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# Silence outside the Repressive Paradigm: Silence as a Condition for Public Exchanges

## Abstract:

*Silence is often considered under the sign of repression or oppression, and as such, the result of forces hostile to democracy. In this paper we will try to demystify that unilateral image of silence, reviving the dialectic between silence and democracy in which the former operates as a foundational precondition for exchanges in the democratic public spheres. An increased awareness of the structures of silence will help us reflect upon what remains external to ongoing public discourses. Through a reading of Deleuze, Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger, it will be shown that understanding silence not as the passive negative of speaking, but as an active form of reflection, will help us become aware of what is pre-emptively excluded from discursive exchanges. It is argued that an awareness of this kind of silence can help us reflect upon the structures of public discourses.*

There is an intimate relationship between democracy and the ability to express oneself. In the eighteenth century, when the modern form of democratic practice was first theorized, a great emphasis was placed on the need to freely communicate. The forthcoming so-called Fourth Estate as it established itself in the spread of newspapers and journals, often in opposition to the government and the established powers of the nation-state is another example of this. It is fair to claim that an intellectual consensus (across varying concepts of democracy) now holds in liberal democracies which links true democracy to the ability of citizens to express themselves (within certain limits) without fear of punishment, thus endowing the citizenry (demos) with the ultimate power to rule (kratia).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, albeit in a more indirect and less examined manner, silence necessarily must play an important role: the right to expression brings with it a natural need for legitimization if certain voices or issues are, in spite of the articulated rights of freedom of expression, brought to silence. The nineteenth century democracies inherited a tool for suppressing voices: censorship. Censorship was a tool, firstly, of the Church, and then of the Absolute Monarchies. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, censorship targeted various kinds of expression: from anarchist papers to pornographic novels. On a technological level, when the media relies on the printing press and semi-public routes of transmission (such as the post office), censorship was relatively easy to accomplish. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, an explosion of media made it much harder to suppress illicit expression. As the internet took off, with its boundary crossing capacities, this became much more complicated. But, if we examine censorship from a broader perspective, not as a regulatory tool of the state, but as a cultural phenomenon that practically censors voices, or denies them any attention, we see silencing all around us. Obvious examples are (i) the framing within discursive articulations;<sup>2</sup> (ii) some voices have difficulties in being heard in a competitive and limited economy of attention;<sup>3</sup> (iii) the cultural determination of structures of which voices and issues are recognized as relevant;<sup>4</sup> etc.

In these approaches, silence is seen as a *challenge* to democracy that should either be overcome or at least counteracted.<sup>5</sup> We will not deny that silence can – and often does – play problematic roles in a democracy. In this paper we will, however, point out that the negative understanding of the relationship between democracy and silence is not adequate. Even though silence can be used for repressive means, it is important to realize that language and democracy cannot operate without silence. In this paper we will investigate some of the ways in which silence plays a constructive role in public discourses and therefore also for democracy.<sup>6</sup> We will certainly not be putting forth an

exhaustive analysis of silence in this paper: We are not writing the *summa silentii*. Instead, we propose a prolegomena to a theory of the relationship between silence, democracy and the public spheres, a reminder that even though it is important to counteract some kinds of silence, it is also important to leave spaces open for other kinds of silence to operate. The silencing of voices and aspects of being opens spaces for alternative voices and aspects of being to emerge.

This is important as a means to understand the limits of our discursive horizons. Reflections on the meaning of silence will help us understand the limits of what can be said (we will bang our heads on the walls of language). We will see that silence makes language possible by setting its limits. Becoming aware of our limits is the starting point of working creatively with them. Not in order to experience some secular transcendence of language, but in order to remember, reconfigure, recompose or even reject the *actual* limits (but not limits as such).

In the following sections we will investigate some of these functions of silence. In section (I), we will sketch Deleuze's worries against prevailing public structures in which people are expected continuously to engage in public discussions, whereby they are left no room to actively contemplate the prevailing discursive horizons. In the following sections it is argued that structures of silence in various ways constitute the horizons of public exchanges. Section (II) discusses Foucault's reflections upon how discourses are constituted by the silencing of certain phenomena. In section (III), Derrida's analysis of how silence preconditions the iterability of language and the silent resistance of the alter ego is discussed. In section (IV) we discuss Heidegger's analysis of how silent listening to the openings and stillness of Being preconditions that public exchanges do not deter into idle talk. The concluding section (V) discusses how silence only becomes democratically significant in tandem and tension with ongoing conversations. It is argued that an awareness of the importance of silence in the constitution of linguistic exchanges may further a reflection upon the prevailing discursive horizons that may ultimately further more creative and challenging exchanges.

