

The Silence of the Absolute

Apophatism in Ueda Shizuteru
and Raimon Panikkar

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The Kyoto School deals primarily with the hermeneutic problem of Japanese modernity. Modern Japan—to borrow a well-known expression of Karl LÖWTH—is an impossibility and a reality at the same time (1983, 588). The term “modern Japan” is itself an oxymoron. In fact, modernity has undergone a very long historical process and is the result of different historical experiences: medieval communes and trading society, geographic discoveries and the Reformation, scientific spirit, rationalism and empiricism, the enlightenment and the French revolution, the industrial revolution, colonialism, and the development of technology, to cite only a few of the most important historical events. In addition, modernity sums up and brings to completion some of the fundamental elements of Western thought: Parmenides’ notion of being, Plato’s dualism, and the prosthetic use of language as an instrument for the subject to define and catalogue reality objectively.

Japan never went through these stages; its cultural roots are of another sort. It had to graft modernity onto a radically different spiritual and cultural history. It did this mainly by taking over modern technology and leaving out the cultural context to which it belonged. If the transition to the technological is one of the aspects of European nihilism, this is

all the more the case in Japan, where it has come to represent a disquieting phenomenon, constantly contradicting and questioning cultural identity. The work of Nishida Kitarō is set against this backdrop. It is an attempt at a critical reading of the modernity and Western cultural traits in which Japan was caught up. At the same time it seeks to adjust traditional Japanese thinking with its Buddhist origins by means of the tools of a philosophy whose origins are in Greece in the sixth century BCE and which matured in the West through Roman civilization, medieval Christianity, the renaissance, and the modern age even as it contributed to these developments. Nishida moves against a twofold horizon with the mastery of two languages: on the one hand, he is perfectly at home in modernity and philosophy, and on the other, he is rooted culturally in traditional Buddhist thought. He is therefore able to rethink and redefine the roots of Japanese identity organically.

I consider it a conceptual mistake—and a dangerous one at that—to see philosophy as a universal form of thought, and even worse to assign it the right to legitimize other forms of thought. Philosophy is historically determined and only as such can we relate to it. This is precisely what the Japanese did when they took it over and named it *tetsugaku* 哲学.¹

At the same time, while philosophy has become subject to the forces of global uniformity, the thinkers of the Kyoto school have drawn attention to differences between East and West through a common language that promotes dialogue. Nishida and his followers who made up the “school” threw themselves deeply into the study of Western thought in order to bring it into contact with their own intellectual tradition. This required considerable philological work, carried out during long sojourns to Europe for research into the original sources.

UEDA SHIZUTERU, ECKHART, AND ZEN

In the early 1960s Ueda Shizuteru went to Marburg, Germany to study with Ernst Benz. Although he already had a footing in Japanese philosophical circles, Ueda felt the need for self-effacing and rigorous

1. The term was first coined by Nishi Amane in 187 to translate the Western word.

exposure to the philosophical and linguistic tools required to do serious comparative work, beginning with a knowledge of German, Mittelhochdeutsch, and medieval Latin. The fruit of these labors was a doctoral dissertation published in German with a provocative foreword by Ernst Benz (UEDA 1965).

Ueda's thesis brought a new perspective to Eckhart studies and succeeded in picking up elements usually overlooked by European critics, whether out of established habit or mere idiosyncrasy. Ueda defined Eckhart's mysticism as "a mysticism of infinity with a theistic foundation," pointing to the dialectic between the tendency to infinity at one extreme and the attachment to the forms of one's own faith on the other. He sees the poles of this dialectic as the two themes that define Eckhart's speculation: the birth of God in the soul and the breakthrough to the divine. The theme of the birth of God shows the typically Trinitarian foundations of Eckhart's thinking. The breakthrough to the divine, meantime, with its emphasis on nothingness, reveals a strong neoplatonic influence. The two themes are not opposed but both contribute to the construction of a coherent position.

The birth of God in the soul forms the foundation for further speculation and development. Beginning from the doctrine of the Trinity, Eckhart notes the dual nature of the Father: *paternitas nomen est fecunditatis* ("fatherhood implies fecundity") and *voluntas enim Patris ut Pater naturaliter est generare et habere filium* ("the father's willingness as a father is to generate and have a son") (LW 4, Sermo 363). The Father thus generates the Son for all time, both in his own person as well as in every soul. In his words: *Pater generat suum filium in anima eodem modo sicut Ipse generat Eum in aeternum non aliter* ("the Father generates his own son in the soul in the same way, not in another way, as he generates him forever) (cited in DANIELS, 1923, 53). Hence the divine Word assumes the nature, but not the person, of a human being. Human nature is related to the divine because God is incarnate in all human beings.

