

**LISTENING-THROUGH-CONVERSATION(ALISM): NAVIGATING AS POROUS  
LISTENING BODIES  
(IN-)BETWEEN MEANINGFUL SILENCES**

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Jaco LOUW

Department of Philosophy,  
Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Email: [18658547@sun.ac.za](mailto:18658547@sun.ac.za)

ORCID No.: 0009-0002-3341-1597

**Abstract**

The interplay between listening and questioning, and its implications for philosophising, has been grappled with only in passing. Although listening and questioning are often cast as mutually exclusive, preserving the tension between them remains crucial for a philosophically attuned engagement with others. Conversational philosophy, I argue, provides fresh insights into maintaining and methodising this tension. When considering the encounter between conversational partners *as constitutive to* philosophising, the (re-)conceptualisation of both listening and the role of productive silences that emerge as (in-)between spaces in conversation becomes crucial. The conversational partners become integral collaborators in cultivating philosophy, creating novel concepts, and sustaining the conversation. But more fundamentally, it allows silence to bloom (echo, reverberate) and for conversational partners to listen attentively. This article argues that the productive tension between listening and questioning can be maintained by rooting the conversation in a novel framework of *porous listening bodies*. Philosophical counselling, a contemporary movement in practical philosophy, becomes an important conduit for concretising the principles of conversational philosophy, especially through the method of *conversationalism*. Crucially, this article thus introduces a praxis of *listening-through-conversation(alism)*. Listening and productive silences are repositioned as dynamic, philosophically relevant, and fundamentally constitutive, particularly in collaborative efforts to cultivate philosophy and create new concepts.

**Keywords:** Listening, Conversationalism, Philosophical counselling, Listening-through-conversation, Porous listening bodies.

**Introduction**

An ostensible paradox emerges if the philosopher's capacity for listening, allowing silences to take hold of them, is juxtaposed with their questioning and inquiring disposition, actively resisting the pull of listening/silences. Philosophising, often understood as an active stance of questioning and inquiry, seems opposed to the practice of quieting/silencing oneself to truly listen (NANCY 2007). However, this apparent tension between listening and questioning presents itself as one that might allow for a meaningful interplay that ought to be maintained, rather than glossed over or excluded. This dynamic activates an oscillation between two dispositions — an actively questioning stance that drives philosophical inquiry and a momentary pause of receptive, genuine listening — to allow the other to speak, to allow oneself to be permeated by silence. Properly facilitating this tension between the disposition of questioning or philosophising, and the ability to listen with an open mind, I argue in this paper, requires a novel framework. While listening and productive silences are somewhat

underexplored as forms of philosophical meaning-making, they are nonetheless *required*. For without listening, the deaf philosopher risks entertaining merely a self-indulgent internal monologue, excluding the other from participating in a potentially meaningful conversation and covering the often-overlooked (in-)between space of silence embedded in the conversation itself (FIUMARA 1990; ARNETT 2004; GROSFUGUEL 2012).

In this paper, I thus aim to construct a novel and alternative framework, that of *porous listening bodies*,<sup>1</sup> by turning to conversational philosophy concretised and activated through philosophical counselling. The porous listening body refers to an embodied stance of radical porosity, openness, and receptivity to conversational exchanges with alterity and otherness. This concept allows me to both problematise philosophical frameworks that tend to prioritise the rational, questioning, and, consequently, the deaf philosopher, and to allow for vulnerability (an openness, a danger, a potential to explore detours). The porous listening body returns attention to radical receptive and genuine listening and the dangers of creativity that inherently accompany this disposition. It provides an alternative way of thinking centred on productive silences, the onto-ethical<sup>2</sup> significance of intersubjective (in-)between spaces, and a de-centred, co-constitutive model of meaning-making attentive to the other's role in collaborative philosophising.

Through the mode of the porous listening bodies, when one conversational partner is speaking (i.e., philosophising), the other remains outwardly silent yet attentively listening. I argue that this mode of listening points to a more radical openness (a *porousness* or *porosity*) that the philosopher fundamentally embodies. It emerges from their becoming a porous listening body. Importantly, it draws attention to the bodily, lived dimension of the encounter itself: the very event and felt experience of listening, of speech, of silences constituting and permeating the (in-)between space of the embodied *listening bodies* (LEVIN 1989; IHDE 2007). The onto-ethical reorientation, which I will propose around productive silence, necessitates cultivating a specific attitude and praxis that finds a conduit in and through the notion of the porous listening body. Philosophical counselling, especially when actualising the method of *conversationalism*, can subsequently be reconceptualised as an *invitation* — one of *listening-through-conversation(alism)*. This invitation is not just to listen(-through-conversation[alism]), but to be listened to, and to fully partake in this event of listening where this act itself becomes the pivotal event around which collaborative philosophising unfolds.

