

Pedagogy of Performative Silence

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ABSTRACT: Usually, during any form of communication in an institutional classroom and beyond, the phenomenon of “silence” is regarded as a form of epistemological and ontological absence. To elaborate further, the act of remaining silent is usually equated with incapability and nothingness. The authenticity and relevance of building and sharing knowledge with one another are mostly judged on the basis of one’s capability to verbally express. But silence as a form of communication and knowledge dissemination has been an integral part of several native indigenous communities across the planet. It was with the emergence of European colonization that such silent systems of knowledge production were disbanded as mysterious and invalid. The exercise of disbanding the phenomenon of silence continues to take place through the colonial/modern vocal-centric pedagogical practices in the contemporary era. With respect to these arguments, this essay attempts to explore the possible ways through which silence, along with vocal pedagogical practices, can be performed in an intersectional manner as a habitual pedagogical practice in educational institutions today. To justify the possibilities contextually, the author shares pedagogical instances mostly from India. This essay is the third part of the three-part pedagogy series. The other two essays are “Pedagogy of the Stupid” and “Pedagogy of Common Sense.”

KEYWORDS: silence, epistemological, ontological, pedagogical, performance, contextually

Performative Silence: Rejections and Resistance

How are *manuhiris*¹ welcomed in the Ngati Porou² community? One of the key stages of welcoming the *manuhiris* into the Ngati Porou community is for a local

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warrior to lay a *taki*² before the visitors. After laying a *taki*, the local warriors perform *Haka* by “honoring” the visitors as “potentially worthy enemies” (Harvey 2003, 135). In the process, the visitors are expected to pick up the *taki* and “face the challenge of the *haka* without reciprocating violence” (ibid.). In a silent and performative way, the hosts welcome the guests. With respect to the thematic dimensions of this essay, this brief anecdote invites us to ask—how can knowledge be shared beyond the exclusive patterns of verbal interactions by performing silence?

This Ngati Porou ritual of treating the visitors as potential enemies and inviting them to face the *haka* challenge in a silent, performative, and non-violent manner lays the foundation of a “polycentric world” (Amin 1990, 15), which embraces the “notion of *chixi*” (Cusicanqui 2012, 105) as a daily practice of thinking and doing. According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, “the notion of *chixi* . . . reflects the Aymara idea of something that is and is not at the same time. It is the logic of the included third” (ibid.). According to the thematic context of this essay, the logic of the included third will be reanalyzed according to the necessity of performing silence as a de-hierarchical, non-linear, and undisciplined mode of communication and knowledge dissemination. In other words, every form of knowledge cannot be conceived and shared through the construction of verbal narratives within the linear boxes of knowledge disciplines, as created by different institutions. There are several systems of knowledge (especially the indigenous constellation of knowledges) that function outside the linearity of verbal narratives and institution-based knowledge disciplines, and within the complex, non-linear, contradictory, conflictual, uncategorized, and collaborative spaces of performative silence like that of the Ngati Porou community’s ritual of welcoming guests. Therefore, the logic of the included third, through performing silence, provokes individuals to investigate the “relationship between knowledge and reality (as an imaginary) and indeed between institutions and intellectual/ideological productions” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021).

This investigation is necessary because, usually, the authenticity of the various systems of knowledge production across the globe are pursued according to the verbalized ethical and functional patterns of institutions like family, schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, etc. The verbalized ethical and functional patterns of such institutions are widely underlined with a “perverse and corruptible thirst to discipline” knowledge through using the “tongue” as a terrorizing weapon to unleash violence and fear. For instance, I remember how, during my childhood days, the elders in my family would often beat me for not speaking up when they asked me something. I also remember that because of remaining silent and not verbally justifying an allegation of disciplinary mis-

conduct, which was falsely brought against me by a tutor in pre-school, I was punished by being locked in the washroom. Once I was physically abused by a mathematics tutor in the middle school for remaining silent and not being able to answer his question. In the first case, the elders in the family equated my silence with arrogance and failed to realize that I did not speak up because I did not have answers to their questions. In the second case, my silence was equated with timidity and dishonesty by the tutor, who had failed to realize that the allegation of disciplinary misconduct was false and my reluctance to give justifications was a non-violent and silent performance of resistance. In the third case, the mathematics tutor equated my silence with insincerity and failed to realize that my silence revealed my state of inability to understand and fear toward the subject.

Gradually, all these experiences made me realize that violent subjugation of the practice of performative silence as a form of knowledge production “is a part of the fabric of the daily functioning of the social life where systematic and symbolic violence passes as natural” (Žižek 2008, 75). If these pedagogies of violence and fear are silently questioned then immediately such efforts are systemically and epistemologically interpellated by individuals and organizations through what Zeus Leonardo and Ronald K. Porter recognize as the “dialectics of violence: *education as violent and violence as educative*” (2010, 140). It is necessary to realize that the dialectics of violence is not just a momentary phenomenon, but a long-term, well-researched and thoroughly conceptualized planetary project, which castrates the spontaneous desire of the individuals to learn, to know, to interrogate and to share and pushes them into a state of what Nestor Garcia Canclini understands as “infertility” (1995, 18). The project is carefully safeguarded by a “global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority . . . that have been politically, culturally, and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial modern system” (Grosfoguel 2016, 10). Since the evolution of the planetary project of European colonization, the colonial modern system has always regarded “silence” as a phenomenon of absence and therefore it should never be acknowledged within the habitual modes of knowledge production. The European colonizers deliberately curated this narrative that silence is a form of “lack” because it challenged their interventionist projects of expropriation, violation, and colonization.