## I. Repressive Expectations of Communicative Engagement

One attempt to bring out how the lack of silence may be problematic in democratic public spheres may be found in Deleuze's outburst from 1995:

...it's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves.<sup>7</sup>

The worry has been rearticulated by Hardt and Negri in 2012<sup>8</sup> as a reaction to a situation in which the "little gaps of solitude" naturally diminish even further with the emergence of the internet. Deleuze and Hardt/Negri agree on the Spinozist point that even though expressions *may* be liberating because they can create counterpublics that oppose established structures of power, expressions are not inherently emancipatory. Depending on the position of the enunciative acts within the strategic field, expressions can be a tool for inducing the subaltern to embrace his or her position, to identify with it.<sup>9</sup> It is thus important to detach ourselves from the view that the quantity and multiplicity of expressions by themselves are indicators of the quality of the public spheres. Freedom of expression does not equal freedom of thought. It is not sufficient that we have the ability to express ourselves, because the very expectations of actually doing so carries a continuous enslavement of the prevailing discursive structures of thought.

In Deleuze's reflections<sup>10</sup> the above outburst is coupled with a critique of the ways in which "journalists have taken over literature".<sup>11</sup> This is a problem because it drains literature of its constitutional distance, putting it in the service of discursively pre-shaped states of affairs. Against this

form of complicity, Deleuze argues that an important aspect in having something to say is the non-referential moment: the moment in which the given does not dominate, but rather, creativity, novelty emerges.<sup>12</sup>

In other words: the value of expression as a means to emancipation is proportional to the challenge implicit in the very form of the expression to existing structures of communication.<sup>13</sup> According to Deleuze this happens by letting oneself be challenged by what seems impossible:

A creator who isn't grabbed around the throat by a set of impossibilities is no creator. A creator's someone who creates their own impossibilities, and thereby creates possibilities.<sup>14</sup>

According to Deleuze the main problem with the journalistic approach is that the ideal of merely referencing the given reinforces the eternal recycling of the same. Secondly, and more importantly the mere repetition stifles the concepts of the participants, they become something they cannot pass. It induces a certain specific view of the necessity of the given that disempowers the question of why it is given, and how it became the state of affairs that we must accept.

This thinking in necessities is according to Deleuze a tool used to foreclose emancipatory thought. In democratic exchanges it is important not to let oneself be caught up in prevailing horizons of understanding. For democratic conversations to be fruitful it is decisive that participants understand that the categories of our understanding are the products of our manufacture – and as such can be reconfigured.

This is what is entailed by embedding the creative within a context of conceptual and pragmatic possibilities and impossibilities. If public exchanges are reduced to statements circling around some canonical state of affairs, the exchanges become, at best, reformist, and at worst, sterile. On a deeper level, participants stop challenging each other about important things, and tend to divert argument into fiercely contested trivialities and unimportant symbols. This is not to say that democratic exchanges should ignore facts and states of affairs, but it is important that facts and states of affairs are treated within varying focuses and categorizations, because this will make varying aspects of reality appear as real, relevant, necessary, impossible, etc.

Towards the end of his essay, Deleuze reflects upon a possible alternative to the prevailing mindlessness of the public spheres. The previous quote on the creator is further elaborated. The creator is someone who bangs his head on the wall, because...

...it's by banging your head on the wall that you find a way through. You have to work on the wall, because without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight, the exit that is creation, the power of falsity that is truth. [... S]tyle requires a lot of silence and work to make a whirlpool at some point[... Y]ou don't get a style just by putting words together, combining phrases, using ideas. You have to open up words, break things open, to free earth's vectors.<sup>15</sup>

According to Deleuze it is thus important to work on the styles of engagement. This takes, however, “a lot of silence” because it is the words themselves that need to be opened, and this can only be done by work on the walls that surround the words. While we are engaged in public conversations, we are captured by the “walls” that constitute the meaning of the words. These walls constitute the style of articulations, style that injects “flight” into the articulated expressions.

These are strong metaphysical claims. We have previously<sup>16</sup> shown how they can be translated into certain concrete strategies for creating spaces for silence in the public spheres – spaces that can eventually help citizens to “find something to say”. However, when working with the notion of silence, we are confronted with the problem that every articulation of silence and its problems or gains, risks reducing its real implications. Silence stops being silent when it is articulated. This paradox cannot be

solved because it is founded in the very relation between language and silence. Thus, every articulation of ways in which silence supports or hinders democracy must presuppose specific accounts of silence that cannot claim adequacy, that is, conventions that will lead to a normative interpretation of silence.

In this paper we will, however, try to bring out (parts of) the diversity in the ways silence can be understood in its relation to discursive practices. We will in the following sections, through readings of Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger, elaborate various ways in which silence may be said to constitute the walls of communicative engagement. It will be argued that silence plays a role in the creation of discursive objects, that silence is decisive for the possibility of articulating ourselves since it preconditions linguistic iterability and intersubjective relations, and that silent listening to the openings and stillness of Being preconditions that public exchanges do not deter into idle talk.