### **Towards a Porous Listening Body: Negotiating the Tensions of Questioning and Listening**

The philosopher *speaks* (NANCY 2007) by asking probing, unsettling questions. Through active engagement with the discourse, the philosopher enunciates their thoughts. While speaking, *genuinely listening* is foreclosed. Jean-Luc Nancy (2007, 1) writes “Isn't the philosopher someone who always hears [understands/agrees] (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely, neutralises listening within himself [or herself], so that he [or she] can philosophise?” For both Nancy (2007) and Gemma Fuimara (1990), the *event of listening* acts as disclosure, opening up, and the creation of meaning. This disclosure emerges as an (in-)between space where one can attend to the other. However, and herein lies the perceived tension between listening and philosophising, through listening, meaning is not “immediately accessible”, whereas to hear (to understand) is already to place something in an already conceptualised framework: to *hear* the alarm bell, to *hear* the growl of an animal (NANCY 2007). The philosopher hears ((mis-)understands), but does

<sup>1</sup> I acquired the idea of a porous body from Kanerva's (2015) dissertation title, viz., “Porous Bodies, Porous Minds”.

<sup>2</sup> Onto-ethical here simply endorses the view that ontology cannot be separated from the questions of becoming, potentiality, politics, change, and thus the idea of porosity or openness (GROSZ 2017).

not necessarily genuinely, attentively, listen. However, if the philosopher is not already involved in some kind of listening, to whom are they speaking here and from where do their questions arise? Does the very practice of philosophy not follow from listening ((mis-)hearing, (mis-)understanding, (dis-)agreeing) exactly at the breakdown of meaning?<sup>3</sup> If not, the philosopher entertains a monologue to which only they have access; a deaf philosophy, one that cannot and does not want to hear.

Listening thus conceived becomes the originary moment from which the philosopher takes their inspiration to philosophise, to question, to investigate, to inquire, to partake in a generative and creative practice. One is reminded here, *inter alia*, by Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), who writes that anyone who is listening remains fundamentally open. This openness allows the philosopher to change their ways of being, to allow different voices to contribute to the discussion, and to move beyond the dilemma they were grappling with, to move beyond agreement and familiarity. Fuimara (1990) holds that when we pause, take time, open ourselves, and listen, we become more receptive to learning (from others), thereby affirming this openness or porosity linked to listening. She continues by warning us that by not genuinely listening to answers or to others' speech, the questions we ask are rendered useless. That is, by not listening, the philosopher risks asking the wrong questions, closing off this openness, and potentially *silencing* others; thereby cutting them off from also speaking, listening, and understanding. But more importantly, listening engenders the question; it breathes relevancy and appropriateness into it, and listening thus becomes an *event*.<sup>4</sup>

Listening, however, still runs the risk of *imposing*, similar to the imposition, interruption, encroachment, or disturbance, of speech onto silence, which penetrates and permeates the receptive body (IHDE 2007). Listening, therefore, already transforms, changes, translates, interprets, alters, and affects. Fuimara (1990, 39), in discussing Martin Heidegger, is troubled by this when he asks that “why it should be so difficult to listen to something without transforming it.” Heidegger (1968, 175), has earlier posed a similar question thus; “But how are we to hear without translating, translate without interpreting?” There seems to be an inherent violence to (passive) hearing in that it always threatens to impose, transform, translate, and interpret. Genuinely listening, to stay receptively open, porous; listening as an utter activity, is thus always threatened by interpretation, (mis-)understanding, to be involved in the process of making sense of what one is *hearing*. The situation is somewhat complicated by the fact that one cannot as readily cease both listening and hearing as one can avert one's gaze; hearing appears to be an automatic process. It is the very practice we engage in to make sense of the world (LEVIN 1989).