Such a narrative has strategically rejected the existence and practice of what Alain Corbin identifies as the “psychological nuances and contexts of silence” (2018, 26). He argues that the phenomenon of silence ranges from “monastic silence to the silence of intimacy; from the discipline of silence in education to

its tragic manifestations; from silence as a tactic to silence as a form of speech” (ibid.). He also adds that “attitudes toward silence range from terror to desire” (ibid.). The performance of silence as a form of communication and knowledge dissemination has been an integral part of various indigenous communities across the globe. Several instances from the precolonial indigenous systems of knowledge reveal that “silence is not opposite to speech” and it “can be created and used in the mainstream communication” (Al-Harabsheh 2012, xi). The next section of the essay further engages with the phenomenon of silence as a mode of mainstream communication and knowledge production through the following possibilities—performing silence as resistance, performing silence in institutional classrooms, and performing silence as a research methodology.

Conversational Silence: Talking without a Tongue

In the article “Epistemologies of Silence” (2017), Spy Dénommé-Welch and Jennifer Rowsell write that “silence might appear small and perhaps opaque to readers, but silence resonates in people’s lives in subtle and varied ways—in spaces, in speech, in photographs, and in lived, felt experiences and as such they are idiosyncratic and not necessarily in need of exposing vulnerabilities—silence shapes [and] shifts around our identities” (12–3). They also say that “silent stories are memories that play out during our everyday lives and that drive ways of thinking and being in the world” (13). This section engages with various stories from everyday lives that show how silences are performed by individuals, communities, and institutions to generate knowledge in a collaborative and co-creative manner.

Performing Silence as Resistance

“Ohén: ton Karihwatéhkwén”
(Rosa-Aquino 2018)

The above quotation is a thanksgiving prayer, which is daily narrated by the Regis Mohawk People in the United States and it can be translated as “what we say before we do anything important” (ibid.). The saying is verbal and non-verbal at the same time. After verbally narrating this prayer, the community members of the tribe sit in a long silence to remember and re-member the knowledge systems that they have imbibed from their foremothers and forefathers. The long silence also allows the community members to indulge in a collective community planning against the threatening intervention of external (colonial/racial/

white-centric mainstream society of the United States) political and industrial forces. The community also firmly believes that it is not always necessary to share their indigenous traditional practices with external organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).⁴ It is so because, with respect to the community's previous experiences, organizations like the EPA, in the name of negotiations and collaborations, hijack and distort indigenous knowledge systems and verbally dictate to the indigenous communities how to create "a climate adaptation plan for its natural resources" (ibid.). As Amberdawn Lafrance, the coordinator at the Saint Regis Mohawk Environment Division reports: "We didn't need them to tell us what's important to us. We already know" (cited in Rosa-Aquino 2018). This is why the community has chosen to ensure secrecy of certain indigenous knowledge practices through performing silence as a form of resistance, so that the community members can indigenously develop climate change solutions, without the "benevolent interference" of the colonial/racial/white-centric environmental organizations.

On an identical note, the Kondh⁵ community in the Kandhamal district of Odisha⁶ has been silently resisting the encroachment of the forest conservation department, which has been making efforts to displace them from their forest and agricultural lands for the sake of constructing roads and factories. Initially, when the community members verbally voiced their concern to the forest conservation department, they were threatened and silenced by the authorities. In fact, to strategically hide their violence against the Kondhs, they resorted to the practice of what Sally Munt understands as "victimocracy" (2017, 868). Within the practice of victimocracy, the oppressors masquerade as victims to "gain a privileged status due to inherited characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, class and sexuality" (ibid.). The authorities from the forest conservation department, taking advantage of their institutional positions, presented themselves as victims by bringing false charges of human rights violation and physical abuse (Mohanty 2020). Such an experience provoked the community members to refrain from verbal resistance and perform silent resistance through the practices of vigilance and tree hugging. To make the forest conservation department realize that they "should play the role of a facilitator" and not "act like a colonial and post-colonial forest bureaucracy" (Mohanty 2020), the community members keep a strong vigilance by guarding the forest every day. The Kondh women and men take turns walking through the entire forest to ensure that the trees are not cut down. Often, when they spot the approaching officials from the forest department, they immediately hold each other's hands and form a circle around the trees, so that the officials cannot harm the nature.

Such performances of silence speak much beyond these specific events of resistance and uphold ways in which native indigenous communities interrogate the colonial/Eurocentric modes of knowledge production, which continue to erase certain knowledge systems and “shadow all that remains” (Radway 2008, viii). The simultaneous exercise of erasure and shadowing takes place through the invisible agreement of “ignorance contract” (Steyn 2012, 8). Melissa Steyn theorizes that the ignorance contract is a “tacit agreement to entertain ignorance” and to “illustrate that for ignorance to function as social regulation, subjectivities must be formed that are appropriate performers of ignorance, disciplined in cognition, affect and ethics” (ibid.). Socio-historically, the agreement of the ignorance contract was invisibly signed the very moment when European colonizers epistemologically-ontologically paralyzed colonized societies by convincing them that their indigenous native systems of knowledge were “by default” inferior to those of the colonizers. The “by default” feeling of inferiority has smoothly pipelined the physically visible colonization of knowledge systems of indigenous native communities into invisible and fundamental forms of “hipster colonialism”⁷ (Nyabola 2018) in the contemporary era. This is why institutions like the EPA and forest conservation departments, in the name of conservation and development, simply mimic the exploitative knowledge systems of European colonizers by physically violating, epistemologically sterilizing, and colonially re-programming the diverse ecologies of indigenous knowledge systems.

The silent resistances as performed by the Regis Mohawk Tribe community and the Kondh community try to demolish the invisibly signed ignorance contracts of “Oppression Olympics” (Yuval-Davis 2012, 48), disrupt the hipster colonial practices of the colonially influenced postcolonial knowledge-producing institutions, and rejuvenate the already existing native indigenous constellations of performative silence as a habitual pedagogical approach.

