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Thoughts Remade Around Silence

Everything I have written hitherto is foreground for me, the real thing begins only with dashes. I am dealing with the most dangerous matters ...

Ours is a destitute time, a time in which our capacity to experience be-ing through the power of the word has been drastically diminished. Our ability to apprehend things in their immediacy has been replaced with reckoning—that is, the activity of attempting to achieve self-determined ends. Thus, thinking has come to be dominated by will or desire and experience replaced by the sought-after. These tendencies devalue thought and speech by proliferating debased images and words (eg. the universal diffusion of the word in its cheapest form as it appears in 'political discourse' and advertising). In order to pull ourselves free of this debased public language, we must understand the nature of true thought and learn how to speak an actualized language. True thought has its origins in wonder. Ultimately, all wonder derives from and leads back to the question: 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' When thinking dwells in the wonder that something—that anything—is, the possibility of nothing is tangibly presented. This is how wonder leads to giving thanks.

It is the work of the word that brings forth things. Silence, on the other hand, effaces the world erected by the word and creates an opening into which things can emerge. This opening is boundless. It is beyond the characterizations imposed by representing things in language. Nonetheless, its quiet is not devoid of power, for its calm concentrates the energy of motion. It is a repose which gathers the energy by which things emerge into being and, what is the same on the side of the listener, the energy of attentiveness and expectation. The activity of speaking, like that of musical phrases, rushes us headlong into the future; silence makes us aware of our duration, of the fact that our being is future-becoming-past. It makes us aware of our potential, calling us back from the forgetting caused by our involvement in actuality. It revives the anxiety from which speaking delivers us time and again. Thus, it turns us back on ourselves.

The world we know is a world that has already been interpreted. We do not test the truths we conceive by comparing them with something we do not know, something undescribed and unrepresented. Truth points toward what is—it uncovers existents. A sign, on the other hand, can only represent its object, it cannot acquaint us with the object itself. Only Being has the power to make evident what is; we know object X only because the totality of existents is such that X is among its members. Truth is relative to Being, but Being, not being a thing, cannot be represented. It is a potency manifested in the emergence of things. Its agent is language, for it is through language that beings come into be-ing, that is, come to have distinguishable qualities. The word does not refer to an already given being anymore than a statement's truth mirrors an already present object. The word is originary. It creates the thing in the same way that statements erect the world.

The self and the world emerge together in an originary experience in which I encounter the world that lies around me as "ever already there." And even though I encounter the heavens, the sun, earth and water as though they were "ever already given," that my being and that of the world are ontologically bound together makes me know the world is my world, for the ontological interdependence of the self and the world intimates itself to me. In this complex of self and world, the locus of which is language, I become a human being. But it is in silence that we recognize that the call and its hearing-reception mutually belong together, that they are the selfsame. We learn, by participating in the energy of silence, that whatever is present is given to

man, that it, in its essence, addresses itself to man in his essence. So it is that the objective content imported by a work of art summons forth the depths of myself; a mystery on the side of objective be-ing calls forth a mystery on the side of the self.

Robert Bringham discusses Seng-chao, an early fifth-century sage who set forth a similar idea. He wrote, “Wù wō t’ung Ken, shíh fei ch’í,” a sentence which as Bringham points out, has a variety of senses, several of which are germane to the ideas I am propounding here. One interpretation is “things and ourselves have the same nature. . . is and isn’t are one energy, which is what we are.” Other interpretations for the last part of the sentence (‘shíh fei ch’í’) are: “Is and isn’t: one weather”; and “yes and no: one breath” and ‘to be and not to be are one energy’; and even ‘to be breathed is to be and not to be’. Implied in the sentence is the idea that this rhythm of inhaling and exhaling is like the rhythm of exchange between Being and Not-being and that the rhythm of that exchange is the cycle which rules both us and things. We can know neither Non-being nor What is by itself, for each is the abode of the other. Being is the abode of Non-being and Non-being is the abode of Being.

