

# Aesthetics of Silence and the Ethics of Voice: The Soundscape of Asghar Farhadi's Cinema<sup>1</sup>

## Sessizliğin Estetiği ve Sesin Etiği: Asghar Farhadi Sinemasının İşitsel Peyzajı

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### Abstract

This paper is a contribution to the discussion of silence in art, firstly through elaborating on the nature of silence and then through its utilization in sound cinema, focusing on the movies of Iranian auteur, Asghar Farhadi. Summarizing broader views on the (im)possibility of silence and its ethical and political boundaries, this article specifies the issue by examining three movies from Farhadi: *About Elly* (2009), *A Separation* (2011), and *The Past* (2013), all of which are based on a story of searching for the truth. Through the partial talks and strategic silences from the characters and director, the ethical and aesthetical implications of these silences in disentangling the truth will be discussed.

**Keywords:** Silence, Sound, Cinema, Voice, Asghar Farhadi.

### Öz

Bu makale önce sessizliğin doğasına, sonra ise sessizliğin sesli sinemada kullanımına bakarak sanatta sessizlik tartışmasına bir katkı sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Sessizliğin imkanı/imkansızlığı, etik ve politik sınırları üzerine görüşleri özetledikten sonra makalede sessizlik kavramı İranlı yönetmen Asghar Farhadi'nin sinemasının izinde, yönetmenin temelde hepsi de bir hakikati arama hikayesi olarak kurgulanmış üç filmi, *Elly Hakkında* (2009), *Bir Ayrılık* (2011) ve *Geçmiş* (2013) üzerinden incelenecektir. Hikaye içerisindeki bölünmüş konuşmaların ve hem karakterlerin hem de yönetmenin stratejik sessizliklerinin aranılan hakikatin çözümlenmesindeki etik ve estetik anlamlar tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sessizlik, Ses, Sinema, Söz, Asghar Farhadi.

Michel Chion, a film scholar who specifically wrote on sound in cinema, claimed that “sound in film is voco- and verbo-centric, above all, because human beings in their habitual behavior are as well” (1994: 6). While thinking about sound (its presence or absence), an inclination emerges to prioritize the voice. Once it has been presented or implied, voice gains central importance as a source of meaning. Chion is not alone in expressing the centrality of voice as the carrier of meaning for human being's sociality. Mladen Dolar also takes voice as the first sign of life and mentions the centrality of voice in sociality:

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“We are social beings by the voice and through the voice; it seems that the voice stands at the axis of our social bonds, and that voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity.” (2012: 540)

At the heart of construction of sociality and meaning, voice seemingly has a predominant role among acoustic processes. This becomes evident also when one thinks about silence, as one’s perception and representation of silence is generally formed through a reference to the absence of voice rather than sound.

John Cage, an American composer and music theorist, insisted on the impossibility of silence in a given spatio-temporality. In his words, “There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear” (Cage, 1972: 8). Telling of his experience in an anechoic chamber, he expressed hearing the sounds of his nerves and his blood circulating. Hence, one’s own lively existence makes silence, in terms of the total abolition of sound, impossible. Even for deaf people, it seems impossible to ignore the presence of sound when Evalyn Glennie (2015), the famous deaf drummer, specified hearing as a form of touch. Ignoring the distinction between hearing sound and feeling vibrations, she positioned the ability to listen with the entire body rather than just the ears. Taking all these into account, silence, in terms of a total suspension of sound vibrations, seems to be physically impossible until death.

