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To Be in Peace and Quiet [“olla rauhassa”] at the Finnish Summer Cottage: A Cultural Discourse Analysis of Voluntary Solitude

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Abstract

Applying the ethnography of communication approach, the article presents results of a cultural discourse analysis of Finnish communication on peace and quiet [“olla rauhassa”], conceptualized in the study as cultural manifestation of voluntary solitude. The data is collected from online discussions on summer cottages during the period from 2001 through 2010 and in 2020, and the focus is on 307 entries in which participants described “olla rauhassa”. The cultural discourse on “olla rauhassa” radiates meanings of nature, silence, chosen social relationships, autonomy, and mental health.

Keywords: voluntary solitude; Finland; summer cottage; cultural discourse analysis; ethnography of communication

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Peace and Quiet ["olla rauhassa"] at the Finnish Summer Cottage: A Cultural Discourse Analysis of Voluntary Solitude

Introduction

In the middle of the summer vacation season in 2004, the primary Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, published a letter to the editor in which the correspondent sarcastically expressed their frustration with uninvited guests at the summer cottage. The writer complained that the arrival of uninvited guests left them unable to "olla rauhassa" [to have peace and quiet] at the cottage. In response, seven readers wrote equally strong letters both agreeing and disagreeing with that initial writer. Despite their differences in opinion, participants seemed to share an understanding of what constitutes a summer cottage, and, similarly, what it means to have peace and quiet. This article presents an understanding, from the ethnography of communication perspective, of this cultural way of being as it appears in "summer cottage talk."

"To have peace and quiet" as an expression exists in several languages, but research on this particular kind of being remains scarce. The late Norwegian social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad described "fred og ro" [peace and quiet] as experienced at home. A quick internet search suggests that the "fred og ro" is also closely associated with summer cottages [hytte]. Gullestad (1992) describes "fred og ro" as combining into an "overarching cultural category" (p. 140), radiating and connecting to other culturally meaningful areas of life. "Fred og ro" reflects having or attaining a desired emotional, harmonic, and balanced state of mind, the experience of being collected, in control of stress or nervousness and feeling whole. Further, she described "fred og ro" as the opposite of anxiety, chaos, confusion, tension, bother, rushing, excitement, and other strong feelings (Gullestad 1992, see also Broch 2020). Another scholar, David Danaher (2010), examines the local understandings of the Czech word "klid". The word carries meanings such as quiet life, calm, peace and quiet, silence, tranquility, serenity, and rest. Danaher's semantic analysis makes notions of the socio-historical political context – his data are Václav Havel's writings. Danaher concludes that "'klid' implies a folk model of the relationships between human states of mind, the human social order, and the non-human natural order" (Danaher, 2020, p. 257).

In this article, the analytical focus lies on the meta-cultural commentary of "olla rauhassa" as people talk about summer cottages. I suggest that "olla rauhassa" could be conceptualized as a cultural manifestation of voluntary solitude. I am responding to Valerie Manusov's recent call for scholars in communication and relationships to further examine the ambivalent nature, meanings, and benefits of voluntary solitude in communication processes. For Manusov, voluntary solitude is time alone or "a chosen communication separation from others, with the intent of cultivating stillness, and focusing, at least in part, on one's own cognition and emotion" (Manusov 2020, 70). For understanding "olla rauhassa" as a cultural manifestation of voluntary solitude I will apply the tools from the ethnography of communication (EC) approach (see e.g., Hymes 1972, Carbaugh 2007a, Philipsen and Coutu 2005). Within the EC approach, "cultural" refers to something widely recognized, strongly felt and available to most members of the community (Carbaugh 1988). In the analysis of the meta-cultural commentary, I will apply Cultural Discourse Analysis (Carbaugh 2007b, 2017) and discuss the radiants of local meanings of sociality, actions, identity, dwelling, and emotions attached to "olla rauhassa" as they appear when people talk about Finnish summer

cottages. CuDA aims to describe and interpret "a rich meta-cultural commentary" (Carbaugh 2017, 19) consisting of cultural practices, patterns and forms of communication, participants' understandings of them and the attached underlying beliefs and values of cultural communication. In doing so, CuDA examines discursive "hubs" and "radiants:" discursive hubs are concentrations of deep meanings observable—if rendered observable—by the participants, while discursive radiants are also hubs, but more implicit in meaning. When used together, these form a discursive web of who we—the participants—are (a hub of identity), what we are doing together (acting, pragmatic action, including communication), how we feel about things (emotions), our relations to others and where we are (dwelling). According to Carbaugh and Cerulli, "[t]he more culturally rich or dense is the communication practice, the brighter and wider is the semantic radiation" (2013, 7). As a result, I will provide a description and interpretation of the cultural manifestation of voluntary solitude as it appears in the "summer cottage talk".

To focus on voluntary solitude addresses some of the challenges in defining solitude. In the introductory chapter of "The Handbook of Solitude: Psychological Perspective on Social Isolation, Social Withdrawl, and Being Alone," (2021) the editors Robert Coplan, Julie Bowker and Larry Nelson write about the "paradox of solitude" (p. 4): solitude has negative and positive connotations and consequences. Manusov's (2020) overview of voluntary solitude introduces philosopher Philip Koch's (1994) explorations on solitude, which I have found useful. Koch highlights solitude as an extended experiental state. He presents a variety of intuitive associations with solitude, most of which also appear in Manusov's definition: (1) physical isolation or the absence of other people; (2) freely chosen social disengagement; (3) reflectiveness; (4) freedom or a time of free activity; (5) quiet, stillness and silence either as a state of noiselessness or a state of passive calmness (Koch 1994, 19) or the absence of all sound or human noise in particular (Koch 1994, 20); and (6) solitude as "a place" that includes the subjective experience of time, and "the special power of solitude to connect us with nature" (Koch 1994, 26–27). He acknowledges the linguistic and cultural differences in experiencing solitude (Koch 1994, 275–97) as do Coplan, Bowker and Nelson who conclude that "given the complex and multidimensional nature of solitude, it appears that the impacts of culture on the causes and consequences of solitude are extremely complex and nuanced" (2021, 7). There are some cross-cultural examinations of solitude in which culture is typically defined as nation or nationalities and solitude is treated as connected to personality or cognitive structures (e.g., Averill and Sundararajan 2014, Maes et al. 2016, Wang 2006).