When a being emerges into presence and a mark accedes to meaning (becoming thereby a sign), unarticulated, transapparent reality seems to be eclipsed. Similarly, when a work of art takes on an actual form, what lies beyond it seems to be hidden. But this is only how it seems. Though the transphenomenal always withdraws from appearance, yet it remains. Similarly when it emerges into the clearing of the distance-being-made-near, beings withdraw from appearance. The relation between movement and repose, between speaking and silence is similarly a relation of the sort I term “apophantic.”

Through silence, we are opened to Being. Silence effaces the multitude of beings in the world and allows us to draw near to the Distant for in silence the Distant draws near even while remaining the horizon and the limit of meaning. Silence involves a renunciation, a setting aside the conceptual categories that are embedded in language’s speaking; this is why the unspoken can show what is beyond the limits of language.

Speaking activates a process by which a network of differences is activated. In this network of differences and absences, beings come to presence. Nothing is presented to us, except through language. We never perceive pure, meaningless sense data. Even if highly indeterminate, what is perceived comes into awareness as some particular thing, and not as an amalgam of raw meaningless data on which meaning is imposed. It is through meanings that things enter the world set up in language.

Even so, because values have no place in time (not even in the time of savings), beauty and truth cannot reside in speaking. It is only through something that abides outside of language that speaking has meaning and value. Everything ‘Intimates’, for all sounds are located within the horizon of silence, just as all being comes to presence within the network of differences and absences that constitute language. Our language belongs, essentially to time and to others. All our words are spoken by another, through the medium of language. For any individual, therefore, words have only second-hand meanings; he can use them to convey only hand-me-down perceptions. In silence we can escape this enslavement by history and accede to a realm that is wholly ahistorical. For silence, since it is never emptiness, since it is a plenitude, makes those who participate in it impenetrable by others.

Even while silence effaces all distinctions, it joins together discrete instances of coming to speech and discrete instances of beings’ emergence into be-ing. In the silence between savings, we hear the echo of the past and intuit the coming-into-presence of the future. Saying is an event in time, but what comes after the event is silence. To learn to rest in this silence is to learn to appreciate the discontinuously continuous character of speaking and the interpenetration of speaking and silence. It is to sweep away the clogs in our consciousness created by a language that is always contaminated by the past. It is to be opened to experiences from which we are usually closed off by our habit of hooking one utterance to

another and of relating events from the immediate past with events from the more distant past. It is to quiet that hyperkinesis of consciousness, promoted by too much speaking and by not appreciating the silence that lies around utterances, that hyperkinesis that blunts the senses, rendering us insensate to the present, and that converts our individual experience into something with an abstract, universal and impersonal form.

Since the world is brought into being by the word, the λόγος, the reality of entities in the world is that of virtual entities, entities whose appearance and reality are one. As speaking recedes into silence, and as the play of differences that speaking activates resolves into the repose (more accurately the reposing, since the repose is a gathering of energies, from which motion arises of silence), we come to realize, if we are attentive (that is, if we can practice what Simone calls attention) and are attuned to that silence (that is, if we can practice what Simone calls attention) that appearance is no different from reality and reality no different from appearance. We accede to the insight that has now become basic science, for it is a notion fundamental in quantum physics, that an entity is just an historical route of events.

Speaking and silence are each the condition of the other. The silence into which words recede after they are spoken is not Nothingness. In it dwells possibility—the possibility from which words arise and the mysterious possibility of the emergence of things. When sounds recede into silence, they recede into the possibility of all sounds. Silence therefore is the ground of all speaking and of all coming to be, as much as it is of music—and all good music, as we know, reveals silence. Silence is richer than any saying, for it contains the possibility of all sayings. If the spiritual has its only true beginning in the absence of any object, it is in the silence between one saying and another, in the repose between one movement and another, that the past is dematerialized and is made spirit; it is in the silent interlude between one saying and another in which the spiritual possibilities of the future dwell.

