


Some Meditations-Ruminations on Cheryl Glenn’s *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*

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Dedication: To Professor Irwin Corey

From so long ago, I remember reading:

“7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.” Ludwig

Such a tragic view of life: It’s both necessary to link and how to link! At least, a tragic view, until I read this set of interrogating phrases:

“135. ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence’ (*TLP*: 7).

§ Is the *must (Il faut, muss man)* addressed to man [woman, thirds]? To Spirit? It is not in their power to pass over in silence what they cannot speak about. Insofar as it is unable to be phrased in the common idioms, it is already phrased, as feeling. The avowal has been made. The vigil for an occurrence, the anxiety and the joy of an unknown idiom, has begun. To link is not a duty, which ‘we’ can be relieved of or make good upon. ‘We’ cannot do otherwise. Don’t confuse necessity with obligation. If there is a must (*Il faut*), it is not a You ought to (*Vous devez*).” Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. 80.

**Chewing the Fat**

If I may re-commence with another recollection of a nostalgic, yet haunting *phrase* long past but not lost: I recall the day that I received a review copy of Cheryl Glenn’s *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Southern Illinois UP, 2004). For the book took me back to a day long past when I first heard the *phrase*: “We need to know more about rhetorics of silence as well as rhetorics of listening.” Which was spoken by and in conversation with Lynn Worsham. After an inspectional reading of *Unspoken*, I sensed that “we” in rhetoric and composition finally had such a book. For it to be such, the book on silence, however, would have to make a (disciplinary) link with “rhetoric and composition.” Which would require that the writer follow a proper, institutional protocol of thinking—one that would, nonetheless, be paradoxical, for How can the unspoken become spoken, much less in a discipline given to the production of successful discourses. So I wondered, Was this the book or not the book? The problem can only be appreciated, seen as paradoxical, with a
particular sense of an "unspoken." It's simply not a matter of stepping out of silence and of just speaking. It's simply not a matter of turning to one’s audience and asking, as often should be the case, How much non-disciplinary counter-honesty can you deal with? Or How much of the return of the repressed can you deal with! . . . The problem could be resolved, perhaps, if the discipline would just make way for the conditions of this book (to come) on silence, the unspoken; would bare as well as bear witness to new idiomatic connections for what wants to be spoken.

The analogical connection that mis/informs this meditation, therefore, and that I am un/working with, throughout this whole re/opening section, is Spoken is to Unspoken as Grounding is to Ungrounding.

There are fables and vignettes that can approach, if not breach, as a broach might, the unspoken. Stand-ins for the unpresentable. Let’s call them, after Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau, “silent technologies.” Stealth technologies. That never have showed up on, since not wired in, our registers of choice. Why? Perhaps because we are institutional, disciplinary fools for exclusion.

[...]

“The track of writing is straight and crooked.” Heraclitus, fragment 59.

“Walking rhetorics. The art of ‘turning’ phrases finds an equivalent in the art of composing a path. [...] There is a rhetoric of walking. . . . [A] suppression of linking words . . . either within a sentence or between sentences. In the same way, in walking [this sophistic rhetoric] selects and fragments the space traversed; it skips over links and whole parts that it omits. From this point of view, every walk constantly leaps, or skips like a child, hopping on one foot. It practices the ellipsis of conjunctive loci.” Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life 100–01.

§ Let’s pretend to re-make some old, silent loci. After the immemorial, preceding ancient Greek tragedy (from Dionysus to Oedipus), but mostly after psychoanalysis, the unspoken still remains unspoken. By
definition the immemorial is unknowable. Except to say that it is impossibility itself. We cannot experience the event or unspoken except as an experience of a return, but in between. As in intercellular tissue, dis/connecting things. In a grounding of cracks, gaps, interruptions. After the event. Of the disaster.

For, as Maurice Blanchot writes: the event takes away the conceptual starting place of “the ultimate for a limit” (Writing 28). Without the ultimate, there is no “I,” nor substance, nor subjectivity. Nor really an object, nor objectivity. All is now impossible. But it is out of this impossibility, wherein lies the unspoken, that we, nonetheless, can speak. For as Blanchot says, the “I” that is now “neutral” cannot but embrace “the adverse I,” or “egotistical Omnipotence” or “murderous Will.” But this “neutral” can now also embrace its neutralness. Blanchot says: “there must always be at least two languages, or two requirements: one dialectical [i.e., egotistical Omnipotence], the other not; one where negativity is the task, the other where the neutral remains apart, cut off both from being and from not-being” (20). The turn is towards a non-synthetic third. There is no longer the sole determining factor of non-contradiction, for the excluded middle is now allowed to return. It’s on the prowl. It’s called “neutral.” For centuries officially silenced. “Neutral” now speaks. So out of this impossibility (or compossibility) of the loss of the ultimate, determined by negativity, comes possibilities (or incomposibilities). With this mis/understanding, we can speak now in the idiom of Xwithout X, that is to say, of a subjectivity without subjectivity, a community without community.

§ The event, after all has been said and undone, is without a point, for “it” does not register. Hence, “it” does not, under disciplinary conditions, matriculate. For in the immemorial, it has no understood antecedent. But “it,” nonetheless, miraculates.