At this juncture, one might again run the risk of closing off the openness (i.e., porosity) required to genuinely listen and to engage with otherness. *Porous gaps*, thus, might be more beneficial if left open, but they are filled by attempts at understanding that cover over, hide, and distort. By porosity, I mean the ontological condition in which the self becomes permeable to the presence and alterity of the other. It is also where the boundaries between the self and the other become penetrable, with exteriority passing into interiority and vice versa (LOUW 2025). It marks the way that one's orientation is never sealed but always co-shaped in relational encounters. The other, the conversational partner, thus always (threaten to) cross the boundaries between self and other, but so too does the self or the speaker (threaten to) exude and cross the other's boundaries (ACHENBACH 2024; LOUW 2025). This becomes, as I will discuss throughout the next sections, an enabling condition for listening in conversation(alism) as it takes the other as an ontological necessity. Fuimara

<sup>3</sup> See Gadamer (2013, 187) writing that “[u]nderstanding becomes a special task only when natural life ...is disturbed” and where “misunderstandings have arisen”.

<sup>4</sup> See Janz (2016), who argues that *place becomes event* as soon as place (or one's horizon) is not seen as a static backdrop but a dynamic place that shapes and influences the philosopher.

points to this crucial idea, that of *reciprocal listening*. This form of listening entails a type of mutuality, community, and interdependence, often overlooked in the philosophising process, one that becomes integral and constitutive to conversational philosophy. Through reciprocally listening, the encounter with the other and their alterity, diverse experiences of lifeworlds, marginalised perspectives, subjugated and/or indigenous knowledge systems, occurs through a porosity, an openness. It therefore requires an open receptivity and willingness to engage with the other's difference without subordinating it to pre-existing conceptual hierarchies, thus remaining open to the transformative potential of encountering the other in their otherness (LEVINAS 1987).

Listening conceptualised thus is always *listening to ...* while remaining fundamentally open (porous). It is a quiet disposition or attitude, symbolised by the ellipses, i.e., "...", allowing the moment in which the philosopher remains silent to take hold of them, allowing them to be open to the influence of the other's response, text, ideas, speech, or even just their *presence*. It is precisely in this receptive moment that listening acquires its philosophical significance; it discloses the intersubjective space in which meaning begins to take shape. This might happen through exposure to the other, which both unsettles and co-constitutes understanding. One might here begin to talk about conversation as a *process of listening*, which is always in relation to other(ness), i.e., a text produced by someone, a response of someone, a question posed by someone, the presence of the other in their otherness, or even just the philosopher's own thoughts. Listening is always reciprocal, entailing a listening/speaking other. Mikhail Bakhtin (1987, 287) maintains that "[t]o be means to communicate... To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself." And Martin Buber (1996, 67) writes that "[r]elation is reciprocal. My You acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us." Both authors lay claim to genuine dialogue and the very mode of being as premised upon this openness and reciprocal exchange with otherness. This passive moment of receptive listening to the other's voice, allowing their presence to shape and co-constitute, is often glossed over or actively undermined. This is especially the case with the pervasive problem of (or preference for) logocentrism,<sup>5</sup> which privileges speech, including moulding, informing, and the literal word itself, over listening (FIUMARA 1990). This suggests that meaning is essentially hidden in words, in speech, in active and verbal enunciation. Listening is consequently covered over by an "assertive tradition of *saying*" (FIUMARA 1990, 9; emphasis mine). The active questioning disposition of philosophers frequently precludes them from giving due attention to this passive yet vital moment of listening, as Nancy reminds us.

Philosophising conceptualised thus often precludes these quiet moments of listening, as opposed to hearing — to place the speech of the other within an already existing meaning-making framework, thus preventing their alterity, their otherness, from becoming porous. What I wish to construe here as productive and tangible silences is constituted by the fleeting brevity of the (in-)between—space created by the onto-ethical event or moment of encountering porous listening bodies—which reveals the radical porosity and continuity between selves and others at the level of embodied experience being. This might be somewhat similar to Buber's indescribable, fleeting, and immediate *between* that "occurs" when I and Thou (You) encounter each other as wholes and can only be "captured" in reminiscence or afterthought (BUBER 1965; 1993). In fact, this onto-ethical event escapes capture, as each instance, each event, becomes unique and different; fleeting in its multifaceted nature. It is when the porous listening bodies, akin to Buber's I-Thou relation, come together in a genuine encounter that productive silences are allowed to permeate the

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<sup>5</sup> Here, logocentrism is understood to be the privileging of words, writing, speech, and language as the primary means through which there is (a supposed) access to reality (DERRIDA 1976; CHIMAKONAM 2019).

very (in-)between space opened up between them. This allows the liminal (in-)between to take on a profoundly *conversational* character. For through this porosity, the other's radical alterity is engaged through a receptive listening posture that imposes no predetermined frameworks: it *listens*.