The Context: Finnish Summer Cottages

In a country of 5.6 million people, there are at least 500,000 summer cottages in Finland.[1] Approximately 2.4–2.9 million Finns have a summer cottage at their disposal on a regular

[1] Recent statistics acknowledge the difficulty in calculating the exact number of cottages. According to the most recent *Mökkibarometri 2021* (Voutilainen, Korhonen, Ovaska, and Vihinen 2021), the official Statistics Finland free-time residence data reports 508,289 summer cottages. However, an additional 100,000 cottages, cabins, lodges, houses, and other residences are used solely for leisure purposes, which also serve as definitions of summer cottages. Free-Time Residence Barometers indicate that time spent at the summer cottages has

basis (Voutilainen, Korhonen, Ovaska, and Vihinen 2021). Finnish summer cottages are typically situated in the countryside, by lakes or the sea. They are on average about 70 square meters in size and moderately equipped; the majority of cottages have electricity and a heating system. One-third of cottages are set-up for year-round living (Voutilainen, Korhonen, Ovaska, and Vihinen 2021), although cottages are primarily used during the summer months. The cottage is located on average 100 kilometers from the permanent residence.

Scholars in the fields of tourism studies, sociology, urban design, geography, literature studies, architecture, and history among others have sought explanations for the popularity of summer cottages. Several Finnish scholars connect their popularity to the traditional Finnish culture and history or indeed Finnishness per se (e.g., Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010, Julkunen and Kuusamo 1991, Kolbe 2003, Lehtonen 1999, Periäinen 1999, Taimela 2005, Venäläinen 1989, Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010), while the traditional rural lifestyle or idyllness of summar cottages are also acknowledged as myths (Periäinen 2004, Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010). Summer cottage users' own explanations relate to the quality of life. Repeated elements of summer cottage experiences include sauna, water, freedom, the possibility to self-actualize, distance from everyday life, nature, spending time with family and countryside living, as well as the oppostunity to enjoy peace and quiet (Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010, Hirvonen and Puustinen 2008, Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010). Spending time at the summer cottage is learned early on (e.g., Kolehmainen 2017), and so familiar to Finns that there is no need to explain the practice to other Finns (see Karisto 2006, Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen 2010; for alternative views, see Melasniemi-Uutela 2004, Periäinen, 2004). Although Finland is one of the top countries in Europe when comparing the quantity of free-time residences to population, second homes or recreational residences are not particularly Finnish. For example, owning and spending time at a (summer) cottage is a recognized phenomenon at least in France, Great Britain, what was formerly Czechoslovakia, Sweden, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Norway (Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010, Chaplin 1999, Hall and Müller 2004, Halseth and Rosenberg 1995, Lankots 2021, Nystrom 1989, Rolfsdotter 2019, Vittersø 2007, Williams and Kaltenborn 1999). The existing literature suggests that in Finland and Norway, more than in most of the countries, summer cottage is equally ubiquitous phenomenon (see especially Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010 and Gansmo, Berker and Jørgensen 2011). An interesting difference is that the Norwegian scholars discuss the notion and metaphor of home, multiple homes, cabin as "ikke-hjem" [not a home] (Hidle and Ellingsen 2011; Berker, Gansmo and Jørgensen), and "hjemme i egen hytte" [home at your own cabin] (Hidle and Ellingsen 2011) in more detail. Despite this difference in interpretations, in these countries cottages and cabins are not only widely popular and culturally meaningful (Carbaugh 1988), but also the research on them is already multifaceted and multi-disciplinary.

Research Design and Materials

increased, especially during the pandemic (Voutilainen, Korhonen, Ovaska, and Vihinen 2021).

As a native Finn, I am familiar with summer cottage life. I have spent days, weekends, and summers in family-owned cottages, and visited several other summer cottages, both as a child and as an adult. I am also familiar with the notion of seeking peace and quiet at the cottage. I began collecting and recording primarily public as well as private discussions on summer cottages as ethnographic data in 2004. At the time of writing, the research material includes Finnish national and regional newspaper and magazine articles (e.g., from *Helsingin Sanomat*, *Kouvolan Sanomat*, *Anna*, *Vauva*, *Kaksplus*, and *Meidän perhe*), broadcast programs (both television and radio), notes from informant interviews, nonacademic publications (e.g., user guides for summer cottages) and academic publications (e.g., books and research reports such as Cottage Barometer and statistics compiled by Statistics Finland). The discussion on and excerpts from qualitative interview and written data collected for previous research on summer cottages, particularly from Pitkänen and Kokki (2005) and Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2010), also provided invaluable insights for understanding the overall experience of being at the summer cottage.

The following analysis focuses on participants discussions of "olla rauhassa" in a particular place (an online discussion forum) and of a particular physical and social context (the summer cottage). The analysis focuses on the ways in which participants in their discussions explicitly and implicitly share meanings concerning social relations, nature, silence, feelings, and identity specifically. This research is designed to answer the following questions: In web forum discussions, what are the cultural meanings of "olla rauhassa" [to have peace and quiet] at the summer cottage? What are the cultural beliefs and values attached to identity, pragmatic action, social relations, dwellings, and emotions in these interactions in which "olla rauhassa" is expressed, and are there cultural features regarding voluntary solitude?