Performing Silence in the Institutional Classrooms

Besides the necessity of performing silence for developing and practicing diverse constellations of knowledge in daily life by individuals and communities, as discussed in the above section, it is also necessary to carve out complex, interactive, and intersectional spaces of “silent pedagogy” where “the teacher makes conscious decisions to abstain from intervention based on continuous sensitive readings of the learning environment” (Ollin 2008, 265). The institution-based colonial/capitalistic pedagogical systems treat the educational institution as a market and regard the students as “a market actor” (Mbembe 2015). The values of aesthetic and intellectual nourishment, which form the

root purpose of education,⁸ are completely compromised in such pedagogical systems through “definite parameters of inclusivity and exclusivity” (Dey 2021, 27) that subject the knowledge of the students to “market metrics (ratings, rankings)” (Mbembe 2015).

I remember that, as a child, to overcome my existential frustrations, I would stand in front of the mirror and make varieties of faces for hours. It was quite exciting and therapeutic to see the different ways that I could express myself. This silent exercise not only allowed me to explore the diverse facets of my being which were suppressed by the dictatorial disciplinary norms of my family and my school, but also made me realize how silence could function as a powerful tool of intersectional and self-realized learning. During this exercise, I realized that the process of learning is not solely about reading chapters, solving exercises, taking down notes, doing experiments in laboratories, and passing examinations. Rather, teaching and learning in classrooms should be a collaborative performance of leisure and pleasure. To do a collaborative performance, instead of verbally “dictating” lessons to the students and “forcing” them to produce answers in a specific way, the tutors should invite the students to contemplate the subjects that they study, understand them with respect to their individual contexts, and then discuss them in the class. It is important to note that such a pedagogical praxis of silence does not devalue the importance of verbal communications, but, instead, “create[s] an inclusive environment” and “enhance[s] critical engagement” (Lausch 2018) so that the phenomenon of silence is acknowledged as a usual form of communication along with the verbal forms.

The practice of making faces in front of the mirror clarified the different aspects of science that were taught by the teachers in my school. As the face took different shapes, I could understand how the different parts of my face like the tongue, the jaw bones, or the palate functioned toward forming different facial shapes. It was these leisurely modes of learning through making faces in a silent manner that later shaped my interest in theater studies, which was an integral part of my doctoral research. With the passage of time, I realized how this experience of performing silence during my childhood enabled me to perceive knowledge as a “living discipline” that is “animated by a form of humility: that its methodological sources reach to reality but do not capture, colonize, or constrain it” (Gordon 2015, 8). The pedagogy of performative silence tries to bulldoze the brick walls of race, class, caste, religion, gender, geography, topography, etc., by performing what Lewis Gordon identifies as “a *teleological suspension of disciplinarity*” (2014, 87). He defines the teleological suspension of disciplinarity as the “willingness to go beyond disciplines in the

production of knowledge” (ibid.). Several research articles and dissertations (a few have been cited in this essay) have also been written about the practice of silence in classrooms, but those works have mostly focused on the linguistic, technical, disciplinary, and the general socio-cultural aspects of silence. This essay deviates from such compartmentalized dimensions and attempts a diverse, intersectional, and non-disciplinary analysis of how hierarchies of race, class, caste, gender, religion, geography, and topography are performed silently and stealthily in institutional classrooms and how they can be exposed and resisted through the performances of counter-silence.

One cannot deny the fact that several attempts are being made by different institutions across the world to revive native indigenous pedagogies of performing silence as a teaching-learning methodology in institutional classrooms, but a collective and collaborative planetary effort is still missing. Some of the ways in which the pedagogy of performative silence can be practiced⁹ in institutional classrooms as a mainstream teaching-learning procedure beyond the colonial/modern knowledge disciplines are:

Silence as a visible teacher: Usually I have observed that acknowledgements of “silence” in educational institutions are mostly pre-conceived and are performed in a non-spontaneous nature. To elaborate further, students are expected to perform silence in specific spatio-temporal moments like during prayers, during teachings in the classroom, during public lectures, etc. A pedagogy of performative silence invites us to disrupt such pre-conceived and non-spontaneous practices of silence and metamorphose the phenomenon of silence from an “invisible” entity to a “visible” teacher. To do that, tutors should begin each class with the practice of meditation.

While doing my doctoral research at Banaras Hindu University, I used to teach English literature in a high school in Varanasi.¹⁰ After I joined the school, on most days I found the students hardly got any rest between their classes. By the time a tutor would finish a class, the other tutor would already be waiting outside. It made the whole process of teaching and learning very chaotic. The students failed to concentrate and lost their interests in learning. When a few students tried to bring this crisis to the attention of the school management committee, they were immediately silenced as “insincere,” “incapable,” and “lazy.” On the first day of my teaching assignment, I realized that the students lacked any form of motivation to be in the class. I finished teaching the lesson that I was supposed to teach but did not enjoy it either. Therefore, from the next day, I did not walk into the class and start teaching immediately. Instead, I started my classes with the practice of meditation. I invited the students to keep all their notebooks away from their desk for five minutes and to close their

eyes, sit silently, and think about a particular motivational event that they have experienced beyond the school premises. Initially the students were impatient and found it extremely challenging to concentrate. But, with the passage of time, the silent meditative practice appeared to be healing for them, enabling them to find motivation and to enhance their concentration in the class.