## II. Silence as a Precondition for Discursive Objects

In 1963 Derrida famously commented on Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. This started a long debate until 1973. Even though the debate as such was not always very constructive, Derrida's text could in our context be applauded for making the notion of silence a prime key in reading the book.

Actually, this should not be surprising, since Foucault himself in the original preface opened the book with the remark that he wanted to write "l'archéologie de ce [i.e. the silence of madness] silence" ("the archaeology of that silence"<sup>17</sup>), which resulted from a locatable incident: the theoretically absolute separation between madness and sanity in the modern era. Even though a superficial reading of the book might suggest that the book is about how the language of psychiatry emerged, Foucault's original impetus was to show how this emergence (the emergence of a language) was based on the emergence of a silence, how the psychiatric approach as we know it essentially was developed in tandem with an understanding of madness as outside possible articulation.

Some of the force of Derrida's critique probably stems from his translation of Foucault's attempt to write an *archaeology* of silence into an attempt of writing a *history* of silence.<sup>18</sup> For Foucault there is a decisive difference between archaeology and history in that while history tries to bring the past into the present through (articulate) documents, archaeology rather seeks (in Foucault's interpretation) to bring the past into the present as silent monuments.<sup>19</sup>

It is of course not without problems to transfer the silence of archaeology to written books. If one should translate this move one might say that Foucault does not commit himself to represent his findings on madness in a coherent metanarrative. In trying to make the described developments stand without some grand story he can be less selective and more faithful to the actual articulations of madness of the investigated lapses – he can show how there actually *are* some incoherent or inconsistent changes throughout history. The aim of his work is to represent the view of the investigated lapses as they were positively articulated at the time.

Foucault demonstrates how madness in the Classical Age, due to the view that reason and freedom gains an independent moral authority, gets a role as something that cannot be contained in language. This exclusion is prepared by a physical exclusion in the hospital. One might argue that the physical silencing of the madman in a certain sense is an important condition for the development of a discursive practice that allows us to substitute, for "man", a model of reason and calculation. In these discourses madness becomes the contrast to reason, the remainder that is left out in the articulation of man. Foucault's structuralist affiliation is obvious in the argument: Madness is important in the signification of reason, because we need to understand what reason *is not*, in order to understand what reason actually *is*.<sup>20</sup> Madness is seen as a positive realization of the absence of reason<sup>21</sup>. However with the emergence of the humanistic understanding of man, the absence of reason and rationality becomes

something that keeps the “actual” man captive,<sup>22</sup> and thus something that must be treated.<sup>23</sup> But in order for this to be possible it is necessary that the madman radically submits himself to the doctor. Thus the madman’s stuttering articulations must be treated as well, that is, plunged into a silence that would allow for the speech acts of reason to emerge<sup>24</sup> – “unreason remains mute, and forgetting comes from the great silent wounds within man”.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault thus suggests a reading of how the humanistic discourses about the relationship between reason and madness can be said to impose silence on madness by delimiting the space of articulation itself. The question about the underlying archaeological approach is, however, still open. Derrida’s critique of Foucault for trying to articulate some kind of fundamental silence attached to madness<sup>26</sup> misses its target: Foucault does not claim any of the existing shapes of silence to be anything more than that: existing. Foucault merely wants to describe the ways madness and silence actually evolved – and how the developing rational view of humanity was connected with this emergence. It is a fundamental part of Foucault’s approach exactly *not* to claim any underlying essential features behind the positively given phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Rather one could say, that the silencing of madness is a kind of remainder from the discursive articulation of the reasonable man. The silenced madness does, however, not disappear – it still needs to be handled. But the more efficient the silencing, the more externally it will appear in relation to the discursive horizons.

However, even though Foucault is not committed to some kind of essential silence, Derrida still has a relevant point as to the archaeological gaze, which necessarily carries a logic that in itself is constituted by silence. Derrida objects against the foucaultian analyses that the pointing out of silenced objects by itself is constituted by a silence that is an inherent part of language (“silence plays the irreducible role of that which bears and haunts language, outside and *against* which alone language can emerge...”<sup>28</sup>).

Derrida can relevantly ask what kind of language makes possible the archaeological writing of history?<sup>29</sup> The archaeological gaze necessarily creates a historical *document* because it seems to know, in advance, that varying and differing events and monuments that can be grouped together as varying instances of madness. Even as it tries to show the accumulation of traits that lead to the definition of madness, it carries with it, silently, its own schema that identifies madness.

Even though it is relevant to reflect upon the ways in which discursive practices create silence (as Foucault does), it is also relevant to reflect upon the ways in which the discursive practices themselves are constituted by structures of silence. Derrida claims that it is only possible to reflect upon discursive silence through a logos that is itself based upon silence.<sup>30</sup>

This is a strong claim that we will now investigate. Foucault has shown some ways in which silence is the creation of a certain set of discursive structures; Derrida will show us that silence is also what *creates* discursive horizons.