The Finnish expression "olla rauhassa" linguistically is a regular collocation and a conceptual expression. "Rauha" [peace] or "rauhassa" [literal translation: in/at peace] seems to appear primarily with the basic form of the verb "olla" [to be]. "Rauha" can be translated as peace, quiet, calm, repose, serenity, rest, and ease, depending on the context in which it is used. Translating this expression into English is complicated. A standard collocation in English is "peace and quiet," but this is not used with the "to be" verb, so in English you can need or want peace and quiet, you can go to a summer cottage to seek peace and quiet, and so on. "Olla rauhassa" is more holistic, active, a state of being, which is described as a result of this study. So, I have not tried to use a single translation for the Finnish, but they vary according to the context and usage in English.

The data consist of primary and verificatory data. The primary data were collected from 11 online summer cottage discussions on a web forum for the *Ilta-Sanomat* newspaper between 2001 and 2010, consisting in a total of 2162 discussion entries (Appendix 1). In 231 discussion entries, writers used various forms the noun "rauha," such as "rauhassa" [in/at peace, in peace and quiet]; adjectives such as "rauhallinen," "rauhaisa" [peaceful] and "rauhoittava" [pacifying, calming]; or the verbs "rauhoittua," "rauhoittuminen" and "rauhoittaa" [to calm down]. In addition to "olla rauhassa," the data include compound expressions for actions performed in peace and quiet, such as sleeping, eating, reading, or puttering.

The discussion entries were answers to topics that were introduced with a short paragraph describing and arguing for the concluding statement or question. Topics were introduced by readers and sometimes by staff writers. Thus, data were generated without any

initiative or prompting from the researcher, and the participants' own voices remained uninterrupted.

Although the web forums were rather interactive and the discussants polite, most discussion entries appeared as individual statements reflecting the writers' individual experiences. As is typical for web-forum discussions used as data, I did not have precise demographic information for the discussants, but I made some observations: Writers used the Finnish language only. The language appeared fluent, indicating that writers were likely using their first language. If writers indicated their gender, they identified as male or female. If writers indicated their age, they typically described themselves as being of middle or retirement age. Writers stated that their living environments consisted of living in cities and urban communities in Southern Finland, although some also resided in the countryside and some even outside of Finland. The writers included comments about their families, current or past spouses, children of various ages, relatives, coworkers, and friends. Writers mainly described their own summer cottages, but also those owned by their relatives and friends.

Most writers reported enjoying time spent at the cottage, although some writers stated clearly that they had no interest in owning a cottage or spending time at one. Interestingly, the writers primarily discussed the positive aspects of summer cottages, such as meaningful life experiences, happiness and joy, fulfilment in life and beautiful lake scenery. A reading of the web forum data creates the general perception of cottages as beautiful, unique, or even mystical places.

In addition to the primary data, verificatory data from 15 articles with readers' comments were collected from *Ilta-Sanomat* between January and May of 2020.[2] In total, the verificatory data includes 1673 comments, in 57 of which the abovementioned "rauha" and its conjugations were used or discussed.

Cultural Discourse Analysis of data proceeded as follows. Entries including "olla rauhassa" and its various conjugations and combound expressions in the primary data were coded for main themes. These themes included disturbances or hindrances to "olla rauhassa;" silence; the end results of, aims or reasons for "olla rauhassa;" and contradictions to "olla rauhassa." Interpretations began by formulating propositions for "olla rauhassa—that is, statements defining "olla rauhassa" by using only the participants' words. Next, the interpretation proceeded by indicating cultural premises—explicit or implicit—for pragmatic actions, identity (being), social relations, dwelling (or place), emotions and silence (or communication).

Cultural Discourse Analysis: Radiants of Meaning for "Olla Rauhassa"

I begin with the formulations of propositions for "olla rauhassa." The propositions present the literal meanings for what the "olla rauhassa" (at the summer cottage) is for online forum discussants. The propositions are as follows:

- Occasionally, an individual needs ["pitää olla"] peace and quiet ["rauhassa"].

[2] The verificatory data, collected between January and May 2020, includes all those stories in *Ilta-Sanomat* published on summer cottages, which also included a readers' discussion section. The articles representing verificatory data concentrated on purchasing and renting summer cottages during the pandemic.

- Thus, occasionally an individual seeks [“hakeutua”] and looks for [“etsiä”] peace and quiet, and hopefully, eventually, attains [“päästä”] peace and quiet.
- To experience peace and quiet takes place in some location.
- An individual has the right for [“oikeus olla rauhassa”], the right to need [“oikeus tarvita olla rauhassa”] and the right to want peace and quiet [“oikeus haluta olla rauhassa”].
- Peace and quiet is owned; it is one’s own [e.g., “minun rauhani”, my peace and quiet].
- Others are allowed [“saavat olla”] peace and quiet or left [“annetaan olla”] in peace.
- Others’ peace and quiet should be respected.
- One’s peace and quiet can be broken [“rikkoa rauhaa”] or disturbed [“häiritä rauhaa”], and others should be wary of doing this.

In the following, I interpret the premises for these propositions. In doing so, I aim to provide a logic for the abovestated propositions.

Meanings of Action

The needs and wants related to “olla rauhassa” generate actions such as searching, gravitating (towards), seeking, and attaining. These are actions connected to “olla rauhassa.”