The event, then, to make it perhaps to appear to be a simple event, is the loss of grounding. This is not just a loss of philosophical grounding but all grounding especially that of rhetorical strategies. What is far left of what it is to be humanisticly possible is tactics, ruses. But this loss of grounding paradoxically is turned into a grounding without grounding.
The event of the loss of grounding \([\text{grund}]\) becomes Unbeknowst \([\text{abgrund}]\) and mise en abyme.

§ But let’s better grasp the ungraspable through *narratives of interruptions*. And recall through speculation that perhaps Tiresias sees the *loss of grounding*, then Jocasta infers and cautions Oedipus not to think it, but finally Oedipus, the impulsive child that he is, speaks it—unnamely, the unspeakable! As Blanchot writes: “Keep silence. Silence cannot be kept” (29). As put forth by the disciplinary, dominate discourse, this fable is all about blindness and insight, insight and blindness. Which is to say, in part, that the fable is approached by one language, not the two that Blanchot speaks of as balanced, as both strategy and tactics. So no wonder Kenneth Burke establishes a compromise formation, the *dialectics* of tragedy: acting, suffering, and then learning (*Grammar* 38–40). But What is learned? Simply Hubris? Egotistical Omnipotence? Therefore, let’s bring out the ratios for the sake of balance! Perhaps. Much much more. In any case, the fable is also read, though little understood, in terms of the other language of the neutral. The language of thirdness. Outside of both being and non-being. In a “radical passivity” of *ex-stasis* (24; cf. Agamben, *Language* 88–90).

§ Tradition (Aristotle, etc.) says, the fable’s not only about Hubris, but also about some impurity. Some improper, paralogical linkage. Some corrupted syntax. Or whatever. We cannot be sure, for the “play” can be seen also as a comedy (indeterminate, change), not just a tragedy (determinate, fixed). Jean-François Lyotard sees the various, yet same *spectators* (audiences) coming around finally to laughing at Oedipus (*Just Gaming*, 42). As the drama is seen repeatedly, yet differentially, there can be nothing but spectacles of laughter in anticipation. Augusto Boal would see the same conditions for the necessary turn away from compulsory tragedy (an unbridgeable boundary situation) to comedy (the conditions for possibilities of change) (see *Theatre* 154–55). There is no good life-enhancing, life-fulfilling reason to think traditionally by way of an Oedipal grounding and, hence, Oedipus’ interpretation of the Sphinx’s riddle. What is 4. Then, 2. And finally, 3? The traditional presumption is that the trekking, the move from two to three, signals an old *Anthropos*
Oedipus with a blindman's cane, walking, but tapping, tapping, tapping. Such tapping, however, is read in a canonized way as Oedipus's composing a tragic path. What a willful, egotistical, murderous presumption to begin with to think that “Anthropos” is What wants to be the answer. The numbers are but a sign. Without any necessarily fixed design. Informing the dispersed signs.

§ I would rather listen to the tapping by way of another ungrounding figure: “Charlie Chaplin,” who, according to De Certeau in another, completely different context, “multiplies the possibilities of his cane: he does other things with the same thing and he goes beyond the limits that the determinants of the object set on its utilization. In the same way, the walker transforms each spatial signifier into something else. . . . [H]e forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory” such as tragic ones (Practice 98).

§ Unlike the obsessive walker (and writer), I do not mind stepping on the cracks in the sidewalks. I really don't think, oedipally, that stepping on the cracks (gaps) will break my mother's back.

§ Chaplin becomes a neutral with his cane in hand.

§ While I feel it is necessary to link, I, having been incited by Lyotard, do not feel it is necessary how to link. After all, I step on the cracks of the pavement and write not only in between the lines but also on the lines themselves. Con-fusing matters. And anyway, Oedipus, like Chaplin, is Dasein, both before and after confronting the Sphinx. Oedipus is not an entity. Not a subject. He has no sub-stance in as much as we have no way of re-establishing substance as a metaphysical concept. I’m not happy with Burke’s notion of the paradox of substance. Rather, I would forget substance in dis/order to remember the neutral. There’s being-here-(Dasein)-in-relation.² As Dasein, we are not agents but outside in that we have our non-being as adjacency. Alongside. Here's a test moment: Sphinx and Oedipus? Sphinx and Chaplin? How might you (variously, invariantly) link them? Into non-beings outside yet folded inside (alongside)?
§ Tradition (Aristotle, etc.) says, Heraclitus is but a child attempting to think a first-philosophy. I find Heraclitus amazing. A maze ing. He offers us, as Martin Heideggers says, “a sign of an unspoken fullness” (106, Early; emphasis mine). I can read, in remnants of philosophical texts, Heraclitus being-t.here still leaning over and staring into the fire, stoking the coals, listening. To fire, as un/grounding. Spending a lifetime, patiently, listening. In his hut. Before the fire. Listening to. *Logos. Sign. Design. Dasein.* Never resolving grounding as either one or many, either something or nothing. But accepting the so-called contradiction (Parmenides). More so, however, maintaining the paradoxical relation of *one* and *many.* In in-variant *wayves.* Playing. With them. A just game of chance. A throw of the dice. For Heraclitus: What arranges itself, for a fleeting moment, separates itself for another moment. The Oscillating movements are Discourse, Figure. Discourse, Figure. Discourse, Figure. Suspension. Dispersion. T.Here’s a test moment: Heraclitus and Fire? How might you listen?