In carving out the (in-)between, I want to transcend the narrow and impoverished idea of silence as mere absence. The experience of productive silences becomes tangible, audible, even material. Annie Dillard describes this experience poetically and phenomenologically when she notes that while being is:

wholly attentive... [y]ou empty yourself and wait, listening. After a time you hear it: there is nothing there... You feel the world's word as a tension, a hum, a single chorused note everywhere the same. This is it: this hum is silence. (DILLARD 2013, 89-90)

One might begin to identify here an *invitation* to attentively listen (to stop, to pause, to take time) even if it is merely to listen to this hum, this tangible silence of the world. Genuinely listening to such productive silences (to step into the (in-)between) is to partake in the event of becoming porous, opening oneself so that the radical presence of otherness can take hold and reverberate through one's porous listening body. Taking this attitude of porosity further, an invitation can then be extended outwards to others, allowing them to speak, to contribute to the discussion or conversation, and open and disclose the present so that it might organically unfold in unpredictable ways. The other, the conversational partner, becomes *the hum of the world* that *echoes* through my porous listening body. Listening allows for this momentary but productive silencing of oneself. But if we again follow Nancy here, traditionally the *active neutralising* of listening within the philosopher is identified as a necessity to philosophise, to produce speech, to enunciate. From this, one might deduce that the philosophising process, including questioning, investigating, and inquiring, remains the active and dynamic disposition of an individual thinking subject. The role of the other, in the form of a text or fellow thinking subject, is negated in such a way that cuts off beneficial encounters from organically unfolding. The hum of the world — echoes of productive/material silences — is understood as impoverished silence, merely absence and empty space waiting to be filled by the active enunciation of the philosopher.

In contrast to the impoverished notion of silence, I want to emphasise the confluence of questioning and listening, allowing silences to take hold not as a negation (void, absence, cessation), but as tangible and imperative moments within the philosophising process. Importantly, allowing listening and silence to take hold, that is, momentarily pausing the practice of questioning, does not signify a cessation of philosophising. Instead, it is a relevant, constitutive moment – a temporary pause inviting others to participate and problematising philosophising as a solitary practice. Listening becomes an invitation, a moment, an event to reciprocally partake in. Productive silences become significant, meaningful, and philosophically relevant. Bodily presence allows for the cultivation of relevant philosophy and knowledge.

It is thus not solely active enunciation and verbal speech that allow for this cultivation; the permeating productive silences, the hum of the world, and the presence of two porous listening bodies alone can begin to influence the participants. The notion of embodied porosity extends beyond the mere bodily presence of listening — the act of being physically present, listening through one's body. It suggests that we listen through a porous body, one that is radically open and permeable, allowing oneself to stare this danger in the face and utilise it. The porous listening body *invites* a receptive state, an openness to absorbing and reverberating ideas, allowing them to resonate through its *hollow channels*. Merleau-Ponty (2014, 370) here refers to a “perfect reciprocity”, that in the “experience of

dialogue”, or conversation, there is a “being-shared-by-two”, and that their “perspectives slip into each other, we co-exist through a single world.” It is two porous listening bodies allowing the productive silences to echo through them and becoming meaningful. Importantly, this onto-ethical imperative is never truly “realised” for it is precisely in the unpredictable emergence of authentic encounters that their value lies. The very act of engaging in conversation as porous listening bodies cultivates the conditions for meaningful, if not genuine, encounters to arise. Their emergence *cannot* be forced or produced on demand, nor can it be defined/predetermined. It merely *happens*; it becomes an *event*.

The porous listening bodies framework can now be appreciated within and through conversationalism concretised with philosophical counselling.

### **Navigating the In-Between of Silence and Listening as Porous Listening Bodies with Conversational Philosophy**

The myth that the philosopher happens to be a lone intellect producing philosophical texts in solitude persists in some manner. Abstracting the notion to fit the contemporary situation, academic philosophy can be conceptualised as inhabiting a metaphorical ivory tower, far removed from the everyday struggles and problems of the lay public (CHIMAKONAM & EGBAI 2016). In formulating key themes for conversational philosophy, Chimakonam writes that the philosopher:

*[M]ust not speak as if there is no one out there to speak to; he [or she] must return to the philosophical village, listen to the villagers, and then speak to the villagers. (CHIMAKONAM 2018, 152, Emphasis mine)*