Example 1

”Muutoin ihmettelen ihmisiä, jotka mennä paukkaavat ylläreinä toisten mökeille, kun tietävät varsin hyvin, että sinne majoittuneet etsivät rauhaa ja haluavat lomailla. Kyllä mökeille kutsutaankin.” (just joo, 2 June 2010)	Otherwise, I’m puzzled by people who storm into others’ cottages by surprise, when they very well know that those residing there are looking for peace and quiet and want to vacation. They could just wait for an invitation.

Example 1 indicates that one can and should recognize others’ need to have peace and quiet by the mere act of going to the summer cottage. “Olla rauhassa” appears as a space or a state that requires an act of withdrawl. When actively gravitating towards or seeking peace and quiet [in example 2, trying and finally being able to], one does not necessarily seek company or opportunities to communicate.

Example 2

”Ilman mökkiä ei ole elämä elämisen arvoista. Se rauha mikä tulee kun perjantaina koettaa ja pääsee viikonlopuksi rauhaan ei voi rahassa mitata eikä kertoa jos ei itse sitä koe. […]” (sivusta seurannut 17 June 2009)	Life just isn’t worth living without a cottage. That wonderful feeling of peace when it’s finally Friday and you can go to the cottage for the weekend and get some peace and quiet, that can’t be measured in money or described if you’ve never experienced it.[…]

Furthermore, as meaningful actions, “olla rauhassa” implies acts of respect from others. An individual should or must let others be and others should prohibit actions that interrupt or

disturb others' possibilities for peace and quiet. In the summer cottage context, this is accomplished, for example, by not compelling others to socialize (example 3).

Example 3

”Meillä kaikki sisaruksen hankkivat omat mökit kestettyään joitakin vuosia sitä perheen yhteistä ”kolhoosimökkiä”. Jokainen halusi oman rauhansa. Edes miltei naapurissa asuvan sisaruksen luo ei meillä mennä ennakkoon kysymättä, jotta sopiiko tulla piipahtamaan. Meillä kunnioitetaan kunkin perheen omaa rauhaa ja näin on hyvä.” (Hurja-Hilta 11 May 2008)	All of us siblings bought our own cottages after tolerating a shared family cottage for a few years. Everyone wanted their own peace and quiet. Even if it's practically next door, we won't go to a sibling's cottage unless we ask ahead of time if it's ok to stop by. We respect every family's peace and quiet, and it's much better like this.

The web-forum data provides a varied picture of what people actually do while experiencing the peace and quiet of their cottages. The actions, practices, rituals and routines at summer cottages range from, for example, heavy and exhausting labor to complete inaction and idleness conducted as social or as unsocial encounters.

Meanings of Being (Identity)

When experiencing peace and quiet at the summer cottage, an individual enjoys spatial, social, work-related, and emotional freedom. Ideally, an individual does not experience social control, pressure, obligations or demands. When in a state of peace and quiet, one is free to choose how to be.

Example 4

”[…] Nykyään mökille lähdettäessä katsoo, että kassissa on ne muutamat hassut vaihtovaatteet, joita siellä tarvitsee, sinnehän ei tarvitse iltapukua ja kauneussalonki-varustusta raahata mukanaan. […] Päivät menee puuhastellessa milloin mitäkin, itse kun en toimeliaana ihmisenä pysty vain olemaan ja aina on jotain pientä tekemistä. Meidän mökillä ei pakkoa tunneta. Puutarha korvaa terapeutin. […]” (Läikky 17 June 2009)	[…] Nowadays when leaving for the cottage I just make sure I have a couple of changes of the clothing I'll need there, no need to drag along evening gowns or the beauty salon. […] I spend the days puttering around, I like to be active, don't much care to just sit around, always doing something small. But at our cottage you never have to do anything. The garden replaces therapy. […]

Freedom implies autonomy and independence. An individual possesses the freedom and independence to make choices regarding the daily rhythm and structure, activities, chores and workload, physical appearance, noise level and the standard condition of or equipment at the summer cottage and its surroundings. While experiencing peace and quiet, one can choose one's actions.

This freedom of choice is related to ownership. Explicitly, writers included the word “oma” (one's own) to describe their cottage [“oma mökki”] or their peace and quiet [“oma

rauha"]. The summer cottage is considered the owner's property or their own space. This is often stated in the data as the reason for acquiring a summer cottage in the first place (e.g., examples 2 and 5). Previous literature claimed that summer cottages represented the builders' own miniature empires (e.g., Julkunen and Kuusamo 1991, Juntto 1999).

In Pertti and Maarit Alasuutari's research, the description of freedom is crystallized as personhood: "[a]t the summer cottage, one does not have to perform as someone who is the I in everyday encounters" (2010, 33). To be free from social control also resonates with writings about remote living conditions. According to Taimela, a romanticized idea exists in Finland, suggesting that individuals in remote locations somehow lie beyond the reach of the social control that precipitates anxiety (2005, 203). Taimela suggests this idea associates with interest in summer cottages.

Meanings of Dwelling

Some discussants argued that peace and quiet is also experienced in the city by, for example, moving away from the city center into nature. Yet, discussants describe "olla rauhassa" primarily as being special, unique, or truly possible only at the summer cottage. The peace and quiet of the summer cottage is presented as being in opposition to life in the city, the rush of the city, pollution and experiencing constant noise and exhaustion. The summer cottage is perceived, then, as a place offering resources unavailable in the city.

