



**HAL**  
open science

## Engaging with Silence Interview with Vincent Crapanzano

Chowra Makaremi

► **To cite this version:**

Chowra Makaremi. Engaging with Silence Interview with Vincent Crapanzano. *Altérités*, 2008, Thinking commitment, 5 (2). hal-03034510

**HAL Id: hal-03034510**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03034510>**

Submitted on 29 Jan 2021

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



# Engaging with Silence

## Interview with Vincent Crapanzano

---

Chowra Makaremi  
Université de Montréal

*Tuhami closed his eyes and was silent for a time.*<sup>1</sup>

*From an ethnographic experience immersed in the narrations of a Moroccan Hamdushi to a collection of essays on the paradoxes inherent to interpretation, Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire, Vincent Crapanzano's works anchor the project of knowledge in a demand for creativity. They are an invitation to reflect on ethnographic practice and writing through both a commitment to theory and careful accounts on issues of presence on the field. Exploring boundaries of ethnography, Vincent Crapanzano has, in many ways, worked with silence, which is the focus of the following interview – although there is nothing less “focused” and as polysemic as silence. An occasion to think on engagement in a “minor key”.*

*In Tuhami, the author's singular approach to live narratives, the relationship to the interviewee's voice and the attempt to make it a new place also implies the restitution of silences, which open, in the process of writing, a space of reflection on the subjective encounter and the ethnographer's emotions. Here, the notion of “engagement” refers foremost to a form of commitment with one's subject: it involves the silence of the ethnographer in an economy of interpellations of responsiveness, where a certain art of “self effacement”<sup>2</sup> comes into play with the necessities of an “active presence”. Silence also relates to the nature of some fields. It receives a specific density in burning political contexts and uneasy moral situations as the whites of South Africa remind the ethnographer during the apartheid: “The first habit we instill is the*

---

<sup>1</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent, 1980, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent. *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

*habit not to ask questions.”<sup>3</sup> While addressing some heavy political and social issues of our contemporary world, it seems that Vincent Crapanzano avoids the (often over-crowded) eye of the cyclone to locate his researches in places and histories marked by ambivalence. In these twilights, silence can be a crystallizing process, like the silence of the Harkis, those Algerians who backed the French during the war of independence. Exploring a field that itself is a kind of collective blackout in French contemporary society, Vincent Crapanzano looks at how the children of the Harkis experience the silenced wounds of their fathers, yet without exactly knowing them. Indeed, while the theme of silence has been an undersong to the anthropologist’s reflections on presence and interpretation, it has also become a subject of study. In a radically different way, his theoretical essay on Imaginative Horizons devoted a chapter (“THE BETWEEN”) on investigating silence beyond the psychological, opening the analyses to the esthetic and the spiritual. While reframing the question of engagement around the relationship between the ethnographer and their subject, the interview explores how silences enlighten and nurture this “complex play of desire and power”<sup>4</sup> that we call engagement. Further, it sheds light on some concerns that are at the heart of Vincent Crapanzano’s work. Questioning silence as a hermeneutic tool and a maieutic process but also as a potential “danger” initiates a reflection on the work of emotions and the otherness of the others as speaking beings.*

*Vincent Crapanzano is a professor of anthropology and comparative literature at the City University of New York, Graduate Center.*

\*\*\*

*Usually we see engagement in the field as a way to break silence: we talk with people, about them or for them – for a specific group. But isn’t there another way of being involved with one’s field, which is, on the contrary, to keep silent?*

**V. Crapanzano:** I think there are at least two principal kinds of silence: the silence for that which isn’t to be heard and clandestine silence, which is tied to the secret, the secretive. I have always felt that all the recent talk about the public and private spheres has avoided consideration of other spheres of social engagement. In his original work<sup>5</sup>, Habermas also talked about the intimate sphere, which has received far less attention than the public and the private. It has often been incorporated into the private sphere. What strikes me as really interesting is that, despite what was happening in Eastern Europe and elsewhere in totalitarian regimes when Habermas wrote, the clandestine sphere was ignored. The clandestine is what you say behind closed doors; it is potentially dangerous. What is said is threatening to those in power. The clandestine is characterized by mistrust and fear of betrayal. You cannot fully trust even those who are closest to you. Members of your own family even.