Without leaving the physical impossibility of silence behind, exploring what one means by silence is crucial. What makes talking about silence possible is the tendency to regard it in a relative sense and its possibility of existence in contradiction with sound. “Silence is never a neutral emptiness. It is the negative of sound we’ve heard beforehand or imagined; it is the product of a contrast” (Chion, 1994: 8). Chion elaborated on this paradoxical relationship between sound and silence, which becomes explicit in sound films (1994: 56), by reminding the reader that Robert Bresson’s aphorism asserts the sound film is what makes the representation of silence possible. Bela Balazs, the Hungarian film critic and author, also emphasized the distinctive place of sound films in relation to silence by pointing out, “No other art can reproduce silence, neither painting nor sculpture, neither literature nor the silent film could do so” (1952: 205). Several sound strategies, like the sound room of a cinema hall or embedding music to accompany images, were also present in silent film as acoustic processes, yet representing silence only became possible when sound reproduction for the images in the narration was introduced into the movie industry. Hence, silence gains its significance with the possibility it implies: The presence of sound and the distinction with which sound films represent silence derive exactly from having made this contradiction possible. Silence is a dialectical relation within acoustic encounters; again, it is a kind of sound surrounded by certain others.

The dialectical relationship between sound and silence becomes what produces meaning in overall narration. Most of the literature on silence in cinema focuses on the rarefaction of sound rather than the total suspension of sound. After introducing the representation of sound in films, the feeling of silence in a soundscape becomes possible by directing attention to certain sounds that are used “as synonyms of silence: faraway animal calls, clocks in an adjoining room, rustlings, and all the intimate noises of immediate space” (Chion, 1994: 58). From this perspective, silence emerges as a reference to absence, and this absence is signified again through sound. As John Cage depicts in his abovementioned experiment, as long as one lives, there is always something to hear. As long as expression is attempted in sound film, there is always a kind of sound to be reproduced, even when this expression is silence itself. What we conceive as silence is the suspension of certain sounds (mostly verbal ones) at the expense of others, rather than a total suspension of them.



Suspending speech through silence is also at the heart of forming subjectivity and sociality, as well as its presence. Silence, as surrounded by the boundaries of sound, plays a critical role in terms of creating meaning in communication. It is this positioning of silence at boundaries that makes the expression abundant and grants it a distinctive role in enriching meaning and communication. Susan Sontag (1967), in *Aesthetics of Silence*, enumerated the different ways that silence exists in relation to art. Admitting the impossibility of silence literally and existentially, she concluded that silence could be present in works of art in two ways: “Either it is taken to the point of utter self-negation (as art) or else practiced in a form that is heroically, ingeniously inconsistent” (Sontag, 1967). While the former implies the non-existence of art itself, the latter presents silence as an aesthetic element that refers to the articulation of sound in a way that leads to “a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence” (Sontag, 1967). Such silence creates a plentitude of meanings through the gap it engenders, rather than objectifying expression. Instead of proposing speech at the center of the work, an artist’s muteness in artwork serves as an enriching emptiness, one that prospers expression and keenly attracts the audience’s attention.

In contrast with clarity being attempted through speech, silence in works of art is a way of communicating in places where meaning is not easily installed. Inevitably it becomes a kind of speech in narration “(in many instances, of complaint or indictment) and an element in a dialogue” (Sontag, 1967). Although Sontag emphasized silence to be an enriching absence as an aesthetic element of communication in art, her appointing silence as a kind of speech in the form of complaints or indictments may open up a discussion on the ethical and political implications of silence. Besides an abstinence from attaching meaning or expressions through silence, recalling silence both as an ethical and aesthetical gesture in artwork is at the center of this article’s investigation in relation to Asghar Farhadi’s cinema. Hence, before introducing a deeper analysis of his three movies, elaborating on how ethics is conceived in relation to sound, silence, and speech can be illuminating.

### **Ethics in Silence and Voice**

E. Ann Kaplan (2009: 160), an American professor on cultural and gender studies, defined two main categories for silence used in film: a character’s voluntary muteness and silence as a director’s cinematic technique for affective purposes. In relation to the latter, an article on Abbas Kiarostami (another Iranian auteur contemporary with Farhadi) remarks on the director’s emphasis on silence as an aesthetic element, claiming that, “The ultimate artistry is to tell a story by not telling it” (Tabarraee, 2012, p. 7). While both of the accounts appoint an aesthetic gesture to the kinds of silence from directors/artists, both silence from characters and the director in cinema carry ethical implications, too.

