Silence and narrative photography

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ABSTRACT

This paper's subject is silence in narrative photography. In executing this study, we have reviewed texts on silence but, given that there are very few, we have had to depend on others that discuss image. We will begin by characterizing silence as a photographic element, and we will distinguish between silencing, a silenced event/image and silence. The latter could be photographs that demand silence from us, photographs capable of emanating stillness and calm that we assimilate to silence, photographs that use metaphors to represent silence and, finally, photographs that incorporate silences. We will emphasize that silence can convey meaning, and that its meaning occurs when it is contextualized and used, rendering it informative as well as expressive. To develop these ideas, we will analyze various photographs and look at their possible silences, which, insofar as they interrelate with other elements of the image to form a unit, make up the photograph itself. For this analysis, and in the absence of texts specific to this subject, we will use classical Chinese painting as an analogy. This text should be read as an approach to a subject that has received little attention up to this point.

For Felix, who likes to watch so much

RESUMEN

El presente escrito es un ensayo cuyo objeto de estudio es el silencio en la narración fotográfica. Para su realización hemos revisado textos que hablaran de él, pero dada su escasez, hemos tenido que apoyarnos en otros que tratan sobre la imagen. Comenzamos caracterizando al silencio en cuanto elemento de la fotografía y distinguimos entre silenciamiento, silenciado/silenciada y silencio. Este último puede aparecer como fotografías que nos reclaman silencio, las fotografías capaces de irradiar quietud y calma y que asimilamos a silencio, las fotografías que usan metáforas para representar el silencio y, por último, las fotografías que incorporan silencios. Subrayamos que el silencio es capaz de significar y que su sentido se da en la contextualización y en el uso. Un silencio que puede informar y no sólo ser un elemento expresivo. Para desarrollar estas ideas analizamos varias fotografías y deparamos en sus posibles silencios, que son, en tanto que se interrelacionan con otros elementos de la imagen conformando una unidad, la propia fotografía. Para este análisis y debido a la ausencia de textos que lo hagan específicamente sobre este objeto de estudio, usamos por analogía la pintura china clásica. El texto debe de leerse como una aproximación a un objeto de estudio que a día de hoy ha merecido poca atención.

Para Félix, al que tanto le gusta mirar

By Way of Introduction

In 1992 we defended a thesis on silence in radio language. From a theoretical viewpoint, we established that radio language was composed of words, music, noises, and silences, all four with the capacity for meaning. But, of the four elements, silence had never been studied in depth. One of the conclusions of that thesis was that total silence does not exist. What did we mean by total silence? That the limits of our perception (as individuals and as a species) led us to suppose that silence exists where, in reality, there is none. In other words, it was an anthropocentric vision related to the physical phenomenon of sound. Furthermore, although throughout the thesis we tried to establish the interconnection between sound and silence as one of opposites, their interrelationship seemed to be one of dependency: that silence exists as long as there is no sound. Today, we are clear that they are interdependent, and that silence is not what it is but what we want it to be.

Biguenet (2021) recalls Adorno in citing a possible silence. Adorno ponders the (im)possibility of representing the unrepresentable —how to speak about the unspeakables— with reference to the Holocaust. Years later, when dealing with the Rwandan genocide, Edgar Roskis (1995) asks questions of himself and us to warn us what would have been said of a Pulitzer Prize won at Auschwitz. Wittgenstein (1981) had already written in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* that what cannot be talked about is better nleft unsaid. We will revisit these questions later, with a focus on photography. However, if allowed, and even if we distort the ultimate meaning of Adorno's words, in this study we will refer to a possible silence (the one we wish it to be), since physics shows it to be impossible.

Enrique Sacristán (2021) interviewed Álvaro de Rújula, a theoretical physicist, asking if there is any place in the universe where there is absolutely nothing other than emptiness. Álvaro de Rújula replied: "Nothingness is the absence of everything that 'could be there.' It is a philosophical concept, characteristically vague. However, emptiness is a physical concept: it is something observablet." This leads us to maintain that nothingness —silence— is a construct of what "could be there"—a construct of silence itself.

In this article, we do not intend to expand on the different meanings or functions encompassed by the concept of silence. If that is of interest, please refer to the first part of the aforementioned thesis (Terrón, 1992). But we do consider it necessary to enunciate a series of interrelated features that, in our understanding, define and constitute silence. We will revisit some of these later.

The first of these is "verbocentrism", which in this case would be the object (we understand people to constitute a type of object) and would not be understood without its constitutive and enduring functions.

The first words in the Bible come to mind for us all. By way of emphasis, it is better to turn to another constitutive myth:

> Everything has been produced through the Word: Vâc was next to God, the Brâhmana repeats: "All this, in principle, was only the Lord of the universe. His Word was with him. This word was his second. He contemplated. He said: «I am going to liberate this Word and thus it will produce and bring into existence this whole world»" (Panikkar, 1984/85, p. 26).