Example 5

"Kyllä kesämökkeily on hyvä keino päästä rauhoittumaan kaupungin vilinästä ja hälinästä. Maalla luonnonäänien keskellä on oma rauhansa ja siellä puuhastellessa voi unohtaa työkiireet, sekä muutkin kiireet. Kesämökki on monille myös mahdollisuus saada pala omaa maata ja omaa pihaa." (Irma 2 July 2004)	Spending time at a summer cottage is a good way to relax from the hustle and bustle of city life. When you're in the countryside, hearing the sounds of nature, you can really be at peace, while doing your chores you can forget about work stress, other pressures. For many people, a summer cottage is also a way to get your own piece of land and yard.

Experiencing peace and quiet at the cottage is about enjoying the tranquility of nature ["luonnonrauha"] and about being in or by nature ["luonnossa", "luonnon äärellä"]. Discussions revealed meanings about dwelling, whereby seeing, living, and experiencing nature at the summer cottage is taken for granted. The tranquility of nature is enjoyed through multiple senses. A commitment to experiencing peace and quiet—although not necessary to summer cottage life—entails an appreciation of the tranquility of nature, the need to experience it or the need to escape its opposite, that is, the city, pollution, and noise.

Previous research on summer cottage life has already highlighted the importance of nature and its connection to peace and quiet (Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010, Jokinen 2002, Pitkänen and Kokki 2005, Venäläinen 1989). Furthermore, analyses of the Finnish discourse on nature support the connection between peace and quiet and nature. For example, Laurén (2001) connected peace and quiet with swamps, Vazquez Harkivi (2015) connected nature in general with feelings of peace and quiet, and Rouhiainen (2000, as cited in Lehtonen et al. 2004) described Finns' images of the countryside as simply quiet and peaceful.

Both the tranquility of nature [“luonnonrauha”] and experiencing peace and quiet intrinsically imply “hiljaisuus” [silence]. At the summer cottage, silence is connected to the place. Thus, silence in these data is not primarily active communicative human practice with cultural meanings (see Carbaugh et al. 2006 discussion on Finnish “hiljaisuus” as quietude). Instead, in these data, “hiljaisuus” better reflects a state or a condition that is an intrinsic part of the environment.

Example 6

”Mökkeilyssä viehättää itse mökki on niin kaunis ja viihtyisä ja luonto ympärillä metsää ja järvi ja pieni puutarha että viherpeukalona voin toteuttaa itseäni. Rauha ja hiljaisuus ja tosiaan se linnunlaulu kuuluu koska meillä ei ole naapureita ihan lähellä.” (Tindra, 2 July 2004)	What I like about summer cottage life is the cottage itself, so beautiful and cozy and the surrounding nature, the forest and the lake and a small garden, such that as someone with a green thumb I can express myself. It’s so peaceful and silent, you can hear the birds singing since we do not have neighbors close by.

In the English translation of “olla rauhassa,” silence or quietude is already explicitly included, although not in Finnish terms. Some online writers described “rauha” [peace] and “hiljaisuus” [silence] as inextricably linked, or they presented silence as equally meaningful as peace and quiet. Both peace and quiet [“rauha”] and silence [“hiljaisuus”] can also be experienced in the city. There, too, silence is connected to life with fewer people. Yet, when describing peace and quiet at the summer cottage, writers referred mostly to “luonnonhiljaisuus” [the silence of nature], which paradoxically includes sometimes very loud sounds from the wind and singing birds.

An illustrative example of the complicated relationship between nature, silence, and peace and quiet can be found in historian Outi Ampuja’s (2014) study on “hiljaisuus.”[3] Participants were asked to describe their experiences of silence in different locations, situations, and environments. The most common definition of silence was the silent soundscape of nature, in which all sounds of human action were absent. In Ampuja’s data, descriptions of peace and quiet, nature and silence were combined. Interestingly, Ampuja herself interchangeably moves between describing “rauha” [peace and quiet] and “hiljaisuus” [silence]. For example, she translates the European Union directive on quiet areas into Finnish as “rauhallinen alue” [peaceful area] or “luonnonrauha-alue” [literally: nature’s peace area], defining them as areas where the noise level is not high, and the sounds of nature control the soundscape. (Ampuja 2014, 266–67).

Meanings of Social Relations

[3] Ampuja (2014) analyzed about 320 stories that were submitted for a writing competion organized by Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura and Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland in 2011–2012. Participants were instructed to produce an informal text, or they could answer some of the following questions: How do you define silence? Where and when have you found silence? What are the sounds that disturbe your experience of silence, and are your experiences positive or negative? (Ampuja 2014, 262–63).

Web-forum discussants wrote most passionately about both unpleasant and pleasant social encounters. For instance, a web discussion that took place in 2008 focused solely on uninvited guests, attracting the most comments with over 500 entries. Writers adopted tones which were serious, sarcastic, and humorous, with some writers laughing at themselves. Sometimes, the surprise guests were discussed using strong negative terms (e.g., example 8). It was clear that the discussants identified with the problem of uninvited guests, held strong feelings on the matter, and offered multiple solutions.

This extensive emotional discussion suggests that the need to get to experience peace and quiet is, indeed, cultural (Carbaugh 1988). In example 7, the writer states that the need goes without saying, since it is mutually shared and understood as a valid reason for refusing to accept uninvited guests (on the importance of family time, see also Alasuutari and Alasuutari 2010). The writer responded to another writer who described their experience of hosting "summer cottage guests from hell" who failed to inform the hosts about their arrival and stayed at the summer cottage for days. Paulina's advice in example 7 serves as a justification for breaking the norms of hospitality or politeness.