The soul is the image of God, participating in the divine nature. It must therefore separate itself from everything in order to reach God. Those who forget themselves and, in silence, *become* that very Word, they experience an *oblatio alteritatis*, an end to separation and alienation. When we escape from the prison of the self, from existence in the literal

sense of *ex-sistere*, standing outside without reason or purpose, life takes on a deeper meaning. As an image of God, the soul fulfills its nature by ridding itself of itself and arriving at the divine. This treatment of *the birth of God in the soul* comprises the first part of the mystical dynamics and grounds all further developments.

The starting point for what Ueda identifies as the second central theme in Eckhart's thinking, *the breakthrough to the divine*, is once again the doctrine of the Trinity. This time, however, it is interpreted in the light of neoplatonic ideas and Maimonides' doctrine of attributes. *Hi tres Personae sunt Unum* ("these three persons are One") and *Deus est Unum* ("God is One"), states Sermon 438. The sense is that unity is the abyss from which God himself springs, suggesting a divine essence that transcends God and all divine attributions, a *Gottheit* beyond the three persons of the Trinity. This original essence assumes of itself an impersonal and undefined character: it stands opposed to God and can only be described conceptually with the tools of negative theology. It is pure nothingness, being beyond all beings. The soul plunged into *Gottheit* returns to its very nature: it lets go of God to unite with the essence of God. According to Meister Eckhart: *Summum quod homo relinquere potest est quod ipse Deum propter Deum relinquat* ("the most man can abandon is to abandon God for God himself") (cited in DANIELS 1923, 33). The breakthrough to *Gottheit* completes the mystical dynamic. The soul, of divine nature from its birth, fulfills itself in leaving the world and uniting with God, thereby arriving at the divine essence. Having experienced nothingness, the soul can now return to everyday reality.

In the final part of his work, Ueda compares Eckhart's spiritual dynamics to that of Zen Buddhism. Rather than carry out his analysis on a philosophical or theological basis, however, he takes up a comparison of two pictures. This turn to concrete examples expressed in imagery helps him avoid the misunderstandings of language and enables him to communicate directly through visual symbolism.

First he takes up a painting by the Dutch artist Pieter Aertsen, who was strongly influenced by *devotio moderna* and therefore belongs to the same tradition as Meister Eckhart. The work, housed in the Boymans Museum in Rotterdam, was painted in 1553 and depicts the Gospel story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10: 38–40). Here Ueda carries on a line of

thought first introduced in Nishitani Keiji's *God and Absolute Nothingness* (1948) to interpret the story in the spirit of *Gott lassen*—letting go of God to dwell in the divine essence. In the foreground of the painting we see Martha working in a kitchen, surrounded by her utensils and intent on her work, her back turned to Jesus, who is a small figure in the background. She has turned her back on God because she no longer needs God: her very soul has become God. Serene in her conviction, she brings God into everyday activity. Still, the link with theological conceptualization is not severed and God remains in the background as a point of reference. In this painting the departure from personal theism is lacking.

In contrast, Ueda draws attention to a thirteenth-century drawing by Ryōkai (housed in the National Museum in Tokyo) that shows Huineng cutting bamboo stalks. A few lines in white space define the contours of the sixth patriarch's image. In the whiteness of the void, the figure of the patriarch, also empty inside, appears to be made of the same empty substance that defines the overall field of vision. The only reality is the banal, everyday action, in which the absolute is revealed.

Ueda goes on to compare the ways in which the fundamental questions of soteriology are treated in Christian and Buddhist thought, citing a famous example from the *Mumonkan* 『無門關』:

A monk once asked Jōshū, “What is the meaning of the Patriarch coming from the West?” Jōshū answered, “The oak tree in the front garden.” (case 37)

Here we have a basic example of how Zen expresses truth, in this case regarding the arrival of Bodhidharma in China from India. It is a question on the meaning of meditative practice. Jōshū's answer is incongruous and apparently illogical.

Ueda then cites what he considers the basic question of Christian soteriology: “Why did God become man?” (*Cur Deus homo?*), followed by Eckhart's reply:

....und dar umbe ist der mensch geworden, daz er dich gebere sīnen eingebornen sun, und niht minner.

To father you as his only begotten child (DPT 357, 22; also 292, 3).