### III. Silence as a Precondition for Iterability and the Alter Ego

To understand this approach, we turn to Derrida’s critique of Husserl in *La voix et le phénomène* (1967), in which he takes up a theme from Husserl’s later writings, in which phenomena appear in a crossroad between the actually perceived experiences and an ideality that constitutes its iterability. Derrida recognizes the idea but rejects the underlying metaphysics of presence that is part of Husserl’s claim: That the underlying representation and ap-presentation constitutes a modification of something.<sup>31</sup> To the contrary, according to Derrida:

What in the two cases is called a modification of presentation (*re*-presentation, *ap*-presentation) (*Vergegenwärtigung* or *Appräsentation*) is not something that happens to presentation but rather conditions it by bifurcating it *a priori*.<sup>32</sup>

Two important notes on the quote: On the one hand, for Derrida it is decisive to understand that ideality does not modify something that could be given in a more primordial state. The ideality *constitutes* the possibility of something being perceived as presently given. Secondly, the ideality in Derrida's view is not (contrary to Husserl) to be understood as a keeping-together (retention and protention), but instead, ideality constitutes an *a priori fissure*, a dissemination. This theme, to which Derrida returns again and again in his work, is key to Derrida's famous deconstructive stance. But the density of the argument here certainly needs elaboration.

The bifurcating ideality is reflected in varying ways throughout Derrida's work. In the early phase he contemplates it through words like "différance", "trace", "reserve", "supplement", "margins".<sup>33</sup> Even though the important sixth chapter of *Le voix et le phénomène* carries the title "La voix qui garde le silence" ("The Voice That Keeps Silence") Derrida does not reflect systematically upon silence in the book. Probably because he seeks to get free from the phonologic perspective. But as seen from his critique of Foucault, silence does play a role comparable to what we are talking about here. The Derrida-quote from the previous section thus continues:

Although the silence of madness is the absence of a work, this silence is not simply the work's epigraph, nor is it, as concerns language and meaning, outside the work. Like nonmeaning, silence is the work's limit and profound resource.<sup>34</sup>

Silence is thus not merely an outside of language (in its organization as work, with its beginning, middle and end): it is also what founds it. Silence can in Derrida's outlook be seen as the non-presence that founds presence. Silence constitutes the *representative* function of language. For signification to emerge from our experiences we need an ideality that constitutes iterability.<sup>35</sup> Temporality is certainly a crucial element of iterability, however the Husserlian ideas of retention and protention are inadequate, because they imply that signification emerges from a keeping together, a synthesis. Derrida, however, emphasizes that significance also presupposes that something is occluded – silenced. Signification can only happen focally, as some parts of the present are brought out as more relevant to whatever topic or paradigm is at hand than others. If everything is equally significant, there is no significance.

To take an example: If we are to make sense of a concrete conversation between agents as an interview, we must have some sense that this concrete example has something in common with other "similar" cases simply in order to understand that this is an interview. And by articulating it as an "interview" we imply that this similarity is what is important in this context. But this can merely be done through *abstraction* – i.e. other aspects of the concretely given experiences (e.g. that they happen at other places, at other times, other people are involved, different subjects, etc.) are *less* important. Without this abstraction it would not be possible to realize that this is an interview – in similar ways as other interviews. Iterability would not be possible.

The Husserlian ideas of protention and retention are unfortunate because they imply synthesis. Derrida suggests that the ideality should rather be understood as a *trace* that essentially happens as a retraction or erasure.<sup>36</sup> Derrida's argument is that signification does not primarily happen through synthesis, but through an erasure that dislocates itself. In order for signification to stand out, some element in the focalization must be withdrawn from our attention.<sup>37</sup>

Silence is thus an essential element of the iterability of concepts. Furthermore, Derrida brings out the ways in which the *alter ego* is an essential element in the constitution of signification: If we are to distinguish between fiction and signification, the alter ego is essential. Real signification presupposes the resistance of the alter ego – “...that there is no communication because there is no *alter ego* [...] it is a fiction; and, after all, fiction is only fiction”.<sup>38</sup> The point is that the mere iterability of concepts would flatline into tautology without the existence of the critical *addressee*.<sup>39</sup> Signification presupposes a break or gap between the articulating subject and the alter ego. In this, Derrida draws upon the late-Husserlian point<sup>40</sup> that real significance, as opposed to fictions of fantasy, presupposes a relation to an alter ego defined as a consciousness that is separated from the thinking subject – i.e. the alter ego is out of the thinking subjects control and perceives a world of his- or her own. Non-fictive significance