Example 7

”Tuo ongelmasi on todella ikävä, mutta et tule siitä pääsemään ilman tiukempaa linjaa. Ei auta kuin sanoa ihmisille, että vierailut eivät nyt sovi: vietätte perheen omaa aikaa, tai muuta vastaavaa. Muista myös se, ettet ole selitysvelvollinen muille ihmisille miksi halua olla rauhassa omalla mökilläsi. Sen kun vain sanot, että ei sovi nyt. Jos joku kehtaa vielä syitä kysellä, niin siihen napakasti voi sanoa, että ei kuulu muille.” (Paulina, 9 April 2008)	That problem of yours is really unfortunate, but you will not get rid of it unless you adopt a firmer position. All you can do is to tell people that a visit at this time is not OK: this is your own family time or something like that. Remember as well that you do not have to explain to other people why you want to have peace and quiet in your own cottage. Just say, 'not this time.' If someone has the nerve to ask why, just tell them firmly that it's none of their business.

In the following example, the writer, who even uses the signature "Röyhkeää" [impudent, rude], is also clearly upset by uninvited guests at the summer cottage. Uninvited guests threaten the opportunity and need for peace and quiet. For the writer, experiencing peace and quiet takes place with their family and possibly with carefully chosen guests.

Example 8

”Mökkeilyssä ei mikään muu ärsytä niin paljon kuin yllätysvieraat!!! En ensin uskonut todeksi sitä että Suomesta voi löytyä joitain niin sivistymättömiä ja tyhmiä ihmisiä, jotka eivät etukäteen ilmoita tulostaan, kunnes viime kesänä saimme mökillemme perheen yllätyskäynnille! Ja pakkohan se oli sitten uskoa kun kerran näki! Eikö tällaisilla ihmisillä ole tarpeeksi älliä ilmoittaa näin kännykkäaikana	Nothing annoys me about summer cottage life more than surprise guests!!! At first I couldn't believe that there are such stupid and uncivilized people in Finland who don't let you know they're coming until last summer a family just suddenly showed up for a surprise visit! So then I had to believe it as I'd seen it myself! In the age of mobile phones you'd think these people would have the brains to call and ask, "is it ok to stop

tulostaan ja kysyä, ”sopiiko tulla..”??? Tai no, tietysti se riippuu vähän vieraistakin, toiset on terveulleempia kuin toiset, mutta nyrkkisääntönä vierailijoille pitäisi olla ilmoitusvelvollisuus. Em. kesävieraaat olisivat jääneet pariksi päiväksi ”meidän hoiviimme” ellen olisi ilmoittanut heille suoraan että ”nyt on juttu niin, että haluamme perheeni kanssa viettää omassa rauhassa, omaa lomaa omalla mökillä emmekä kaipaa siivelläeläjiä. Ja jos ensi kerran meinaatte ajaa ohi, niin ajakaa ohi…” (Röyhkeää, 2 July 2004)	by???” Well, of course it depends on the guests too, some are more welcome than others, but as a general rule of thumb, guest should always let you know. These particular guests would have wanted to stay a couple of days and have us take care of them, except I told them directly that ‘the thing is this, my family and I want to spend our vacation alone in peace and quiet at our cottage and we don’t want to take care of anyone else. And the next time you think of driving by, then please just drive on by…”

One reason for the disturbance lies in the contradiction between the need for peace and quiet and the imposed role of being a proper host. Extending hospitality is a compelling norm. To be a proper host could override an individual’s—that is, the host’s—need for peace and quiet or at least it can restrict the hosts’ choices, plans and timetable—that is, their freedom.

While being in peace and quiet implies fewer social contacts, emphasis is placed on the possibility of choosing between contacts. Naturally, guests, whether invited or not, are not always viewed as unpleasant or intolerable. In these data, unpleasant social contacts consisted of, for example, neighbors, uninvited guests, work-related contacts (e.g., calls from work) and, in general, other people and human noise in general. Yet, some writers welcomed all such contacts at their summer cottage. Some identified and welcomed only selected and cherished relations, such as family, extended family, and good friends. In addition, these data also included descriptions of having the option to not be with others at all. However, discussants did not explicitly address negative experiences associated with loneliness. In their entries, writers primarily employed the first-person plural “me” [we], and typically described time spent at the cottage with immediate family members. While the number of social contacts in the writers’ descriptions vary, the shared belief seems to include the right to and possibility of choosing one’s company, whether that means being alone or even with uninvited guests.

Meanings of Feeling

Finally, in this analysis, I examine the data, asking what is accomplished by having peace and quiet? What is accomplished by finding one’s way to the summer cottage and being there in peace and quiet, in whatever way is chosen? Why is having peace and quiet so important to these writers?

The writers described *ataraxia*, the ways in which “sielu” [soul] and “mieli” [mind] rest and become refreshed [“lepää,” “virkistyy”], along with the ways in which one’s nerves benefit from peace and quiet. For Finns, peace and quiet revolves around relaxing, calming down, unwinding, enjoying being and getting a break from or counterbalancing pressure(s). Peace and quiet is a precondition for staying sane [“järjissäpysymisen ehto”, example 9], a chance for the soul to rest (example 10) and a way to relieve stress (example 11). In

Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2010), experiencing peace and quiet is also described as helping to gain the strength to continue [“antaa voimia jaksamaan”].