The practice of meditation was an integral part of the indigenous traditional education system of precolonial India. Besides teaching different subjects like history, literature, language, science, mathematics, and philosophy, the Gurukul education system of precolonial India also taught yoga and meditation to its students (Chandwani 2019). With the arrival of the colonial/modern laboratory-based and classroom-based education systems in India, the mainstream practices of mediation as a teaching-learning practice were pushed to the margins and fractured as “optional subjects”¹¹ in educational institutions. After a few weeks of practicing meditation during my classes, the students shared that it not only enhanced their concentration, but also enabled them to understand the different disciplines in a transcendental manner (Gordon 2015, 12). The habitual practice of meditation provoked the students to understand the verbal teachings of their tutors from diverse social, cultural, political, economic, racial, religious, geographical, and topographical contexts. While sharing their experiences, most of the students admitted that during meditation many of them shifted their minds beyond the generalized teachings of the tutors in the classroom and tried to reinterpret the subjects from their respective existential and experiential positionalities. This practice expanded the epistemological-ontological¹² horizons of the students by enabling them to disentangle from the stereotypical teaching-learning exercise of dictation and note-making and indulge in a self-interrogating and self-realizing process. This silent meditative practice also improved my teaching skills as I could decentralize and de-hierarchize my classroom by displacing my role from a “teacher-instructor” to a “teacher-co-participant.” In other words, the students in my class did not exclusively wait for me to “teach” them. Rather, they started identifying their drawbacks, made efforts to collaboratively address them, and humbly invited me to be a part of their discourse. In this way, through blending self-contemplative silence with vocal discourses, they started questioning, dismantling, and weaving counter-resistances against the mechanized “troubleshoot narratives”¹³ of the colonial/modern dictatorial pedagogies. As this pedagogical transformation unsettled the dominant practices of teaching and learning in the school, so, doubtlessly, it faced resistance from most of my colleagues. But there were also a few tutors who acknowledged and adopted this pedagogical practice.

Before, I continue with this discussion of the pedagogy of performative silence, it is necessary for me to admit that the above argument that has been drawn from the consolidated feedback of the students does not represent the feedback of the entire class. The feedback was collected in a written manner from the students and most of the students agreed that the practice of meditation positively impacted and diversified their habitual processes of gaining and sharing knowledges. But a few students also mentioned that meditation did not have any impact on their habitual stressful classroom experiences. Instead of sharing a detailed tabular and statistical analysis, I am sharing a consolidated report because, with respect to the thematic direction of this essay, I felt that a detailed statistical analysis on the impact of practicing meditation on the individual students in my class was unnecessary.

Now returning to the discussion on meditation as a potential pedagogy of performative silence, several mainstream educational institutions in India, including Gyankriti School in Indore¹⁴ and MIT (Maharashtra Institute of Technology) Vishwashanti Gurukul in Pune,¹⁵ have adopted meditation as an integral pedagogical practice. In the article “A Modern day at the Gurukul for MIT Students,” Atul Sathe (2018) observes that besides several application-centric pedagogies, yoga and meditation as silent pedagogical exercises are habitually practiced in the classrooms of MIT Vishwashanti Gurukul for developing environmental responsibility and collective socio-cultural awareness among students. In a similar manner, The Gyankriti school, which represents itself as “a modern gurukul” (Gyankriti), also regards the practices of meditation and yoga as integral parts of their classroom teaching-learning methodologies. In both these institutions, the practice of meditation has not been reduced to an “optional subject,” rather it is regarded as a nuclear methodology to teach and learn subjects like science, mathematics, literature, philosophy, history, and geography in a contextually diverse and intersectional way. But the highly expensive fees structure of these institutions puts their principles of inclusivity and diversity¹⁶ at stake. Due to expensive fees,¹⁷ only individuals from affluent households can seek admission to these schools. If only a handful of students experience the privilege of alternate pedagogies like meditation as a silent pedagogical practice, aren’t the principles of inclusivity and diversity questionable? By building collaborative and co-creative frameworks of knowledge exclusively among socially, culturally, economically, and geographically privileged groups of students, aren’t these institutions triggering the already existing hierarchies and discrepancies of the colonial/modern capitalistic knowledge systems?

Due to these factors, though several educational institutions in India have been making efforts to revive the diverse, intersectional, and multiverse indigenous pedagogical practices of performative silence (like reviving the gurukul system and practicing meditation), they have failed to de-monopolize hierarchical mainstream verbal pedagogical practices. Therefore, the purpose behind sharing my pedagogical experiment of intersecting meditation as a silent pedagogical exercise with vocal pedagogical exercises is to invite readers to think about how to transform mainstream colonial/modern education systems from within, rather than creating new institutional spaces and committing the same mistakes. The instances of MIT Vishwashanti Gurukul and Gyankriti School reveal that without internal pedagogical transformations of existing institutions, building of new institutions with alternative pedagogical goals only constructs an “imagined exterior,” embossed with pseudo-promises and fake goals of inclusivity, diversity, and intersectionality, while the “genuine interior” of educational institutions in classrooms, prayer halls, tutor cabins, and school management committees remain contaminated with various forms of epistemological-ontological violence like redundant teaching-learning models, non-contextual syllabus structures, unmotivated tutors, and dictatorial functional patterns.

Performative silence as a disciplinary carnivalesque: Apart from practicing meditation as a silent pedagogical exercise, the performance of disciplinary carnivalesque can also be adopted as a pedagogical practice of performative silence in institutional classrooms. The phenomenon of disciplinary carnivalesque is a collective performance of silence in which the pre-determined hierarchical borders of knowledge disciplines in academic institutions are collapsed inwardly,¹⁸ and subject disciplines are not approached as separate entities, but in a de-hierarchical and intersectional manner. The performance of disciplinary carnivalesque should not be confused with the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity because the latter acknowledges interactions and collaborations between diverse knowledge disciplines, but in a conditionally inclusive way (Cusicanqui 2012, 100). The engagements between the knowledge disciplines within the realm of interdisciplinarity are often dictated by socially, culturally, economically, racially, politically, geographically, and topographically privileged individuals and institutions. As a result, in the name of epistemological and ontological fluidity, the phenomenon of interdisciplinarity operates within the hierarchies of good knowledge/bad knowledge, high knowledge/low knowledge, and authentic knowledge/inauthentic knowledge. During the silent performances of disciplinary carnivalesque, these binaries that gate-keep hierarchical knowledge systems are quashed. After quashing hierarchical

knowledge disciplines, individuals are invited to approach existing academic disciplines without any predetermined analogies and in a de-hierarchical, non-linear, multidirectional, and spontaneous fashion.