Whenever reading these constitutive myths, language action theory comes to mind. Let us close this paragraph with a reference to the Dogon people because they understand that there are two types of wordse: *dry* ones, which communicate, and *wet* ones, which enter a woman's ear and leave her pregnant.

On the other hand, we must remember that, for thousands of years, culture has been transmitted mainly thanks to the oral word and osubsequently the written one. The verb makes a culture endure, and it manifests itself in another verb —one pertaining to that culture's subject. Suárez Gómez (2021) tells us that voice is rewarded as the main form of human communication, causing other forms to be forgotten or to be relegated to complementarity. He follows Bauman in stating that only by giving importance to those other forms , can we stop operating under the human-language-speech premise:

> That has silently (mis)informed the categories set by the supposed limits of our existence and that unfortunately continues to determine, as it has done since ancient times, "the porous line between the human and the non-human, between the civilization and savagery" (Suárez Gómez, 2021).

Later he looks at what Derrida calls "phonocentrism". According to Derrida, the voice has conveyed the idea of rationality since ancient times (Derrida, 1977). On the other hand, Chion (1993) speaks of "vococentrism" because the voice hierarchizes the perception around it (cited in Valdés de la Campa, 2018). This leads us to the simple conclusion that silence is usually subordinated to the word (the object), and that it is silence because of the word's absence. Word and silence do not complement each other; silence is subordinated to the word. The notion of contrast prevails over that of interdependence and, to a certain extent, it questions silence's ability to convey meaning, tending to restrict it to its expressive or emphatic abilities, forgetting that it can also describe and inform (Terrón, 1992). Silence clearly acquires meaning in context, as do words (Lyons 1983), and they acquire meaning when they are used (Wittgenstein, the forerunner of the speech-act theory, formulated it as referring to the unit of speech, and therefore its components). However, the word does not seem to need context and it therefore ranks higher than silence. Let us not omit to add that a text's grammar communicates semantic relationships (antonyms, synonyms, homonyms, paronyms, hypernyms and hyponyms) as well as semantic fields and that, in both cases, the context —which can be the semantic field itself— determines the meaning. To be used and understood, every discursive expression needs context, either before or after it.

However, there is one context —culture— which must be afforded its own place, since we enunciate from a cultural viewpoint, and, to decode the enunciation, that culture must be known. Communication processes are cultural processes. Authors such as Jaworsky (1997), Saville-Troike (1994) and Tannen (1991) emphasize the cultural contextualization of silence and how misunderstandings can occur when silence is practiced by people from different cultures. It is the same with images. For instance, where we perceive emptiness and repetition, a connoisseur of classical Chinese painting would see a balance between three elements (water, mountain and sky) with two-thirds of a composition canonically stipulated to contain nothing; where the emptiness and fullness are one and the painted sections emerge out of the nothingness to form a whole (Cheng, 2016). Does the canon lead to reiteration? Every connoisseur of classical Chinese arts and its culture —even this author— knows the importance of repetition (reiteration) and copying, which is considered a commitment to copied work and not as forgery or an attack on intellectual propertyn. On this matter, see Byung-Chul Han's (2016) indispensable book *Shanzhaiat: Deconstruction in Chinese*). It cites the texts that appear in painting, including the realization of the feeling the work has engendered (the painter of a landscape also tries to convey perceptions, such as stillness, rather than descriptions, thus encouraging the appearance of silence). It is considered normal and there is value in the different owners adding their own feelings (nothing is further from the caption). Incidentally, calligraphy made the ideogram into an art form that became independent of its story-telling function.

This brings us to another feature of silence: its polysemic character rather than its ambiguity. Ambiguity results from the desire to be ambiguous or the inability to communicate what is intended. Silence, therefore, is polysemic and sometimes ambiguous.

We end this section by mentioning noise, which can also be a metaphor for the superabundance or stimuli that do not allow us to isolate ourselves or therefore to reflect or concentrate. Silence—the kind that allows us to contemplate a composition or the objects within a (photographic) composition—would be antipodal to noise. Regarding the superabundance of content, of images, it is worth dwelling on the recent work by Andrea Soto Calderón (2020), *La performatividad de las imágenes* (The Performativity of Images). Soto Calderón tells us that "we could question whether there is an excess of images. Doubtlessly there is a visual excess, but of a hegemony that does not stop repeating the same images" (Soto Calderón, 2020, p. 13). If correct, the problem would lie not so much in the number of images but in that they are always the same and, therefore, always tell us the same thing in the same way. Soto Calderón (2020, p. 14) adds: "However, the biggest problem is perhaps all those realities without images, in other words, that lack the ability to be imaginedt". The issue is that we must consider gazes as problematic (before the camera and its use, there was "the gaze", the way of seeing the world) and, for instance, decolonize them. Further down the line, she states:

Undoubtedly, there is a dominant information system that selects and eliminates all the singularity of images, extracting them from their contexts, emptying them of meaning and turning them into icons, which is not equivalent to saying that there are too many images (Soto Calderón, 2020, p. 14).