- 1 Hansen, “The Positive Freedom” and Hansen, *Tal! - sammen*.
- 2 Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis, Discourse and Social Change, Language and power*; Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and socialist strategy*; Entman, “Media framing biases”.
- 3 Simon, “Designing organizations”; Dahlberg, “The Corporate Colonization”; Lanham, *The Economics of Attention*; Wu, *The attention merchants*; Hendricks & Vestergaard, *Fake News*.
- 4 Honneth, *Kampf um Anerkennung*; “Unsichtbarkeit”; *Das Recht der Freiheit*, ch. III.
- 5 Examples of this approach can be found in Thiesmeyer, *Discourse and silencing*; O’Donnell, “Journalism, change and listening practices”; Seshadri, *HumAnimal: race, law, language*; Hansen, “Ethics of the Fourth Estate”; “Hermeneutisk og dekonstruktiv intervention”.
- 6 A similar shift in attention to silence can be found in MacKendrick, *Immemorial silence* and MacLure et al., “Silence as Resistance to Analysis”.
- 7 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 129. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 177.
- 8 Hardt & Negri, *Declaration*, 14-19.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 10 The following analysis of Deleuze’ argument largely mirrors the analyses in Hansen “The Fourth Estate”, section IV. However, we are here going to use it differently in the succeeding sections.
- 11 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 130-131. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 178.
- 12 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 122-126. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 166-172.
- 13 Elaborated in Hansen, “The Fourth Estate”.
- 14 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 133. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 182.
- 15 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 133-134. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 182-183.
- 16 In Hansen, “The Fourth Estate”.
- 17 Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, 160.
- 18 Derrida, “Cogito histoire folie”, 57.
- 19 Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir*, 14-15.
- 20 Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, 170-6.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 202.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 227.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 493-507.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 532-549.
- 25 Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 530. In French: Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, 549.
- 26 Derrida, “Cogito histoire folie”, 58.
- 27 Hansen, “Hackers in Hiding”, sect. 3.
- 28 Derrida, “Cogito History Madness”, 65 – italics in the original; In French: Derrida, “Cogito histoire folie”, 84.
- 29 Derrida, “Cogito histoire folie”, 66.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 60.
- 31 Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 5-6.
- 32 Derrida, “Speech and Phenomena”, 7 – italics in the original; In French: Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 5.
- 33 E.g. Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, ch. VI+VII; *De la grammatologie*, 96-108+110; *Marges de la philosophie*, 13+26-7.
- 34 Derrida, “Cogito History Madness”, 66. In French: Derrida, “Cogito histoire folie”, 84.
- 35 Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 8.
- 36 Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, 25.
- 37 See also Derrida, “Speech and Phenomena”, 95. In French: Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 106.



differs from the fictional by making sense as real for others than ourselves. The perspective of the alter ego materializes in a silent (listening) manner.

To return to the Deleuzian perspective of the public discussion, one might conclude that the structural tie between the concept and its iterability is one factor in the larger notion of the silently listening perspective in which ego and alter ego can theoretically exchange places preconditions the significance of expressions.

To return to the Deleuzian perspective of the public discussion, one might conclude that the iterability of concepts together with the silently listening perspective of the alter ego preconditions the significance of expressions – structures of silence constitute the horizons of possible signification on the one hand, while at the other hand structures the relationship between speakers and listeners.

#### IV. Keeping Silent in the Peel of Stillness

The difference between Foucault and Derrida on notions of silence thus stems from the fact that Foucault analyses ways in which silence is created in discourses, while Derrida analyses the ways in which silence is a precondition for the possibility of discourses as such.

As such this debate mirrors the development in Heidegger's approach to silence. While early Heidegger focuses upon the ways in which silence, as listening, is a constitutive element of Dasein's care-based being in the world, late Heidegger argued that silence is rather (or furthermore) to be understood as a kind of pre-given quality of Being that is constituted before our active engagement as something we have to respect. We will, however, also see that late Heidegger radicalizes the analysis, by emphasizing the ways in which discursive silence is preconditioned by a stillness of Being that is never in the control of the acting agent.

In the early years, mainly in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) but actually also still some years after the *Kehre* in 1933/4,<sup>41</sup> he mainly analyses silence through notions of keeping silent (“*Schweigen*”). In later writings he gradually focuses more on stillness (“*das stillen*” and “*die Stille*”) – starting in the late 1930's around *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, and getting its most articulate formulations in 1950 in the lecture “*Sprache*”, published in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*.

