

# *Silent Treatment*



If silence is a lack of sound then silence in the lexicon of painting is, what, a lack of light?

A painting lacking light evokes Reinhardt, Malevich, and—by extension—Carnegie's masterpiece *Black Square* [2008]

If, however, the hierarchy is one of matter rather than luminosity, then the former examples flatten to noise

Each example is additive, materially

Additive in that oil paint has been applied in various thickness to canvas/linen

Oil painting involves a third-dimension, albeit slight, encouraging coverage, build-up, addition, burial

The material of the paint is the material of the image, or 'image'

Black oil paint exactly as additive relative to silence as noise to a space

Any equating to all

Once, always



If silence is a lack of sound then perhaps silence in the lexicon of painting is a lack of paint?

A lack of paint equates to raw surface, to gesso even; to white

White then, like light, is the presence of absence

What then of Ryman? Even Martin?

White can be noise or it can be silence

If paint is noise then non-paint is silence

If non-paint is silence, though, it is not strictly painting



The application of gesso to linen/canvas is zero

No: the application of gesso to linen/canvas is achieving zero

Zero as potential silence

Achieving zero is the situation

Everything subsequent is aftermath, or, in other words, treatment

Aftermath = treatment

For silent treatment to occur, gesso must achieve zero

For silent treatment to occur, the room must be before it is silent

The room can be a body, a voice, an epoch, a relationship, a binary, a state

Silence only is after its opposite becomes

Gesso itself as the initial frame, narratively

Gesso pre-, gesso zero, gesso like Conrad's Marlow, say

Within and without, simultaneously





Watercolour floating upon gesso as a manipulative contortion of silence

The silence functions through the noise; it maintains; it is not buried, only modified

The pigment in silent treatment is screening—transparent, translucent, suspended

Pigment as veil

Craquelure in the screen a reminder that silence predominates

Burial impossible, coverage impermanent

Silence nonexistent, however, even notionally, without the surrounding noise

Silence without the noise un-becomes

(“Two states! / We want two states!”)

Noise, then, creates silence

Black creates white

Non-light, light



This is me at my most ambiguous

Ambiguity is often mistaken for mystery, vagueness, even the obtuse, but ambiguity is really the identification of a forking road

No: ambiguity is ending at the fork

However for it to work the ends of the forking paths must be suggested through precedent

Without the ends ambiguity becomes 'ambiguity'

A good example of effective ambiguity is showcased in the final line of the final verse of Mount Eerie's devastating "Ravens" [2017]

In the song Phil Elverum details his wife's death and the eventual scattering of her ashes:

*And God-like huckleberries  
The ground absorbs and remakes whatever falls  
Nothing dies here  
But here is where I came to grieve  
To dive into it with you  
With your absence  
But I keep picking you berries*

The fork here is the use of the 'you' in the final line

Read one way, he cannot grasp the fact of her absence, and continues—as he had when she was alive—to habitually pick berries for her

Read another way, he has scattered her ashes into the earth and she has become the berries; they are berries of 'you'

Ambiguity depends on meaning being at each of these ends

But it is further bolstered when the space between these two states further describes the displacement and agony of grief



The same can be true of representational painting

Ambiguity necessarily dwells in the tense-shift between form and content, material and image

Each can be an end, each is

A zone emerges in which the two layers coexist—a zone muddied or lost in the middle twentieth century's devolution to pure painterly abstraction

A very good abstract painting can exist within a representational work; the inverse is impossible, though certain Browns and De Koonings, say, maybe at least approach event horizon

(Then again so do Magic Eyes)



The x-axis is image

The y-axis is material (physical matter, 'medium,' that is)

The z-axis is the frisson of x and y's interrelationship(s)

In a narrow sense, all success in representational painting resides in the proportionate fortitude of its z-axis





Content is situational

Situational to time, culture, identity, history, geography, physiology, mythology, religion, interpersonality, psychology, sexuality, mortality

Context is linguistic

Silence problematised involves content and context being presumed and then accepted under hegemonic norms

[What non-failure looks like in this aspect is possibly only theoretical, and solved exclusively by duration, i.e. the arrival of retrospect, at which point the young devour the old every time no matter the case specifics.]

Silence unproblematised is optic, nostalgic, nihilistic

Nostalgia is the dissolution of identity

Nihilism is the denial of context

Optics presumes objectivity

Silent treatment is, in this sense, a trap



A silent treatment is situational

Situational to time, culture, identity, history, geography, physiology, mythology, religion, interpersonality, psychology, sexuality, mortality

We are given a silent treatment; it precedes us; it outlives us

(We are in one now, you and I)

The context is that of aftermath

All form is aftermath

All aftermath is linguistic



The silence of silent treatment is one-sided

One-sidedness, paradoxically, requires two sides

The two sides are entangled, yet polar, like magnets, with a positive and negative aspect

If one side of the silent treatment is silent then the other must be noise

They may invert, but never coalesce



I am noise, you are silent

However: you are noise, I am silent



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This publication was produced for Joseph Yaeger's solo exhibition *Silent Treatment*  
20 September 2023 - 21 October 2023 at Project Native Informant, London.

Image: Joseph Yaeger, *Silent Treatment*, 2023

