stepping back, what seems clearer to us is that we cannot separate ourselves from silence – we are *a part of* silence. Productive, tense, or ambivalent, people exist within silence and its translucent quality allows individuals to use it to particular effect. Inside of silence gives us fluidity and mobility to shift moods and environments. Silence is transitional and it invites change. The qualities that constitute silence invite sensations of being in helpful, powerful ways.

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