

In-tensional In-dwelling, New Considerations in the Semiotic Existence of Silence in Human Semiosis

Running title: In-tensional In-dwelling, Semiotic Existence of Silence

Original Study

Sebastián Nabón Hernández
University of Tartu
nabonher@ut.ee

Submitted: 29.04.2025; Accepted: 08.05.2026.

Abstract. Silence as a phenomenon plays a fundamental role in human existence. The scientific approaches reveal three shared notions by which the phenomenon acquires its distinctiveness: *sound*, *speech*, and *noise*. However, these dyadic considerations follow the principle of the excluded middle, making the different semiotic relations as logical ones between discrete entities. Within this framework, the concept of silence is stabilized as a discrete term, losing its dynamics, its capacity to be distinct and interconnected simultaneously. Moreover, when they are transferred to a more ontological scale, the subject/object distinction is not overcome. Therefore, important studies applying the semiotic square had to become more flexible to address the phenomenon's dynamics when approaching its ontological status. This paper aims to highlight this problem and to propose another theoretical framework by drawing on existential semiotics, biosemiotics, Heideggerian phenomenology, and Claude Zilberberg's tensional semiotic perspective. The *intended feature* of the phenomenon will be revisited to sow the seeds of new methodological considerations. Through the neologism "in-tension in-dwelling," I propose a new tensional space for thinking the semiotic existence of silence as a deep structure of human enacted cognition.

Keywords: Silence, Semiotic Existence, Heidegger, Biosemiotics, Tensional Semiotics, Existential Semiotics.

THE QUESTIONABLE CONSPICUOUS

I could have begun the first section of this essay by calling it "Introduction." However, more than an introduction, I will present the main problem considered here, its actual importance to the public in general and to the field of cultural semiotics in particular. But, why "conspicuous"? And why "questionable"? By questioning what is so-called "clearly perceived," or what attracts our attention, it is the way therein that we can broaden our understanding of the world, and this framing through questions and the heuristic paths, which they may open, is one of the liberating aims of semiotics, and in my opinion, in a more stress manner, in its dialogue with phenomenology.

This paper's compound title seeks to condense or combine, like different flavors in one bite, the novelty and value of a theoretical framework for a semiotic-phenomenological approach to the semiotic existence of silence within human semiosis. Conspicuously enough, the first two words, "In-tensional In-dwelling," may connote an association with Franz Brentano's most influential concept of "intentional inexistence." It may be seen as a distilled expression of the final proposal; therefore, I will keep this expectation until the end of this introductory framing, for clarity, and then start with the questioning.

Semiotics shares the problem of *the presence* or *actuality* of intelligible objects with epistemology and

philosophical ontology, but its aim at this level can be achieved by an operational hypothesis that does not compromise it. In this sense, without emitting ontological judgments, objects can be *present* and *absent* for a researcher, and due to this, they face the problem of the examination of the modes of existence, or existential relations that are encountered in the discourse. Then, as Greimas and Courtés state, the researcher is forced, at least, to take a stand in this *semiotic mode of existence* (1982 [1979], 167).

Silence, as a research topic, has the acknowledgement (as it will be shown in the next section of the present article) of several researchers in different fields such as communication, linguistics, philosophy, semiotics, psychology, and psychoacoustics, to mention some, as a phenomenon that implies a trans and multidisciplinary approach having even an existential status regarding human semiosis. Focusing here on the phenomenology of aural perception, the air's waves of compressions and releases is a physical manifestation beyond how we interpret it. Now, when we pay attention to the specific instance of aural perception, i.e., when we pay attention to sound, we encounter ourselves fully engaged in this act of observation. It is an already-semiotic dynamic process created via ongoing communication between an organism and its surroundings.

Through this relational constitution, it is not far-fetched to assert that listening or hearing is already hermeneutical and, in this sense, always already semiotic, without our awareness of it. Therefore, "silence," understood as both a presence and an absence, is always already meaningful. Silence always reveals something else, in some respect, for someone, and here is its value for a semiotic-phenomenological study.

As will be shown in the first part of this work, an exhaustive review of relevant literature in the fields of semiotics, philosophy, communication, and psychoacoustics regarding silence identifies at least three main complex terms through which the phenomenon, as a presence or absence, is commonly approached. The first one, already deprecated, is *Sound* itself, considering the erroneous idea of silence as the absence of sound. *Speech* and *Noise* hold sway as the other complex terms against which silence "neutralizes its self-sufficient presumption" (Pelkey 2017, 284). Moreover, the *aboutness* of this semiosis, or its intended feature, is approached indirectly, or, most of the time, it is not considered.

While it is recognized that the complementariness of all these contributions in the epistemological and phenomenological forms of silence constitutes a fruitful whole, a holistic and accurate multidisciplinary approach to this complex phenomenon, there is still a lack of contributions regarding its semiotic ontological status. The main problem I am cautioning against is treating the different epistemic distinctions as directly related to the ontological essence of silence. In its treatment so far, in dyadic logical opposite relations, there is an underlying supposition of the principle of the excluded

middle, making the opposite relations and other logical and semiotic relations as discrete ones instead of distinct ones, where the phenomenon is encapsulated in a subject/object discreteness, neglecting their interconnectedness, without allowing consequently a more gradual spectrum of differences that ground the terms.