These philosophers, listening and then only speaking, actively promote the use and adoption of philosophy by and for the lay public, taking philosophy so to speak out of the ivory tower and the halls of academia. Importantly, as the quote above attests, the philosopher is actively listening to the villagers, the lay public, and fellow philosophers, that is, those who are situated and embedded within a concrete lifeworld. Emerging from this discussion, and conversational philosophy, is the notion that the practice of philosophy requires others, such as the lay public, fellow philosophers, with whom one can engage, speak to, and listen to in turn. Much like the above discussion, conversational philosophy relies on the onto-ethical encounter with the other in their otherness. Integral to this philosophising approach is the process of listening, as the philosopher continually asks: *Does this philosophy/concept resonate with those embedded in a concrete, shared lifeworld? Do they require such debates and discussions?*

A real danger arises when no one is listening and everyone is speaking (without listening), consequently asking incorrect and irrelevant questions. Indigenous knowledge systems, philosophical approaches, and alternative ways of living have been excluded, marginalised, and occluded due to the pervasive and reproductive nature of Western modernity and coloniality, which still pervade under the spread of neo-colonialism and its residues (SEREQUEBERHAN 1994; 2021). As Fiumara (1990, 23) notes, within this logocentric culture, genuine dialogue, the very possibility of learning from others in their radical otherness, becomes systematically resisted, ignored, and suppressed: “there is no longer any room for listening.” Consequently, and especially in some Western traditions, “a single tradition is recognised in which everything alien is considered irrelevant” (FIUMARA 1990, 26).

The deafness of philosophy, that is, the inability to listen to relevant voices speaking from an African lifeworld, is thus perpetually reproduced with the disregard for knowledge systems that root themselves in the very soil from which questions and problems emerge. Western philosophy speaks *over* indigenous voices, precluding these rooted voices from

speaking for themselves on and in their own terms, and thus not responding to issues that are distinctly their own. These voices are effectively *silenced*. The use of silencing here functions as a tool for marginalising, occluding, and excluding, thereby denying the other access to their own experiences of different lifeworlds and situations. There is an inability to listen to different experiences of racism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism in the postcolonial present (SEREQUEBERHAN 2003). Not only is the other not allowed to speak or voice their philosophies, but their ways of being (which include their languages) are also actively erased, subjugated, and covered over. This prevents the cross-fertilisation of philosophical approaches; instead, one voice (one way of living and one language) is allowed to speak louder than others, forcing other voices into *non-productive silence*. This is a type of *epistemic saturation* at play, which precludes becoming porous (CHIMAKONAM 2019).

This unjust silencing of others, an unwillingness to listen and become porous, returns us to the problematic and impoverished understanding of silence as absence, void and speechlessness. However, here, silencing is additionally used to marginalise, exclude, and positively occlude the other: *the (in-)between space is effectively erased and ignored as the genuine conversation cannot happen*. The philosopher who encounters others in philosophical villages without the necessary contextual and situational awareness illustrates an inability to listen, potentially speaking over others and silencing them. This philosopher is thus perpetually busy with questioning and inquiring as if it were a rootless activity that does not hear, i.e., understand, the needs of those living in philosophical villages.

Conversational philosophy counters this deaf philosophy as being a philosophy that *can* listen (that is, addressing inequities, giving voice to those who speak from a concrete lifeworld). As noted by many in the conversational philosophy discourse, conversationalism fundamentally reconceptualises the notions of “conversation” and “relationship”. Conversation, within this framework, takes on the technical meaning, denoting an inherently critical and epistemic encounter between two conversational partners (CHIMAKONAM 2015; 2017b). One might also refer to this praxis as (sub-) micro-level<sup>6</sup> conversationalism (ATTOE 2022). This encounter is characterised by the dynamics of contestation and defence, arguments and counterarguments, a conversational dialectic of ideas pitted against the scrutiny and onslaught of challenges from the conversational partner who is listening and not-yet speaking. Or the philosopher might be engaged in a conversation with themselves, pitting their own ideas against the onslaught of reason itself (ATTOE 2022). Central to the understanding of relationship (nmeko) underpinning the conversation is the tenet of mutual interdependence between conversational partners (CHIMAKONAM 2017a; 2019). Rather than viewing the philosopher as an isolated figure who only “listens” to their own thoughts, conversational partners are understood as relating to each other in a fundamentally co-constituting and co-dependent manner, actively engaging in a collaborative process of philosophising. They become porous listening bodies through a confrontational yet open manner of intellectual skirmishing.