Eckhart's answer is logical and consequential, but at the same time, it

maintains that the redeeming event takes place in each individual, thus establishing a tie to Buddhism and its concept of the universality of enlightened nature.

That said, Eckhart's reply differs on a linguistic level. He accepts the question-and-answer setting and within it offers his answer. In other occasions Eckhart underlines the nature of the "without why or wherefore" (*âne warumbe*) of God. God is the fullness of being from which the divine nature springs *naturaliter* and without deliberation. *Deus non agit propter cur aut quare* ("God cannot be thought using the human category of *why*." LW 4: 21). *Proprium est Deo, ut non habeat quare extra se aut praeter se* (LW 2: 247). Eckhart and Jōshū converge in conceiving of the indescribable and unattainable absolute by means of human categories, logical and linguistic. Jōshū's, however, is the stricter apophatism. He does not judge the question regarding the coming of the patriarch to be "nonsense" or answer that it is "without why or wherefore." Not only does he give a negative response, he rejects the logical framework supposed by the question, nipping any possible misunderstanding in the bud.

Ueda examines another example of the theme of "without why or wherefore" in the Rhineland mystics, the famous verse of Angelus Silesius:

The rose is without why or wherefore.
It blooms because it blooms. (cw I.289)

Here the "without why or wherefore" does not refer to the divine but to an actual thing, the rose. The rose belongs to the world of creatures, but in being "without why or wherefore" it is related to God. The rose becomes a manifestation of God. The life of God blooms in the rose, therefore it is "without why or wherefore."

Another poem by Silesius reads:

The rose, that your eye here sees,
is forever blooming in God. (cw I.108)

The rose, which we see blooming in front of us, is the being of God become real. It is an appearing of the being without why or wherefore, and as such answers the question regarding the meaning of incarnation.

The rose, in its concreteness, transcends the question-and-answer, logic-and-language framework. If Jōshū had been put the question: “Why did God become man?” he might have replied, “The rose.” He would simply have pointed to reality in its here-and-now, unique and concrete form, discarding the reference to its being “without why or wherefore” as locked into the realm of logic and concepts, that is, to the human dimension. “Without why or wherefore” is a human category attempting to define God. To remove it from reference to the rose—whose attribute as a creature makes it subject to divine control—means taking leave of all reference to God and indeed of the very concept of God. It means moving towards *Gottheit*, to the nothingness of God. At this stage Eckhart’s *Entwerdung* in which both God and nature are annihilated is accomplished.

In contrast, the sentence “The rose is without why or wherefore” implies a subject expressing a concept and therefore entails a divine-human duality. The Rhineland mystics who maintain that God is without why and wherefore do so to acknowledge God’s incomprehensibility, and yet they remain in the domain of human thought. To claim that God is unattainable means one is having thoughts about God. The break with talk of God’s being “without why or wherefore” leads to the disappearance of God into nothingness, to man’s silence about God—that is, to the end of language—and to the overcoming of the duality between God and nature. Zen refers to the collapse of the absolute, language, and nature into nothingness as a *great death* or a *double forgetfulness*. One forgets both oneself and God; God forgets God and human beings. Zen represents this double forgetfulness with an empty circle (*ensō* 円相). In pure nothingness, where the human and the divine disappear, the rose is also annihilated. Hence the meaning of Jōshū’s supposed answer: “Why did God become man?” “The rose.” “What is the meaning of the patriarch coming from the West?” “The oak tree in front of the garden.”

To Eckhart, the breakthrough to *Gottheit* represents the annihilation of both the human and God. The same holds true of Zen, but with a decisive difference. Eckhart shares with Zen the reason for the severance, but he never goes beyond the rose. When Eckhart changes from a negative response to an affirmative one, he returns to God and therefore to the rose. He does not return directly to the rose—i.e., nature—but

reaches it via a detour through God. According to Eckhart, even after the annihilation of God, God remains the source of one's affirmative response. On the way back, Eckhart's and Zen's paths diverge. Eckhart does not say "Nothing," as Zen does, but rather "God is nothing." After the experience of *Gottheit*, Eckhart returns to God and restores the dualism between the divine and the human.