These epistemic cuts, which respond to specific methodological and research aims within a given context, are interpreted as ontological descriptions of silence without further reflection. As an example of this, in the third section, the ongoing discussion in the methodological application of the semiotic square will be explored to illustrate these relations regarding silence and the different opposites, and how it has changed its application from a more rigid consideration of the logical square to a more embodied understanding of relations. This is partly due to the high ambiguity of the phenomenon, which, as proof of the common ground or continuum flow of experience, when considered on a more ontological scale, cannot sustain a fixed logical discreteness without implying interconnectivity.

Finally, in the last section, I will propose a theoretical framework based on biosemiotics, existential semiotics, and Heideggerian phenomenology to consider silence in its ontological status. Its intended feature will be revisited to build a bridge to new methodological considerations within Claude Zilberberg's tensional semiotics framework.

STATE OF AFFAIRS

Regardless of the multiple forms we can perceive and/or interpret silence, I base my insights on the phenomenology of hearing, where any articulated discourse about silence is, above all, about listening. I start from the premise that silence indicates, not a modality of the physical material of sound, but an interplay of multiple modalities through listening. Therefore, this phenomenon, silence, is an active component of our audible capacity for interaction/communication with the environment, rather than a void or absence that stops or ends sound or the act of hearing.

The intelligible aspect of the phenomenon, capable of being articulated in verbal discourse, has been stressed by the pragmatic approach to communication (Saville-Troike 1985), which holds that every act of conduct can become a speech act, since the discursive act is composed of a series of behaviors. In this sense, silence also becomes a type of performance (Furassola 1999, 171).

Saville-Troike (1985) distinguishes silent acts with propositional meaning, which can have a verbal correlation, from silences with meaning but no propositional content, which cannot be translated into words. Silent acts are not signs or symbols with definite meanings; instead, they unfold contingently upon the context in which they occur, regardless of having a verbal correlation. We are discussing a sign with the highest degree of ambiguity possible, yet the lowest level of informativeness. Moreover, its signifier can be strongly linked to

the illusion of the absence of auditory content, leading to the common idea of the absence of sound; what is absent, at least in these situations, is what is expected to be present. Silence appears as a patterned (to some extent) socio-cultural symbol within the linguistic system and communicative interactions. In Le Breton's words:

La distribución del silencio y de la palabra en la conversación responde a un estatuto social y cultural que cambia de un lugar a otro y de un tiempo a otro; también varía según las situaciones y sus protagonistas¹.
(Le Breton 2009, 33)

Furthermore, as Alain Corbin points out in his book *A History of Silence* (2018), knowing when to speak gently and when to be quiet amid the general public's loudness was a badge of distinction in the early nineteenth century. "In this century of elective affinities and confidences, the silence of the one who knew how to listen was revealed as of extreme value. [...] Not to talk was also to show that you were ready to listen" (Corbin 2018, 60). Silence was considered polite behavior from the middle of the seventeenth century onward. The idea of silence as a speech act and speech being its counterpart has existed in Western history since it is understood as God's absence in the Bible (Corbin 2018, 70).

A review of this object of study in the realm of semantics and linguistics can never be fair without mentioning the contributions of Michal Ephratt (2022; 2008), with an exhaustive study of verbal silence or silence as a verbal expression: *eloquent silence*. Another important contribution from anthropological linguistics is Adam Jaworski's (2011) edited volume, *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, which brings together several works in the field.

Several authors have developed methods over the past 60 years as interest in the phenomenon has grown. Some significant studies include the following: Jensen (1973) demonstrates the various functions of silence in communicative contexts; Kurzon (2007) establishes a typology of silence in social interaction; Bruneau (1973) also notes a taxonomy; Johannsen (1974) further establishes the functions of silence in counseling and psychotherapy with a list of twenty possible meanings; and Kukkonen (1993) deals with the semiotics of silence related to linguistics studies. Without delving into ontological considerations, these works complement one another and provide a more comprehensive map of the phenomenon's typologies and functions. Who makes a movement into the ontological is Bernard Dauenhauer in his book *Silence, The Phenomenon, and its Ontological Significance* (1980), where he highlights silence as an active performance "abstaining from some previously engaged in stream of experience" (Dauenhauer 1980, 101).

In his account, Dauenhauer develops a phenomenological analysis based on Husserl's noetic and noematic schema. He distinguishes between a more syntagmatic axis of silence: *intervening silence* and *fore-and-after silence*; and a paradigmatic axis: *the silence of the intimates*, *liturgical silence*, and *silence of the to-be-said*, characterized as *deep silence*. After these distinctions, he presents the performative aspect of silence, which can be related to Furrasola's (1999) *type of performance*, but with the accent on the *abstaining* or reticent action.

Although it is one of the important monographs completely dedicated to the phenomenon, the application of Husserl's phenomenology is inundated, and the subject/object division still haunts it.