The anthropologist may be invited to clandestine meetings. I have been. For the anthropologist, the clandestine is always dangerous and intrusive. It raises moral and ethical questions. Should one participate in such meetings? There

<sup>3</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent, 1986, *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. New York: Vintage.

<sup>4</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent, 1995, “Comment on Objectivity and Militancy: A Debate.” *Current Anthropology* 36(3):421.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, Jürgen, 1989[1962], *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity.

has to be sufficient trust – which I doubt is ever full. Anthropologists have to realize that there are complex and often hidden reasons for an invitation. Their hosts may want them to pass on information, whether immediately or in their writing. Sometimes they just want to give the anthropologist an idea that there is something happening. Sometimes they may want to use the presence of the anthropologist to communicate something to their enemies: an affirmation of their connections with outsiders. As an anthropologist ought you to accept such an invitation, even as a neutral observer, say, to a revolutionary cell? Or a right-wing one? You have, of course, to recognize the pull of self-imaginings – of the possibility of adventure – in deciding whether to participate in them. You have to evaluate your decision against the importance you attribute to any possible findings. Against the possible harm it may do to any of the people in the community you are working in or the wider community. In a sense you find yourself in an impossible situation since you are also making a statement in refusing to participate – one that will influence responses to you and thereby the data you collect.

When I interviewed certain people in South Africa during Apartheid (particularly people of color), telling silences played an important role. The people I was interviewing really had no idea who I was. I'd say I was recommended by so and so. Or, they had been told by some one they knew that I was a "good guy." There was always an element of mistrust in these meetings because the political tension was so great. The response to some of my questions was silence. Sometimes the silence indicated a simple refusal to answer the question. It often signaled danger. At other times, according to the context, it indicated an affirmative or a negative response to my question. In either case I would change the subject. I didn't push because I recognized the danger or knew the answer. Often my question was answered, by indirection, in the conversation that followed. Such conversations were almost always coded. What was said literally was what could not be held against my interlocutor, say, in a court of law, but what was communicated was communicated through silences and innuendoes. Indeed, innuendoes depend on silence – on what is not said, what cannot be said.<sup>6</sup>

Silences punctuate all conversations. They may simply be pauses. They define the rhythm of conversation. Aposiopesis, as the rhetoricians refer to silences, mark the genre, conventions, and style of an exchange. As a rhetorical figure silence may be taught as if was by the ancient rhetoricians. Silences may be persuasive, appellative, seductive, suspenseful, or bullying. They may emphasize the significance of what has been or is about to be said. They may suggest the depth or difficulty of an exchange, the anxiety it produces, the possibility of communicative breakdown. They can be threatening. They may be thought to reveal the mental and emotional state of the speakers or their evaluation of their interlocutors. The witting or unwitting use of silence obviously varies from society to society, occasion to occasion, individual to individual, speech genre to speech genre.

In all field situations, as in life generally, there are points where you really want certain kinds of information from your informant but realize very quickly that you cannot ask them directly. You have to wait, so you are being silent in the sense that you are not talking about something you want to talk about. This reticence is not quite the same thing as silence, but it haunts the conversation. No doubt it affects one's interlocutors. "When do I say it?" "Can I ever say it?"

---

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of coded language and court speech see my concluding essay in *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire* (Crapanzano 1992).

“Will my interlocutor understand?” “Will he know what he is getting into...” So you circle around and around that subject, sometimes not ever getting to it and sometimes you find out without ever knowing in concrete terms what it is. What exactly is being conveyed in a situation like that? What is the relationship between silence and the *non-dit*? I think the *non-dit* is in a sense a form of silence, but it is not a form of silence that is necessarily recognizable in its immediacy. The *non-dit* is not just something that is consciously avoided. It may simply be framed out of cognition. But this does not mean that it is without influence on what transpires. We have to recognize that our utterances, our conversations, are enveloped by the *non-dit* – in silence. Can we call this silence, this absence, this emptiness, this space of articulatory impossibility, the *dehors*?