For instance, in India the intellectual capability and horizon of knowledge of students are mostly measured on the basis of the percentage of marks they receive in their examinations. To clarify, in many academic institutions, students who score in a very high percentage (75 percent and above) are expected to build a career in the fields of science, mathematics, and technology and the students who score medium and in the low percentages (between 50 to 75 percent), irrespective of their areas of academic and research interests, are often compelled to build a career in the humanities and social sciences (Prabhudev 2018). It is so because students with medium and low percentage marks are regarded as incapable of achieving careers in science, mathematics, and technology and the humanities and social sciences are usually denigrated as “worthless” (Ruggeri 2019). Therefore, the students with medium and low percentage marks are regarded as academically and intellectually worthless and are compelled to study humanities and social sciences. Such compartmentalized parameters of analyzing intellectual richness and knowledge values of students give birth to illogical categories in which students who study science, mathematics, and technology are considered smarter and more intellectually capable than students in the humanities and social sciences (Wali 2013). The phenomenon of disciplinary carnivalesque disrupts these hierarchical compartments and shifts the focus of knowledge systems from “statistical values” to the “values of individual interest.”

Through the shift, the phenomenon provokes academic institutions to perform an epistemological-ontological rupture in which knowledge, intellectual capability, and career interests of students will not be presumed, decided, dictated, and mobilized by the institutions, but the students, irrespective of their percentage marks, will be able to decide and pursue their career in their respective areas of academic and research interest. The phenomenon of disciplinary carnivalesque as a silent pedagogical practice emerges from Gordon’s arguments about the practice of a “pedagogical imperative” (Gordon 2015, 29). According to Gordon, the practice of a pedagogical imperative reminds individuals that a tutor is a lifelong learner and therefore the “obligation of teaching is the art of continued learning” (32). The phenomenon of disciplinary carnivalesque diversifies this argument by engaging with complex issues like monopolization of colonial/modern knowledge systems, oppression of certain academic disciplines, canonization of dictatorial pedagogical practices, and epistemological and ontological enslavement of students. How can one

perform disciplinary carnivalesque as a silent pedagogical practice to counter these complex issues? To address this question contextually and experientially, let us explore the silent pedagogical practices of the happiness curriculum as practiced in the schools in New Delhi that are run by the Government of Delhi.

In July 2018, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) in collaboration with the national Directorate of Education (DoE) launched the happiness curriculum. It made efforts to introduce diverse, de-hierarchical, non-linear, non-disciplinary, inclusive, spontaneous, intersectional, and “child-centered” (Sisodia et al. 2019, 10) pedagogical frameworks. The principles and practices of the happiness curriculum are motivated by the phenomenon of the Green School system in Bhutan. As I already discussed the Green School system in detail in the first essay¹⁹ of this three-part pedagogy series, I will not discuss it here. The pedagogical frameworks of the happiness curriculum are based on the following principles, which SCERT and DoE refer to as the “triad of happiness” (Sisodia et al., 12) in their handbook:

Momentary Happiness: The pedagogical practice of momentary happiness is based on the experiences of learning and sharing that are silently and meditatively conceived by the five senses of the human body—smell, touch, taste, sight, and sound. While performing this pedagogical practice in classrooms, tutors suggest that students undergo these experiences in a silent manner. For instance, while consuming and sharing foods during lunch breaks, teachers encourage students to refrain from verbally talking to each other. This is because talking distracts the students from enjoying the smell, touch, taste, sight, and the sounds that they make while consuming them. During the consumption of foods, the tutors also invite the students to contemplate the diversity of foods that they eat, to identify the various ingredients with which the foods are cooked, and their possible nutritional values. This is how, through such silent pedagogical practices, the students perform disciplinary carnivalesque by engaging in collaborative and intersectional learning, without any form of disciplinary predeterminations, ontological suppressions, and epistemological distillations.²⁰

Deeper Happiness: The process of gaining and sharing knowledge through the senses, as discussed above, enables students to learn about nutrition, cultural diversity, biology, sociology, literature, moral values, and human relationships. If we reanalyze the exchange of foods that takes place during the lunch breaks from the wider phenomenological perspectives of class, gender, race, community, religion, geography, topography, etc., then we see that through the exchanges of various food items the students collaborate and co-create spaces of shared learning in the forms of “affection, care, gratitude,

[and] respect” (Sisodia et al., 21) toward each other. In this way, the performance of disciplinary carnivalesque, as seen through the silent experiences of momentary happiness, gradually expands to deeper and longer forms of happiness.

Sustainable Happiness: Besides the teaching and learning of different subjects, the exchange of foods during lunch breaks also develops epistemological and ontological flexibility among the tutors and the students. While exchanging foods, it often happens that the students are introduced to certain tastes and smells with which they are not familiar. They may like or dislike those unfamiliar smell and tastes, but in the process of exchange they realize that, irrespective of their personal preferences, all forms of socio-cultural diversities should be acknowledged. As already discussed, the process of eating, tasting, and smelling varieties of food items generates intersectional spaces of “depolitized pluralities” (Santos 2008, 29), which involve “clarity of thought, deeper understanding of self, being able to focus, being mindful, finding cause, purpose and interconnectedness of living” (Sisodia et al., 10). The varieties of knowledge that emerge out of these silent, spontaneous, non-linear, and non-disciplinary methodologies of teaching and learning metamorphose the colonial/modern knowledge disciplines and pedagogies of “monolithic will” (Santos 2008, 29) into a pedagogical paradigm of “transformative and progressive action” (ibid.), systemically, epistemologically, and ontologically driven by the performance of disciplinary carnivalesque.

All three principles of the happiness curriculum and their pedagogical methodologies outline how the phenomenon of silence can be performed as a habitual pedagogical exercise in educational institutions without the solipsistic interference of colonial/modern knowledge disciplines. The silent pedagogical practices of the happiness curriculum were not introduced to replace mainstream vocal-centric pedagogical practices, but to end the monotony and monopoly of vocal-centric pedagogies and to diversify them.