If Eckhart's apophatism, though a *via eminentiae*, ends up back in dualism, Zen consumes every dualism in what is called "a great ball of fire." If one experiences nothingness and then returns to the world, one can express reality in many different ways. One shifts from the freedom from words of silence to a freedom of speech. One can either express emptiness negatively ("The rose is not the rose"), destroying the foundations so that empty nature emerges; or one can take a more affirmative path ("The rose is the rose"), in which the rose is represented as a being permeated by nothingness, as the negation of the negation. *Śūnyatā-śūnyatā* is how the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* refers to emptiness that annihilates itself (CONZE 1973, 165). In Zen, this being without a foundation is expressed through the relational copulative *soku* (卽) and the truth of being is seen in the relationship: A is not A, but A *soku* A. The rose *soku* rose. The rose blooms *soku* it blooms. *Soku* opens a space for the poetic language through which Zen expresses itself.

What we must liberate ourselves from is the substantializing language, in which languages—the "house of the being," as Heidegger calls it—becomes the prison of the being. The substantializing of language is first of all a projection of the ego trying to substantialize itself. Therefore, following the insistence of Eckhart and Zen, the self and all beliefs must be gotten rid of: forget God, leave God, and reach the nothingness of *Gottheit* that is at the same time the foundation of the soul.

Ueda develops this topic, commenting on the renowned epitaph on Rilke's grave: "Rose, oh reine Widerspruch..." and questioning the nature of that *oh* (UEDA 1976). In grammar it is an interjection. In poetic language it signals the primary event in the poem. *Oh* is pure presence, transcending language. It is the presence of the rose; it is the presence of the inexpressible. *Oh* is the original sound of presence before it drifts towards language. It opens the door of absolute silence that annuls the human and its linguistic dimension. At the same time, the *oh* is the breath

that opens out into language, in which the unutterable presence yields to language. It is the inarticulate whole preceding articulation. Thus the event of the *oh* is actually a double event. On the one hand, it is the place where the individual and the rose meet, a place without subject or object. On the other hand, it represents the beginning of structure. It is both individual and totality, or what Nishida calls “pure experience.” Pure experience is neither a linguistic nor a nonlinguistic occurrence, but rather a place where the two both coincide, the place of freedom *from* language and freedom *in* language.

Ueda calls this place *Urwort*,² the place where “the ecstatic unity of self, word, and reality” is revealed (UEDA 1976, 157). *Oh*, as pure experience, allows for a circular movement from words to silence and from silence to words; in other words, it represents the *Urwort* in its descending phase of being articulated in language. In this sense, the whole of Rilke’s poem can be read as an articulation of the *oh* ecstatically evoked by the poet. As a word, *oh* can be conceived as *Urwort*; without language it would be a sound devoid of meaning. Once articulated it becomes a nothingness uniting articulation and complexity. At the same time, it becomes a way for realizing nothingness in language.

The theme of the relationship between *Urwort* and language is taken up by Ueda in another essay in which he reflects on the final three pictures of the famous *Oxherding Pictures*.³ He reads the story as a metaphor for the path towards emptiness. The last three pictures represent three articulations of emptiness after the oxherder has completed his journey. Picture eight shows an empty circle, that is, emptiness itself. It is an absence of image depicting continual transformation. This is the sphere of absolute silence. Only when one has renounced words, concepts, and representation of ideas in the realm of seated meditation can one attain the terms for revealing emptiness, for seeing the form of the formless and hearing the sound of the soundless.

The ninth picture shows a flowering branch hanging over a river, depicting emptiness annihilating itself to reappear as nature. Here the

2. In this connection, Ueda cites Rudolf Otto’s definition, *numinosen Urlaut* (OTTO 1932, 203ff). See UEDA 1982 and IZUTSU 1979.

3. See *Der Ochs und seine Hirte: Eine altchinesische Zen-Geschichte*, trans. by K. Tsujimura and H. Buchner (Pfullingen: Neske, 1976).

language of nature is expressed: “Flowers bloom as they bloom.” The word is present in this statement, but not as a projection of the subject. It leaves apart judgment and questions. It is without why or wherefore, a “nature” that Zen calls *jinen* 自然: not a substantialized, fragmented, and objectified nature, but one seen in its entirety just as it appears. It is truth emerging from concealment prior to all conceptual differentiation. Human beings also belong in this nothingness. As emptiness, they appear in the form of *jinen* to state, “Flowers bloom like they bloom.” They are no longer subjects pronouncing an objectifying statement but are rather units of nothingness, nature, and word. The human is the achievement of the word.

The tenth and final picture, which shows an old man and a youth talking, represents the emptiness in which one man recognizes his own emptiness in another man. This is the sphere of language. Language, however, can, because of its force, become a cage imprisoning the self. The freedom of language can be reached only by annihilating its ties to the self and realizing its empty nature. One must go out of the linguistic universe to be able to come back to the linguistic universe as a free individual. By this freedom one can start an interpersonal dialogue and help others to become aware of their essential emptiness.