In other words, the zero degree of photography, which has nothing to do with silence. Does this constant exposure to the same images end up trivializing them? We constantly ask ourselves the same thing as Susan Sontag (2014a): would silence not be preferable? It is worth reading a small extract from her interview with Arcadi Espadar, following the 2003 publication of her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

Arcadi Espada: Show the pain. Thirty years ago you said, in 'On Photography', that the repeated display of pain anesthetized perception.

Susan Sontag: I'm always in discussion with myself. Today I'm already discussing things from this latest book. Imagine what I think of what I wrote thirty years ago. But ultimately, I don't think it's true that the exhibition of images of pain anesthetizes the conscience of man (...).

AE: What made you change your mind?

SS: Reality. The image of Christ, for example. How many years have the faithful been contemplating that life-sized, blood-stained, naked, dying man? If it were true that we got used to suffering, Catholics would have ceased to be moved long ago. They haven't. That's reality. Sometimes we have to submit what we think to this type of decisive verification. If you feel committed to certain images, whether you've seen them once or a hundred times, you'll continue to suffer (Espada, 2004).

Silencing

To proceed with this study, we emust first establish the difference between silence as an enunciation of silencing —adapting the distinction established by Puccinelli Orlandi (1993) between silence that has been sought— and *silencing*, or hushing up. However, as a result of exploring the subject thoroughly, we believe that silencing (which is exerted on the photographer from the outside, is coercive and prevents them from showing what is seen) has to be distinguished from silenced (broadly speaking, the subject chooses to stay silent based on viewpoint and photographic choice). This section will be dedicated to silencing, which can arise because of censorship, hegemonic culture (and its taboos), media production routines, aesthetic waves, and even professional ethics.

So as not to extend the scope of this study too much, we are going to limit this section to three cases: the first COVID-19 lockdown in Spain, the Rwandan genocide and the recent repression in Myanmar (2021).

A few months ago, we wrote an article entitled "Cómo representan las fotografías una pandemia" (*How photographs portray a pandemic*; Terrón, 2020), which includes the following quote:

Aguiló Vidal (2020) wrote an interesting report on the treatment of the pandemic in Spain based on a series of interviews with renowned photojournalists. The report bears the eloquent title 'A blind pandemic' because according to the author —and the photojournalists— his photographic images had been shown, but with limitations (Terrón, 2020).

The fact is that weeks elapsed before they could show the interiors of hospitals, nursing homes and makeshift funeral homes.

All photojournalists agreed that, in Spain, there was a desire not to show the chaos into which the health system was plunged for weeks. So that it could not be seen, a series of statements were issued from hospitals, residential homes, and government offices/headquarters (Terrón, 2020).

This situation impeded the work of photojournalists. Some photographs reached us, namely those taken by sufferers or their close friends, and by the staff of those institutions where access was denied to photojournalists. This brings us to a very important point: nowadays it is not necessary to be a professional to *document*; to attest. We believe this is an extremely interesting observation: when studying the photographs produced by photojournalists today, we can see that they do not correspond to the images that are produced at an event or incident, and even less so as a synecdoche.

But there are still many images that have not yet been published yin our media, or that have been published very rarely, such as the faces of the mourners and our dead. This brings us back to Sontag (2014a), and how to show pain and death if we hide our faces. Moreover, we have not yet seen what happened in our institutions during the early weeks, since what has been published is still just a small —politically correct— portion of the photographs that were taken. By way of illustration, and to accompany these words, we asked a medical friend for permission to publish some of the photographs she has of those days inside a large hospital. She considered it inappropriate.

Conversely, we know that our colleagues from other European countries were surprised by the harshness of the images reproduced by our media. Meanwhile, we were surprised by others, such as those that circulated in Latin American countries[1]. Some cultures are more permeable than others when it comes to showing certain images. To put it differently, taboos (sometimes veiled by decorum) prevent certain images from being shown. Time and distance allow us to show images, since they are dispossessed of the proximity necessary for empathy. The passage of time will allow us to see many of the photographs of the COVID-19 pandemic that are currently hidden from us. Distance permits us to show the faces of the mourners who are not our own.

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1   On this point, see, for example, the photos that were being published in the Mexican photography magazine *Cuartoscuro* (cuartoscuro.com/revista).