Silence regarding speech and verbal discourse constitutes not only a considerable body of research across different fields but also a well-established ongoing object of study. In this corpus of research, silence regarding noise and movement (noise=movement::silence=stillness), although with less presence, forms the other notions against which the phenomenon acquires its distinction. Noise has been researched across acoustics, information theory, linguistics, communication, philosophy, and semiotics. It is as polysemic and relative as its commonly thought counterpart, silence. For example, Pirjo Kukkonen (1993) analyses noise as the opposite of silence, considering noise as a sign that iconically can be associated with "chaos," "loudness, and "sound pollution," which becomes disturbing if "we cannot attach to it any meaning or if it is repeated so often that it loses its information content" (Kukkonen 1993, 284).

Information theory introduces a new conception of noise and expands the physical explanation of acoustics and psychoacoustics, which define noise as an inharmonic spectrum, i.e., different frequencies and with different amplitudes simultaneously, which do not seem to have any potential organization; therefore, they produce an unpleasant sensation. From an information-theoretic perspective, this is expanded, with noise defined as any negative perturbation in the communication channel. Like silence, the transversality of the notion has the potential to be applied to "a stain of ink in a newspaper, the broken page of a book, or to a spectator's shadow upon the screen of the cinema."² (Antunes 1999, 1; my translation).

Sebastián Nabón (2023) suggests that both notions share a common middle ground, making them distinct yet interconnected. This resists their being treated as opposite relations; i.e., they cannot acquire their distinctiveness by negating their counterparts.

Parecería haber una conexión gradual, por decirlo de alguna manera, entre un conjunto de interpretantes (que en el contexto de un proceso comunicacional podríamos asociarlos a "ruido") con otro conjunto

1 "The distribution of silence and speech in conversation responds to a social and cultural status that changes from one place to another and from one time to another; it also varies according to the situations and their protagonists." [my translation]

2 "una mancha de tinta sobre un diario, la página rota de un libro o la sombra de un espectador sobre la pantalla del cine."

que de la misma manera llamaríamos “silencio/acto silente”, y que en la jerga o en su uso más habitual se encuentran ambos términos en zonas antagónicas. No llegan a constituirse como opuestos, pero no se manejan como nociones cercanas.³ (Nabón 2023, 95)

According to Kukkonen (2008), silence is multifunctional, offering multiple representations, values, and connotations, potentially having both negative and positive dimensions. “Silence is a metaphor for (auto)communication and also for the deep structures of human existence,” (Kukkonen 2008, 14). It is time for its existential analysis, and Tarasti’s existential semiotics has its role here.

The most interesting, existential moment of signs is in the movement before or after them, since the life of signs does not stop with their fixation into objects. In any case, if there are existential signs, they are always in a state of becoming. Therefore, only in exceptional cases can the analysis articulate the text or situation into clear-cut units. They can have moments, which constitute existential demarcations. There are situations in which the continuous becoming, flux, and streaming of signs – which hence imitates the inner movement of subjects carrying them – stops, stagnates for a while into a phase of *l’être en soi* (the sign is the same as its concept). There form and substance, matter and mind, communication and signification are united in oneness. However, the pause is always temporary. (Tarasti 2000, 7)

The existential turn in considering the phenomenon opens new possibilities for grasping its dynamic features, rather than fixating on silence as an object that seems to lose its interconnectivity and ontological state of becoming. “[...] we can go beyond the view of silence as mere absence of sound, and from an existential perspective discuss this hermeneutic phenomenon as semiosis in *Dasein*” (Kukkonen 2008, 17). However, for this to be possible, and this is the main contribution of this paper,

it is necessary to be aware of the impossibility of dual opposition based on the principle of the excluded middle as assumptions for the dynamic explorations of silence.

In the next section, I will show how applying Greimas’ semiotic square to the analysis of the deep structure of human experience regarding silence requires gradualness in its semiotic and logical relations, as the phenomenon’s ambiguity and interconnectedness cannot be neglected.

OPPOSITIONS, CONTRADICTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS. WHERE IS THE MIDDLE GROUND?

The logic square diagrams a set of logical relationships of four oppositional propositions formulated by Aristotle in *De Interpretatione* (Pelkey 2017, 277). A. J. Greimas has expanded the potential of such a square in semiotic analysis (e.g., Greimas, Rastier 1968; Greimas, Courtes 1982), called the semiotic square (Figure 1). It has been successfully applied as a hermeneutic and heuristic tool for the semiotic analysis of various topics. According to Jamin Pelkey (2017, 278), this success is “due to its position as a given – its embedded, generative nature – that which enables it to “define the fundamental mode of existence of an individual or of a society, and subsequently the conditions of existence of semiotic objects” (Greimas, Rastier 1968, 48).

The ‘S’ in the schema is one Greimasean addition to the classical square, meaning “semes” or “sememes,” referring to a complex term that condenses the smallest unit of difference. This upper axis results after establishing the “neutral term” from the contrary relations. The neutral term, as Pelkey explains, neutralizes the complex term’ self-sufficient presumption’ (Pelkey 2017, 284).