RAIMON PANIKKAR AND SILENCE

Ueda’s doctoral dissertation appeared in 1965. Five years later Raimon Panikkar published his *El silencio de Dios*. Both works belong to the same period and deal with the themes of apophatism and intercultural dialogue. With their many similarities and occasional differences, they bear witness to two different ways of approaching intercultural issues.

The thought of Raimon Panikkar is a radical and planetary effort to depict the cultural identity of our age. His philosophy of interdependence develops from the Śāṅkarian understanding of *advaita*. His life story is itself a reflection of his speculations. Born of an Indian father and a Catalan mother, he is fundamentally a Catholic thinker, but from 1954 he has been engaged in a recovery of Indian thought, beginning with

the experience of nonduality. He says of his first sojourn to India: “I left as a Christian, I found myself a Hindu, and I returned a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian” (PANIKKAR 1978, 2). This openness has made him a living paradigm of planetary thought, as reflected in a work he defines as a *Colligate fragmenta* (PANIKKAR 1993, 1–77). In it, the problem of language, or rather the ecology of language, plays a central role, both for its relational value and as a bridge to silence.⁴ Here Panikkar acknowledges his debt to Bhartr̥hari (sixth century), one of the greatest Indian philosophers of language, and to Heidegger, with whom he was in contact with from 1953 and who, a few weeks before his death, dedicated a poem to Panikkar entitled “Sprache.” The poem opens with the line: “Wann werden Wörter wieder Wort?” (When will words be word again?) and later on he hints at the “Geläut der Stille” (sound of silence).

Heidegger had already written of these matters in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* and Panikkar follows him in considering language intrinsic to the human being, not as an instrumental faculty, but rather as an indication of the intrinsic solidarity among humans, of the relational and dialoguing nature of the human (HEIDEGGER 1959, 241). At the same time, language enables thought insofar as the human being lives in a linguistic context. As Bhartr̥hari had already said:

There is no cognition without the operation of words; all cognition is shot through and through by the word. All knowledge is illuminated through the word.⁵

Language is essential to determining thought but never to determining reality. It always points to a horizon beyond itself; it proceeds by approximation. Language represents the mode of human interdependence and human thought, but it also represents human limits. Silence and mystery remain prior to language. Indeed, silence is the origin of language and in some sense the word is the result of a sacrifice of that silence. Just as emptiness annihilates in order to make manifest, silence retreats in order to let the word appear. Still, silence must not be hypostatized as some

4. On these topics see PIGEM 2007, to whom I am indebted on several counts

5. *Vākyapadīya* 1, 115–23.

kind of reality preceding the word. Silence and word are two aspects of the same reality, like nothingness and being. In Panikkar's words:

There is no-thing beyond or behind the word. The silence out of which the word comes and which it manifests is not another thing, another being, which then, because already in some way thinkable, expressible, would be in its turn the manifestation of a still more primordial being and sic in infinitum. The word is the very silence in word, made word. (PANIKKAR 1974, 158)

Word and silence are different but inseparable realities. Words are soaked, impregnated with silence: words and silence interpenetrate each other in a nondualistic relationship. Separating the word from silence and mystery means to get into an egocentric dimension. It produces *avidyā*, the darkness of ignorance. As Panikkar says, "I am too much of a Buddhist to assume that language discloses reality univocally" (PANIKKAR 1974, 154). The word echoes the human sphere, but once it is faced with the absolute, it must enter into silence. This apophatism, common to various religious traditions, is taken perhaps most seriously in Buddhism.

Panikkar tackles this question in *El silencio de Dios*. The work is a kind of biographical journey, beginning from his claim to belong to both Christianity and Hinduism. This "double belonging" also brings into relief the post-Christian phenomenon of atheism and the post-Hindu phenomenon of Buddhism. Panikkar's speculation moves within these four spheres. It is a paradigm of the restlessness of our time, one that Panikkar experiences without being torn apart by it precisely because he finds himself at home in all four spheres.