*So, in the field experience, there is a close relationship between silence and danger?*

**V. Crapanzano:** One expression of silence I experienced was on the Navajo reservation. It involves the role of silence in a sequence of stories. When I first came to the valley where I did fieldwork, I was told a joke at several of the camps I visited. “Ah! Here’s the anthropologist. You know the definition of a Navajo family?” And they went on to say: “A Navajo family is a mother, a father, children, and an anthropologist.” They’d laugh. I laughed too. I had heard it before; it’s a cliché by now. Days later, people began telling me about a psychologist who had come to the area and given them pictures to look at. They had to say what they thought when they saw the pictures. He paid them five dollars and left without explaining what he was doing. It turned out that he was a quite well known psychologist. He had been administering a Thematic Apperception Test, which can be very anxiety provoking – particularly if you don’t know what it’s all about. The Navajo felt that he had stolen something from them – what, they did not know. So they told me that story, and I was sympathetic with them because I thought what the psychologist had done was atrocious. In fact, I knew the psychologist. He had actually asked me to do work for him on a similar project in the Yucatan. I had refused. Then several months later, when I was about to leave the reservation, I was told another story. It was about a drifter who had arrived in the valley in the winter a few years earlier. It had been very cold and they found him freezing on the road. One of the Navajo families took him in. He remained with them all winter and they fed him. Everybody kind of liked him. And then, one day in the spring, he disappeared and they found one of the girls in the family raped and murdered. There was, I believe, a reference to my leaving which was very powerful. I realized later that through these stories the Navajos were describing their reaction to me over time. They were a way of telling me about their suspicions of me. I was first the anthropologist in the joke; then the psychologist who was objectifying – and stealing from – them; and, finally, and most disturbing, the dangerous drifter. Since I had not acted like any of these characters, the story sequence demonstrated, I believe, their final confidence in me. Of course they never explained any of this to me. It was the silent surround of the stories that was most powerful. I have mulled over it for years.

*When we talk about silence, we are talking about a whole range of things: there is a difference between, for instance, ellipses and blanks.*

**V. Crapanzano:** What is silence? It is a catchword. The blank and ellipsis are modes of (indicating) silence. There are, as I've said, many different kinds of silence. I think this is one of the points that disturbs me very much about an awful lot of linguists who do these very technical transcriptions and time silence, that is the gap between words and phrases. But they do not consider that the silences are not just blanks. They are highly communicative. They may indicate reflection or anxiety, happiness, boredom or resistance to answering. The measurement-linguists do not consider these things. They are simply timing. I think this is absurd. This is a kind of positivism of the worse sort. The meaning and evaluation of silence is not revealed by its length but by the way it is framed by context and co-text. If, for example, you are talking to someone you have angered they can yell back at you but they can also close their mouth and refuse to talk. This is clearly a silence that relates to the anger, but it is also a containment of the anger. It is a very different silence than, for example, the silence that accompanies the telling of a story – the silence as a device for suspense. Anthropology is often caught up by the temptation of naïve empiricism. It's a crutch. I say "naïve empiricism" because everything we have said is empirical. A silence is 2.5 seconds, which may be satisfying the empirical needs of the linguists but to say "it's a sad silence" is still an empirical qualification, complex to be sure, which has to be judged hermeneutically, in terms not only of context but our judgment of the person describing the silence as sad. So we dismiss these things that want a subjective response. But subjective responses are objective facts, and it seems to me that these have to be considered, for otherwise we are throwing away an awful lot...

Some silences are suspenseful. They may even occur between phrases in a straightforward narrative. Suspense is stronger when there is a pause in non-conventional narratives, staccato ones, in which there are unexpected changes of subject or style. Suspense plays an important role in rhetoric but also in interpersonal relations. I am thinking of exchange systems, for example. I want to give you a gift, and I am not sure you're going to accept it. This is always a possibility any gift giver faces. Reciprocally the recipient is not sure he or she will actually receive the gift. The gift giver can always change his or her mind. On the other hand, the recipient is also not sure that he is going to get the gift, and he is not sure that he will take it. There is, then, in any exchange a moment of suspenseful silence. Once the gift has actually changed hands, the risk, at least for the moment, has ended. In fact, the acceptance is the first counter-prestation, one which has been ignored by those exchange theorists who only follow the movement of concrete objects and persons. They miss the complex temporality of exchange and the role silence plays in it. Even at the signing of a contract, there is always a point, an asymptotic point, a highly dramatic point of silence. One may talk of trust before the signing or afterward but not at that moment. Were we to say, at the moment of signing, "You see you can trust me," doubt would be cast on the good faith of the parties to the contract. They might even abandon the agreement. In a certain sense, trust has to be set in silence, to be wrapped with silence. Can we say that at this moment silence is trust's signifier? We might also speak of the potential violence of the moment, but consideration of that would lead us astray.