Paraphrasing Peter Bernhard (2008), in his well-explained different logical relations, applied to the semiotic square, could be as follows: the relation of upper opposition means that these semes or sememes cannot be true simultaneously, but can be false; it means an *either/or* relation. In the down opposition, these semes cannot

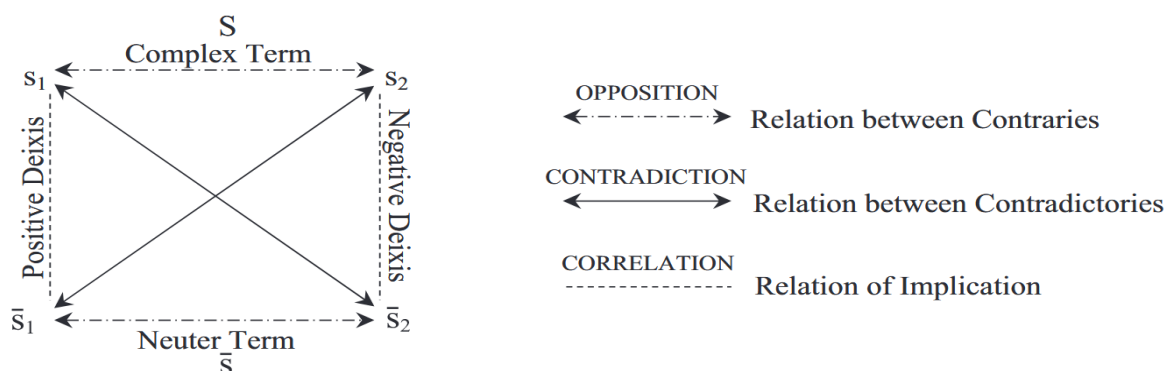


Figure 1: Greimasean semiotic square (Pelkey 2017, 284)

3 “There seems to be a gradual connection, so to speak, between a set of interpretants (which in the context of a communicational process we could associate with “noise”) with another set that in the same way we would call “silence/silent act”, and that in the jargon or its most habitual use both terms are found in antagonistic zones. They are not constituted as opposites, but they are not handled as notions that are close to each other.” (My translation)

be false simultaneously, but may be true, meaning *both/and* relation. The diagonals representing categorical contradiction mean that one of the semes is true if and only if the other is false. Finally, the vertical connection correlation represents implication: if the upper semes are true, the lower semes are also true. In the semiotic square, the neutral term represents a graduation, while the contradictory relationships together with the implications are stressed rather than the opposites.

Kurzon (1998) takes as an ideal situation in a conversation, a turn-taking procedure where periods of speech and silence are alternated, and locates it in the following square:

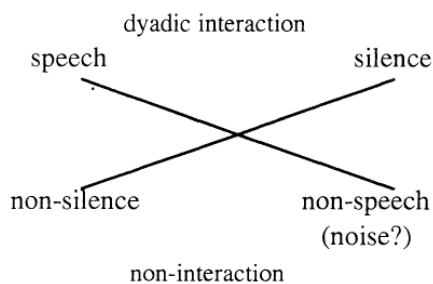


Figure 2: *Speech and Silence as Opposites* (Kurzon 1998, 11)

In the present situation (Figure 2), when the dyadic interaction is established as contraries (S axis), we find *speech* and *silence* in an either/or relationship, expressing that one cannot be silent and speak simultaneously. We can agree to some extent, but continuous talking or the emptiness of meaning can also be considered a silent act. The crucial limitation arises on the vertical axis, which concerns the implications.

Non-speech implies *silence* in the present dyadic interaction; however, *non-speech* has at least two meanings. First, if *non-speech* means a lack of communication, then it cannot imply *silence*, since *silence* is considered a communicative act. Secondly, if *non-speech* means non-verbal communication, it cannot imply *silence*. Non-verbal communication includes kinesics and body language, proxemics (the distance between participants in the conversation), paralinguistic aspects (tone of voice, intonation, volume, pitch), as well as chronemics (timing and rhythm), and *silence* is usually considered an important part.

Thus, *silence* and *speech* are complementary in one individual's communication, but the other communicative implications occur with either *speech* or *silence*. The problem is needing one term that binds together *speech* and *silence* in contrast to the other semes.

In the diagram, the categorial contradiction of *silence* is *non-silence*, in opposition in the lower axis to non-speech. It is called *noise*, a negative complex term that, in this case, is neither *speech* nor *silence*.

The concept of noise presents paradoxical relativity. It shares with silence what we have been discussing: an act of a specific attribution of meaning. We could say the same thing Le Breton (2009) says regarding silence:

noise is not only a particular modality of sound but a modality of meaning.

To a certain extent, it would seem that both concepts could function as opposites; we do not attribute the meaning of *noise* to the same thing that we attribute the meaning of *silence* and vice versa, but there is a conceptual connection between them because we are not referring to a physical quality of the sound phenomenon but to a semiotic relationship that we establish with it.

When it is put in the scheme, *noise* does not imply *speech*, but there is a physical relationship in terms of acoustic activity; likewise, non-verbal communication does not imply *silence*; in fact, *silence* does imply non-verbal communication only as a genuine alternative to *speech* and not as a concurrent feature.

In the physical plane, we have a different situation. *Noise* and *speech* are both the result of the movement of sound waves. If we consider *noise* as the fourth term in the semiotic square, but according to the physical aspect of the phenomenon, we can arrive at another square that shows other possible relations (Figure 3).