At first glance, the confrontational style often associated with conversationalism may seem antithetical to the notion of genuine conversation and porous listening. The confrontational style of these exchanges, with its emphasis on creating disagreement, tension, and struggle, could potentially alienate the porous listening bodies, thereby undermining the very possibility of establishing an authentic (in-)between space imbued with tangible silences. When approached from the embodied stance of porous listening bodies, this confrontation is not the aim but rather a manner of co-cultivating and co-creating knowledge. These moments of tension and creative struggles are opportunities to engage with the other

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<sup>6</sup> Macro-level conversationalism pertains to inter-cultural philosophy per se.

in their otherness, without subverting their alterity to our own frameworks of understanding, agreement, or consensus, thereby effectively erasing their alterity (TILLMANN 2013). Yet emerging from the very encounter between the conversational partners in the dynamic and perpetual interaction is the need for a praxis of listening, especially in allowing the partners to meet each other in their alterity as porous listening bodies. Additionally, accompanying silences, which further illuminate the (in-)between or liminal space of the conversation, demand attention and an onto-ethical reorientation. Even though it appears to be the case that the conversational partners are on course for a never-ending conversation filled with only speech that rarely tends toward resolution (ENYIMBA 2023). The injection of moments of silence and listening plays a constitutive role and thus becomes philosophically relevant. The (African) conversational philosopher, Diana-Abasi Ibanga (2017), begins to lay the groundwork for a richer understanding of silences in conversational philosophy, noting that silence and presence alone can generate meaning.

What follows is the idea of how the conversational partners receive and engage with the responses that emerge from the encounter. The presence of the conversational partners demands a praxis of listening, or again, in following Fiumara (1990), a *hermeneutic rooted in listening*. It is not the mere passive reception of thoughts, speech, or ideas. The careful and genuine listening that happens between the conversational partners, in-between active moments of speech, allows productive silences to take hold of them and, thus, potentially allows for new pathways to manifest. From the momentary suspension of speaking, questioning, or inquiring, the conversational partners listen to the present moment, heeding its demands, and fundamentally remaining open (porous). Questions emerging from incessant disagreements, facilitated by a creative struggle, are allowed to bloom and dictate new and unfamiliar directions for continually unfolding conversations. Even though the questioning disposition will again follow, productive silences, moments (in-)between speaking to and listening to, are allowed to permeate the space between the conversational partners. Listening, thus, becomes a fundamentally participatory, radical activity, a practice in which both conversational partners partake, and thus becomes an event.

However, the listening of the conversational partners is of a different kind, demanding a different disposition from each participant. To elucidate the distinct dispositions and to illustrate the implications of this reconceptualisation of listening as porous listening bodies and the reorientation of productive silences as an (in-)between space, I turn to philosophical counselling.

### **Concretising Conversationalism through Philosophical Counselling**

Even though listening has received only passing consideration within the discourse of philosophical counselling (see ACHENBACH 2024), its originality and pivotal role emerge from the very encounter between counsellor and guest, allowing the (in-)between to take hold of both receptive participants. While the philosophical counsellor listens attentively to the guest's articulated problems, questions, and narrative contexts, the guest simultaneously listens to the counsellor's responses, questions, and reframing. The listening dispositions exemplified by the counsellor and the guest are distinct yet deeply interdependent. The counsellor embodies a porous listening body — a stance of radical openness, porosity, and receptivity to the guest's alterity. The guest is allowed to speak freely, while the counsellor, in their porosity and confrontation with the other's otherness, involves their whole being. Simultaneously, the guest's listening is an active process. The guest is potentially transformed through both the counsellor's embodied porosity and the response that follows the initial listening encounter. The listening of both participants becomes co-constitutive and interdependent, a dynamic porosity where the very encounter in the (in-)between leads them into uncharted territories. Each encounter is unique and cannot be determined beforehand.

The counsellor's porous embodiment and the guest's vulnerability in presenting themselves in this listening event constitute the collaborative philosophising endeavour. In this process, the listening dispositions are continually and reciprocally shifted with each new interjection, productive and tangible silent moments, or the birth of new concepts and ideas.