But the happiness curriculum has only been introduced in the state-run government schools of New Delhi and only between classes 1 and 8 (Sisodia et al., 25). This disrupts the diverse and inclusive vision of the happiness curriculum since it only functions with a limited number of students. Before we proceed with these arguments, let us take a break from reading to engage in a collective exercise.

A Collective Exercise I—Performing Silence as a Research Methodology

In this section, I invite readers to take a break from reading and to engage with the following questions from diverse spatio-temporal and geo-political contexts. Prior to sharing the questions, I would like to clarify that the questions have been conceptualized in such a manner that instead of dictating a fixed set of colonial/modern parameters of teaching and research, the questions will make efforts to reconfigure the existing hierarchical spaces of teaching, learning, caring, and sharing as an “incomplete and co-creative work-in-progress” planetary project. In the reconfigured spaces the participants will be made to realize that the praxis of teaching and research is a never-ending evolutionary and diverse process, so one should never interpret any form of pedagogical praxes as complete and conclusive. Let us collectively engage with the following questions:

- a. How can the phenomenon of silence be used as a methodology of conducting research in different disciplines? With respect to my research experiences, I would like to discuss this question in the context of interview-based research with the following sub-question: How do I incorporate the “silence” of the interviewees as a research methodology while conducting interview-based research? To elaborate further, it often happens that after listening to a question or while answering a question the interviewees remain silent. The silence of the interviewees may represent confusion, hesitation, or resistance. How can these different performances of silence be critically and theoretically analyzed while conducting research?
- b. How can silence as a research methodology assist the researchers in conducting research in a diverse, intersectional, and spontaneous manner? Once again, I would like to refer to my experience of conducting interview-based research to address this question. While conducting interview-based research, I have often asked myself: Is it ever possible to categorize the different performances of silence, as mentioned above, in specific disciplinary categories? As the interviewees were silent, my focus shifted from their verbal expressions to their facial expressions. A thorough observation of their facial expressions enabled me to build my research diversely across various knowledge disciplines. Irrespective of the various individual psychological and emotional factors behind observing silence, the pedagogical phenomenon of silence, altogether, is a firm resistance against modes of re-

search that are limitedly and hierarchically conceptualized within the prisons of specific disciplines. For instance, while doing a film documentary research project on the Anglo-Indian women of Kolkata,²¹ I conducted several interviews of various Anglo-Indian women of different age groups across the city. As I shared the film documentary and a short essay with my research colleagues, they preconceived the research project as part of the academic discipline of gender studies. But, as they watched the documentary²² and listened to the conversations, they realized it involved the intersection of different knowledge disciplines, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, race studies, gender studies, and many more. It was the intermittent silence of the interviewees that made it possible for me to understand the critical and theoretical value of this research project beyond the limited borders of knowledge disciplines. As I documented their silence in the documentary, I realized that unlike verbal reflections the phenomenon of silence can never be catalogued in specific knowledge disciplines because it always occupies a non-categorized and non-conclusive complex space of in-betweenness.

- c. Here, I would like to clarify the phrase—"unlike verbal reflections the phenomenon of silence can never be catalogued in specific knowledge disciplines." While doing a research project, verbal communications in the forms of interviews and discussions are often voluntarily or forcefully "fit" in knowledge disciplines like sociology, history, or cultural studies. During research discussions, I often find my colleagues saying: "This interview-based research fits in the field of Sociology" or "This conversation fits a research project in the field of anthropology, but it does not fit in the field of history." These kinds of analysis limit the scope of a research project and force individuals to approach their research with pre-decided theoretical and methodological frameworks of a specific knowledge discipline. Obviously, I do not ignore that all research need not incorporate diverse knowledge disciplines and can remain confined in a particular discipline. This critique is particularly directed toward those research works that consistently try to generate disciplinary hierarchies by weighing one knowledge discipline against others and by systemically denying the possibilities of developing theoretical and methodological intersections among different knowledge disciplines. But, in the case of silent expressions, it is very difficult to create such epistemological barricades. So, on several occasions the

phenomenon of silence is theoretically and methodologically ignored by researchers as a non-researchable entity.

Through these questions, I invite readers to explore the various possibilities of applying the phenomenon of silence as a research methodology across diverse spatio-temporal contexts. I also expect that while exploring the possibilities readers would keep adding questions to this list and collectively analyze them. Based on some of my contextual research experiences, the two questions branch into sub-questions. If readers find these questions and sub-questions relevant to their teaching and research contexts, then they might analyze them. Otherwise, they may feel free to counter these questions with their own questions and sub-questions. Based on the performance of silence, these activity-based interrogations have the potential to generate several pedagogical possibilities in diverse existential contexts. So, instead of establishing violent laboratories of epistemological and ontological closures, let us peacefully come together and silently weave endless planetary possibilities of sharing and caring.

Raranga:²³ Weaving a Performance in Silence and in Words²⁴

(*Setting:* In an unrecognizable and undefined open space of learning, sharing, and caring, two unidentified living figures are sitting face to face. They do not have identity cards. They do not have dress codes. They do not know about each other's age, religion, socio-economic status, caste, class, race, geographical identities, and topographical belongingness and are communicating with each other both in silence and in words. The space has no fixed points of entry and no fixed points of exit. It is accessible to every living body.)

Characters

no-one

everyone

no-one (murmuring): *Tungia te ururua kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke*

Tungia te ururua kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke

Tungia te ururua kia tupu whakaritorito te tupu o te harakeke

Tungia te ururua kia tupu wkari.

everyone (interrupts no-one): What are you murmuring? I don't understand.

no-one: (Remains silent, raises eyebrows, and looks at everyone in a suspicious manner.)

everyone (Waits silently and eagerly for no-one to answer the question. Does not receive any answer. Asks another question): Which language?

no-one: Māori.

everyone (asks again): What were you murmuring?

no-one: Set fire to the overgrown bush and the new flax shoots will spring up.