In the CAC's (*Catalan Audiovisual Council*) recommendations *Sobre el tractament informatiu de les tràgedies personals* (*On the depiction of tragic events in the media*; 2001), it dedicated part of that document to the work behind the camera. It emphasizes not using zoom shots or close-up shots, while also stating that, if *hard* images are to be broadcast, the audience should be forewarned appropriately and in good time. Its conclusions sinclude: "As far as possible, and as a general rule, we must avoid resorting to images of dead victims, coffins, or the wounded" (CAC, 2001). It is written in the present (from whence the past and the future are written) and the phrase "as far as possible" is accentuated. At this moment in time, in this part of the world and with reference to the pandemic, it is not yet possible. And we are warned:

> The images of pain referring to tragedies happening far beyond the immediate scope of reference of the media that broadcast them must also be treated with special care to avoid causing, through flagrant differences in treatment, the effect of trivializing the suffering of 'others' in contrast to the suffering close at hand (CAC, 2001).

Let us look, more briefly, at the case of the 1994 Rwandan genocide4, in which it is estimated that more than 800,000 people were murdered. In a piece that documents how this massacre was covered photographically, Roskis (1995) concisely and accurately entitles it "Un genocidio sin imágenes" ("A Genocide Without Images"). To put it simply, it was not on the media's agenda. Between April 7 and July 15, 1994, approximately 70% of the Tutsis were murdered. During those three long months, there was a complicit silence from the Western powers, even if not collusion with the misdeeds of the Tutsis, especially on the part of France, the former colonizing power. Did this French passivity influence its media? Roskis explains to us that during part of those three months there were two Western photojournalists (that is correct: two) and no journalists touring Rwanda. On their return, they only managed to place a couple of photographs; the newsrooms showed no interest in their images. However, a few weeks later, upon the exodus of tens of thousands of Rwandans and the perpetrated genocide, Rwanda made news headlines across the world:

> It was not therefore the civil war, that planned massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and Hutu opponents, that most inspired photographers, newspapers, magazines and televisions, but the humanitarian liturgy, "exodus and sacks of rice, orphans and dispensaries, murders of human beings and charitable souls in action, images of pain and movements of salvation" (Roskis, 1995, p. 28).

These are, of course, recurring images that illustrate every great conflict; the first that come to mind are those of the Spanish Civil War. Roskis (1995, p. 28) adds: "Let us say that this is

characteristic of images: that they show proportionally more than they hide. Under the protection of such photogenic humanitarian camps, the Hutu assassins have been rebuilding their administrative and military potential"[2]. As we will see, from our point of view, they show as much as they conceal.

The third case is the Myanmar Spring Revolution, which occurred in response to the coup d'état instigated by Min Aung Hlaing, Chief of Staff of the Defense Services. In this case, despite the dictatorship's attempts to silence or divert attention, it should be noted that the protests were front-page news across the world. We saw pain because it was shown to us; we even saw the face of death.

Figure 1. Relatives of a young man mourn his death after he died in the protests against the Myanmar coup. From *Press Bangla Agency;* https://www.pba.agency. Copyright: Press Bangla Agency.

Figure 1 shows a relative crying over a young man who was killed in the protests against the coup d'état. The two faces —of the deceased and his relative— are observed in the foreground. This image contravenes all CAC recommendations, unless publishing it was "unavoidable." Do you think that is the reason? Or do you think it is because the protagonists are unfamiliar?

Silenced Event, Silenced Image

In this section, we will discuss the silencing of an event or an image (sometimes both occur together). As we will show, they are not the same. However, we are aware that separating silencing from a silenced event or image is, in many cases, an impossible task. For instance, even the photographer can be a silencing agent due to self-censorship, and this can be due to external causes or the photographer's own convictions.

We will start with the distinction that Juan Luis Pintos (2003) drew between relevance and opacity. Pintos developed a large part of his thought in relation to social imaginaries,

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2   As with the images of ICUs during the pandemic, which medicalize while simultaneously praising technology as a solution and a common good.

"schemes that allow us to perceive something as real, explain it and intervene operationally in what is described as reality in each social system and functionally different subsystems" (Pintos, 2003, p. 27). Imaginaries would operate by distinguishing between relevance and opacity, their blind spot.

One might wonder if we can consider photography to be a social imaginary. If we look at the statement "perceive something as real", we must remember the words of Fontcuberta (2016) regarding photography:

> It would seem that photography is not only a depository of verisimilitude (the quality of visibility), but also of veracity (the quality of speech). On the one hand, it faithfully transcribes reality, and, on the other, it infuses the photographer with an aura of honesty. In both cases, these qualities do not appear as options attributable to the operator's will, but rather as procedural impositions, as an ontological imperative. Therefore, the camera simultaneously brings together the true, the truthful and the plausible (Fontcuberta, 2016, p. 122).

But in photography there is also this opposition between relevance/opacity:

> The focus of the camera that records the visible always produces a difference. Initially, this is material: the visible field that appears a"in-shot", and athe "out-of-shot" field that is therefore invisible from the position or perspective assumed and transmitted by the camera in question (Pintos, 2003, p. 28).

Pintos also states:

> We believe, therefore, that there is no privileged point of view, a point of view not limited by geometry and time from which reality could be linearly defined as unique, as true, as universally valid, as authentic, as certain. We will always find ourselves limited in our definition of reality, since we will have to assume that different perspectives will establish different relevance and ignore different opacities (Pintos, 2003, p. 26).