Example 9

”Pari kertaa vuodessa on ihanaa jättää kellot ja puhelimet ja mennä mökille viikoksi-kahdeksi rauhoittumaan. … Puoliso hiipparoi jossakin rannalla… Itse makaan heinikossa tai aurinkotuolilla, sadesäällä ullakolla vanhalla hetekalla. Korvat ja silmät lepäävät ja jaksan taas puoli vuotta armotonta mekkalaa, unenpuutetta ja pyöritystä. Kukaan ei tule koskaan kutsumatta käymään. Jos tulisi, saisi aika kylmää kyytiä – vaikka olisi oma äiti kyseessä. Yksinolo mökillä on järjissäpysymisen ehtona!” (Mökkihöperö, 29 April 2008)	A few times a year, it is wonderful to leave clocks and phones behind and go to the cottage for a week or two to calm down. … My partner wanders around somewhere on the beach… I myself lie in the grass or on the lounge chair, or when it rains, in the attic on an old cot. Our ears and eyes get a change to rest and then I’m able to cope with six months of the relentless hubbub, lack of sleep and the general hoo-ha. Nobody ever visits us without being invited. If they do, they would get the cold shoulder — even my own mother. Being alone at the cottage is what you need to stay sane!

Example 10

”Mikää ei ole upeampaa, kuin saunan jälkeen laittaa nuotio tulille, olla yhdessä rakkaan miehen kanssa, kuunnella hiljaisuutta jonka rikkoo vain luonnon äänet ja katsella järeven selkää. Siinä sielu lepää ja mieli rauhoittuu. Joten kyllä, olen mökkihullu!” (Nyyti, 12 April 2007)	Nothing is more wonderful than lighting the campfire after a sauna, being with my beloved husband, listening to the silence, broken only by the sounds of nature, and looking out across the lake. That’s how the soul rests and the mind calms down. So, yes, I’m ‘crazy about cottages’!

Example 11

”Minä olen ollut kaupunkilainen koko ikäni ja vaikka täällä hyvin pärjääkin, niin välillä alkaa jurppia jatkuva mökä, pakokaasun hengittäminen ja kiire. Silloin on hyvä lähteä mökillle rauhoittumaan. Minulla siis mökki toimii nimenomaan stressin poistajana, ei lähteenä.” (Hirvosen pena, 2 July 2004)	I’ve been a city dweller all my life, and although I can manage here just fine, sometimes the constant hullabaloo, breathing in exhaust fumes and constant rush start to get on my nerves. Then, it’s good to leave for the cottage to calm down. In other words, for me, the summer cottage works specifically as a stressbuster, not as a source of stress.

As an outcome of experiencing peace and quiet, writers cite feelings of tranquility, sanity, of gaining strength and relieving stress. Being hindered from peace and quiet could wreck one’s mental health and drive a person crazy. Previous research on voluntary solitude among adults connects it to wellbeing (e.g., Cole and Hall 2010), creativity (Long adn Averill 2003), a new understanding of oneself (Long et al. 2003) and an overall balanced adult life (Littman-Ovadia 2019).

Despite these positive effects, peace and quiet is not a lasting or persistent state, but something available or achieved on occasion. While some writers would like to remain at their cottage on their own "for no matter how long," others say they are able to tolerate being at the cottage—with its peace and quiet—for only a week or two, or even for just a few days at a time. One writer stated, "maaseudun rauhakin alkaa ottaa hermoille pidemmän päälle" [in the long run, even the peace and quiet of the countryside starts to get on your nerves].

Discussion: Cultural Manifestation of Voluntary Solitude

This analysis of "olla rauhassa" examines the cultural understandings of voluntary solitude in Finland. The radiants of meaning are intertwined in multiple ways, creating a web of meanings (Carbaugh 2017), and presenting voluntary solitude as a holistic experience. Meanings of silence and nature are closely connected, although not interchangeable. "Olla rauhassa" (at the summer cottage) radiates the meaning of being in or near nature. Nature and silence both, but not exclusively, provide tranquility, a component of "olla rauhassa." Silence can be found within nature, and the Finnish language has a word for this reality, "luonnonhiljaisuus" [the silence of nature]. Human noise disturbs or violates the possibility of "olla rauhassa," which connects with the meanings of silence and social relations. When the peace and quiet of the summer cottage is disturbed, the violators are considered to be intruders (uninvited guests) or strangers, such as other cottage owners with the sounds from their motorboats, screaming children, or construction work. Simply hearing the presence of others through loud voices and actions renders such social connections as undesirable and prevents people from experiencing peace and quiet.

Furthermore, the radiant of meaning of social relations is connected to meanings of identity. The autonomous individual is not only able to control their environment and daily rhythm and activities but can also control their social world. One has the choice of being with those an individual chooses and the possibility of remaining unhindered by others. For some, "olla rauhassa" means being alone, for others with a select group of chosen people.

Finally, the radiants of the meanings of identity (autonomy) and nature are also intertwined. Autonomy is hindered by the mere features of city life, such as traffic, social rules, or work life. For some, true autonomy—or true peace and quiet—is only experienced in complete aloneness, which can be reached in the wildest nature, away from all the elements of the constructed environment and the associated social relations.

The philosopher Philip Koch (1994) states that in order to understand the nature of voluntary solitude, "the most promising place to look for the core of solitude is in the realm of social disengagement" (p. 15). In addition, previous descriptions of voluntary solitude have strongly associated solitude with feelings and the significance of being alone (e.g., Long and Averill 2003, Wang 2006). "Olla rauhassa" at the summer cottage as a form of voluntary solitude is not affiliated with experiences of being alone, although some kind of withdrawl from specific social connections forms a part of the experience. The cultural meanings of "olla rauhassa" appear to portray the core of voluntary solitude as more complex and holistic. Further, as Koch also acknowledges, voluntary solitude might have "the special power of connecting us with nature" (1994, 26–7). The Finnish "olla rauhassa" at the summer cottage, as a way of obtaining voluntary solitude, cannot be detached from nature.