Silence, in contrast to speech, destabilizes meaning and multiplies questions for the audience rather than presenting answers and stabilizing meanings; it creates an “enriching lack.” A call for audience participation lies at the heart of intentionally created gaps and absences in narrative. The silence of Abbas Kiarostami, for instance, bestows an attempt “to make the audience participate in the process of a personal creation over which the director seemingly has no control” (Tabarraee, 2012: 11). Although the possibility of silence is questionable for the director, it becomes a crucial pinpoint in the narratives of Farhadi: There is always a search for the truth through the absence of a search for the guilty, as his stories drive the audience in a way to find one while leaving them incapable of finding the other. In this sense, the rhetoric of sound and image prevails the construction of the narration with such a vulnerable positioning. In an inter-



view, he emphasized his trials on omitting the director's point of view in film (Osenlund, 2013). The positions of both Iranian directors might be an aesthetic concern for enriching meaning, as well as an ethical concern for avoiding monopolizing and objectifying the truth. At this point, another idea emerges for consideration: Can the rhetoric of sound and image that emphasizes muteness from the director at the expense of a situation also be considered a neutrality of ethics?

Mladen Dolar reserved a chapter to the relationship between ethics, voice, and silence in his book, *A Voice and Nothing More*. Taking the longstanding relationship between conscience and voice as a start, he attempted to present a history of ethics in relation to voice. From Socrates to Rousseau, from Kant to Freud, he pointed out philosophical discussions on the relationship drawn between voice as a calling and ethics (Dolar, 2006). Basically, he mentioned these philosophers' processing an inner voice in their writings as a driving force, which somehow has a relationship with ethical concerns. For instance, Socrates has the voice of Daemon that prevents him from doing certain actions, while for Kant and Freud, the voice of reason is what calls humanity to ethical responsibility (Dolar, 2006). From a different perspective, all these philosophers related voice to ethical considerations. In their articulations, this voice always calls people to an ethical point. Yet one should note that all of them describe a mute voice: "Ethics requires a voice, but a voice which ultimately does not say anything, being by virtue of that all the louder, an absolute convocation which one cannot escape, a silence that cannot be silenced" (Dolar, 2006: 98). This is a crucial point in following the traces of ethical concerns implied by silence in Farhadi's movies while following characters' tensions before uttering the truth. Yet in parallel with this tension is also the narrator's (director's) tension for uttering the truth, for appointing who is just and unjust.

In another chapter, Dolar argued, "Speech, logos, does not merely indicate, it expresses or, better still, it manifests: it manifests the advantageous (useful) and the harmful, and consequently the just and the unjust, the good and the evil" (2006: 105). The search for the just and unjust presents the political implications of voice, as the ability to speak is always equated with power and gaining a voice is equated with the struggle of the suppressed. Implying the relationship between voice and power, Pascal Bonitzer indicated a rule by saying that those who have the right to speak should use it as little as possible (2007: 35). As mentioned above, Farhadi himself as a director abstains from searching for the good and the evil in his films. His attempt to lessen his voice as a director as much as possible endows a concern in line with the rule Bonitzer set, which seems to stand at the intersection of the ethical and political considerations of silence and voice.

The relationship of the right to speak with power (or domination) brings up the issue of silence as a tool of resistance. Sontag (1967) also approximates silence to resistance by relating its communicational meaning to indictment and complaint. Encountering such resisting silence is mostly found in relation to feminist literature. In her article on increasing the representation of silent female characters in Turkey's cinema after 1990s, Özlem Güçlü specified four distinct types of silence: silencing silence, resisting silence, complete silence, and speaking silence (2010: 75). Illustrating how silence may carry multiple meanings in art, she indicated both how silence is associated with power and knowledge and how it is used as a mechanism of resistance. For example, while her depiction of speaking and resisting silences concerns silence as a response to character's trauma, silencing and speaking silences are more related to how a character's silence reflects knowledge and power relations in the narration. Examining the multidimensional roles of silence from a feminist perspective, Güçlü's typology could be an enlightening source for elaborating upon the silence of Farhadi's female characters, whose silence becomes indispensable in (dis)solving the story. Finalizing the role of silence in narratives is not easy. What appear at



this point are its multi-dimensionality and its creation of an enriching space in works of art. For sound film, silence becomes the patterns of sound and image that makes one approach the final meaning or realm. Regarding this, the cinema of Asghar Farhadi opens up a field of wealth on the discussion of its ethical and aesthetic articulations.