§ Here’s a hybridic, metaleptic, Sophoclesian-Heraclitian sketch of grounding. As an image of thought thinking. Yet, figureless. Faceless. Mud rising up out of the ground. In many ways, this figure is the eternal return of Oedipus. And perhaps Samson. Bringing down the temple filled with Philistines. Gilles Deleuze says:

> It is difficult to describe this ground [*grund*], or the terror and attraction it excites. Turning over the ground is the most dangerous occupation, but also the most tempting in the stupefied moments of an obtuse will. For this ground, along with the individual, rises to the surface yet assumes neither form nor figure. It is there, staring at us, but *without eyes.* The individual distinguishes itself from it, but it does not distinguish itself, continuing rather to cohabit with that which divorces itself from it. It is the *indeterminate,* but the indeterminate in so far as it continues to embrace determination, as the ground does the shoe. (*Deleuze, Difference* 152; emphasis mine)

This quote continues yesterday and tomorrow, to be one of the most important, thick, complex de-scriptive discussions of grounding as ungrounding (*grund* as *abgrund*).³
§ And yet, surprise interruptions never cease to present something anew. Madeline Gins, in her "novel" *Helen Keller or Arakawa* writes of microsubstances, making up the body that is bodyless in as much as the body, anyone's extended-exposed body—Helen Keller or Arakawa or Gins herself—are all forming a collective wave-like force of each passing through the other. The anonymous author on the dust-jacket summary of the bookless writes: "Gins pilots a kind of 'mute' speech... which subsumes great heuristic constructions in its wake." At one pointless in the work, Gins, through the body of Keller and the artwork of Arakawa, writes of "the first brick of substance... a micro-ground" (22). A *singular* substance is named and personified as "Voluntar, short for voluntary action" (22). What Voluntar "does is feel the way for me. She is a blind man's cane, but a soft, small, internal one, with a core of flexibility. Voluntar, then, is substance and sign (structure) of the voluntary" (22-23).

§ Virginia Woolf: "But when we sit together, close," said Bernard, "we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (*Waves* 185).

Where are "we"? Now? Perhaps, we find ourselves in a gasp. In a silence.

§ Blanchot: Silence "demands a wait which has nothing to await, a language which, presupposing itself as the totality of discourse, would *spend itself all at once, disjoin and fragment endlessly*" (29; emphasis mine). . . .

To re-capitulate: I was re-commencing a recollection. Then, . . . grounding. Confounded, however, with the conditions of ungrounding. . . . I visually scanned the book called *Unspoken* and just believed, propelled by a memory—perhaps something immemorial—that this book must be the *one*. But not the *one* that would determine the *many*. But the spoken of, the promised one, in the form of an ungrounded book. Or rather, a bookless. I still believe it. And yet, *it's still to come*. 
§ That there are other notions of the unspoken, of course, is obvious—all that remains in silence, or silenced, in terms of how we wittingly or unwittingly mis-represent the unspoken, even the cultural takes on “silence” itself, or in terms of our systematically silencing what someone could and should say, given the opportunity.

But Victor, “Are you not silencing most, if not all, readers of your review-article with this oracular writing?” — I don’t think so. For . . .

Yours is a wonderful dark ironic proposition that turns dizzily both ways if not still more ways. It’s one thing to be silenced (there are so many who have been silenced); and quite another to find ourselves (appropriated, expropriated) in silence. Think about this—take a lifetime—to think what it means to be found, to be grounded (spoken), yet ungrounded (unspoken), in silence.

§ What is needed—desired—is an art of listening. Not of speaking well. Not of correcting well. But. A lifetime of listening to the logos. Giving ourselves over to errancy.

But again, Victor, “What happened to Cheryl’s book? When are you going to start reviewing it?” — The “book,” as you call it, is in great part in the immemorial, and this response of mine is, consequently, a meditation on the book to come. The book that is called “Cheryl’s book,” on the unspoken and silence, lies not in the past, but lies in the future. Or what will have come. The future anterior. (Cf. Blanchot, Book 224–44.)

§ When I type typos, I look at them for a long while, looking for what and where they are directing me. I’ve had to turn off my auto-spell-checking-correcting feature in my word processor so as not to miss the events of misspellings. Cheryl has some interesting typos in Unspoken. E.g., “white schoslars romanticized” (146). Here’s a test moment: What are your experiences of this “schoslars” sandwiched in between white and romanticized? I keep returning to this new word, listening to it. In fact, I typed “schoslars” into my reading-speech software. The word, when spoken by my software, sounds like “skezlars.” A word-riddle from the
Sphinx! I love that insertion of S in the midst of the word. It’s casting a spell over me. It’s like an incipient Z. It’s an invitation to zigzagging. We are all subject-to-typos, if we would not just correct them, but let them be. It’s a sickness of disciplinary thinking that demands typos be corrected.

To be silenced. When typos expressed by the logos can guide and teach us. I can only thank the gods, the forces at un/work, that the alphabetic figures, speaking to us, as if uttering riddles, through our fingers, rebel by creating typos. Alphabets without alphabets. Alphas without Omegas. Means without ends. When alphabets throw the dice: “schoslars.”