Early Heidegger focuses upon the ways in which the human modality of being carries the possibility of creating silence (by *keeping* silent), and the ways in which this again carries the possibility of language and discursive speech (*redenden Sprechen*)<sup>42</sup>. In *Sein und Zeit* silence is brought up in §34, after the analyses of how Dasein is given in a relation between attunement/affectivity/disposedness (“*Befindlichkeit*” – §29-30) and understanding (“*Verstehen*” – §31-32). Silence is brought up in the analysis of discourse and language in his reflections of how the attunement can be opened through understanding of the situation into various forms of “for-the-sake-of-which” (“*Worumwillen*”). In line with the analysis of early Derrida that was sketched in the preceding section, Heidegger argues that discursive speech is preconditioned by a *hearing* that is based on a *keeping silent*.<sup>43</sup>

In Heidegger's writings reflections upon the alter ego are mainly brought out as analyses of Being-with (“*Mitsein*”), i.e. the analyses of the ways in which Dasein relates to the other Dasein. In order to avoid the degradation of an authentic relationship into one of idle talk (“*Gerede*”<sup>44</sup>), it is important for

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38 Derrida, “Speech and Phenomena”, 70 – italics in the original. In French: Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 78.

39 Derrida, *La voix et le phénomène*, 88+92.

40 Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen*, §49.

41 In Heidegger, *Sein und Wahrheit*.

42 Heidegger, *Being and time*, 151. In German: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 214.

43 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 214.

Heidegger to emphasise that the active practice of discursive speaking should be solidly founded in a *listening*. Like Derrida, Heidegger thus argues that no real understanding is achieved without listening. When it comes to public exchanges, the trouble is, however, that exchanges might very well continue with only a superficial understanding of what the other *might* have said<sup>45</sup> and:

The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its being public, but encourages it.<sup>46</sup>

Heidegger argues that insofar as communicative exchanges detach from the commitment of listening the exchanges deteriorate to something where participants merely focus on how they are themselves able to respond, the answers become an aim by themselves. The conversations thus lose their gravity and become light because they are no longer burdened by the duty to be accountable as to something that might challenge the pre-given expectations of the exchanging agents. Discursive exchanges thus become mere games or plays. They might create a community between the participants, but it is a superficial community because it is not based upon real listening to what is said. It is a community that merely keeps the conversation going.

Heidegger here repurposes the Kantian dictum that thoughts are not truly intelligent if they are not informed by receptive awareness,<sup>47</sup> adding that such kinds of thought may very well dominate in our public discussions. In the words of Deleuze: The main challenge in public discourses is not to be able to express oneself, but rather to make certain that there is a kind of *Boden* in the exchanges. But what, then, is the relationship between *Boden* and silence?

Working on this question, Heidegger argues that clarity and significance is not to be measured by the amount of words spent on prevailing issues:

Speaking a lot about something does not in the least guarantee that understanding is thus furthered. On the contrary, talking at great length about something covers things over and gives a false impression of clarity to what is understood, that is, the unintelligibility of the trivial. But to keep silent does not mean to be dumb.<sup>48</sup>

“Talking at great length” leads to public *Gerede* because it makes no room for authentic silence:

Authentic silence [*Schweigen*] is possible only in genuine discourse. In order to be silent, Da-sein must have something to say, that is, must be in command of an authentic and rich disclosedness of itself.<sup>49</sup>

This is so, because communicative exchanges according to Heidegger must be founded upon the selective opening of understanding and attunement. Reticence (“*Verschwiegenheit*”) is necessary for language to be able to bring out certain aspects of Being as significant – signification happens through a bringing out that happens on the background of something standing back, being silenced.<sup>50</sup> Staying silent is a founding element of understanding, because staying silent is a founding element of listening.

To understand the argument, it is important to notice that silence is not understood as merely “being mute”. The kind of silence in question is when we actually do have something to say, but refrain from it. This kind of keeping silent is not noticeable in a mere exchange of words. In order to

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44 Ibid., 223-224.

45 Ibid., 223.

46 Heidegger, *Being and time*, 157-158. In German: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 224.

47 Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A50-51/B74-75.

48 Heidegger, *Being and time*, 154. In German: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 218-219.

49 Heidegger, *Being and time*, 154. In German: Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 219.

50 Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 219.

notice the void, we have to listen carefully, noticing how what is being said is shaped by what is not being said. It is not enough to notice and understand the words, discursive significance stems from the relationship between the articulated words as selected in a pool of other possible words and utterances. Silence reveals this pool whereby a more diversified significance becomes part of the exchanges.

In less Heideggerian words: If we are to truly challenge each other discursively in speaking and listening, we have to make space for reflections upon the relationship between what is said and what is not said. Otherwise we get public exchanges in which we merely repeat ourselves (in the Deleuzian sense), and public exchanges tend to be exchanges of platitudes, of conventional wisdom. Public exchanges of this kind is found when we (i) focus too much upon maintaining and fortifying previously articulated views, (ii) articulate ourselves in stereotypes of which we have forgotten their underlying structures of silence, or (iii) put our opponents in predefined boxes and interpret everything they say into patterns that confirm our expectations. Early Heidegger characterizes such exchanges as mere exchanges of words (“*Gerede*”). No real conversation takes place because no room is left for really listening to what is being said. We are not puzzled, challenged or stunned by the underlying structures of silence.