Pintos's words lead us to look at the frame, and every frame is a point of view that contains both in-shot and aout-of-shot fields. We are not therefore talking about denotation and connotation, or the explicit and the implicit. The connotation and the implicit make us see the aout-of-shot field, the silencing. On the other hand, the in-shot and aout-of-shot fields are both inherent to any photograph and involve selecting the object that will be seen. The point of view is a phenomenon that is at once mechanical and cultural (not forgetting the linear perspective), as well as authorial (what and how it is shown).

Pintos himself emphasizes that "every selection (...) is based on a context of condensation, confirmation, generalization and schematization, that is not found as such within

the environment it is communicating about" (2003, p. 28). Without reference to them, Pintos tells us about production routines, which are simultaneously a reason for silencing or keeping us silent. aaAmong the authors we have studied for this paper, Marzal (2007), Mussico (2007), Sontag (2014a, 2014b) and Cárdenas Chapa (2020) have a great deal to say about the continuity (rather than the contrast) between in- and out-of-shot fields. Mussico's work is entitled *El campo vacío* (*The Empty Field*) and, as the author points out, the empty field is full. In it, he tells us that one of the possible functions of the empty field is the ellipsis. We must bear in mind that the ellipsis can be the place for what cannot or does not want to be shown. Román Gubern (1989) has stated on more than one occasion that pornographic cinema is a genre that fills the ellipsis with cinematographic sexual relations. In the case of photography, for instance, among the series of images within the same narrative act there are usually jumps in time that are not ellipses —they are unavoidable, even if very small. Nonetheless, in the exposure of that series of images, an ellipsis can be embedded perfectly.

In all these cases, we are talking about the total suppression of both in- and out-of-frame afields. But it is common that, either when taking a photograph or during editing, certain images are omitted for different reasons, which can be done by means of the synecdoche or by voluntarily *concealing* part of the photograph mechanically or with people or objects[3]. Broadly speaking, two things can happen: the setting, or part of it, is silenced to highlight an object or living being; or the object or living being itself is silenced.

Finally, in relation to the field and out-of-field shots, we will find that none of the authors studied consider it possible to create a new frame at the moment of editing. At that point, a field that we will see and an out-of-shot field that we will not see are created from the original photograph. This is a way of focusing our attention on something, deliberately concealing certain images, or seeking a more balanced or more aesthetic composition. None of these purposes excludes the others within the same photograph. However, in more than one case, a story is constructed through editing that has nothing to do with the original photograph's narrative. The image is decontextualized, and the result is an aberrant reading.

An extreme example of what we have been saying is the image Brian Wansky recreated from two photographs, which he later had to retract (see Figures 2 and 3).

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3   Nowadays there are applications in which anyone can remove objects or subjects from photographs.

Figure 2. Cover page of *Los Angeles Times* on March 31, 2003. From "Algunos ejemplos de imágenes manipuladas" ("Some examples of manipulated images"), Jesús de Baldoma; https://fotografialibre.com/articulos/ejembres-imagenes-manipuladas. Copyright: Jesús de Baldoma.

Composition:

Figure 3. Combination of two photographs to create a third image —Brian Walski (2003). From "Algunos ejemplos de imágenes manipuladas" ("Some examples of manipulated photographs"), Jesús de Baldoma; https://fotografialibre.com/articulos/ejembres-imagenes-manipuladas. Copyright: Jesús de Baldoma and Brian Walski.

It is often said that a photo captures an instant and that each photograph is an unrepeatable moment. However, what is not usually said is that narrative photography can observe a series of photographs. This being the case, we can very carefully assimilate each photograph sequentially, causing us to have to analyze the images individually as well as interrelatedly with those that precede and follow them. We will cite two examples to explain the sequencing of some images, knowing that we could have chosen others[4].

Let us turn our attention back to the COVID-19 pandemic. The scientific journals covering those months are full of articles linking communication and COVID, but few of these texts analyze images. None of the authors I have read (except for Rebeca Pardo, 2019) treat epidemic photography as a photographic genre, as advocated by the medical anthropologist Christos Lynteris. As with all genres, it registers some themes typical of pandemics, themes that surprised us so much months ago (the empty streets, the solidarity, the precautions, and so on). We are not that unique, and neither are the photographs, as follows.

The photograph in Figure 4 depicts a group of patients with tuberculosis (another pandemic) from St Thomas' Hospital lying in their beds in the open air alongside the River Thames. The photo dates from 1936.

Figure 4. Tuberculosis patients take air by the Thames. From *The Daily Mail*; https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1326436/Tuberculosis-infection-rates-reach-30-year-high-rise-immigration.html. Copyright: Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

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4 For example, the series "The Horse in Motion" by Eadweard Muybridge (1878).