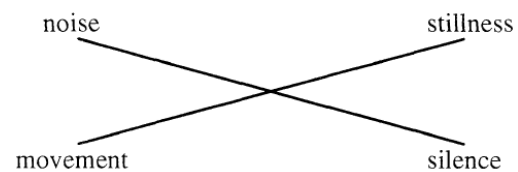


Figure 3: *Noise and Stillness as Opposites* (Kurzon 1998, 15)

Kurzon shows that, in terms of acoustic properties, the opposite of noise is stillness: the movement of sound waves represents noise, and the lack of movement represents stillness. *Silence* and *noise* appear as contradictions; as we have seen above, they do not relate to each other in *either-or* relationship; i.e., they can co-occur in communication, but it is not always the case that silence occurs if and only if noise does not, or vice versa.

The present square, without any adaptation to considering the relations and only changing the positions of the different terms, is not an accurate methodological tool for analyzing silence in human communication in dyadic interaction with *speech* and *noise*, as Kurzon already shows. For a more detailed criticism, see Daniel Torras (2022). Besides, I would say it is not methodologically accurate for analyzing silence in general, and not only in human communication in dyadic interaction.

Jamin Pelkey, in his work *Greimas Embodied: How Kinesthetic Opposition Grounds the Semiotic Square* (2017), demonstrates something that is neglected in the previous approach:

[...] far from being a static, timeless diagram, the semiotic square appears to be an active projection or manifestation of "our real-life, real-time kinaesthetic experience of movement" (Sheets-Johnstone 2011a, 118), rooted more specifically in body memories of

dynamic structural relations that emerge from distinctively human experiences of kinesthesia and proprioception, correlative with the constraints and affordances of upright posture. (Pelkey 2017, 296)

Although there are some terms regarding movement, such as “stillness,” “movement,” in Kurzon (1998), it is related to the physical acoustic movements of sound waves and not the possible associative paths through the graduation of the neutral term towards the implications, which could be a possible way to grasp the dynamic processes of semiosis that serve as a base for the distinct terms in the upper axis of the square. Moreover, I believe that a crucial aspect is left out (explicitly by Kurzon, but in most of the approaches), that is, its *intentional feature*. Intentionality, in my opinion, is what gives the phenomenon its *eloquence*; it grounds its intelligibility; however, this loaded concept must be understood differently than mere volition or purposefulness (in-tensionality), which I will present in the next and final section.

If we consider as a premise the ontological continuum, or, in Peirce's terms, the “synechistic continuum,” as the common ground of ontic distinctions and the phenomenon's high ambiguity, the attempts to define silence as a particular entity have been possible as epistemic cuts; most of the time, two terms that, together, completely or almost paradoxically, express the smallest unit of difference. In Greimas' terms, a *seme*. This approach is based on a structural linguistic inquiry in which the semantic units share a semantic axis and constitute expressions of differences across domains through the identification of similarities in other domains, i.e., isotopies. However, paraphrasing what Claude Zilberberg pointed out in his work *Ensayos sobre semiótica tensiva* (2000 [1981]), between the terms, *semes*, there are gradual discontinuities of the minimal difference that the *semes* try to convey. The apprehension of these discontinuities unfolds as dependent and dissymmetrical relationships, which are sensed as *tensions*.

This complementary perspective on silence remains unexplored, even though, as we can see, the different terms used to address silence sometimes do not share the same semantic axis, corresponding not to an approach through the semiotic square but to a tensile net in which different dimensions are associated simultaneously.

If we dive into the inquiry of the fundamental modes of existence which consequently inform and shape semiotic objects, “the deep structures of human cognition and culture” (Pelkey 2017, 277; Greimas, Rastier 1968, 87, 105), whatever epistemic distinction that we have made regarding silence and its whatever opposite or contradictory other considered in a specific situation, it loses the quality of the relation, its distinctiveness as the only already always there; they are not only in a *either/or* relation like opposites or contradictories, but in a *both/and*. The relations become *tensions*, connected and co-existing, in-dwelling in tension; again, they are distinct and interconnected in a simultaneous complementary

occasionality. In the next and final section, I will support this argument.

IN-TENSIONAL IN-DWELLING

There is a common agreement that silence as a phenomenon plays a fundamental role in human existence, and this is my primary premise. Throughout the previous sections, I provided a supported overview of its scientific approaches, which reveal the shared notions that underline the phenomenon's distinctiveness, i.e., *sound*, *speech*, and *noise*.

In the introductory section, I pointed out that these dyadic considerations of the semantic units follow the principle of the excluded middle, making the different semiotic relations as logical ones between discrete entities. Within this framework, silence as a phenomenon is *fixed* in a stable sign relationship, losing its dynamics and ambiguity; its capacity to be distinct and interconnected simultaneously.

Paraphrasing Jacques Fontanille, these relatively conventionalized relationships between contents and expressions are part of a major undetermined tensional space with more possibilities of association than the stabilized ones (2022, 27). However, when they are transferred to a more ontological scale, this discreteness conceals the elementary semiotic existence's phenomenological conditions, which ground the complex terms, then reducing the multiplicity of possible other relations for interpretation.