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The later Heidegger takes the reflections on silence out of the Dasein setting, and situates silence in a setting of *Ereignis*. This is done by replacing the focus on active reticence or reserve (discourse build upon “*Schweigen*” and “*Verschweigen*”) with a focus upon the ways in which silence happens to us in the “acquiring of Silence” (“*Erschweigen*”). Silence is not only to be thought of as a pointing out of what is missing in discourse:

The word is at the outset the silenced voice of Silence. The silence of the a-byss of appropriation.<sup>51</sup>

This quote certainly very easily takes us towards the lack of words (or linguistic need – *Sprachnot*) of which Gadamer accused Heidegger:<sup>52</sup> If silence lies ahead of the words as a foundation that withdraws itself (Ab-grund), it is evident that language will fall short in trying to come to grips with silence. Heidegger is quite aware of this,<sup>53</sup> and it is actually a significant purpose of his: Heidegger is seeking to articulate how language is essentially embedded in the structures of Being, structures that can be characterized as appropriation through withdrawal. Through his paradoxical analyses he tries to point towards the essential characteristic of language that it reveals through withdrawal, a withdrawal that must get out of sight in order for language to let something else into sight.

Heidegger seeks to bring this withdrawal back into sight – to make us aware that language can only reveal through withdrawal. The point being that even though something is left out of sight (brought to silence) it still speaks:

*Language speaks as the peal of stillness.*<sup>54</sup>

This point is closely connected with the Derridean analyses elaborated previously: The significance-generating stillness is not only constituted by the silence of the speaking agent. The silent stepping out

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51 Das Wort ist anfänglich die erschwiegene Stimme der Stille. Die Stille der Ab-grund der Er-eignung. Heidegger, *Zum Wesen der Sprache*, 152 – my translation.

52 E.g. in Gadamer, “Text und Interpretation”, 332; “Destruktion und Dekonstruktion”, 365-7.

53 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 63. In German: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 79.

54 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 205 – italics in the original. In German: Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 27.

of the conversation (through “*Schweigen*”) is itself preconditioned by the ability of speaking in which stillness speaks.

This kind of stillness is in a certain sense a “remainder” in relation to active speech, listening and silence, and as such is left behind in obscurity – a trace – because if we were to notice it we would have to go outside of the focal framing that the stillness was supposed to make possible. This is why stillness slips between our hands: Something can only be brought forth as significant by keeping something else out of sight. But the remainder still sounds: “Language speaks as the peal of stillness”.

This is certainly tightly connected with the active keeping-silent (“*Schweigen*”) of Dasein as brought out by early Heidegger. Late Heidegger, however, argues that stillness is not exhausted by the keeping silent of Dasein. In order to be able to keep silent, language has to be there already. And language presupposes another kind of stillness – it presupposes that “Stillness stills [...] inasmuch as the difference takes place”.<sup>55</sup>

The idea here is that language is thought as a form of being in which being is “stilled” – Being in its entire complexity is brought to stillness, something withdraws whereby something else stands out as significant. Understanding is preconditioned by this stillness, because the stillness preconditions the difference that (as we saw in the reflections of Derrida) preconditions iterability.

Silence as the active keeping back certainly can happen through an active willed decision of the care focussed Dasein. But Dasein also needs to listen to the appeal (“*Ruf*”) of being.<sup>56</sup> Some differences are pertinent and demands focus and attention.

Returning to Deleuze’ worries, Heidegger can be said to demonstrate how silence preconditions a listening to the ways in which language opens through a silencing and that the entire communicative exchange is preconditioned by the ways in which Being itself becomes approachable through a withdrawal. And insofar as we fail to reflect upon this, public exchanges will run idle. There will be exchanges of words, but the words carry no reflection upon the ways in which words are shaped by structures of silence. Words will be used, repeated, but our heads will not be banged on the walls.

## V. Silence in the Political Field

To summarize the previous sections one can say that while Foucault focuses upon the ways in which silence is a kind of by-product of discursive exchanges that makes possible the articulation of certain issues, phenomena, situations, etc., Derrida focuses upon the ways in which silence is a presupposition for iterability and the silent listening resistance of the other. Early Heidegger too focuses upon the ways in which listening and staying silent precondition substantial expressive exchanges.

In comparison with Foucault, Derrida and early Heidegger, late Heidegger takes the reflections on silence out of the semantic setting (as part of human practice) and brings it into reflections on the general constitution of being. It is the stillness of Being as an a-byss (a ground that withdraws itself) that makes it possible to actively keep silent and listen to the appeal of being.