*In terms of ethnographic writing, how can we describe the "texture" of silence?*

**V. Crapanzano:** That is an interesting question. I think this depends on ones

aim, on what you are doing. Describing a conversation that you had with somebody, a life history that somebody tells you, or a ritual you have witnessed. We, anthropologists, have perhaps too much faith in the word – the literal word, in all its sonic or scriptural materiality, the quotable word, the transcribable word. Sometimes I think we fetishize the word. Unlike the novelist – certainly the 19<sup>th</sup> century novelist – we tend not to put in our own understanding. We don't normally write in our notes or in the texts we produce, "Jacques was silent; it was a sad silence; he looked mournful", even though we are sure of his mournfulness. (I should note that some anthropologists have now begun paying more attention to their subjective evaluations of what they are describing or quoting). We are capable of noting Jacques' silence. That's easy. It can be "measured". We can also tell by his expression that he is sad, and we can tell by the length of silences the depth of sadness. But it seems we don't trust these perceptions (though we live our lives by them). I think their exclusion reflects, among other things, our attitude towards emotions. We prefer the technical to our own perceptions as if our own perceptions were not important. We forget that our informant is also responding to us – to our expressions, our silences. I think that is a big mistake because we ourselves, even if we do not recognize it, are responsive to emotions, pain, etc. If you have asked a question and there is a silence, and you see it as a sad silence, that perception is going to affect how you ask the next question or say the next thing. Not only does our focus on the technical sterilize the conversation but it distorts our understanding of the dynamics – the complex interlocutory dynamics. There is one example I can give. I was in Morocco, and I was starting to work in a particular shantytown where I ended up doing a lot of fieldwork. I was going around meeting people and taking genealogies, because that was what I was taught to do at the time. I was talking to one man, a sad sort of man, but kind. He was very friendly, very welcoming, and he gave me his genealogy, which was quite extensive. He mentioned who certain people were and so on. When we got to his own children, he saddened (at least that is how I remember it retrospectively, though I did not note it at the time). I asked him if he had any children, and he said yes. I asked: "Are there any boys?" He was silent. He just closed his mouth and absolutely would not say a word, which seemed very odd. I pushed. I said: "Don't you have a son?" He remained mute, absolutely mute. There was a very long silence. Then I said something – I don't remember exactly what. "I don't understand, you told me about everybody else, you told that you have children, and you won't tell me whether or not you have a son..." Again, a very long silence. Then he mumbled that his son had died two days before. I had not known this. I had tears in my eyes. I am not sure what those tears were. Had I noted his sadness, had I given it the importance it deserved, rather than insisted on collecting data, I would not have pushed him. I learned my lesson. I should add one thing. Those tears helped my fieldwork more than anything. I became human; we became friends almost immediately. Word must have got around because people were much more open with me after that.

*For you, "writing silence" implies the question of emotions on the field...?*

**V. Crapanzano:** We have to recognize that we are always emotionally engaged. Our perceptions have always to be measured against our emotions as best we can. They are not simply in us but are responsive to the complex situation in which we find ourselves and can never fully grasp. You may have a "wrong emotion", but it is still there. The emotions that lie behind our

silences – the silences themselves – may be read differently. To play on Roland Barthes' words: silence is an occasion for interpretation. Is it a reflective silence? A silence of relief? A silence that hides the desire to actually say what you are really thinking? Or a silence from an incapacity to speak? Our own silences may at times appear autonomous. They may envelop us. Let me give you another example of silence in the field. This time it was my own silence. While I was in Morocco, two of my informants asked me if I believed in the djinns. I was caught because I did not. At the same time, I was afraid of saying I did not, because I might disturb our relationship or cut it off completely. I was driven to a silence. The problem with that silence was that I knew that they knew that I was trying to figure out how to get out of the question. People are very shrewd and they are particularly shrewd when they are confronted with an outsider who is puzzling. It was the most frustrating of all silences, because I knew very well that I was communicating through that silence what I did not want to communicate. The cruelest lie may lie in being silent.