### **Silence and Pauses in Asghar Farhadi's Cinema**

Asghar Farhadi, who himself wrote a bachelor's thesis on silence, pauses, and their meaning in the plays of Harold Pinter (Philips, 2012), indeed bases his movies on frequent conversations. Distinctive moments are found in his movies that gain their meaning from the silence and pauses embedded in these conversations consecutively. As mentioned above, one conceives silence as a product of contrast. For this reason, frequent conversations become elements that grant silence its significance. *About Elly* (2009), *A Separation* (2011), and *The Past* (2013) are all based on situations of deadlock mostly due to what is unspoken. Each of these films turns into a story of a search for the truth articulated through partial talks, characters' strategic silence, or utilizing the surrounding sounds as synonyms for silence. While the mysteries of each film unfold, finding the "rightful" character or protagonist gets more difficult instead of easier because the director refrains from allowing the audience to make final judgments by suspending the answers and meanings of pauses and silences at the expense of questions.

In relation to the soundscape of Farhadi's movies, the first thing to note is the absence of non-diegetic music. The director explains this through his concern for abstaining from creating a mood or from invoking emotions through music (Farhadi, 2011). In a sense, this is a crucial characteristic of his cinema that unveils the silence/muteness of director in the narrative. He situates all sources of emotions within the narration itself, not through music but through other sound effects: Silence and diegetic sounds substitute for the role of creating a mood. In this sense, the sound of story-space emerges with its significant role, sometimes as a guiding light in the absence of speech, and sometimes as synonym of characters' silence or the director's silence himself. The sound of the locale or a close-up to an object's sound is used to express the absence of voice, or relative silence. The sound of the sea in *About Elly* occupies such a role for rhetoric purposes. The continuous presence of the sound of the sea gains several meanings throughout the film, changing in line with the narrative, contributing to the rejoicing mood at the beginning of the film, and then contributing to the thrilling mood after Elly's disappearance. For the audience and characters, feelings and the effects of the sound of the sea invoke radical changes after Elly's disappearance.

*About Elly* is based on the story of vacationing college friends, four men, four women, and three children. Sepideh, appearing as the leader of the group, invites a friend, Elly, who is unknown to the rest of the group. By inviting Elly, Sepideh's aim to pair Elly with Ahmad, a newly divorced member of the group, during the vacation becomes quite obvious in the first minutes of the film. The film opens with a scene of a light beam in the darkness; after a while the location being a mailbox becomes clear. The shadowy sound of footsteps and horns are in the background. The light beam grows, the sound of horns escalates, and the camera ends up in a tunnel which the group passes through, shouting out with joy. Changing his sound rhetoric from shadowy sounds to joyful shouts, Farhadi gives a tip to the changing mood of the movie from one end to the other. The cheerful noise of the group continues until Elly's disappearance in the middle of the film.

Elly, as a character with silences and pauses in the presence of this noisy group, appears as a contrast from the very beginning of the film. On the day after the evening the group had spent