§ We need to place ourselves in silence, to found ourselves in silence. In errancy. We should find ourselves already placed there, but without any hermeneutic. Forget hermeneutic procedures, for they are rotten with searching for perfected disciplinary meaning. Especially in terms of typos, slips of the typing fingers. I am enamored with misprisions. Alpha-tics.

§ Otherwise, nothing but the same old same, Nought! “We” need to disperse, break into diaspora, and cross over, out of disciplinary cities, into the desert. Of Gustave Flaubert’s Saint Anthony. Into booklesses. All across the imaginary sandscape of the deserted. The unspeakable monsters. A monastery of unpronounceable, lexical monsters. Crawling out of our libraries. Even if our so-called audiences cannot follow us into the desert of the real. Once there, we can replenish our art. It is through paramodels of aesthetics that we will jettison our agencies and rediscover our various adjacencies (cf. Sontag, “Aesthetics of Silence”).

§ Okay, my anonymous Reader. If you do not like the juxtapositions here and throughout, then, write me, tracotanza vitanza (sophist@clemson.edu), and I will send you an e-copy of this MSWord file and then you can cut and paste the fragments in any distribution of the sensible (Rancière) as you see fit. Then return the file to me. After which I, again, will cut-paste for different affects. Returning it to you if not to another inquirer. In such a way, we will play fragment golf, bringing into visual, if not auditory, ex-istence unspoken in-between events in a pastiche. Long live Patsy’s itch.
§ Being thrown ... off the path can be a productive, interruptive event. *Aporias*. Especially in the desert. Of the real. It’s that way after the event of the disaster. How to inhabit it, to write it within its strange *habitus*. To write exscriptions. To live. Off the path. To live. Ecstasis. (cf. Freud, *SE*, IV: 197).

§ As the conceptual architect Lebbeus Woods says and illustrates: We should live in the “scab” and “scar” of the wrecked buildings, the city. Our *habitus*. After the event. “To accept the scar is to accept existence” (16). He continues: “Healing is not an illusory, cosmetic process, but something that . . . both deeply divides and joins together. New forms of knowledge, those that give greatest weight to individual cognition rather than to abstractions representing an authority external to experience, mandate a society founded on differences between people and things rather than similarities. The city of self-responsible people, of individuals—each of whom tells a personal (even private) story—exhibits its unique scars, its transformations in solitude, which are a new kind of history. Increasingly, these would be stories of resourcefulness and invention, more and more distant from conditions created by conformity to social norms” (16).

Victor, “But you silence people with your ‘abstractions representing an authority external to [our] experience!’”!—But my abstractions, exstases, my scars, are internal to my sense of an external world. Which we all share. We are, when gathered, all but subalterns in silence, in the facelessness of what lies outside (Cf. Ballif, et al.).

By definition, the subaltern does not know and, if it did, it cannot even speak for itself. It cannot authorize a *sign*. It’s a long way from, however, the generic notion of the subaltern to the person of Joseph Jacotot, who says: “One can teach what one does not know” (Ranciere, *Ignorant Schoolmaster* 135; cf. Polanyi 195–97). Oh, my gosh: Did I paralogically mis-link this “from subaltern to Jacotot” statement? Are they not co-extensive, yet not necessarily coherent enough? If so, then, let us understand mutually, if not authoritatively, that all typos and mis-linkings
await re-discovery of their excluded-secreted-silent lives, at some disruptive moment, in the future anterior. Ex-stasis.

§ I picked up the NYTimes, Sunday edition, to learn that Mickey Spillane died. He was 88. The reporter, Thomas Vinciguerra, remembers: "Malcolm Cowley called [Spillane] 'a homicidal paranoiac'; even his father described his output as 'crud' But Mr. Spillane was unfazed" (5). Vinciguerra additionally recalls Spillane writing: "Silence has a funny sound" (The Body Lovers).

§ We have historically volume after volume of The Art of Speaking and an occasional volume on the Art of Listening. But on the Art of Silence? Which might suggest ways into the intractable unspoken, for a variety of ethical and political purposes. Or for just curiosities. Funny sounds.

§ I have always felt that in the academy what wants to be said remains mostly in silence. Wittingly and unwittingly. As if both desire and silence would rather be under the sign of the negative. Can you believe it! But especially in the academy! Why? Well, perhaps, it's because the academy (formal education), beginning with Plato and Aristotle, is founded on what has to remain silent—on remainders, remnants—for if What wants to be spoken were to be spoken and thereby linked (or mis-linked) with what has been spoken, there would be no academy. Socrates tried to represent himself as being an ignorant schoolmaster, but we know that his (or rather Plato's) rendering is a cheap card trick (cf. Burke, Grammar 415-16). I strongly suspect that Socrates was a cad (unprincipled, a man or woman or hermaphrodite such as Favorinus without qualities), but re-mixed, re-purposed by Plato. What is desired now is the previous Socrates. If Socrates's unspoken were spoken, I figure that the very conditions for the possibility of the academy would no longer be. Which I think is a pretty cool idea. Don't you! I often think, perhaps nostalgically, as Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn, that I find ways, still to this day, to skip school, or class, while attending to school. Can "you" do so? All it takes is a few good bricoleurs.