Clear away what you don't need and the good stuff will go through.

everyone: (Appears to be a bit confused now.)

no-one: What happened?

everyone: (Without answering no-one, silently closes eyes and looks downward. Seems to meditate.)

no-one: (Silently and closely observes everyone.)

everyone (after some time slowly opens eyes and speaks): But I do not find any overgrown bush around me.

no-one: Close your eyes once again and look within yourself.

everyone: And then?

no-one: (Does not speak anymore, puts finger on the lips and indicates everyone to do as suggested.)

everyone: (Closes eyes, looks downward and starts meditating again.)

Both remain silent for some time, and as everyone is meditating no-one closely looks and tries to analyze the facial expressions and body languages of everyone. no-one observes that everyone's eyebrows are twitching and their face is shivering. everyone appears to be a bit disturbed. After some time, everyone gradually opens their eyes.

no-one: (Remains silent and patiently waits for everyone to speak.)

everyone (Looks tense and breathes heavily. After some time speaks in a quivering voice with intermittent silence): I saw an open ground with

overgrown bushes . . . (silence) . . . I mistakenly ran into the ground from where I do not remember . . . (silence) . . . I lost my way . . . (silence) . . . I was running out of my breath . . . (silence) . . . I was struggling to stand up . . . but . . . was falling down again and again. Then . . . (silence) . . . suddenly I saw . . . a plume of smoke rising up at a distance and approaching the overgrown bushes . . . (silence) . . . I tried to stand up once again and run . . . (silence) . . . and then . . . I do not remember. I could not grasp the series of events completely. I am confused.

no-one: Good, incompleteness is a virtue, completeness is a vice.

everyone: What did I see?

no-one: Maybe chaos.

everyone: Did I see the same thing as what you said in English?

no-one: Maybe and maybe not.

everyone (agitatedly): What do you mean by “maybe and maybe not”? Either say “yes” or “no”?

no-one (patiently): Not every answer comes with a “yes” or “no.” Some lie in between. In fact, not every question has an answer. It all depends on “who we are,” “what we are,” and “how we are.”

everyone: What are you?

no-one: An experience. An argument. An agreement. A disagreement. An idea. A thought. A culture. A possibility. A tradition. A root. A tree. A leaf. A flower. A fruit. A seed. A branch. A knowledge. A learner. A sharer. A caregiver. An *aka pacha*. And many more . . . (takes a deep breath, remains silent for some time, appears to be lost in a deep thought, and then speaks again) . . . I am no-one and everyone at the same time.

everyone: If you are both no-one and everyone, then who am I?

no-one: (remains silent and smiles pleasantly at everyone).

everyone (Unable to understand the silence and the pleasant smile of no-one, asks another question): By the way, you referred to yourself as an *aka pacha*. Can you speak Aymara?

no-one: Yes, I am an embodiment of all living beings. In fact, we are all an embodiment of each other. We are all interwoven with each other.

everyone: But how do you know this language? From where did you learn this idea? You are a Māori. Aymara is my language. I am an Aymara.

no-one (Remains silent, calmly looks at everyone for some time and then speaks.): No knowledge is yours or mine. No language is yours or mine. It is always ours. Our foremothers and forefathers have knitted our knowledges with the same threads and clothes, but in different dimensions, directions, and colors. Every day, they keep teaching and reminding us. So, each and every day we must embrace them and remember them.

everyone: But they are already dead. So, how can we talk to them?

no-one: Ancestors never die. They only transition from one existential realm to another and continue to remain with/in us.

everyone (appears to be partially convinced): Alright . . . (silence)

no-one: (Remains silent and closely observes everyone.)

everyone (Keeps silent, thinks deeply, looks into the eyes of no-one, then speaks): Will you be my tutor? Can I be your student?

no-one: Both of us are tutors and students at the same time. We are inseparable and shared entities. We are different from each other, yet we have so many things to learn from and share with each other.

everyone (excited and happy): So you mean I can be your tutor as well?

no-one: Of course you are. Both of us are co-tutors and co-learners at the same time.

everyone: How do you know that my knowledge is of any value to you?

no-one: How did you realize that my knowledge is of any value to you?

everyone: Experience.

no-one: Same here. Experience.

everyone: But so far, I did not share anything. I only asked you questions.

no-one: Your silence is as loud as my words. Your questions are as deep as my reflections.

everyone (utterly surprised): Really?

no-one: Every time you were silent, I closely observed your facial expressions. It reflected so many sides of your character—confidence, confusion, strength, weakness, thirst for knowledge, and many more. In our silence, as I was reading your body languages and facial expressions, I realized that we were weaving each others' minds with threads of diverse knowledges. My words have values only in your silence.

everyone (gradually gets up): And my silence has values only in you being in silence and in words. (Stops for some time, looks at no-one closely, and then speaks.) You make me feel lighter.

no-one (gradually gets up): You too.

everyone (start slowly walking toward no-one): Your words in silence and silence in words are gradually burning the overgrown bushes in me.

no-one (starts slowly walking toward everyone): We have . . .

everyone (embraces and interrupts no-one): Your words in silence and silence in words are gradually cleaning the dirt that lies within me.

no-one (embraces everyone): We have . . . done it . . .

everyone (interrupts once again and whispers in no-one's ear): You make me realize that my silence is as diverse, spontaneous, and powerful as my words.

no-one (whispers in everyone's ear): We have . . . done it . . . together

everyone (whispers): I feel like I am you being me.

no-one (whispers): Me too.