For Panikkar Buddhist apophatism, unlike its Western counterparts, is ontological. In the Western world, as in the case of Meister Eckhart, silence with regard to the ultimate things, principally silence concerning God, has an epistemological character. It is an acknowledgment of the impossibility of defining the absolute in relative terms. Buddhist apophatism, in contrast, denies the existence of any *quid* as origin and foundation. The absolute does not belong to the category of ultimate reality but to that of manifestation: it consists in interdependence. The silence of the Buddha is not the negation of an answer but rather the negation of the question itself. It refuses to deal with ultimate reality as *some-*

thing that is somehow dependent on our questioning and our interests. It refuses to deal with ultimate reality as something belonging to the human sphere. Consequently, Buddha refuses to deal with the absolute as transcendental—also viewed as an anthropomorphic concept—with the human being as its point of reference.

According to the Buddhist tradition there are fourteen questions Buddha refused to answer (*avyākrtavastūni*), dealing with four fundamental issues: the eternity of the world, the finitude of the world, existence after death, and the identity of soul and body. The matter of the existence of God is not alluded to in any of the questions.

Western apophatism considers God as one who is always absent and who, were he present, would be no more than a manifestation. Strictly speaking, not only is God unknowable to humans, but also to himself. *Deus itaque nescit se quid est, quia non est quid: incomprehensibilis quippe in aliquo sibi ipsi et omni intellectui* (“Thus, God does not know what he is, because he isn’t anything; therefore, he is completely incomprehensible to himself and to any mind”).⁶ This statement sounds similar to the ontological apophatism of Buddhism, which might read: *Deus non est quid*. The difference is that here God is assumed as a matter for discussion. When all is said and done, we end up back in epistemological apophatism.

Indeed the Western and Eastern traditions have different attitudes towards the absolute. In the East the absolute is considered to have a meaning apart from human knowledge. In the West, critical thought prevails: the absolute has a meaning when humans grasp it or when they give it a meaning, albeit from an anthropocentric perspective. Traditionally, the most important trait of the silence of the absolute is identified as *mystery*. Moderns, however, tend to find in the silence of the absolute a way of consigning mystery to the outer limits of human language and its entropic development. Modern men and women are terrified by silence and mystery, not to mention the anxiety of solitude. The silence of the Buddha teaches us to overcome such displacement. At the same time, Gautama Siddhartha renounced his own *mahāparinirvāṇa*, i.e., his own silence, in order to save humanity and move the wheel of Dharma with

6. Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *De divisione naturae*, II, 28.

words—words, however, that lead to a silence from which they take their meaning.

The separation of East and West, which took place at the time of the birth of philosophy in Greece and of Buddhism in India, had not only an ontological dimension, with opposing attitudes to being and nothingness, but also a linguistic one. In the West, the departure from the world of myth took place through the option for presence and being, and their conceptualization through language, which became the tool that logic used in order to master reality. Language was therefore structured to define and analyze the presence of beings. This structuring determined Western thought up until the end of its metaphysical itinerary in nihilism. Conversely, the East took its character from the opposite ontological side, that of void and nothingness, and it adapted its language to this original position, characterized in a symbolic and aesthetic attitude.

In the contemporary West language is undergoing a degenerating and entropic process in the wake of technological development. This process alienates the word from its poetic nature. In Western culture language has developed in a disorderly manner, losing its meaning at the same time as it expands its range. The invasion of all areas of civilization by language has blocked the way for different attitudes towards insight and understanding. Western language is blamed for a certain conceptual fundamentalism and an arbitrary codification and analysis of reality in which everything is located on a conceptual grid and assigned a fixed name at the same time as it leaves out important areas of meaning. Western language is affected by a sort of *horror vacui* that does not allow for areas of emptiness from which a different and more comprehensive insight might emerge. Gradually words have been transformed into something no longer listened to. They have deteriorated through a degrading process, the causes of which Heidegger identifies with idle chatter, misunderstanding, linguistic inaccuracy, and an obsession for novelty. Language, thus degraded, renders itself self-evident and in the process trivializes mystery.

Both Ueda and Panikkar have dealt with these themes in their writings by drawing attention to the relationship between apophatism and the word, between West and East, between nihilism and tradition. Their analysis converges at numerous points, even though they begin from dif-

ferent assumptions. Ueda is a Japanese Buddhist integrated into modernity. He analyzes and compares the roots of his double horizons where he accents convergences and differences. He works primarily within an East-West framework to focus on self-awareness of otherness. Panikkar is a Christian scholar deeply affected by the thought of his fatherland. He advances an advaitic (nondualistic) interpretation of the religious phenomenon, moving naturally in and out of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and nihilism without pitting them against one other. His perspective of “dialogic dialogue” aims to gather the fragments together. These two approaches, for all their differences, point towards a way to carry out intercultural thinking.

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