§ As presumptuous as it might sound for me to say so, I think that
Cheryl in *Unspoken* establishes the conditions for the possibilities of bricoleurs. She has accomplished such a task by reintroducing to us (in the *academy*) what, heretofore, had not presented itself in some *forthright* as well as a *forthwrong* manner.

§ Now the question is What will “we” do with the book? . . . *Unspoken*—after all is said and un- and re-done—is a dangerous book, like all great books are dangerous. Why dangerous? I will not explain, but say: I think that the most dangerous audience (spectators) to write for is composed of colleagues in rhetoric and composition, for “we,” like most *academics*, have little interests in reading affirmatively, and no apparent abilities to read the silences themselves. Together: To affirm those silences in textual adventures, following De Certeau’s call for a “pedestrian speech act” in “walking rhetorics” (97–102).

§ Such acts of walking would require that our colleagues and ourselves—not in a college, but in a collage—unlearn what we have learned when it comes to academik reading and writing.

§ I’m here because *Unspoken*, along with a set of memories, calls me to write what an “unspoken” wants spoken, heard, written, read. Not Redocumented. Re-thought. Re-saved. But unthought thought. Not, however, for the strengthening of this discipline, but for a *loosening* of it, in hopes that it would—*loosened*, in a statelessness—drift in the directions it wants to drift in, wherever. Up the Nile to the sourceless. In silence. Listening. Interrogating with a radical passivity and with patience the question, *What is it that writing wants?* As such. What is it that it wants while walking towards a *responsibility for another rhetoric* (cf. Blanchot, *Writing* 25).

To return to my little narrative, before my interruptive excursesus on the *academy*, I gave *Unspoken* an inspectional reading, and I recalled Lynn’s phrase and immediately wrote Lynn, suggesting that the *book to come* had arrived. Sometimes a thing is called for, but it takes a long time for it to begin to arrive. In mixed libidinal installments that make for nothing but non-sequiturs. Tracings. Breachings of the argument that
needs to be an argument or a narrative, but one that becomes scattered, splattered, all across the scene of writing. In the exchange with Lynn, I promised in 2004 to write this review-article, so—what can I say, other than—I am way overdue in paying due respect to the event of the publication of *Unspoken* and similarly to Cheryl. But what I want to write on, with continued patience, *is* belatedness itself in our academik discipline, or field. But I want to write about it as Freud and others speak of it in the term *nachtraglichkeit* (see Freud *SE* 17: 7–122; 23: 1–137; Nägele 169–201; Derrida 203; Rickert). A word that is often translated as *belatedness* or as "deferred action." For me, *a belatedness to silence* should not be utilized in a dialectical scheme such as species-genus-differentiae analytics, or class, race, gender/sexuality. But rather can be rendered as "breaching" (pathbreaking). The logic of the cut is different between dialectical cuts and breachings. As Derrida explains: "Breaching, the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path. Which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached" (200). Commentaries become Fragmentaries.

Conduction, a line of conduction (Freud *SE I*: 298), is a para-logical way or psycho-logical wayves of fragmenting and yoking in still other peculiar ways, but, nonetheless, with their own logic of sampling and remixing thoughts together.

An *unspoken* deferred is a justice denied. A *third* denied.

Here is an example of a breaching, with only a nervous tissue establishing lines of conductive paralogic, linking two thoughts:

But if “you” think this is impossible, *then*, let’s also think that “we” are eyeless in gaza.

I can hear some reader, or for sure, readers, thinking: “Now what in the world does Victor assume that I should do with *this*! . . . It’s unreadable! It’s detritus and a detriment to not only our discipline but also to our students. It’s space dust published!”—I would assume that at least you realize that to read *as a listener*, not just as a schooled writer, takes
a lifetime. Roland Barthes is good on “Listening,” as well as Jean-Luc Nancy.

§ In my own separate ways, however, I cannot not link (illegitimate or not) to Cheryl’ s book, which potentially takes me and, as I will presume, us toward rhetorics of the anxiety and the joy of the unspoken spoken but more so, crudely put, towards future rhetorics of unknown idioms. Why anxiety? Why joy? Because we as well as I, in the academy, know so little about such matters as silence and listening, listening and silence. About connections. We know little about the archaeology of knowledge (Foucault). Or of the archeology of the frivolous (Derrida). Or of the third body (Cixous). Or of the telephone book (Ronell). For the most part, what we know, do, and make is text + text + more text (written and spoken). For audiences, telling them what they already know and, thereby, flattering the hell out of them. And then, calling it a discipline! When. The only un/reason for writing is to uncover, turn over the ground, to discover what we do not know and perhaps can never turn into knowledge. But what we can spend a patient life of listening to. If we can but learn to just listen!

§ And besides...

§ Without a doubt, we as a discipline know nothing of noise. “The prosopopoeia of noise” (see Serres Hermes 67). The Art of Noise? (see Attali; Russolo). Other than to filter it out. For the enhancement of communication. So as to feel secure in knowing what we already know. It’s there that we huddle together in (false) security! We need to learn, however, how to tune in on three different channels, or registers, simultaneously and listen to the noise. To the mix.