Additionally, some philosophical counsellors, such as Michael Russell (2001) and Aleksandar Fatić and Ivana Zagorac (2016), maintain that this listening disposition of the philosophical counsellor is distinct from philosophising as typically conceived. The philosopher here is not merely someone who solely listens to the problems of others, as that role falls more within the purview of counselling psychology. Rather, the philosophical counsellor, especially by adopting a conversational dialectic, at times takes a confrontational stance. The productive tension that emerges from juxtaposing porous listening with active philosophising, the neutralising of listening for Nancy (2007), is what potentially generates the transformation in the guest or what acts as the driving force for the continuation of the conversation. Here, the counsellor does not simply receive the guest's narrative passively, but aims to actively and creatively struggle with it in conjunction with all the philosophy might offer (SCHUSTER 1995). This again underscores how the philosophical counsellor's listening itself becomes an engaged praxis of continual (re-)interpretation. They position themselves as a sort of listening-mediator, one who, through the conversational dialectic, aims to co-create novel concepts and co-cultivate alternative ways of becoming. The philosophical counsellor thus continually mediates, translates, and (re-)interprets the guest's articulated problems, contexts and self-understandings through a contextually aware mediating of the guest's voice with the history of philosophy (ALLEN 2002). This confrontational-yet-receptive disposition catalyses a space of productive tensions that allows the conversation to continue and persist.

An important link can and should be made between the temporality of listening and listening as praxis situated within philosophical villages. The philosophical counsellor's listening attitude becomes distinctly temporal, and listening becomes an event, a temporally located moment. The idea of a listening-mediator implies that in the very encounter between the guest and the counsellor, something of epistemic importance *emerges* (FIUMARA 1990; RAABE 2001; FASTVOLD 2005). The mediation happens between the guest's highly contextual nature and their encounter with the history of philosophy, understood as a vast reservoir or inventory of different voices, arguments, ideas, and conversations. Listening here thus plays a guiding role, not as a strict limiting principle or rigid border. Instead, listening illuminates, discloses, or reveals the boundless potentiality of what might ensue from the encounter; in the same breath, it also shows the guest the dangers of philosophy. For "we shall proceed as if I know, I really don't know" (SWAZO 2000, 50). Collaborative philosophising thus roots itself in the fertile soil that emerges (in-)between the guest and counsellor, which springs forth from the very encounter when listening becomes event, from when both conversational partners become porous and allow silences to permeate and echo through them. By thus taking the guest's problem and question seriously, the philosophical counsellor avoids utilising a rootless philosophy, disembodied thought disconnected from the particular situation. The conversation between the philosophical counsellor and guest thus becomes interdependent, an active co-rootedness and co-creative praxis embedded in mutual listening, and where productive silences are honoured as epistemically relevant.

The very presence of the guest thus demands that the philosophical counsellor listen to them, allowing the guest to speak and verbalise their problem/question. By taking their presence seriously, thus showing the guest that they are being listened to, the philosophical counsellor "listens attentively" (ACHENBACH 2024; FASTVOLD 2005; LEVIN 1989). This demands a type of improvisation through the continual introduction of new and novel ideas, information relevant to the present situation, and the demands of the guest. Contrasted

with a well-orchestrated movement (e.g., dance, musical piece, performance) illustrated by repetitively applying a method, philosophical counselling is a continual adaptation, i.e., improvisation, to novel situations, conversations that might venture into any direction, and thus demanding that the philosophical counsellor be a generalist (FATIĆ AND ZAGORAC 2016), a type of methodological anarchist (SWAZO 2000), and extremely well prepared for any situation that might unfold — even though they cannot ever fully prepare for the potentially untimely arrival of the guest (PLANT 2006). Moreover, the immediate attitude of the counsellor towards the guest's problem or question is not one of resolution or amelioration; even though these might manifest as by-products. Instead, the process involves an intimate entanglement. That is, placing the problem into the conversation and taking it as demanding serious consideration and unpacking. The philosophical counsellor Anders Lindseth notes that this entanglement with the question or problem produces a “creek of sighs” when the weight thereof sinks in, pointing toward the *bodily* aspect of experiencing aporias, impasses, or seemingly insurmountable mountains. It demands a physical verbalisation, not in words that carry any immediate or transparent meaning; it remains only as audible “sighs” (FASTVOLD 2005, 174).

### **Beginning to Listen-Through-Conversation(alism)**

Conceptualising the practice of philosophising as fundamentally interdependent and collaborative necessitates a nuanced understanding and appreciation of listening and productive silences that might take hold of the participants and the very encounter. The situation demands *porous listening bodies*, participants that remain fundamentally open to the situation, either as listening or remaining silent, so that even presence alone might influence the conversation and the philosophising process. If this radical openness is fully appreciated, silence becomes distinctively constitutive, significant, meaningful, and epistemic, thus allowing both participants to explore the potentially infinite ways the conversation might unfold. In productive silences, echoes of what just unfolded are experienced — listened to — as rich moments in which thoughts and ideas reverberate through both porous listening bodies, leaving behind traces that meaningfully impact both participants. Even if this moment is only fleeting, the boundless possibilities entailed by the porous listening bodies are imperative to maintain and allow to take hold, rather than gloss over. The porous body additionally entails an openness to be touched, influenced, and transformed by the other. It is a vulnerability that is at once dangerous and full of potentialities.