It is worth noting that, in this paper, I am not attempting to disarticulate the conclusions reached by the authors; they hold valid within the specific circumstances wherein silence is approached. I consider this contribution and my perspective as complementary.

I presented in the second section how important it is for research to apply the semiotic square of oppositions, contradictions, and implications to become more flexible in addressing the phenomenon's ambiguity and interconnectedness when approaching its ontological status. Having said this, the semiotic square, without reconsideration, is an insufficient hermeneutic and heuristic tool to address it.

Regarding the dynamic phenomenon to be described, its *semiotic existence*, i.e., its multiple *what*-features, must be addressed in an analytical language that allows graduality and movement in terms of semiotic becoming (gradual differences in valuation through time) if we aim to reflect in terms of its *essence*, or ontology. This *essence* must be understood not in terms of a fixed entity but in a Heideggerian phenomenology instead, i.e., the *how*-feature, the endurance through time in its unfolding that is its presence.

As noted earlier, the term “Dasein” indicates that existential semiotics (Tarasti 2000, 2009, 2015, 2023) is highly influenced by Heideggerian phenomenology and existential philosophy, serving as a promising framework for approaching this phenomenon. Although it has been applied mostly to music analysis, existential semiotics has modified the semiotic square into more

than what Pelkey (2017) has called the embodied X to the embodied Z called the zemic-model (for more details see: Nabón 2024, 39–45), which, following Pelkey's idea, can be based on the embodiment and enactment of body *movement*, instead of body position. Moreover, the model has been expanded beyond the square, involving and combining Greimas's modalities as methodological tools for approaching the intended features, which have been neglected so far.

When approaching silence as a fundamental aspect of human semiosis, we must return to the dynamic phenomenon as it unfolds through our analytical language to better grasp its value.

Keeping that in mind, the premises upon which I am constructing my argument are: the fundamental existence of the ontic continuum, Peirce's "synechistic continuum," or James Augustus Bacigalupi's "relevant noise" (2023) —expressed in the recognition of the continuum flow of experience, for example in the phenomenology of hearing—, silence as a modality of listening, and its ambiguity as an embodied or as an affectuality of the co-existence or in-dwelling simultaneity of tensions.

This simultaneity, according to Bacigalupi (2024), is necessary for affect, i.e., "the capacity to be about many things at once" (personal lecture's note with Bacigalupi on the 2nd of April, 2025, at Department of Semiotics, Tartu, Estonia).

This *aboutness*, or intended feature, is already present in some approaches but not explored in depth, for example, as Torras states:

The author [Kurzon] considers that silence and speech (and also non-verbal communication devices) can be distinguished from noise by their intentionality; silence and speech are intentional utterances, while noise can be classified as unintentional (although Kurzon debunks this nuance by arguing that intention is not part of the Greimasian model and by presenting some contradictory situations).⁷ Finally, for Kurzon, the intention is subordinated to the very concept of meaning forged in the philosophy of language (ibid.: 12–13). Thus, according to the author, the meaning is what matters in this scheme. (Torras 2022, 99)

Or by John Cage:

For, when, after convincing oneself ignorantly that sound has, as its clearly defined opposite, silence, that since duration is the only characteristic of sound that is measurable in terms of silence, therefore any valid structure involving sounds and silences should be based, not as occidentally traditional, on frequency, but rightly on duration, one enters an anechoic chamber, as silent as technologically possible in 1951, to discover that one hears two sounds of one's own unintentional making (nerve's systematic operation, blood's circulation), the situation one is clearly in is not objective (sound-silence), but rather subjective (sounds only),

those intended and those others (so-called silence) not intended. If, at this point, one says, "Yes I do not discriminate between intention and non-intention," the splits, subject-object, art-life, etc., disappear, an identification has been made with the material, and actions are then those relevant to its nature. (Cage 1961, 12–13)

However, this *intentionality* needs further reflection to adapt the concept beyond its strong association as an intrinsic feature of consciousness as self-reflective awareness. Based on new contributions from biosemiotics, the semiotic threshold regarding semiosis is far beyond what we can be aware of in our everyday lives. Therefore, the capacity to be about many things at once, the aboutness being an intrinsic part of the human semiosis process, demands a brief exploration.

I will focus on a brief historical account of the term and on recovering an older meaning of intentionality that ties it to tensionality in a more ontic sense.

The most influential of Franz Brentano's (2009[1874]) concepts seems to be the idea of *intentional inexistence*. This concept is derived from Aristotle's theory of perception, which holds that the soul contains the shape of the experienced thing but not its matter. According to Brentano, this can be understood literally: the sound I hear is a part of my hearing it; the thought that I am hearing the sound has both my hearing and the sound as parts; and my enjoyment of hearing the sound has the thought, the hearing, and the sound as ever more mediating parts. This is the view that every mental phenomenon contains its object within itself. In-existence does not imply non-existence but existence-in (the phenomena) or "in-dwelling," since sound is a physical phenomenon containing nothing in a semiotic sense.

Although the concepts are related, intention in this context does not refer to purpose, design, or the aim of achieving anything. Brentano's more general theoretical idea likely originated with Aquinas through Islamic philosophy. The Latin word was an attempt to translate the terms "ma'na" and "ma'qul," which were used by Avicenna and Al-Farabi and had a concrete meaning related to drawing (stretching, hence tension) "a bow whose metaphorical target is the object intended" (Brentano 2009 [1874], xviii).