All the techniques we employ in field research, in so far as they involve communication, at some point, involve silence. The silence of thinking it out, the silence of wanting to change the subject, the silence of indicating that one does not want to talk about it, etc. But there is another technique, which I hesitate to call psychoanalytic. I believe there is an immense difference between what anthropologists do and what psychoanalysts do. I think that the conflation of the two or even thinking of them as having the same dynamics is incorrect. But using a psychoanalytic technique, like free association is another matter. I pose a question, I let the person answer it, and in certain instances, I will be silent for quite a while. I think that usually the person whom I am interviewing will continue to talk, and their talk becomes looser. My silence goes on. There is certain nervousness, certain anxiety perhaps. But my silence can also be freeing. Insightful we might say. Such moments can be very informative. I can give an example from my fieldwork in Morocco. Among the Hamadsha – the religious brotherhood I studied – the demonically (the *djinn*) possessed were ritually entrapped. Once they had been struck or possessed by a demon, they had to fulfill certain obligations “the *djinn* imposed” – to wear the demon's favored color, to burn certain incense, to eat or not eat certain foods, to make a yearly pilgrimages to the Hamadsha saints' sanctuaries, and occasionally to sponsor an exorcistic ceremony. If they failed to meet these obligations, they were susceptible to demonic attack. When I asked the Hamadsha about their life and particularly their illness trajectory, I found out that on a number of occasions they had been demonically possessed or attacked. When I asked them directly or indirectly – or sometimes I did not even ask them – why they had been possessed or attacked again, they usually explained that they had failed to carry out one of more of the obligations the demon imposed on them. Most often they failed to make the annual pilgrimage or sponsor a commemorative ceremony because they did not have the money or they thought it no longer important. Sometimes they claimed to have done something – they did not know exactly what – that offended the demon. Now many anthropologists like Paul Radin (1957) had observed this ritual entrapment and interpreted it as a sort of shamanistic exploitation. They left it at that. Once a Hamdushi told me of his ritual failure, I stopped asking questions and remained silent, sometimes for what seemed to me to be an inordinately long time. Sometimes, but not always, the Hamdushi would then begin to talk about the everyday events that occurred around the time that he (or she) had been struck again, and usually they involved negligence or moral fault for which we in our psychological idiom would say was guilt-inspiring or shameful. The most dramatic of these was



when a man who had explained his attack on failing to make an annual pilgrimage told me that as he was tending his little son he became distracted and the son fell in the fire and was scalded by boiling water in a teapot and died. What became clear, to me at least – and I would not have learned this if I had not been silent at that time – was that the ritual fault was a sort of cover for the moral fault. There seemed to me to be two parallel but distinctive idioms: the ritual and the quotidian. An intolerable thought or act in the quotidian was almost immediately rearticulated as a ritual fault. What was most interesting was that despite a “bar” between the two modes of articulation, the Hamadsha seemed possessed of an uncanny savvy.<sup>7</sup>

*The silence was the passing from one level to another?*

**V. Crapanzano:** Exactly. It worked the other way also. Sometimes I would be silent and the Hamadsha themselves would appreciate the crossing of idioms and see a connection they had not seen before. It was a kind of insight – I suppose we can call it that. Suddenly, there was an “aha”. That silence can be very beneficial – you might say therapeutic. But let us be very cautious because it can actually be very disturbing. You do not necessarily want to know the secrets behind all these defensive structures.

*In some situations, silence can be experienced as a way of “breathing” or getting out of certain assigned subjectivities. As far as anthropology does not have a therapeutic, healing purpose, how far, then, does the anthropologist have the “right” to invest people’s silence, or interfere with their silence?*