The concretisation of this listening praxis entails the active participation of both participants, inviting them to listen and to be heard. It instantiates a *listening-through-conversation(alism)*. The conversational participants (philosophical counsellor and guest, fellow philosophers) actively engage in conversation, speaking, verbalising thoughts, improvising, or co-creatively struggling, subsequently entering a relationship that demands listening and productive silences to take hold and permeate the temporally and spatially located conversation-as-event. The core tenet of both philosophical counselling and conversational philosophy lies in the original moment when participants encounter each other and thereby constitute the (in-)between. This encounter is situated within a confrontational, critical, sceptical, yet open and porous framework with both the history of philosophy and the demands of the present situation. This encounter relies on porous listening bodies remaining open to the seemingly limitless possibilities that might unfold, even though there are multiple dangers linked to it. Through the method of conversationalism, the critical encounter entails a defender of a position (the guest's initial contributions to the situation where the philosopher attentively listens as a porous listening body) to continually transform and amend their position with the critical contributions of the opponent, the philosophical

counsellor who responds to the guest who now becomes another porous listening body but with a different receptiveness. This entails that the opponent attentively and genuinely listens to the defender. However, the opponent is not merely listening to critically engage with the defender of a position; they listen for silences that might be productive, allowing them to permeate the conversation and allowing them to echo through the porous listening bodies. The philosopher listens to the many voices in the philosophical inventory which were deemed important for the current situation, and they listen to (mis-)conceptions and (mis-)understandings which are themselves fuel for further discussions and philosophising.

Similarly, in philosophical counselling, the counsellor and the guest enter a conversation that entails attentive listening, with silences permeating the very encounter. The counsellor listens to the guest, they listen to the past, i.e., the philosophical inventory, and they listen to the potential need for silence to allow both participants to remain open, to become porous. Every new situation and every guest dictates different approaches (TUKIAINEN 2010; RAABE 2013). The importance of listening cannot be glossed over. The counsellor will continually listen to the guest through their practice, potentially rooted in the method of conversationalism. But the implication for the practice of philosophising between the counsellor and guest is that philosophy will be made relevant to the needs of the guest, appropriate to their lifeworlds, and possibly leading to the beneficial cultivation of alternative ways of living. Again, improvisation, the in-the-moment decision-making, relies on a keen sense of contextual awareness, of what might rejuvenate the conversation and potentially help the guest to collaboratively cultivate a beneficial philosophy. This cannot be pre-determined; it only emerges from the very encounter (in-)between the guest and the counsellor. The co-rooted and co-creative moment is constitutive of the practice of philosophising, relying on the imperative notion of listening (through conversation) and the significant moments of silence (in-)between the conversation.

### **Towards Concluding**

Ultimately, then, listening-through-conversation(alism) emerges as an attitude, a disposition, a way of practicing philosophy which radically reorients our perspective on, firstly, the place and the role of the other in the practice of philosophising, and secondly, the significance of listening and the very encounter between the participants when silence permeates this space and their porous listening bodies. Within this praxis, productive silence is itself onto-ethically reorientated. This constitutes itself as a reservoir of potentialities that await actualisation, porous openings through which novel concepts might be created and alternative ways of living/thinking disclosed in the moment of encounter, and echoes that leave behind beneficial traces or seeds that might grow into new conversations. The porous listening bodies remain fundamentally open to what lies ahead, not predetermined, but yet-to-be-realised, shaped and moulded by the demands of the present and the future. Philosophising is thus not the solitary exercise of a disembodied mind entertaining a monologue; instead, philosophising becomes an interdependent event, a moment in time, an encounter between two philosophers who remain fundamentally open (porous) to the situation through their listening dispositions – listening-through-conversation(alism). They do not dictate the direction in which the conversation might flow by incessant questioning underpinned by a deaf philosophy; instead, through listening and allowing productive silences to bloom, they remain fundamentally open in their interdependent inquiry and epistemic journey, underpinned by the confluence of listening and questioning.

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