Figure 5. Isidre Correa, with his wife and medical team, facing the beach in front of the Hospital del Mar in Barcelona. From *El Periódico de Catalunya*, David Ramos; https://www.elperiodico. com/es/sociedad/20200603/coronavirus-barcelona-hospital-del-mar-uci-7986021. Copyright: Getty Images/David Ramos.

The photograph in Figure 5 was taken by David Ramos and published by El Periódico on June 3, 2020. It depicts Isidre Correa next to a beach in Barcelona after he had spent days in intensive care. This and other photographs of the same patient facing the sea are iconic images of the pandemic. No one realizes that doctors are successful precisely because they are aware that they are not pioneers, and they are therefore acting in a way they know will benefit the patient. However, for the recipients of care, it is a novel experience (hence much of the reason it is widely known) as they are ignorant about previous epidemics.

We were bombarded with "old" images of people with masks and that was the end of it, almost always limiting epidemics and pandemics that have been photographed to the so-called "Spanish flu". We believe that whatever their research, a researcher who lacks a diachronic (historicist) vision can easily fall into error. From our point of view, and with reference to the pandemic and what we have been writing about, along with the images that are repeated during every pandemic, it would be very useful to know which pictures appear and which disappear. In this way, the images would inform us of changes in popular consciousness.

This is precisely what happens in the second example (Figure 5): the representation of death. We know there was a time when the dead were photographed because that is how they were honored and physically remembered (is this time being relived thanks to cell phones?). We believe that, in many cases, photographs also acted as oratories. In the lines that follow, Morcate (2019), perhaps the greatest expert in Spain on post-mortem photography, talks about how the consideration of the images to be remembered has changed:

> It is precisely in this idealized space (*domestic photographs*) that photographs representing agony, illness, pain or death are generally expelled, because they prevent the perfecting of a story in which there is still only space for joy, fun, and the pursuit of happiness, even though this so-called happiness has often been specially fabricated for the camera (Morcate, 2019, p. 146).

Lierni Irizar (2018) is right to tell us that death is seen as a failure in our society and that, like disease and suffering, they are impossible to accept because of a world that values presentism, happiness, and success; a kind of social infantilization. Regarding death, she adds that "we neither can, nor do we know how to, talk about it" (Irizar, 2018, p. 185). Perhaps this explains Barthes' unease (2020):

> So, is there nothing to say about death, suicide, injuries, accident? No, nothing to say about those photos in which I see white coats, stretchers, bodies lying on the floor, pieces of glass, and so forth. Ah, if only there were a look, a look from a subject; if someone in the photo would look at me! (Barthes, 2020, p. 121).

We evade the representation of death so as to deny it and to feel foolishly immortal. We have moved from representing death to avoiding its representation, and from remembering the dead to wanting to forget death[5]. Linking to the previous section, we must bear in mind that the exclusion of death can also be a silencing. "Fenton, following the instructions of the Ministry of War (Crimea) not to photograph the dead, the mutilated and the sick (...) took care to present the war as a solemn excursion" (Sontag, 2014a, p. 48).

Silence

Having written in the introduction that silence does not exist and that we recreate it, is it worth dedicating a section to the absence of silence? We think so. However, we need to preface what follows with a warning: we intend to avoid the error of creating a taxonomy. Thus, the different relationships with silence we will list are only a means of referencing the relationship between photography and silence. We believe it worth pausing to consider some examples, to clarify our point of view to the reader.

In writing about silence and photography, we must first make four assumptions. The first, and the one furthest from the scope of this essay, consists of those photographs that ask us to remain silent, such as the face that calls for silence and is portrayed by an index finger in front of closed lips. Allow us a brief digression. The Roman god of silence and confidentiality was the Greek god of silence: Harpocrates. This name was in turn borrowed from the Egyptian god Horpajard (the childhood name of the god known as Horus), who was represented as a naked child with his finger in his mouth. During Greco-Roman times, he is portrayed as emerging from a lotus (which we think precedes pictures of the birth of Venus). In short, the finger he brings up to his mouth (as a child he sucks his finger) was interpreted by the Greeks as an indication of silence. This error gave rise to a deity and a symbol we consider universal.

The second assumption refers to photographs that can emanate stillness and calm. We can fall into the error that the images that emanate silence for us are interpreted as such by eve-

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5 And this is the ultimate meaning of the applications that claim to give life to a deceased person.

ryone. There is insufficient research to certify whether this is the case or to characterize the predominant features of this type of photography (which are rooted in painting, most ecommonly Western). We assume that they usually depict open spaces in which no movement is perceived and, rather than telling us a story or offering us a description, they show us the stillness we referred to above. Thus, the stills taken by the landscape photographer Ansel Adams are usually understood as capturing images that lead us to contemplation and, with it, to silence (Revenga, 1983). They are photographs to be gazed at in silence. We believe that, to a large extent, this is because black and white are used to transcend viewing objects independently so as to focus attention on the whole. Curiously, traditional Chinese painting reserved color for paintings whose central objects were human beings, animals, and plants. Landscapes used black-based shades.