Like music, sayings continuously recede into and arise out of silence. Thus sayings and music are given life in a process of continuous creation similar to that by which consciousness arises. In the relation between speaking and silence, as in the relation between striving and reposing, each of the *relata* brings the other into existence, for each releases the other to be, and each provides the ground for the other to be. This relation therefore is homologous with the relation between the virtual dynamism of a work of art and its cadences. Silence interrupts dynamic, flowing time and brings forth instead durational time. It interrupts the flow of time so that, in its own time, form can emerge, for in silence what has been spoken is gathered together and takes on form. Thus silence makes manifest being's becoming. In this newly made definite form that is erected between utterances, the beginning of a saying merges with the end to create duration. Silence thus makes being eternal. In this open space of duration, the vital energies gather which bring speaking to start over and the process of being's becoming to begin again. From there, further sayings are initiated, for all further sayings embrace the past in order to go forth into the future. In that silence which provides memory with the opening to participate in that activity through which man builds his dwelling place, the mind takes possession of the empty form which is its highest perfection, empty form.

In the pattern traced out by speaking's emerging from and receding into silence, we glimpse both our own nothingness and our own freedom ("freedom" here referring to the standing open to those possibilities which are given us). The anticipation of additional sayings that silence causes us to feel provokes an anxiety that opens us to pure freedom. The drama of the emergence of sonority from silence reflects the fundamental human drama, that of the self in search of serfhood. Silence brings us to question our own being. Indeed, silence brings into question what it means to be. When our thinking attunes itself, in silence, to itself, we can hear the silent speaking of Being. We then confront the power of possibility, for as the word returns to soundlessness, the surface of the world fades into nothingness and the wondrous presencing of language is made manifest.

The word shines a light; it brings things into evidence, into presentness. (Hence be-ing and time are intimately related, as are speaking and time.) When speaking ceases, being returns into the inscrutable. But not only appearance is secondariness—so is non-appearance, for the inscrutable itself is never revealed, not even in the mode of non-appearance. Only its power manifests itself—and only indirectly—in the dynamic by which it eclipses or is eclipsed by being. The first word is never said. Nevertheless, all saying is in response to something that lies deeper. What issues the call is intimated—but not revealed—in silence.

Silence effaces the idle chattering in which we lose ourselves even as it liberates the mind from the alien impressions furnished by memory. It effaces that impersonal discourse which makes one person interchangeable with any other. It turns us back upon ourselves. Idle talk is disassociated from Being, while silence, as reposing potentiality, gathers Be-ing. Too often when we speak, the words that come to us are lifeless, inert and impersonal. But while language is impersonal, silence is suprapersonal. Too, everyday speech is disassociated speech, speech that is unmoored from the body. Such speech is degenerate, for it is inevitably false, simplifactory and inauthentic. Silence re-roots speech in the body (for in the silences between utterances one senses his body, its presence in space, etc.) and through the body, to the whole of physical be-ing. One's speech thereby takes on gravity.

Speaking establishes distinctions. In silence, we experience the continuum of everything that exists. We learn that the world never lost its unity, that the marvellous never departed. We experience the Holy. To experience, for the first time, our familiar reality as the Holy is to accept, for the first time, the holy self.

In silence, we can hear the reverberations that echo within the primordial word. Attuning ourselves to these reverberations allows us to speak the word anew. Silence creates a clearing that allows us to sense the potency of the word made new. With every uttering of the word made new, a wave of renewal passes across the surface of be-ing. It is the harmony of the reposing dynamism of cadence that enables us to speak the new word.

But, as Nietzsche pointed out, the word that is spoken is rarely a word-made-new; mostly they are tired, worn-out expressions. The shopworn character of the speaking hides the fact that the interpretations of the world they embody are products of will:

What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors and metonyms and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished, poetically and rhetorically and which, often, from long use, seem firm, canonical and obligatory to a people. Truths are illusions about which one has forgotten this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensual power; coins which have lost their pictures and matter only as metal, no longer as coins.