cheerfully, Ahmad and Elly have warmed up to one another. Yet, Elly seems a little uneasy. She explains to Sepideh that she cannot stay longer, while Sepideh consistently ignores her. Elly, seeing the impossibility of communicating with words, falls silent. While Sepideh reads this silence as acceptance, when taking her disappearance into consideration, this moment can be regarded as a moment of resisting silence for Elly, instead. This moment of resisting silence, using Güçlü's terminology, turns into a complete silence that endures for the rest of the film. Last seen by the children while flying a kite with them, Elly disappears; this becomes the main trouble of the film. Whether she has gone without notice or has drowned in the sea becomes the vital question that changes the mood of the film dramatically. Trying to uncover this mystery, the group encounters many more questions about Elly rather than answers; Elly has become completely silent, "one who is spoken of but has no chance to reply" (Güçlü 2010: 79). While the group speculates about Elly while searching for her, they learn things they didn't know. Elly's complete silence disables them from making a final decision or judgment. When Peyman's daringness to criticize Elly and her going on the vacation is revealed, Ahmad silences him in order to stop the process of judging the one who is completely silent. Here, silence as an ethical concern cancels the speech (being judgmental), manifesting the good and the evil. After a while, nearly all members of the group utter statements about Elly, accusing her of coming with them even though she is engaged. Accompanying these conversations is the sound of the sea, existing as if to represent the silent Elly. Becoming a disruption to judgments, the sound of the sea says nothing, but implies a calling closely related to Mladen Dolar's discussion on the history of ethics of voice. As such, this history "finds its conclusion, its last and perhaps purest form, in Heidegger, with the voice which says nothing in particular but insists as a pure injunction" (Dolar, 2006: 95).

Another moment of silencing the characters occurs at the end of the movie when the men explain to Elly's fiancée the real intention for calling Elly to the vacation: to pair her with Ahmad. While the camera does not appear positioned at a far distance, the audience is unable to hear their conversations as it is suppressed by the sound of sea. This scene is an example of submerged speech in accordance with the definition of Michel Chion: "The filmmaker uses the situation itself as an alibi ... to reveal and conceal the words, thus relativizing human speech while locating it in space" (1992: 108). Although submerged speech can contain information that may enable the audience to make a final judgment about lies, unknown things, or Elly's intentions/fate, the director twists the focus of sound from speaking characters to the sea. Having devoured Elly, the sound of the sea seems to stand as the voice of Elly. At the end of the film, Elly's having drowned in the sea becomes clear, yet learning all the troubles she had to deal with, Elly's complete silence even leads the audience to question whether her drowning was accidental or voluntary. Using the sound of the locale as a synonym of the character's silence, Farhadi utilizes silence as an enriching lack in the narrative. In this sense, *About Elly* appears as an example of aestheticizing silence. Additionally, the calls for silence in moments of crises (as unknown things about Elly come to light) embody the ethical dimension of silence and speech.

*A Separation*, just like *About Elly*, opens in darkness, this time in a photocopy machine copying passports. Right after, the camera ends up in a courtroom from the point of view of the judge while a couple sitting in front explains their intention to divorce. In the courtroom, Nader adds an annotation to the demand for divorce in contrast to Simin's continuous speaking. Simin wants to go abroad for their 11-year-old daughter, while Nader refuses his wife's demand because his father is suffering from Alzheimer's and he feels he should take care of him. To get rid of this deadlock, Simin files for divorce. Another annotation added by silence occurs in the courtroom when the judge asks the reason for her insistence on leaving Iran. She answers, "As a mother, I



prefer that she does not grow up under these circumstances.” In return, the judge asks, “What circumstances?” Simin falls silent. On the threshold of the impossibility of communication, she falls silent. For the judge, this silence could be indicative of a bluff, as he concludes the case by saying, “Your problem is not a big problem.” For the audience, this could become a speaking silence in relation to the typology presented by Güçlü, who relates speaking silence to “an issue that has been silenced by society” (2010: 79). In other words, a silence with political implications in front of authority is most probably what she means by “circumstances.” As discussed above, the ability to speak is highly related to power relations. In this sense, the presence of only the judge’s voice becomes Farhadi’s reference to the political implications of voice. As both Bonitzer and Dolar have brought up, such a voice holds the right to speak emerges in relation to power.