Third, we must consider the use of metaphors to represent silence in a photograph. As in the first assumption, our most common cultural metaphors should be thinned out so we can then carry out comparative studies with other cultures. Let us take the example of a photograph that has been used as a metaphor for silence, in this case related to the cosmos. We are referring to "The Blue Marble", taken on December 7, 1972, from Apollo 17. In it, we see the Earth as a blue planet floating in a void (incidentally, the image we all know is not exactly the one captured from Apollo 17, as it was subsequently edited on Earth to more accurately depict what we dreamed of seeing). This photograph has an added valuee: that of questioning our anthropocentric vision of the world.

Fourth, and finally, we have to consider the photographs that contain silence —that fifth dimension that Cheng (2016) says constitutes the "emptiness", an element that gels together and connects what is shown. In traditional Chinese painting, it is often defined as the harmony between the *support* (emptiness) and the *ink* (fullness). Panikkar (1984/85, p. 43) tells us that "in Buddha-inspired landscape paintings (*ch'an*), all the elements, mountains, trees and clouds are only there to point out the contrasting emptiness they seem to be emerging from at the very moment they become ephemeral islets". According to Lizcano (1992), the same occurs with the texts in Chinese that are in solidarity with space and realize the aspiration of Apollinaire, whom he quotes: "In a poem, the union of the fragments will not be that of grammatical logic, but rather that of an ideographic logic that enables an order of spatial arrangement contrary to that of discursive juxtaposition" (Lizcano, 1992, p. 67). That is what Mallarmé's poems also seek to attain.

Moving on to the examples, we believe Hengki Koentjoro, born in Jakarta, best exemplifies what we mean by taking classical Chinese painting as an analogy. In the first of his images we show (Figure 6), the union, dialogue, configuration of a whole becomes clear. The object sinks into nothingness, which is what prevails, an object that ceases to be a (fishing) tool and endows the image with a contained abstraction. Silence as a place where meaning breathes.

Figure 6. Composition showing "everything" immersed in silence. "Submerge" by Hengki Koentjoro; https://m.facebook.com/koentjoro24. Copyright: Hengki Koentjoro.

We can see in the second photo (Figure 7) that, rather than using a linear perspective, the foreground and background are layered (as also happens in many Chinese paintings, which never contain a vanishing point). The layers are separated by fog, thus creating a void out of which a landscape is born that ends up fading back into fog (another technique widely used in Chinese painting).
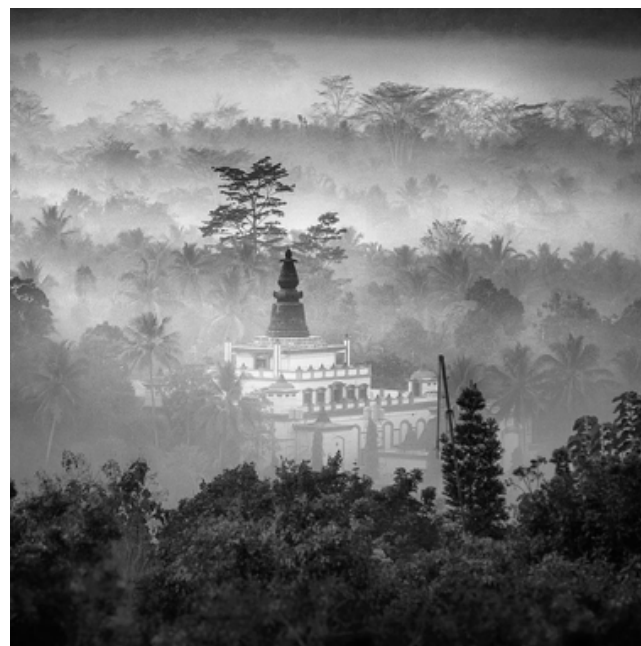

Figure 7. Fog as a layered background and the creation of "emptiness". "Java", Hengki Koentjoro; https://m.facebook.com/koentjoro24. Copyright: Hengki Koentjoro.

Let us now compare the following two photographs, the first by Hengki Koentjoro (Figure 8) and the second by Michael Kenna (Figure 9), who was greatly influenced by Ansel Adams.

Figure 8. Image of the beach in downtown Sanuar, Bali (Indonesia). "Sanuar Beach", Hengki Koentjoro; https://m.facebook.com/koentjoro24. Copyright: Hengki Koentjoro.

Figure 9. Image of Lake Biwa in Takaishima, Japan. "Torii, Study 2", Michael Kenna; https://www.michaelkenna.com/. Copyright: Michael Kenna.

While subtlety and harmony prevail in the first composition, the contrasts in the second —especially the clouds— lend the photograph drama. On the other hand, it is notable that the object is in the center of the image in the second photo while it is located on a jetty (a line) to the right in the first and we see an almost invisible mountain emerging in the background.

