

## **The Idea of Silence, Light, Death and Love (Threshold: Kafka Defended Against His Interpreters)**

five brief blindfold piano performances  
3 30 pm saturday may 9 2009  
john buckley gallery melbourne australia

### **1. The Idea of Silence**

In a collection of fables from late antiquity one can read this apologue: 'It was customary amongst the Athenians to give a good thrashing to whoever desired to be considered a philosopher; if he bore the beating patiently he could then be considered a philosopher. Once there was a fellow who underwent the beating and having endured the blows in silence, exclaimed: 'Well worthy am I, then, to be called a philosopher!' But he was rightly answered: 'You would have been if you had but kept quiet.' The fable certainly teaches us that philosophy undoubtedly has something to do with the experience of silence, but undergoing the experience in no way constitutes the identity of philosophy. In silence philosophy stands exposed, absolutely without identity; it endures the *without-name*, without finding its own name. Silence is not its secret word – but rather, philosophy's word perfectly leaves unsaid its own silence.

### **2. The Idea of Light**

I turn on the light in a dark room; naturally the lit room is no longer the dark room; I have lost it forever. Yet isn't it the same room? Isn't the dark room the only content of the lit room? That which I can no longer have, that which infinitely flees backward, and likewise thrusts me forward is only a representation of language: the dark which light presupposes. But if I give up the attempt to grasp this pre-supposition, if I turn my attention to the light itself, if I receive it - what the light gives me is then the *same* room, the non-hypothetical dark. That which is veiled, that which is closed in itself is the only content of the revelation - light is only the coming to itself of the dark.

### **3. The Idea of Death**

The angel of death, who in some legends is called Samael and with whom it is said even Moses had to struggle, is language. Language announces death – what else does it do? But precisely this announcement makes it so difficult for us to die. From time immemorial, for the entire duration of its history, humanity has struggled with this angel, trying to wrench from him the secret he restricts himself to announcing. But from his childish hands one can wrench only the announcement he had in any case come to bring. The angel is not at fault for this, and only those who understand the innocence of language likewise grasp the true sense of the announcement and may, in the event, learn to die.

### **4. The Idea of Love**

To live in intimacy with a stranger, not in order to draw him closer, or to make him known, but rather to keep him strange, remote: unapparent – so unapparent that his name contains him entirely. And, even in discomfort, to be nothing else, day after day, than the ever open place, the unwaning light in which that one being, that thing, remains forever exposed and sealed off.

### **5. Threshold: Kafka Defended Against His Interpreters**

Explanations are, in fact, only a moment in the tradition of the inexplicable: they are the moment, to be more precise, which keeps watch over it by leaving it unexplained. Emptied of their content, explanations thus fulfill their task. But at the point where explanations, by showing their emptiness, leave it be, the inexplicable itself is in jeopardy. Only the explanations were, in truth, inexplicable, and the legend was invented to explain them. What was not to be explained is perfectly contained in what no longer explains anything.

Giorgio Agamben  
from *Idea of Prose* translated by Michael Sullivan, State University of New York Press, 1995

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