**V. Crapanzano:** First of all, there is a dimension to all anthropological engagement, which is therapeutic or potentially therapeutic, or potentially destructive. I think this is true of any kind of intimate discussion – in the very wide sense. Somebody feels sad, for example, and you talk to them as a friend, and at a certain point, through talking, they are able to rearticulate the cause of their sadness or just gain a new perspective on it. This has a positive – you could say therapeutic – effect. This certainly happens in the field, when you reach the point of having intimate, trusting relations with your informants. (I always hesitate to use “informant” since the relationship it suggests precludes such intimacy and trust.) In fact, when such moments occur you become friends and have all the obligations – the concern – that friendship requires. These obligations sometimes interfere with the “professional” relationship your research demands. These are always difficult moments from both a psychological and an ethical point of view. I have no simple solution for resolving such conflicts. All I can say is that one has to be careful to respect an informant’s – a friend’s – silence. As a friend you may, under certain circumstances, try to break it if you sincerely believe it will be helpful. But, if your only reason for breaking it is to further your research, then I would think it is unethical. Posed abstractly the question of breaking another’s silence seems unanswerable, but in everyday life we do it all the time. We must not forget that most of the time we are in the field we are relating to people in a very human, a very everyday fashion. Sometimes we seem to defend ourselves from “human” demands by assuming a professional stance. However we judge that stance ethically, I am certain that it leads to bad

<sup>7</sup> See Crapanzano, Vincent, 1973, 212ff; 2008.

fieldwork.

There is always an anxious dimension in any communication, which is exaggerated when the communication is unusual. When you meet someone you know in the street and say: "Hello, how are you? It's a beautiful day? Are you going off to the park?" or something of that sort, the anxiety is minimal. You are engaging in a banal conversation, whose purpose is probably no more than to maintain contact. It is phatic. It is what Heidegger would refer to as *Gerede* (idle talk)<sup>8</sup>. But the moment we move from banal to authentic talk, from *Gerede* to *Rede*, something happens. We become far more aware, I think, of what our interlocutor is thinking – thinking about us too. We have to recognize, though we defend ourselves against this recognition, of the other's opacity. There is a difference between what our interlocutor is thinking and what he or she is saying. I (2000: 213-215) have referred to the silent mentation that accompanies any conversation as shadow dialogues. Silence is one of the indicators of such dialogues. Our acknowledgement of them is particularly disturbing when we ask ourselves (in our own shadow dialogue) what the other is thinking of us. Sometimes we seek escape from this terrifying recognition quite physically – through an embrace, through making love. In Gabriele D'Annunzio's *The Triumph of Death*<sup>9</sup>, if I recall, two lovers are so obsessed with not being able to know what the other is really thinking that they are both driven to jump off a cliff hand-in-hand. D'Annunzio's hyperbole is ridiculous but it is revealing. I am, I have to admit, haunted by the ultimate unknowability of what goes on in the mind of the other. It is a neglected dimension of consociation. It relates, metaphorically, to the eye, in the sense that the eye is a *quasi* orifice. It leads us into the body – the mind — of the other as it reflects out at us. It looks into us. I think this is one of the reasons for our fascination with the eye. It speaks silently but forcefully of that which we prefer to ignore.

*Can we engage with silence in a non-interpretative way?*

**V. Crapanzano:** To play again on Roland Barthes' observation: silence, like a text, is an occasion for interpretation. But there is a difference, because a text restricts interpretation in a way that silence does not. We have to depend far more on context in our interpretation of silence than we do in textual interpretation. It leaves far more to the imagination – and the uncertainty that accompanies imaginative constructions. But there is that other silence, which I think you are talking about – a more metaphysical silence: the silence of prayer, the silence of churches and synagogues and mosques, the silence before the sublime, the awe-inspiring, that which defies understanding... Metaphysical, yes, but also communal, profoundly so. Think of the Quaker meeting. Think of those intensely communal moments when we are so overwhelmed by something, in such awe, that we are bound together by our silence. We know at such moments how invasive a breach of that silence can be.

We really know so much and so little about silence. There are a number of books that have been written on silence in literature and the silence in art. Everybody quotes classically the silence in Munch's *The Scream*. What is

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger, Martin, 1996[1927], *Being and Time*. Joan Stambaugh, trans. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>9</sup> D'Annunzio, Gabriele, 1990, *The Triumph of Death*. New York: Hippocrene.

terrifying about it is not the distorted face that is depicted; it is the fact that nothing is coming out. It is nightmarish. Silence can be violent. Indeed, in certain ways it is as ungraspable as violence.