Figure 10. Image of Lake Biwa in Takaishima, Japan, taken five years before the previous one. "Torii, Study 1", Michael Kenna; https://www.michaelkenna.com/. Copyright: Michael Kenna.

Perhaps Michael Kenna's second photograph (Figure 10) is more indicative of what we are trying to say. It is the same *torii*, but now it no longer occupies the center of the image and emerges out of a sea that almost blends into the sky. The *torii* is the (Shinto) gateway that separates the sacred space (where the shrine is) from ordinary space. Sometimes there may be a series of *torii*. This picture is of the torii in Lake Biwa and it is the Shirahige shrine's first gateway (the second largest on the mainland). This *torii* must be the most photographed in the whole of Japan and, normally, we are shown it iwith the lake in the background. It is not usually appreciated that it is a few meters from the shore, and that the shore is the space that separates the two *torii*. When photographing the *torii* with the lake in the background, we are actually depicting *ordinary* space. Why then a gateway in the water? For those traveling by boat to enter the sacred space. Sarutahiko-no-mikoto, the shrine deity, offers blessings to those who ply the waters (both freshwater and the sea), among other things. We see how in this case the point of view is of such importance that it distorts the original meaning of the *torii*: "beauty" prevails and the meaning of the narrative is diametrically opposed to the intention of those who built the sanctuary. As Gloria Jiménez and Leyre Marinas (2020) remind us, the photographic gaze precedes the invention of the camera itself and, therefore, we would add, of each photograph. In the case we are reviewing, some spectacular sunsets in front of the sanctuary and a lake —water that reflects the beauty of a *torii*— highlight the surrounding "emptiness".

However, the reading we have been able to make of these photographs is possible thanks to knowledge of their context. Sometimes a caption is not enough, or it is just as "wrong" as the photo itself. The context allows us to read an image, but we must first learn how to do it. Marzal (2007) tells us that we must take into account the following levels to read a

photograph: contextual, morphological, compositional (which includes the in- and out-of-shot fields), enunciative, and global interpretation. The contextual level includes general data, technical and strictly contextual parameters, biographical information and critique. He definitely talks about artistic photography, but even in this case, we need to know more if we really want to read it (merely contemplating it is totally legitimate, whether or not we absorb it), just as we might view the portico of a cathedral or any other narrative that uses other languages in any kind of medium (interfaces).

When discussing audiovisual silence, Torras (2014) distinguishes between diegetic, multiple, narrative and real contexts. From our point of view, this contextual taxonomy is more useful for analyzing the elements that make up a photograph.

However, we do not share areagree with the following words:

> It is well known that the power of images resides in the suggestion they offer to those who observe them. It is the viewer who interprets them and decides their meaning, and it is precisely this lability of interpretation that makes two people attribute different meanings to the same picture (Conesa, 2021).

We believe that this "quality" is not exclusive to photography. It is the case with any narrative, and even more so if we do not have the contextual ability to interpret it.

The last example is a well-known photograph by Robert Capa —one of the few remaining depictions of the Normandy landings (Figure 11). An error on the part of the development technician caused the rest of the shots to be exposed. In this case, the blurring, the objects and the soldier that emerge from the nothingness of the sea (which almost blends in with the sky) provide a plasticity and expressiveness (also due to the contrast between "objects" and void) that transcends the moment and the informative purpose.

Figure 11. US soldier on the 'D-Day' of the Normandy landings, Robert Capa; https://www. magnumphotos.com/photographer/robert-capa/. Copyright: Robert Capa and Magnum Photos.

Conclusions

This paper is an initial approach to silence and photography, an almost unknown subject. Of the few texts we have read on this topic, most are dispensable because they lack usefulness, hence we have relied heavily on classical Chinese painting by way of analogy. Our starting point was that silence is not possible and that, therefore, what we call silence is a representation of silence. It has a series of features and we have selected one feature that seems to us of great importance: silence's ability to convey meaning. As with words (and objects), it needs to be interrelated with other narrative elements and to have a context that renders it intelligible to achieve its objective.

We consider silence to be on a par with the other elements of any language, which gain meaning through unity and use. From our point of view, it should be possible to delve scientifically into production processes and, especially, reception processes in photography studies. We reflect on them but do not know for sure what the recipients read (see). On the other hand, we lack more visual education.

When speaking of silence and photography, we have distinguished silencing, a silenced event/ or image, and silence itself. For the latter, we have differentiated between the photographs that demand silence; the photographs capable of emanating stillness and calm and which we assimilate to contemplation and silence; the photographs that use metaphors to represent silence; and, finally, those photographs, the fewest, that incorporate silence due to their composition.

We are aware of the need to explore this subject more deeply if we wish to define it with more care and precision, so we leave this as an invitation to this author and to all who study photography.

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