

“Architecture of Silence”

Excerpts from a seminar talk by Szabó Lajos on January 10, 1948

SzL:¹ SILENCE is the living and nurturing background of a person – just as it is the real background of a word. It is what provides the solemn, festive background to the appearance of a person... [thus it is] a stage. – This highlights that organic background without which appearance does not have its [proper] effect... the effect of entering the stage. In music, it is the instrumentation in composition that creates silence... that infinitely rich quality of rest. *Silence* is, as it were, an absolute requisite, the momentum that defines the [specific] architecture. What this silence-requirement is like is the motive postulate of landscape architecture in the broadest sense. What are the power and realizing articulation of this silence-requirement like? – this is the origin of the structure of a culture, a community or society. It determines the sense and degree to which it is a community or a society[?/] The places of persons, types, elites and strata within a community or a hierarchy are all determined by this formula of silence-requirement.

One of these ineffable, magic points is the world of this silence-requirement. In spite of its clear and rational transparency – as the unity and research of language and thought – it is still a magical and ineffable cycle and requirement.

This concrete silence is the universal, sphere-radius-like microscope or telescope whose structure takes up the field lines of reality, and whose inner strength is thus determined by the center of silence.

What kind of hard-shelled protection can the appropriate community or society provide for this organic silence-sensitivity? Very fine and highly sensitive instruments need very robust supporting structures.

KGy: In the bourgeois, middle class way of life, the positive requirement for silence [only] appears in negative forms. The maximal level of inner engrossment, sensitivity... distance... retirement, world peace, recreation, distraction – nostalgia.

SzL: [According to] Kepes: In order to be able to reflect [as a mirror] I must achieve unwavering steadiness. Water-surface. In order to reflect, to be able to/ to know.

Socrates: knowledge is a virtue. – Internally I must meet all human requirements [all requirements of humanity]. *It is ethical sensitivity that enables one to delineate the fine theoretical questions... And it is the versatility of ethical sensitivity that renders the versatility of theoretical sensitivity possible.*

In a physical-physiognomical sense, silence is an organism. It can be physically described; it is not a mood. It has a [definite] structure.

Silence is in opposition to muteness, even in the sense that it is organic. Pause and silence.

KA: Silence: a blank sheet of paper, a basis, purity, serenity... a living, dimensional background... power, articulation, language, alimentation...

KGy: Taoism and Boehme's center-mysticism. – Bible... silence, peace.

The modern notion of world peace is [nothing but] nostalgia and the negative silence of exploitation and violence. – Silence as the etiquette of the mutual approach of inner activities and qualities. – Silence as a required distance, as a prerequisite of talking to each other.

¹ The participants of the seminar were Szabó Lajos (SzL), Kunszt György (KGy) and Kotányi Attila (KA). The latter two were architecture students at the time and the conversation was taken down by the two of them.

SzL: We can't keep silent in French.

Understand, listen, silence. – Intuition. It is a very rare, borderline phenomenon for anyone to have an intuitive idea while surrounded by an awful lot of yelling. *Silence and scientific research. The racket of ideas and marketplace of questions.*

Communal-societal hierarchy – prevalent forms of materialism; these are determined by their relation or repulsion to silence.

Typology, characterology.

We can't expect to have an ode to silence even from a Democritian materialism.

Kepes: the blare of material energies. If they do not transform into the hard shell of silence, they out roar the transfixing silence.

If I have a toothache I am *stupider to shades* by leaps of dimensions than if I don't have a toothache.

The birth of the word out of silence.

BASILIDES (a gnostic of the 2nd century) establishes silence as the essence of God.

Silence as the ultimate dimensional background... the birth of the word out of silence...

Logos-theory... Father–Son.

It is when trinitary science sets the structure of silence as the subject of inquiry that the birth or genesis of the human word becomes tractable.

The birth of the Word out of silence: from God... God spoke, God's pronouncement.