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ENDNOTES

1. It is a Ngati Porou term and is used to refer to “respectable guests.”
2. It is a Māori community and they are mostly located in the Gisborne and East Cape regions of New Zealand.
3. A symbol of the God of War.
4. It is an independent executive agency of the federal government of United States. It engages with matters that are associated with the protection of the environment.
5. A native indigenous community in Odisha.
6. A state in eastern India.
7. The phenomenon of hipster colonialism can be defined as an attempt to “reclaim colonialism by couching it in neoliberal trends and or ideology while advocating for a return to an essentially exploitative system of social and economic organisation” (Nyabola 2018).
8. The English word “education” originates from the Latin word “*educare*” which means “to bring up,” “to make grow,” which has connotations, as well, of nourishment.
9. To engage with various contextual experiences, the author has cited examples of pedagogy of performative silence exclusively from India.
10. A city located in the northern part of India and part of the state of Uttar Pradesh.
11. In most of the schools in India, the subjects for teaching and learning are broadly divided into two categories—compulsory subjects and optional subjects. Subjects like science, mathematics, English (and other languages), history, philosophy, geography, and computer sciences are categorized as compulsory subjects that students must study. The schools believe that without studying these subjects the knowledge systems of students will remain incomplete. But subjects like sports, visual arts, performing arts, meditation, and yoga are categorized as optional subjects because the colonial/modern education system in India believes that these

subjects are not necessary for building a diverse and holistic knowledge system for students.

12. I use “epistemology” (and its grammatical variants) and “ontology” (and its grammatical variants) together with a hyphen because my understanding and usage of these terms in this essay is based on the interrelatedness of these two terms as argued by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Catherine Walsh, and Walter Mignolo. In *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, de Sousa Santos argues that “social scientific knowledge invented much of what is described as existing; such an invention became part of social reality as it got embedded in the ways people behave and perceive social life” (2018, 27). In this statement, de Sousa Santos outlines how the phenomena of epistemology and ontology are constitutive of each other. This argument is comprehensively stated in *On Decoloniality*, where Walter Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh observe that “Ontology is made of epistemology” (2018, 35).
13. Just like the troubleshoot mechanism in the mechanical and digital systems, “troubleshoot narratives” are forms of fractured narratives that function as stereotypical, preconceived, and one-size-fits-all solution kits to diagnose challenges of teaching and learning in the colonial/modern educational institutions in contemporary India.
14. A city in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.
15. A city in the Indian state of Maharashtra.
16. As one navigates through their websites, one can easily see that both institutions regard the pedagogical practices of inclusivity and diversity as crucial. For convenience, readers can visit the websites of these institutions here—MIT Vishwashanti Gurukul (<https://www.mitgurukul.com/>) and Gyankriti School (<https://gyankriti.com/en/home/>).
17. For more, readers can visit the following links for more detailed information—fees structure of Gyankriti School (<https://gyankriti.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Fee-Structure-AY2022-English.pdf>) and fees structure of MIT Vishwashanti Gurukul, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/pune-news/mit-vishwashanti-gurukul-school-s-fee-hike-board-change-draws-parents-ire/story-Sswm8uboUcCuKnHZvy4NP.html#:~:text=pune%20news-,Pune's%20MIT%20Vishwashanti%20Gurukul%20School's%20fee,board%20change%20draws%20parents'%20ire&text=change%20of%20board.-,According%20to%20the%20parents%2C%20the%20current%20fees%20is%20Rs%2021%2C000,to%20Rs%2060%2C000%2DRs%2070%2C000.>
18. The process of inwardly collapsing the pre-determined disciplinary borders of academic institutions refers to activities that not only erase the externally visible borderlines of hierarchies, but also obliterate the internally invisible and/or partially visible ingredients that preserve the borders. In many academic institutions, the colonial/Eurocentric patterns of disciplines like Humanities, Social Sciences, and Physical Sciences are often remolded and amalgamated as Schools of Liberal and Interdisciplinary Arts, but the hierarchies of academic disciplines with respect to financial allocations, scholarship schemes, faculty recruitments, student admissions, cross-institutional collaborations, project works, etc. persist. This is why just

the erasure of externally visible borderlines won't do. The invisible and/or partially visible internal borderlines generated in daily functions of such remolded and amalgamated institutions should be disintegrated as well.

19. For a detailed understanding of the Green School system and its contextual relevance with respect to the green curriculum initiative in New Delhi, see "Pedagogy of the Stupid," https://www.pdcnet.org/pgs/content/pgs_2021_0999_2_8_3.
20. Epistemological distillations refer to those processes of knowledge production where only selective portions from a whole knowledge system are extracted, distorted, glorified, and generalized. This is what European colonizers did to native indigenous systems of knowledge across the globe. European colonial modes of extraction, distortion, glorification, and generalization of selective portions of a whole knowledge system continue to take place through colonial/modern pedagogical systems today. The preceding essays, "Pedagogy of the Stupid" and "Pedagogy of Common Sense," have elaborately reflected on different forms of epistemological distillations that are performed by colonial/modern educational institutions today.
21. A city in the state of West Bengal in India.
22. For the convenience of readers, I am sharing the film documentary link here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0oM7-jEvu8&t=602s>.
23. Raranga refers to a Māori tradition of weaving. For Māoris, weaving is more than just a manual skill. It is "full of symbolism and hidden meanings" (Puketapu-Hetet 1989, 2). The process of weaving is "embodied with the spiritual values and beliefs of the Māori people" (ibid.). While weaving, apart from the spontaneous and non-rhythmic sounds of weaving, the Māori weavers are not supposed to engage in any kind of verbal communication. This performance of silence "evokes strong feelings of unity and togetherness; the weaving together of the people into their families and tribes and into the Māori nation, and spiritually, the weaving together of all of creation into a single indivisible living wholeness" (Kirkwood 2015, 40).
24. To demonstrate a possible way of intersecting pedagogy of performative silence with vocal-centric pedagogical practices, the concluding section of this essay has been written in a conversational manner. The conversation outlines how the performance of silence as a pedagogical practice acknowledges the experiences of confusions, incompleteness, and inconclusiveness as usual experiences.

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