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Censorship and Silence

Umberto Eco

### My Thoughts on "Censorship and Silence"

In "Censorship and Silence" by Umberto Eco, he describes how silence affects communication. He provides examples on how words change meanings over time, how the media can encourage poor behavior, and how noise can be a form of censorship. After reading Eco's essay, I thought it was interesting and would like to reflect on a few of his points.

Eco starts off his essay by stating that a word's meaning can change over time with the example of the word "veline". He claims "veline" now refers to "pretty girls on television" and in the Fascist regime, it referred to "sheets of paper that the government department responsible for controlling culture sent to the newspaper". I can agree with Eco's statement because I can think of a few words that have had their meaning changed over time. For example, the use of the word "sick". The most common meaning for sick is when a person is not well with an illness. The normal meaning of "sick" is still used however. Nowadays, people also use the word "sick" to describe something that they think is cool. For example, if you see someone doing a cool trick with their bicycle, one would say "Woah, that's sick!" I think the closest comparison to this idea of words changing meaning is slang words. Slang words often change the meaning of words that we are accustomed to using with their normal meaning. I do not think Eco was referring to slang words when he expressed this change, but I do think he is correct and I find his observation fascinating.

Another idea that Eco mentions is that the media can cause poor behavior. I agree with this take because I believe that if a person were to read about something in an article that is considered a bad act, they would be persuaded that pulling off this act is possible. For example, if a criminal was caught robbing a bank and another criminal were to read about it, maybe they would be less inclined to rob banks because they know they will get caught. This could also have the opposite effect. If there was a news story that a bank was robbed and the suspect had not been caught yet, a person reading that story might think they could get away with it as well and go out and attempt to rob one. Eco also states how “a great noise can silence everything else.” He explains that if he committed something bad, he would plant a bomb outside the police headquarters so that his committed crime seemed like a smaller story. I never thought about this but I do think his idea makes sense because bigger stories do usually overshadow smaller ones even if the smaller ones are still meaningful. I always thought of censorship as blocking information or speech but I never thought of noise as a form of it. But after reading about Eco’s example of the bomb, I agree with his statement.

I also was fascinated by Eco's take on how silence is also another form of communication. When I first read that he believed that silence helps communication, I didn't really understand what he meant by that. After reading his explanation, I agree with his opinion. He believes that silence is important because you must be able to hear what other people are saying. I think this idea is important because when I was growing up and was learning good communication skills, one very good point was to be willing to listen. I was taught that the only good way to listen was to not say a word and to completely focus on what the other person was saying. I believe this is what Eco was

trying to explain and why he concludes that one ethical problem we have today is “how to return to silence”. Sometimes we need to take a step back and be silent in order to completely understand what is going on and why it is important.

I thought Umberto Eco’s essay was very interesting and I agreed with a lot of his points of view. In the past, I have read multiple books on censorship such as *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury and *1984* by George Orwell but their viewpoints on censorship were nothing like Eco’s which is why I found his opinion intriguing. I believe that censorship is a topic that everyone needs to be more aware of and reading Eco’s essay allowed me to do that.