*You devote a chapter to silence in your book Imaginative Horizons. At two points, silence is depicted as a "left over" from something: Barthes talked about "the left over from the symbolic" and you also quote this Moroccan mystic evoking "a rest from the soul". If I try to understand what this "left over" means, it recalls what cannot be divided, what resists certain categorizations. On the other hand, talking about silence and literature, we can remember how, in The Order of Things<sup>10</sup>, the authors Foucault quotes as potentially opening a path out of our constructed episteme are engaged with silence: Mallarmée and Blanchot are authors of silence.*

**V.Crapanzano:** That particular kind of silence is the result of an abstract thinking<sup>11</sup>. It emphasized the framing of an event. Framing is always framing in and out. The outside, le dehors cannot be gathered into the inside. No system can ever be all-incorporating. Remember Gödel's proof. Something is always left out. It cannot even be defined by what is inside – by the system. I think this is what Blanchot means by the dehors<sup>12</sup>. In a way, it is not that dissimilar from Lacan's notion of the real, which is that which is outside the symbolic. It cannot be articulated but it is not without effect. For Lacan, its invasion is traumatic. Is it silence? Or is silence only its figuration? It cannot be named since it is outside nomination. To refer to it as the outside, the neuter, le neutre, the silent, the beyond is, at best, to evoke it.

A poor analogy would be entering a room in a museum whose walls are covered with paintings. You move from one framed picture to another, and as you look at them, you are lost inside the frame. The picture comes alive. You do not see what is outside the frame – the other pictures, the walls, the space between the pictures, the pictures as objects, the frame. Now you step back and view the room as a whole, the wall, the spaces between the pictures, the pictures as objects. You are on the outside of what had been framed. You can no longer see the picture as alive, it is simply an object.

There is, of course, the fully, the irretrievable outside whose silence is absolute: death. We haven't mentioned the silence of death. At the end of *Imaginative Horizons* in the chapter on death and world-ending I quote Wittgenstein (2001: 6.431-6.4311) "As in death, too, the world does not change, but ceases. Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through." And then in the spirit of Wittgenstein's terrifyingly realistic declaration that "whereof we cannot speak, we must remain silent,"<sup>13</sup> I observe that "of death and world ending we must remain silent." But, I note too that despite the fact that we must remain silent before it, we speak effusively, noisily, about death and world ending. "Is it," I ask, "that we must speak and act, even when

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, Michel, 1970[1966], *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon Books.

<sup>11</sup> Crapanzano, Vincent, 2003, *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>12</sup> Blanchot, Maurice, 1955, *L'Espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard; Foucault, Michel, 1966, *La pensée du dehors*. Paris: Fata Morgana.

<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 2001[1921], *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. David Pears and Brian McGuinness, trans. London: Routledge Classics.

silence and inactivity seem in order, to perpetuate the world, to create it again and again, the way the Aborigines do in their rituals and the Hindus in their mortuary sacrifices." Silence, it seems, does not speak loudly enough for us. Or too loudly.

## References

- D'Annunzio, Gabriele  
1990 *The triumph of Death*. New York: Hippocrene.
- Blanchot, Maurice  
1955 *L'Espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Crapanzano, Vincent  
1972 *The Fifth World of Forster Bennett: Portrait of a Navajo*. New York: Viking.  
1973 *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry*. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.  
1980 *Tuhami: A Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
1986 *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. New York: Vintage.  
1992 *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.  
1994 *Réflexions sur une anthropologie des émotions*. *Terrain* 22:109-117.  
1995 *Comment on Objectivity and Militancy: A Debate*. *Current Anthropology* 36(3):420-421.  
2003 *Imaginative Horizons: An Essay in Literary-Philosophical Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.  
2008 *On the Preclusive Dimension of Ritual Representation*. In *Rituals in an Unstable World: Contingency, Hybridity, Embodiment*. Alexander Henn, and Klaus-Peter Koepping, eds. Pp. 317-337. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Foucault, Michel  
1966 *La pensée du dehors*. Paris: Fata Morgana.  
1970[1966] *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Habermas, Jürgen  
1989[1962] *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Heidegger, Martin  
1996[1927] *Being and Time*. Joan Stambaugh, trans. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Radin, Paul  
1957[1937] *Primitive Religion*. New York: Dover.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig  
2001[1921] *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. David Pears, and Brian McGuinness, trans. London: Routledge Classics.

*Chowra Makaremi  
Doctorante  
Département d'anthropologie  
Université de Montréal  
chowra.makaremi@gmail.com*