According to Moran (2013), the intended character or aboutness is a widely acknowledged characteristic of many mental states. As I mentioned, we can continue the metaphor or this primary notion of tension and say, instead of the intended object as an intrinsic characteristic of a mental state, say in a more enactive perspective: as a *tuned mode*.

I arrived at the neologism in-tensionality to illustrate, in some sense, the "capacity to be about many things at once." In this sense, in Heideggerian terms, silence appears more as a space of possibilities, a "clearing," a significant interplay between *concealment* and *unconcealment*. It will be clearer with the following quotation:

[the clearing] grants first of all the possibility of the path to presence and grants the possible presentencing of that presence itself. We must think 'Ἀλήθεια, unconcealment, as the clearing that first grants being and thinking their presence to and for each other" (GA14:84). [...] The clearing in a wood does not manage to be a clearing simply by presenting some trees and moving others out of the way or out of sight. Rather, the forest clearing just is the fact that there are no trees in it. Similarly, the clearing (in Heidegger's sense) makes some possibilities possible not by putting others offline or in cold storage, but by making it the case that no other possibilities are available." (Wrathall and Carman 2021, 796)

Thinking along Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), silence is not equivalent to the essence of silence, in the sense that what it is intrinsically in every silence as such is not *something* that can be encountered as an *object* of perception. The essence of silence seems not to be *some-thing*, and it is not *silent*. If the aim is to elucidate silence phenomenologically, i.e., ontologically, it is necessary to think beyond of our experience of the essence of silence as the representation of or pursuing of the silent, or in other words, we must consider that the pursuing and representation of the silent or absences constitutes epistemological cuts in the continuum flow of experience and this aspect alone does not constitute ontic distinctions.

Considering semiotic relations as tensions and enacting and embedding their simultaneity, the phenomenological ambiguity of silence as a fundamental structure of human semiosis afford a methodological approach through modalities that existential semiotics has introduced in the analysis of musical discourses. This opens our understanding of feeling as tension, affectuality in Bacigalupi's (2023) terms, where meaning-generation arises because of asymmetrical or different degrees of mutual tensions at once.

If we consider the continuous interdependency or interconnectedness that I have repeated in several parts of this paper, and the discontinuous differences that the semes express in their approaches to silence, we are dealing with a tense structure, as proposed by Zilberberg (2000 [1981]). The interdependency (interconnectedness) forms an axis that crosses the discontinuity axis as the tensive difference. This complementary perspective, and what Zilberberg called "sub-semantic discontinuity" (2000 [1981], 6), does not compromise the seme's continuity and unity. It is in this framework that Zilberberg developed a tensive perspective where the tensions captured by affectuality, effect a tensive structure where interconnectedness and dissymmetry become analytical tools for the "systematic exploration of the seme that allows to think about the distinctions as based in dependencies" (Fontanille 2022, 16).

The phenomenon of silence has not been considered in this framework, and I think that a promising path for dialogue between existential semiotics and the tensive

perspective is an accurate methodology for addressing it. Zilberberg said that his perspective is a "prosody of content" (2004 [1998], 136), but I consider apter Oscar Macchiavello's expression: "Claude Zilberberg musicalizes the meaning" (2021, 125).

Much more fruitful dialogue is open now on a common problem between existential semiotics and tensive semiotics:

"Tensive semiotics is concerned with the existential, immediate, imperative relationship between the self and the non-self." What Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, calls "a first layer of meaning as something attached and giving rise to thought as style, as affective value, as existential mimicry, rather than as conceptual statement. Under the conceptual meaning of words, we discover an existential meaning that is not only translated by them, but inhabits them and is inseparable from them." (Zilberberg 2000, 54, my translation).

Dwelling in-tension has a thought-provoking heuristic when silence is thought of as a interplay of modalities by its own, and it is analyzed metaphorically as Zilberberg's "llegar a" [arrived at, reach out to] or Heidegger's "waiting in terms of an attentive and engaged openness to an arrival of something unexpected" (Heidegger 2010, xv).

REFERENCES

- Antunes, Jorge, 1999. O Silêncio. *OPUS Revista Eletrônica da Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-graduação em Música* (ANPPOM), v. 6, 01–09.
- Bacigalupi, J. Augustus, 2023. Creativity: Transcending the Cybernetic Mode via the Virtuality of Relevant Noise. *Angelaki* 28 (3), 78–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969725X.2023.2216550>
- Bacigalupi, J. Augustus; Favareau, Donald (2024). The physiology of coordination: self-resolving diverse affinities via the sparse order in relevant noise. *The Journal of Physiology*, 602 (11), 2581–2600. DOI: 10.1113/JP284418.
- Bernhard, Peter, 2008. Visualizations of the square of opposition. *Logica Universalis* 2(1), 31–41
- Bindeman, Steven L., 2017. *Silence in Philosophy, Literature, and Art*. Studies in Existentialism, Hermeneutics, and Phenomenology. Leiden Boston (Mass.): Brill-Rodopi.
- Brentano, Franz, 2009 [1874]. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Translated by D. B. Terrell, Linda L McAlister, and Anto Rancurello. London, and New York: Routledge ISBN 0-415-10661-3.
- Bruneau, Thomas J., 1973. Communicative silences: forms and functions. *Journal of Communication* 23, 17–46.
- Cage, John, 1961. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. 19th ed. Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan Univ. Press.
- Corbin, A., 2018. *A History of Silence: From the Renaissance to the Present Day*. John Wiley & Sons, United Kingdom.