Since the appearance of Unspoken, I have been able to make some sense of a group of memories that for years returned, and yet only puzzled me, but ever frequently return to me, more and more now as time passes with more intensity for me. I think and quip that these memories return, never to be lost on me, so that I might read and listen to the unspoken spoken, or unwritten written. Sometimes a lesson takes a lifetime. We live such belated lives in as well as outside the academy. Specifically, I
remember . . . I must have been 9 or 10 years old . . . one day, observing and listening to my mother at the telephone. I was standing and observing her sitting: There were long stretches of her nodding and saying: "Yes . . . Unhuh . . . Yes . . . Umhmmmmmm . . . Yes . . . No? . . . [laughter] . . . Sure . . . Yes" (Reloop that string about 100 times, or so it seemed to me a hundred times then, and you might get the sense of how I received the string of phrases. I thought them odd. Peculiar. In fact, I remember saying something to my mother about this way she had on the phone. She listened to me and to my impish laughter and explained: "Understand Victor, I am letting my mother, your grandmother, know that I hear her, that I am with her, that I am listening and thinking about what she is saying to me."

As Barthes says, about the demands of the telephone, "the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: listening speaks" (252; Barthes' emphasis).

Listening speaks!

Today, I understand that this was my first lesson in how to listen through unspeaking speaking. Or as we-academiks say, phatic communication (cf. de Certeau 99; Glenn 6). Or better yet, as our elders used to say: chewing the fat. Or as KB was fond of saying: chewing the phatic communion. Much later, I came to understand that my mother was also, in a manner of speaking, acknowledging for herself what my grandmother was leaving unspoken, both known and unbeknownst perhaps to my grandmother herself. Theirs was a complex logological, though I believe, typically complex mother-daughter relationship. There are similar party lines of text-messaging and international cables and satellites to carry them. And there are ancient songlines, ab-original dreaming-tracks (Chatwin). All informing the artificial as well as natural matrix (mother, uterus, intercellular tissue which links cells) of communication.

§ I love walking on a sidewalk or through a hallway, while passing someone, and asking, "How are you doing?" One day, however, I asked a dear colleague that I had passed hundreds of times in the hall, "How are
you doing today? Are you living a happy life today?” She stopped dead before me. Her face cracked and crumbled. A simple linkage that had not been made before, a yoking of two questions. Of two faces. That dared to speak phatically of happiness (fulfillment). Both drawn by language with its concerns. About which we could not speak, but which, nonetheless, was spoken: Nothingness. Silently. Yet, emphatically. It was disconcerting for a while in that hall. Until we were able to remake ourselves (cf. Heidegger, *On the Way* 107–08). And yet, never. For we continue to live in, share together, that (now more visible) scar. In our voice and our void. Yet. Affirming existence and extasis. I share that scar with her.

§ This is what I mean by silence, walking with eyes wide shut and tripping over *it*, living in *it*—if there is a referent, let’s call *it* “caesura”—in which we can discover *things* that cannot be said though they forever want to be said. They “murmur” (Foucault, *Archeology* 27–28). They take “flight” (Agamben, *Language* 107–08). And therein lies the matrix of our connections. With the “intractable (Italian tracotanza)” (108; Agamben’s emphasis). As Deleuze says, *turning over the ground is the most dangerous occupation*. As the indeterminate touches the determinate, as the ground touches the shoe, or swollen bare foot. And yet, as Blanchot says, therein can rebegin our search for a language of thirdness for this *caesura* (cf. Agamben, *Remnants* 145). In the relation of the unspoken.

§ Perhaps this is an appropriate moment to take a walk.

[. . .]

**Linking Speech and (yet in) Silence**

§ Welcome back. "Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable," — frères, soeurs, etcetera! (Baudalaire)

Link the above—restarting, way at the top—vignette of my experience with Lynn’s phrase to a book I read by Allen S. Weiss, The Aesthetics of Excess (1989), which refers to Abbe Dinouart’s L’Art de Se Taire, principalement en matière de religion (The Art of Silence, principally in matters of religion), 1771, and to other books that I had read but did not know what to do with, or what they themselves wanted to do with me. At the time. (Patience is required.) Way before I received Unspoken. Then, link them together with the fact that they were haunting me, and What do you get? Perhaps an assignment! Coming to me at least through conductive linkages.

§ I am taking Unspoken as the unspoken spoken as well as the spoken unspoken. As is generally, though incipiently, understood today, speech, writing, silence are one and the same. And noise? Cheryl’s understanding of the relations of speech-writing-silence-noise, however, is by far richer in its implications than I have yet here to suggest.

For first, I must be about my mother’s business. Which requires great patience, when done in public, by the public, but not for the public. An audience without an audience.

For now, I would add through yet another recollection that silence is, as Lyotard reminds us, a phrase itself. In dispute. Waiting for greater levels of repression (Freud), suppression (Nietzsche), or political oppression (Marx) before it turns to us in its own right. Through its own force. As perhaps an event (an appropriation that expropriates). And erupts all across a body. On the tongue. Or the fingers. If what stands for authority, if what stands to reason, or its principles, disallows it, a body, in tropings, allows it. Polymorphously.

§ And the body’s ears. That perpetually listen?