The question now becomes how this answers the quest articulated by Deleuze above: how is it that the new can arise, can embody creativity, from banging our heads on the wall? What is the democratic relevance of the above analyses on silence? We will argue, that the above analyses demonstrates ways in which silence is part of the walls that we should bang our heads towards. By regaining an awareness of the ways in which structures of silence determine structures of speech, it will be possible to struggle more actively with these structures whereby new structures of silence will replace the old ones, and truly new ideas may be thought and articulated.

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<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 205. In German: Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 205. In German: Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 27.

It is, however, important to be careful here. The analyses of Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger in the previous pages have mainly focused upon semantic and ontological issues. Transferring such reflections to the political is not without its challenges. One obvious challenge here is that if stillness (understood as the stillness of the world we are facing) is foundational for the creation of significance then one might be tempted to conclude<sup>57</sup> that the more stillness the better. Insofar as speech and words are considered to occlude the creative powers of stillness – or, following the audio-visual logic here, to deafen us to them – would an absolute stillness then create an absolute insight? How, indeed, would we recognize such stillness? How would it be distinguishable from the noise of the world, so to speak? Sometimes Heidegger flirts with this thought:

This history that is grounded in Da-sein is the concealed history of the great stillness. Only in such history can a people still *be*.<sup>58</sup>

This talk of a “great stillness” as a necessary condition for the emergence of a “people” certainly differs quite heavily from Deleuze’ idea of creative engagement with impossible assignments. This difference can also be found in Deleuze’ less essentialist account of a “people”. While Heidegger argues that a people is something that can only be founded through an absolute restraint through which a certain “great stillness” can be established, Deleuze on the contrary argues that a people is something that can only be experienced in its *absence* – as a resistance towards something.<sup>59</sup>

The point is that for Deleuze the silence to be valued is not a silence that stays in the contemplative mode. The “people” may be closely connected with forms of silence, but silence is only of value insofar as it constitutes a break from discourse – and only insofar as it as such is brought back into discourse. Silence should be understood not as a fleeing from discourse, but as a pause or break from discourse. A “people”, constituted on the rise of silence, is only of value as an opposition to something.

Similarly with silence: Silence is an important tool in democratic discourses because it introduces or makes us aware of resistances against or paradoxes within the discursive structures.<sup>60</sup> Silence as a resource to contemplation presupposes that we challenge silence itself – without the discursive attempt to overcome the withdrawal of being, there will be no withdrawal.

The above quote about the relationship between the people and the great stillness is from 1936-8, when Heidegger’s rhetoric had veered dangerously towards a mysticism of the “people”. Later Heidegger is less cocksure and essentialist about the issue. Rather he focuses upon how words and stillness are two sides in a strife. Words need stillness to gain significance, just as stillness needs words in order to be able to withdraw:

The word is the Stillness of the Fissure, which Beyng itself as ap-propriating battle between Encounter and Strife puts in the abyss of its lightening.<sup>61</sup>

Stillness is not thought as the mere absence of words, stillness is what shows itself *through* the words – in the insufficiency of the words, as a battle against or confrontation with the words. Translated into a democratic public sphere, this means that silence or stillness should not be thought as a withdrawal from public discourses as such. Rather a re-attention towards the structures of silence that govern our

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57 Even though this would of course be highly un-Heideggerian, since this would conflate beings with Beyng.

58 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 29– italics in the original. In German: Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, 34.

59 Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, 126. In French: Deleuze, *Pourparlers, 1972-1990*, 171-172.

60 Derrida, *Apories*.

61 Das Wort ist die Stille des Risses, den das Seyn selbst als er-eignender Kampf zwischen Entgegnung und Streit in den Abgrund seiner Lichtung hinterlegt. Heidegger, *Zum Wesen der Sprache*, 136 – my translation.

structures of public discourse will re-install an attention towards what is left out of sight in the discourses.

As such a (temporal) withdrawal from public discourses can be understood as resistance towards the prevailing structures of public discourses. The encounter of Beyng that rebels against articulations or wordings. Hereby the horizons of public discourses are challenged and Beyng can gradually come to emerge (as withdrawal) through new articulations or wordings. The world is created anew – whereby new fissures and strives can sound in their stillness.

This can happen in various ways. It can happen through active discourse analyses,<sup>62</sup> it can happen through deconstructions of prevailing horizons of public discourse,<sup>63</sup> it can happen through journalistic interventions into which voices are being heard.<sup>64</sup> Etc. However, all these strategies are conditioned by a rethinking of the role played by silence in public exchanges. As long as silence continues to be thought merely as an obstacle for public exchanges we will fail to realize the political potentials of working consciously with the ways in which what is said is shaped by silence.

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62 Hansen, “Positive Freedom of Public Sphere”; *Tal! - sammen*; “Den dialog-udfordrende journalist”.

63 Hansen, “Positive Freedom of Public Sphere”.

64 Hansen, “The Fourth Estate”.

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