- Dauenhauer, Bernard, 1980. *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Ephratt, Michal, 2008. The Functions of Silence. *Journal of Pragmatics* 40 (11), 1909–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2008.03.009>
- 2022. *Silence as Language: Verbal Silence as a Means of Expression*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108650779>.
- Fontanille, Jacques; Zilberberg, Claude, 2004[1998]. *Tensión y significación*. Trad. de Desiderio Blanco. Lima. Fondo Editorial de la Universidad de Lima
- Fontanille, Jacques, 2022. Colaborar con Claude Zilberberg: La convergencia semiótica entre la tensividad y las pasiones. *Tópicos del Seminario*, 1(47), 11–30. <https://doi.org/10.35494/topsem.2022.1.47.764>
- Greimas, A.-J. and J. Courtes, 1982 [1979]. *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- Greimas, A.-J. and F. Rastier, 1968. The interaction of semiotic constraints. *Yale French Studies* 41, 86–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2929667>.
- 1968. Meaning. In Strawson, P. F. (Ed.), *Philosophical Logic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 39–48.
- Heidegger, Martin, 1977. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. New York: Garland Pub.
- 2010. *Country Path Conversations*. English ed. Studies in Continental Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jaworski, Adam, (Ed.), 2011. *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. *Studies in Anthropological Linguistics*. Berlin New York: Mouton de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110821918>.
- Jensen, J. Vernon, 1973. Communicative functions of silence. *A Review of General Semantics* 30(3), 249–257.
- Johannesen, Richard L., 1974. The functions of silence: a plea for communication research. *Western Speech* 38, 25–35.
- Kukkonen, Pirjo, 1993. On Silence: The Semiotics of Silence. *Acta Semoitica Fennica*, 283-289
- 2008, Silence, Language, And Experience: On The Theory Of Subject In Translation Of Silence As A Sign System. In *A Sounding Of Signs*. Acta Semiotica Fennica. 30, 168-189. International Semiotics Institute, Helsinki.
- Kurzorn, Dennis, 1998. *Discourse of Silence*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 2007. Towards a Typology of Silence. *Journal of Pragmatics* 39, 1673–1688.
- Le Breton, David, 1997. *El Silencio, aproximaciones*. Tercera edición: Ediciones sequitur, Madrid, 2009. Translation by Agustín Temes.
- Macchiavello, Óscar Q. 2021. Eficiencia y eficacia de la hipótesis tensiva. *Tópicos del Seminario*, 2(46), 118–134. <https://doi.org/10.35494/topsem.2021.2.46.741>
- Marco Furrasola, Ángeles, 1999. *Una aproximación a la semiótica del silencio*. PhD Thesis. Universitat de Barcelona, Spain.
- Moran, Dermot, 2013. Intentionality: Some Lessons from the History of the Problem from Brentano to the Present. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 21 (3), 317–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2013.812605>.
- Nabón, Sebastián, 2023. Silencio, una manera de escuchar con el cuerpo. In Colombia, Urueña López, J.E.; Mangieri, R. (Eds.), *Las artes del cuerpo como celebración de la vida y el encuentro*. Editorial Universidad del Rosario, pp. 91–106. <https://doi.org/10.12804/urosario9789585002005>
- 2024. *Counter-current of Signs: Resistance Through Existential Silences in Minimalist Music*. MA thesis, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia.
- Pelkey, Jamin, 2017. Greimas Embodied: How Kinesthetic Opposition Grounds the Semiotic Square. *Semiotica* 2017 (214), 277–305. <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2016-0188>.
- Saville-Troike, Muriel, 1985. The place of silence in an integrated theory of communication. In: Tannen, Deborah; Saville-Troike, Muriel (Eds.), *Perspectives on Silence*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 3–18.
- Tarasti, Eero 2000. *Existential Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- 2009. What Is Existential Semiotics? From Theory to Application. *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 1(1), 25–39. <https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2009-0011>
- 2015. *Sein und Schein: Explorations in Existential Semiotics*. Berlin, München, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614516354>
- 2023. *Transcending Signs*. In: Tarasti, E. (Ed.), *Transcending Signs*. De Gruyter, V–VIII. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110789164-202>
- Torras, Daniel, 2022. The Semiotic Square Applied to Silence: A New Attempt and Some Revelations. *The American Journal of Semiotics* 38 (1), 91–113. <https://doi.org/10.5840/ajs202342082>
- Wrathall, Mark A., (Ed.) 2021. *The Cambridge Heidegger Lexicon*. 1st ed. Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9780511843778>.
- Zilberberg, Claude, 2000[1981]. *Ensayos sobre semiótica tensiva*. Trad. de Desiderio Blanco, Lima, Fondo Editorial de la Universidad de Lima, FCE.