This, all this, is what observing my mother, listening to my grandmother, taught me. It’s a legacy that I lost, misplaced, when becoming an
academik. After all, they were only ignorant schoolmistresses (without any education), yet egalitarian thinkers of their own (with natural-cultural attributes). 8

§ Such listening, as I have thus far exemplified through memory (perhaps a screen memory) is not by any means passive, nor necessarily active. Rather, at best, it’s some unknown, improper third phrase, recounted by Blanchot, such as “radical passivity” (Writing 24; cf. Wall) that allows for a listening that our discipline of all disciplines does not yet acknowledge or teach, though I am encouraged by Krista Ratcliffe’s work, especially *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (2005). For the most part, having been trained as a rhetor by my mentors, I have been trained to produce words (texts), and if I have been taught to listen for the unspoken, I have been taught only to listen so that I might turn what is not said into what should have been said. I have been trained, in other words, to turn the whole unspoken into a weapon against my interlocutors in a game of argumentation. To win. In the name of some social justice. Based on what has been left unsaid. And in the name of justice not just for myself, or for comrades. But for some other so-called greater good. What I have been taught—in the name of a standard protocol of scholarly thinking—I also teach. No doubt, you, Reader, do as well. But there is finally nothing to obtain in winning at this game except only more anxiety without much real joy. Fulfillment. And yet, such lessons lead to a career, tenure, recognition, stature, and more often than not, a tumble.

§ Hence, at times, the remaining anxiety drives an obsession that I have, or that has me, an obsession in writing to grasp and to say it all; or the remaining anxiety drives an eccentricity that I am to examine all conceptual starting places (*topos, utopos, eutopos, atopos, ex-topos, etc.*), whatever that “all” might impossibly be. The heuristic, to rebegin with, is as simple as “And Yet.” Introducing a thinking by way of ZigZagging. Or hesitations. Yet, not constructing Ziggurats. Not monuments. This obsession, for good or bad or whatever, has turned me toward a listening to the text, or to the *logoi*, that says far too much, mostly through what it leaves unsaid in its sayings, than can be rendered. Hence, phatic communications that acknowledge someone’s presence without
any real concern. Best not to get involved. And yet, entering silence is nothing but involvement. Collaboration. With the indeterminate. Overdeterminate. Walking down the hall with the ground meeting the shoe. Walking on the pavement and stepping on the cracks. Taps. Gaps. The logos, has its wayves, of being perpetually indeterminate. Causing us to lose face. Identity altogether. There is no entering silence until we give up our identities, which cause us to struggle for our own recognition. It is hard for an academik to enter into the unspoken that forever remains in silence. The only way is through self-overcoming.

Takıng a Glance (or Two) at Cheryl Glenn's Unspoken

§ This is a “meditation” or perhaps, more so, a rumination on Unspoken, for the appropriate time to review the book has long passed, and yet has not yet come. If “you”—you know who you are—have not read the book, then, Go read it! Yes, you, Go read it! I would insist, however, that Unspoken is untimely. But this word “untimely” best not be read in terms of kairos, which is usually diluted to mean opportune moment. On the contrary, all has become inopportune in terms of the disaster.9 . . . Unspoken is a posthumous book, by which I mean its importance may not be, if ever, realized for a very long time to come. Unspoken, I believe, will more fully speak to future generations, but whether they, too, will hear its apotentiality (adynamis), remains. To be determined. In coming indeterminate, indifferentiated worlds.

§ The most impressive part of Cheryl’s writing that is thinking and listening (to herself) takes place in her self-examinations. The opening section is titled “A Word (or Two) on Terms and Categories” (xix–xxii). On terministic-political screens. Herein, she begins to unweave and reweave perpetually in rhizomatic wayves the tapestry of species-genus-differentiae analytics. She recommences by studying a species such as “white” (xx). An odd place to rebegin! But “we” who are categorized as “white” today seldom, if ever, examine that word historically. “We” spend our time, exclusively, on other colors, if colors. Historically excluded from white. Considering these other group colors leads Cheryl
to reconsider her own group color: "[W]hen I came to making a decision about the many other options for referring to various groups of people [genus], I became even more uncomfortable. How can any one term—‘white,’ ‘black,’ ‘Indian,’ ‘deaf’ [species]—capture the wildly rich diversity [differentiae cum ubertà] of any social, cultural, ethnic, or bodily group? How can any one term capture their group identity, let alone their individual humanity? How can ‘white,’ for example, speak to the various categories it supposedly constitutes, when only a hundred years ago, Slavs, Celts, Italians, and Jews were not ‘white’?" (xx). Cheryl struggles with her own frame of reference. She asks herself: "If I cannot handily identify myself, can I claim to identify others?" (xxii). Therein is the Event (Ereignis), as the pointless of rebeginnings. Cheryl walks on into the text, perpetually through her ruminations and self-examinations. Her book is on the way, in as much as she thinks down many different paths as well as off the path, constantly revising, leaving the future open for still more revisions. Thereby, Cheryl de-monstrates responsibility for an other rhetoric. Through defining, engendering, witnessing, attesting, commanding, opening silences.

There’s some more to say, but—You—Go read and reread Cheryl’s book (i.e., posthumous book, bookless).