As acknowledged earlier, "rauha" carries a relevant meaning in the Finnish discourse on swamps (Laurén 2001) and in the Finnish environmental professionals' cultural discourse on

nature (Vazquez Harkivi 2015). In a different arena of life, I have examined discursive forces related to mobile phone communication norms in Finnish interview and media data (Poutiainen 2007). I have claimed that the individuals' explanations for both disturbances and for not being available via mobile phone were sufficiently argued by claiming a need for "olla rauhassa." In general, "rauha" and "olla rauhassa" seem to be widely acknowledged in the Finnish language and its discourses. One of the most interesting indications of this lies in compound words. The data in this study contained the compound words "luonnonrauha" (the tranquility of nature), "mielenrauha" (peace of mind), "lukurauha" (reading peace), and "pyhärauha" (Sunday peace or holy peace). In addition to these, I have found in colloquial, everyday language use the following words: "työrauha" (work peace; to work in peace and quiet), "koulurauha" (school peace; declared at the beginning of the school year to combat bullying), "joulurauha" (Christmas peace; officially announced on 24 December at noon), "perherauha" (family peace), "vessarauha" (bathroom peace; recognized by the parents of small children), "ruokarauha" (mealtime peace), "kotirauha" (home peace; also a legal term, equivalent to domestic peace), and "naisrauha" (women's peace; to go without harassment), among others. Obviously, these types of "peace" are connected to a variety of modes, states and spaces of society and everyday life. Yet, they all imply an atmosphere or an orientation that can be described using words such as calm, concentration, uninterrupted, undisturbed, respect, and – often – voluntary solitude. Marianne Gullestad suggested that in the Norwegian context "fred og ro" (peace and quiet) is an an overarching cultural category to understand Norwegian life (1992, 139-140). I am suggesting that "olla rauhassa" is a similar overarching cultural category—or a key cultural frame (Bloch 2003)—in Finnish life.

Also, it is relevant to remember that the existing Norwegian and Finnish (and some Swedish) research on summer cottages has similarities. Despite the obvious linguistic dissimilarities, the prevalent notions of "fred og/och ro", "lung och ro", and "olla rauhassa" suggest an interesting and strong shared notion about the human experience, the experience which is tightly connected with particular space (nature), allowing a selection of social relations and an appreciation of the meaningful ones, and a larger cultural perception of personhood thriving in freedom, tranquility, and calmness.

An understanding of the cultural meanings for "olla rauhassa" provides a potential extension or an additional area of human life for the studies in ethnography of communication. In future ethnographic or other research, selected terms for being could expand our understanding of the cultural meanings of voluntary solitude and its role in communication, private and public life, public argumentation, education, and other social structures. Future research could expand upon the data presented here from participants writings (see also Wang 2006) to encompass field work, autoethnography, as well as naturally occurring data on the communication during and of voluntary solitude. In this study, such fruitful online discussions are most likely limited to middle class, somewhat educated and technologically savvy participants.

Further, "olla rauhassa" directs us to examine nature, place, and dwelling. Some earlier ethnographic studies of communication bring these forth in the research on the meanings for and ways to nonverbally relate to the natural world (Scollo 2004), on cultural meanings associated with water (Morgan 2003) and on discourses about dwelling-in-place (Carbaugh 1996; Carbaugh and Grimshaw 2021). For instance, Tema Milstein and her colleagues (2011) applied the ethnography of communication framework to describe Hispanic respondents' shared ecocultural premises. In their respondents' discussions, nature appeared as "a highly

social place in which one experiences a largely human-to-human relationship" (Milstein et al. 2011, 494). Among Hispanic respondents, the sense and knowledge of place is inseparable from social relations. Relationships consisted of family relationships, neighbors and community members, and the discussions revolved around food and the importance of storytelling. The ethnography of communication approach allows a holistic examination of cultural beliefs and values acknowleding social relations, roles, and structures; communication and other (pragmatic) actions; identities and notions of personhood; dwelling, place, and space; and emotions and feelings. These beliefs and values—or premises—appear in local forms of communication. "Olla rauhassa," as a cultural manifestation of voluntary solitude, as it appears in the discussions of summer cottage, implies not only beliefs and values regarding those aspects of human life, but also directs us to ask questions about cultural beliefs and values regarding the state of existence or the mind.

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Appendix 1. Web-forum discussion topics, dates of initiation and number of posts on the web forum for “Ilta-Sanomat”

Title of the discussion on the web-forum	Date of initiating the discussion	Total number of posts	Posts incl. comments on “rauha”
Primary data			
“Laiska naapuri häiritsee mökkeilyämme” [Lazy neighbor disturbs our cottaging]	6/15/2001	118	18
“Mikä mökkeilyssä kiehtoo?” [What enthralls in cottaging?]	7/2/2004	126	25
”Pitääkö mökin olla rannalla ja lähellä kotia?” [The cottage must be on a beach and close to home?]	5/9/2006	293	25
“Oletko ‘mökki-ihmisiä’?” [Are you one of those ‘cottage people’?]	4/12/2007	377	38
“Mökkivieraita helvetistä?” [Cottage guests from hell?]	4/9/2008	532	68
“Mökki tuhoaa tasa-arvon” [Cottage destroys equality]	5/25/2009	92	3
“Joko myisin mökin?” [Should I already sell the cottage?]	4/17/2009	106	5
“Yök, mökkikesä alkaa” [Yack, cottage summer begins]	5/6/2009	203	15
“Onko mökkeily katoavaa kansanperinnettä?” [Is cottaging a disappearing folk tradition?]	6/16/2009	233	23
”Apua, taas kutsumattomia mökkivieraita!” [Help, uninvited cottage guests again!]	6/2/2010	82	11
TOTAL		2162	231
Verificatory data			
15 articles	1/1-5/31 2020	1673	57
TOTAL		3835	288

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