The will-to-be aspires blindly, without object. Since it desires nothing more than to continue in be-ing, and since the be-ing it desires to persevere in is essentially constituted by willing, this being represents itself mentally as the will-to-will. The will-to-will is pure, aimless, striving. It is indefinite and infinite—compare this with Spinoza's *Ethica more geometrico demonstrata*: "Conatus quo unaquaque res in suo esse perseverare conatur, nullum tempus finitem, sed indefinitum involvit," and "Mens tam quatenus claras et distinctas quam quatenus confusas habet ideas, conatur in suo esse perseverare indefinitq quodam duratione et huius sui conatus et conscia."

In order to become definite, the will must have an object. In order to escape the perpetual striving implied by the circularity of the formula, "the will-to-will," particular individuals (or modes of be-ing according to Spinoza's richly resonant terminology) must protect their being as an end and become the material embodiment of that concept. Beings come into being by limiting

themselves, by changing themselves from a state of pure indeterminacy to a state of determinacy, by changing from being the will-to-will—or, what is the same thing, considered from the standpoint of physical attributes, the striving to continue in be-ing—into the will-to-be this be-ing. The will-to-be ceases to strive with the recognition of the identity of truth and being, that is, of the identity of what is meant or intended in speaking and what Be-ing brings into being.

Similarly in the identity of what is meant in speaking and what is (what Be-ing brings into being) a person reaches the *terminus ad quem* of what it is to be a person. He ascends from the knowledge of being that is embedded in language to the silent recognition of Be-ing. He rests—that is, he gathers himself together in the act of repositing—in the unity of the intended and the actual. After speaking truly that is, after speaking that which creatively discloses be-ing—one's will is quieted and one discovers the openness that releases things into disclosure. The peace of the quieted will is beyond purposiveness. It is, indeed, a gift. It cannot be demanded—but it does demand. It demands openness to what is given. It does not follow upon a narrowing of one's interests but rather from an enlarging of the field to which one is open. To put it otherwise, in speaking a world and a self are disclosed to one another, for speaking brings the world into the openness of the self. In silence, one delights in the Unity of the self and the world, for in that unity, all that is striving rests.

The sign that has the power to determine and to limit the will is the sign that bears within itself the right-to-be. In works of art, goodness, being and truth coincide, firstly because works of art possess virtual existence and secondly, because, by its beauty alone, a work of art convinces our will that it ought to exist. A work of art imposes a demand on will and requires it to submit. Nevertheless, the will submits willingly and freely, because of the work's right-to-be-ing. The experience of actively willing what already is and, at the same time, of willingly surrendering self willing and allowing oneself to submit to the necessity inherent in the right-to-be, is an experience of calm and quiet, yet surging and active bliss. Of *jouissance*.

“Beauty is,” said Kant, in a very famous comment, “the form of the purposiveness of an object so far as this is perceived in it without any representation of a purpose.” According to Kant, for something to have a purpose is for it to exist by reason of its suitability for some use. What sense can there be to the claim that some object *X* is purposive when I judge that there is no end *Y* which *X* exists to serve? And why does Kant locate beauty not in the purposiveness of some object but in the “form of purposiveness”?

To answer the latter question first, this is because, according to Kant, my engagement with a beautiful object results in a harmony among my faculties of cognition. Because it does so, my feeling that a beautiful object makes sense and is coherent is achieved without my using any concept. If I hold no concept of an object, I cannot regard it as having any determinate purpose. Even though I find this to be so, I also discover that the beautiful object possesses a particular kind of suitability—a suitability for producing the pleasure that arises from harmoniousness among my cognitive processes. When the beautiful object *X* is suitable for something, even if that suitability is not for a particular end, Kant attributes to *X* the form of purposiveness.

Kant draws a brilliant comparison between a beautiful object and the good will—of which, readers will remember that Kant remarked, in the first sentence of *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, “Es ist überall nichts in der Welt, ja überhaupt auch ausser derselben zu denken möglich was ohne Einschränkung für gut konnte gehalten werden, als allein ein *guter Wille*.” The formal similarity between the good and the beautiful object lies in the fact that the goodness of that which the good will wills does not lie outside the good will itself, while the beautiful object displays only the form of purposiveness.