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Notes

1. My re-thinking, in retrospect, here is in part based on Michel de Certeau’s re-thinking against disciplines in The Practice of Everyday Life, in which he discusses and extends Foucault’s notions of “silent technologies” and “the network of antidiscipline.” These technologies with their networks are constantly re-established by anyone (though they are not necessarily “human” in production) who is dominated (xiv, xv).

De Certeau makes a major distinction between “strategy” (in terms of rhetoric, Aristotle) and “tactics” (the Sophists). A tactical walking as writing, writing as walking, is a way of writing through poaching. Which in contemporary words today would be called sampling and remixing for repurposing. As for the term “antidiscipline,” we must remind ourselves that anything “anti” stands within the horizon of the very thing it would escape. I think, however, that de
Certeau’s usage suggests paradoxically a remaining passivity to the dominant discourse without the ways of passivity, but by ways of ruses after ruses. To reale eyeze a counter-memory. That remains in silence, waiting for us, to just listen. A lifetime. Which is not offered here as an invitation to become apolitical! But many readers will, nonetheless, have to think so. Leave them be.

Additionally and most profoundly, much of what I attempt here is mis/ informed by my—but not mine alone—predispositions towards un/working with sigetics (sige) and the problem of silent thought (or silent technologies) as un/grounding, that which always already remains unspoken; or, as I have put it forth, the problem, not of the silence of determinate negation, but that, ever more so, of absolute negation. The problem of ethics, an improper proper dwelling place. The best, most recent commentary on this problem, or thought, is Agamben’s Language and Death.

2. Someone is going to try to argue, based on a set of Burke an pentadic ratios, that the paradox of substance (Burke) is the same as a “coexistent analytic” (Heidegger; Nancy, Being Singular Plural). Which would be a reinscription and, thereby, a loss. If so, let it be.

3. The question of grounding is, by definition, one of those ultimate, or should I say, absolute, questions. The figure of a being here, without eyes to see, should resonate on numerous registers of meanings and uses. I encourage the reader to continue to read after this quotation on page 152 and thereafter, for Deleuze builds on turning the ground and the melancholic face and then slips into a discussion of teacher-students and errors. The problem of silence, the unspoken in absolute form, is not limited to the ears, nor to the eyes: it is not limited since un/working from absolute negation. It is, again, that of a most profound unfounding as founding, ungrounding as grounding. An unspoken that can never be spoken. Cf. Agamben, Language and Death.

4. What I am doing, in a manner of speaking—skipping school, cutting class—is an unworking (inoperative, unavowable, or worklessness, in terms of Blanchot’s le désœuvrement); it’s also a continuation of what I am unworking on in “Abandoned to Writing.” Which is a continuation of “The Hermeneutics of Abandonment.” Much of this drifting has to do with the abandonment, the unworking of, the academy, while remaining in the academy. But also, there is an allusion here, perhaps, to Donald Murray’s suggestion that the teacher should cut class. It’s a matter of relocating a paralogic of the cut.

5. I first encountered Dinouart in Weiss’s book, but did not want to bother with the French language. But then, one grows up while growing down. Still today it remains untranslated and uncited. The French is not that difficult, after all, to read even in between the lines. Also Courtine and Haroche’s discussion of Dinouart, in an historical context, is extremely helpful. They, too, remain untranslated. Much of their understanding of 17th-18th centuries in France is based on Michel de Certeau’s understandings. Dinouart was considered a
feminist and a plagiarist ("the Alexander of plagiarists") in his own day. Courtine and Haroche make much of these charges and thereby re-charge Dinouart's re-thinkings and re-makings for newer ethical purposes. No two terms—feminist and plagiarist—could better resonate in any book, but most assuredly in this book called L'Art de Se Taire, The Art of Silence, the art of searching for the tare that would be withdrawn to balance the scales in hopes, temporarily, to determine justice. Dinouart's is also a most dangerous, posthumous book. (I leave this work and what I have to say about it undisclosed here, but for a later inopportune moment.) As for other books conductively linked in my reading and listening experiences, see, e.g., Blanchot's The Book To Come (which I read before Unspoken) and Rancière's La parole muette: Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature (after Unspoken).

6. In "unspoken spoken" vice versa, I am echoing the most in/famous idea of Levinas, and yet through Blanchot's "double patience, for patience is double too—speakable, unspeakable patience" (Writing 27).

7. The "ear" seems to be the most recalcitrant of sense-organs. But more important is the question: What to listen with and to? Listening has nothing to do with the "ear" except when the "ear" of the other (or other of the ear) is used as a metaphor. As Heraclitus says: "Listen not to me but to the logos . . ." (frag. 44). Cf. Kazantzakis's notion of listening to a logos that is mis/informed by waves of a "dual substance" (1, 25–33).


9. Blanchot writes: "The disaster: inopportune" (Writing 13). With this notion of the inopportune, thereafter signaled by an ellipsis in my text above, I will have to fall out of silence. And then hastily move to where the discipline, always already as discipline, presently is, contradictorily-paradoxically, is in a pre-disaster world in a post-disaster world. What I bring to a reading of silence, the unspoken, is, therefore, not only informed by the disciplinary expectations of rhetoric and composition, but also informed by a reading of continental philosophy on the problems of writing, listening, silence, communication, after the disaster (M. Blanchot, J-L Nancy, G. Agamben, and J. Rancière).

unWorks Cited


