

Essay on “Censorship and Silence” by Umberto Eco, translated by Richard Dixon

Censorship and Silence is a piece that describes two sides of the coin, one which is the truth and the other which is a popular although not false misconception. It starts with the idea of a veline as pretty girls who dance on the television and a casino as a chaotic mess. Eco soon after states that during his generation, casinos meant brothels and only later, by connotation, did it lose its initial meaning. This relates to the idea of veline as they too had their meanings redefined, because during the Fascist regime, veline were sheets of paper that the government responsible for controlling culture sent to the newspapers. These veline also told newspapers what to print and what to keep quiet. So to the journalists, veline was a symbol of censorship, and a source which made information disappear. This is something that shows heads and tails of the term “veline”. On one side there is the symbol of the television events, the shows, etc. which is used through noise, the other one is the thin sheet of paper used in order to conceal news according to the fascist agenda.

No matter how you flip the coin, you will always land on censorship. Eco makes a big point in his piece that noise will be censored by a louder noise. And that the louder noise will ultimately wash away the existence of the quiet noises; as stated by his bomb example and basically his whole piece. And through this noise, anything quieter than the loudest voice will be censored- directly or indirectly. Furthermore, Eco also focuses on the clarity of noise. Noise that is sharp and precise will not affect those who hear it, but more so noise that is unclear and fogged will insinuate doubt within skeptics.

Eco also goes into the form of noise in that a combination of uninteresting sounds will create noise. Meaningless noise nowadays draws itself into our daily lives, constantly. There is

no end to advertisements of different phone brands, Cellular data plans, or home insurance plans. When viewing these things, we as the consumer truly gain nothing from these adverts but because of these unrelenting bashes to our subconscious, I now know that “15 minutes can save you 15% on car insurance” or even that “Like a good neighbor, state farm is there”. And I wholeheartedly agree with Eco’s stance on the internet being the “greatest noise that yields no information”. The internet is always full of topics that we relate to but because we must keep our guard up when surfing the internet because there are few sites that are reliable and even the ones that are might not always apply to us. Nonetheless they will still provide information which 90% of the time will be rendered useless. But because they are the ones that generate the most sound, we will be guaranteed to hear the noise. And this sort of leads us down a rabbit hole of noise because when you are in one of these websites, we will be drawn in by the noise of one thing, then the next, then our minds tend to get fogged and either give up, or move onto something that is familiar.

And because now that noise is so common that it is like air, we must breathe it to stay within a state of comfort. As Eco says, “This great need for noise is like a drug; it is a way to avoid focusing on what is really important” I believe that this is one of the vital messages that Eco is trying to convey to us. That in order to obtain true freedom, one must avoid noise and instead adapt to a lifestyle that does not fog up our minds and instead we need to start filtering out noise so that we can obtain mental clarity.

It seems that Eco’s final point is that salvation lies within silence. Silence and only silence is the lone factor that allows for the medium—word of mouth— to truly be able to digest information. The problem that has occurred in the modern generation is that silence has been buried deep down into a place of seemingly no return and that today’s generation won’t ever

recover from the noise. Noise is in my opinion something that has its grip on society and influences relationships, news, politics, and virtually anything imaginable.