*A Separation* is based on two legal cases, one is divorce and the other a murder charge against Nader; Razieh, Nader’s father’s caregiver, accuses him of causing her to miscarry after the two have had a dispute. Whether Simin really wants to get divorced or is indeed just bluffing, and whether Razieh’s miscarriage resulted from Nader pushing her or occurred before their dispute become the basic questions that Farhadi unveils to the audience and the characters. Mladen Dolar explains, “Speech is ‘always-already’ a response ... and always bears the responsibility in relation to the voice of Being” (2006: 97). In the doubtful atmosphere of the film, speech emerges with this implication of responsibility, while silence refers to its suspension. In the confession scenes, one can see examples of speech emerging as a consequence of taking responsibility. In the scene, Termeh, the daughter of Simin and Nader, clearly asks her father whether he had known Razieh was pregnant when they fought and whether he had lied in court and pretended he did not. Although Nader falls silent first, suspending the responsibility he encountered, he then speaks the truth, saying he knew about the pregnancy. When reconsidering Dolar’s above-mentioned discussion on ethics and the mute voice, the ethical moment occurs in the moment of silence rather than the moment of speech where he takes on the responsibility of the truth. The moment of silence implies his inner voice makes the final decision to take responsibility. Another moment of falling silent before taking responsibility for the truth occurs when Razieh confesses to Simin that she had been hit by a car the day before her fight with Nader, so the miscarriage could have occurred at that time. Razieh falls silent right after reconfirming that Nader had pushed her. This silence leads Simin to ask more, and then Razieh utters the truth, which triggers doubt about Nader’s guilt. *A Separation* is seemingly filled with the ethical and political implications of silence. Firstly, certain moments of silence as a response to questions, like in the case of Simin falling silent in front of the judge, imply the political implications of silence; the ethics of silence is revealed in moments of taking responsibility for the truth.

How Farhadi silences characters or suppresses sound as an enriching lack to make the audience participate in the creation of meaning can also be observed in his later movie, *The Past*. The opening and final scenes of the film are equipped with silence. Farhadi refers to *The Past* as his most silent film, using quiet characters because the situations are so inexplicable to them and others (Roberts, 2013). The moments of silence lead to a keen contrast among the noisy clamor of the characters’ disputes during the film. In addition to characters’ silence within narration, Farhadi also creates silences for the audience by submerging speech with the story’s locale.

At the beginning of the film, the audience sees Marie waiting at the airport behind a glass wall, trying to make herself seen and her voice heard by Ahmad. Once Ahmad sees her, they meet on either side of the glass wall and talk to one another without being heard. The audience cannot hear or understand either of them, yet they understand each other. This scene is a reference to the name of the movie. That is, their communication in silence shows that the two characters



share a “past” (Mert, 2014). In this sense, instead of providing conversation, Farhadi mutes it for the audience as a way of appropriating silence for aesthetic concerns. As the story opens, Ahmad is understood to have come to Paris from Iran due to Marie’s call to terminate their marriage officially. While Ahmad expects to stay at a hotel, he nevertheless has to stay at Marie’s house in the midst of turmoil. When they arrive home, Ahmad discovers that Marie is living with another man, Samir. The deadlock of the film is the situation of Samir’s wife: Celine is in a coma. Whether or not the affair between Marie and Samir is the reason for his Celine’s coma and whether or not she had learned about the affair become the questions in focus. Dealing with such tough questions, the film is full of moments of characters’ silence in response to many other questions. This leads to a call for audience participation in the process of generating answers, as the questions of what is right and wrong are left unanswered. This call for audience participation also implies an attempt from the director at ethical neutrality in order to avoid monopolizing and objectifying the truth in his storytelling.

Apparently, Lucie, Marie’s daughter from before Ahmad, accuses Samir and her mother, thinking that their affair is the reason for Samir’s wife’s condition. Yet Marie explains Samir’s wife’s suicide attempt as a result of her chronic depression. Ahmad stumbles into such trouble and is forced to be the peacemaker among them at certain moments. Lucie’s silence during the greater part of the movie once again stands out as a resisting silence. She tries to disturb Samir with her silence by leaving his questions unanswered when he asks something.