Art works make manifest the truth that the goodness of a be-ing is its being what it ought to be. But that which ought to be is constituted as an ought-to-be only insofar as its be-ing is adopted by the will as an ought. Since things emerge into real be-ing only through the will's intending

and desiring them, the condition for the coincidence of the what ought-to-be with what is is always fulfilled. “*Ens et bonum convertuntur*” was the scholastics’ expression for this idea. But while this is a truth for all be-ing, it is in works of art especially that this truth is made manifest because artmaking, resulting as it does in the production of things which have virtual existence, occurs in the realm of absolute freedom.

All works of art have a be-ing that involves both dynamism and containment, both gathering and release—in essence, both speaking and silence. This is because they emerge into be-ing (dynamism) through the perfection of their forms (containment). It is form which contains, limits, and gives meaning to dynamism. The form of the work has similar powers over the human will. It limits and gives meaning to striving and, at the same time, symbolizes its own so doing.

In making manifest the coincidence of Being and the Good. Silence reveals the bankruptcy of the liberal view of nature and our place in it. The liberal account of nature is the picture of the universe that was first sketched by Descartes, that found favour with intellectuals beginning in the seventeenth century and that, since the nineteenth century, has been the image that has dominated the popular conception of the universe. Liberalism expounds the view that we inhabit an objective, value-free universe.

Aristotle proposed the contrary, for in the *Metaphysics* (1072a, 26) he stated that nature (that is, the realm of change) depends on an Unmoved Mover:

The Final Cause, then, causes movement as being loved, but all other things cause movement by themselves being moved. Now if something is moved it is capable of being otherwise than it is ... But since there is something which causes movement while itself unmoved, existing actually, this cannot be in any way other than it is. For movement in space is the first of the kinds of change, and movement in a circle the first kind of spatial movement, and this the first mover causes.

The first mover, then, exists of necessity; qua necessary its being is good, and it is in this way (as good i.e. as object of love and desire) that it is a principle.

The work of Descartes and the discoveries of the science of his time convinced Locke, a founder of liberalism, that the Aristotelian concept of nature was wrong. Nature, Locke advised, is not dependent upon God; consequently, we cannot discover the Good in the way things are. The state of nature, he claimed, provides knowledge only of evil (or at least, of deprivation, savagery and violence), not of good. This, he believed, makes it necessary for humans to use reason, for by reasoning they can formulate contracts which allow them to escape from the state of nature.

On the liberal view, the cosmos consists of objective phenomena and of subjects who perceive and who discover the laws of the regularities of these phenomena. Because the liberal view holds nature to be value-free, according to liberalism people are free to remake nature. In this way, it has encouraged the development of technologies to allow them to intervene in nature with the maximal efficiency. Technology then, is an expression of the freedom that the liberals believe humans have to impose their will on nature.

The darkness that the liberal view has left as its legacy is nowhere more evident than in the philosophy of Sartre. Sartre’s philosophy bears all the traces of latter day liberalism: a dichotomy between subjects and the material world (in Sartre’s terms, between the *pour-soi* and the *en-soi*), an affirmation that *the en-soi* is inert, valueless, just there, inaccessible to the projects which the *pour-soi*, which is pure potentiality, conceives for it. The blackness of Sartre’s philosophy is among the most conspicuous evidence we have of the terrifying darkness of the view that persons are totally free and that nature is valueless.

In silence, on the other hand, we enter into a dynamic reposing in which there gathers together

the energy that releases objects into be-ing. In this gathering, we can discover that each thing stands forth precisely in its be-ing. From it, we learn of the apophantic relation between Be-ing and Non-Be-ing. And devalued things are revalued when we learn, through entering into silence, that our words are uttered by the silence from which they arise, and that Being, Goodness and Truth co-incide.