While each character seems to have an answer in mind regarding the issue, the director does not finalize the reason for the suicide attempt in any way. Samir’s wife becomes the completely silent character of the movie, while the other characters speculate on the reasons that pushed her to attempt suicide. Samir, different from both Marie and Lucie, thinks the reason to be a debate Celine had had a fight with a customer in their shop and sends an employee who was also in the middle of the debate to explain it to Lucie. At this point, Lucie confesses to Ahmad that she had sent an e-mail to Celine that had included all the love messages between Samir and Marie only one day before her suicide attempt. That Lucie is the real target of her own accusation, rather than her mother or Samir, becomes clear; this leads the audience to rethink her silence and resistance. Lucie’s preference to remain silent or speak about that she had done refers to moments of taking responsibility. After this confession, Ahmad replies, “Either you keep this secret to the end of your life and suffer, or you talk to your mom;” inviting her to speak about her secret and take ethical responsibility.

As including the account of Naima, Samir’s employee, the story proposes reasons that may have been in Samir’s wife’s mind, whether she had ever read these e-mails or not becomes uncertain. In order to explain this, when Samir and Marie meet in front of the pharmacy where Marie works, their speech remains hidden from the audience again behind a folding glass door, even though this is one of the significant moments where the truth they are searching for is revealed. Submerging speech behind walls in addition to characters’ quietude multiplies questions for the audience; meanwhile, the narrative creates a strong demand for answers. The movie carries much tension through speech and silence, dealing with the issues of deception and suicide. Generally, the moments of speech adds cumulatively to the narrative in the audience’s mind, complicating judging or deciding who is just or unjust. Yet at the end of the movie, a silent scene creates an affective source for finalizing the story. Samir, fed up with all the mess from questions, goes to the hospital to see his wife while wearing the perfume she used to love; she reacts to his smell by squeezing his finger. Hence, this one act from the completely silent character in the final scene eloquently reveals a full void that, for a moment, cancels the questions of those who can speak throughout the movie.





## Conclusion

Asghar Farhadi designs the soundscapes of his films as a crucial representation of atmosphere. His films, especially those discussed in this paper, are based on frequent dialogues that deal with a main deadlock, which itself emerges through consecutive silences and speeches. In revealing the truths that will (dis)solve the deadlock, both silence and speech become elements that feed and lead on one another. Farhadi's movies locate the contrast between speech and silence on issues that call for ethical positioning in our daily lives. In the elusiveness of silence, Farhadi implies the relativity of the truth with the impossibility of determining the truly right character. In this sense, characters' silence or delayed speech makes a resonating effect for the audience in a way that makes judging a certain character nearly impossible. The silence of the director, in this sense, also blurs his position and implies ethical concerns presenting the subjectivity of truth, inviting the audience to listen to each character with his/her subjectivity. Silence as an aesthetic element gives birth to different articulations of narratives in the audience's minds. By enriching meaning and avoiding a static truth, silence also stands as an ethical annotation before judgment.

Silence stands as a challenging notion both in social life and works of art. Throughout this paper, the possible ways for articulating silence, especially in the genre of sound films, has been explored. Sound films, with their distinguished position of making possible the representation of silence, enjoy enriching expression by creating a contrast between verbal sounds and silence. The elusiveness of silence creates an enriching emptiness in narratives, yet it also gains this enriching capacity from the contrast engendered at the expense of sound. This paper is an elaboration over the aesthetic, ethical, and political connotations on the richness of silence, without neglecting how sound effects contribute to representing silence. The relativity and verbo-centrism in understanding silence appear in the fact that we mention silence mostly as the silence of a character and as the suspension of speech. While thinking about silence as a moment for taking responsibility for the truth (as an ethical act), we assume an inner voice to the character, or we assume the director uses spatial sounds to emphasize characters' silence. Ultimately, the existential possibility of silence being surrounded and covered with sounds becomes apparent.

## Conclusion

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