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Pinter: held incommunicado on the mobile

Joff Peter Norman Bradley

'Keep your mind in hell and despair not' Gillian Rose's Love's Work

'Life is beautiful but the world is hell' Harold Pinter

'In both Bangkok and Tokyo, teenage boys and girls value texting as a means to communicate without having to voice feelings and thoughts' Sadie Plant

Abstract

This paper mounts a critique of the mobile phone as an instance of so-called 'industrial temporal objects' (Stiegler, 1998). Pharmacologically, it will be seen that the mobile phone acts as both a means and an impediment to frank communication. The thoughts of a range of continental philosophers are used to consider the problem of how people are increasingly in a permanent state of hibernation and held incommunicado. The paper will reflect on silence, taken as not simply the absence of speech, but as something profound, menacing, unsettling, haunting: a silence that threatens to erupt, a becoming-wild (devenir-inculte) (Stiegler, 2011, p. 15). The first part of this essay addresses Roman Jakobson's work on phatic communication before detailing the use of silence in the short sketch Apart From That (2006/2011) by 20th century dramatist and Nobel Laureate Harold Pinter. The paper asks in what sense it is possible to say that Pinter moved from the unspoken or unspeakable to the 'must be said'.
Keywords: Silence, Pinter, Jakobson, Lingis, Phenomenology, Subjectivity

Harold Pinter (1930-2008) - *Apart From That* (2006) - A Short Sketch

GENE: How are you?
LAKE: Very well. And you? Are you well?
GENE: I'm terribly well. How about you?
LAKE: Really well. I'm really well.
GENE: I'm so glad.
LAKE: Apart from... oh you know...
GENE: I know.
LAKE: Apart from... oh you know...
GENE: I do know. But apart from that...
LAKE: How about you?
GENE: Oh you know... all things considered...
LAKE: I know. But apart from that...?

Silence.
GENE: Sorry. I've lost you.
LAKE: What do you mean?
GENE: I... I lost you.
LAKE: No, you didn't... I'm right here where I was.

Harald Pinter (1930-2008) それはそれとして  （喜志哲雄訳）

Gene: どうしてる？
Lake: とても元気だ。で、君は？ 君は元気かい？
Gene: おそろしく元気だ。君はどうだい？
Lake: ほんとに元気だ。ほんとに元気だよ、俺は。
Gene: そりゃよかった。
Lake: ただ、そのほら、分るだろ。
Gene: 分るよ。
Lake: ただ、そのほら、分るだろ。
Gene: 分るとも。でもさ、それはそれにして？
Lake: 君はどうだい？
Gene: ほら、分るだろ。あれこれ考えてみれば。
Lake: 分るよ。でもさ、それはそれにして？

沈黙。
Gene: ごめん。どこにいるんだ。
Lake: 何だって？
Gene: どこにいるんだ。
Lake: 何を言ってるんだ。俺はここにいる。もとのまま。
The inspiration for this essay stems from two chief sources. It emerged through a reading of the Japanese translation of Pinter’s *Apart From That* (それはそれとして) by Tetsuo Kishi (2009) in which 沈黙 is used to express the equivalent meaning of the Pinterian pause or silence. When I first thought
about this, I wondered whether it was possible to translate such aching silences into a culture that *primae facie* and for the most part embraces to a large degree the tranquillity of the unsaid. Thoughts on 沉默 were also stirred by Alphonso Lingis’s 2013 lecture entitled ‘Communication and Silence’, at the “Life and Phenomenology: Celebrating Algis Mickūnas at 80” conference at Vytautas Magnus University in Lithuania, in which he spoke of the heavy silences that one must endure in life.

**Roman Jakobson**

Roman Jakobson’s philosophy of communication (1956) makes great strides in explaining the role of phatic utterances in conversation. At first glance, the model is commonsensical; it goes something like this. The addresser sends a message to the addressee. The message in need of a context attaches to a verbal or otherwise ‘referent’ or something referred to by the addressee. As such, the code must be common and shared between the addresser and addressee as the message operates through a dyad of encoder and decoder. Lastly, there must be a means of contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, sustaining the chitchat. Although verbal messages must include all of the aforementioned functions, for Jakobson (1960) some functions dominate others. Jakobson’s functionalist model of universal representation of communication – part of the formalist-functionalist commitment of the Prague school - is structured around six components - addresser, context, message, contact, code, and addressee. The six functions are orientated towards one or another factor. These functions correspond to the following: the emotive (expressive), the referential (cognitive, denotative, ideational), the poetic (aesthetic), the phatic, the metalingual ('glossing'), and the conative (appellative).
As one might expect, the emotive function expresses the addressee’s attitudes or feelings, though this need not be through an explicit statement. It can manifest in an exclamation, such as ‘oh no’ or ‘wonderful’. According to Jakobson (1960), referential communication is the ‘real or external situation in which the message occurs’. It is used when we state a fact, or describe a situation. The poetic function focuses on the message itself, although in itself it pertains not only to poetry. For Jakobson, the poetic function of language challenges the referential function in terms of the fundamental ambiguity of messages. Ambiguity alters the referential function. We can use it when we decide how to say something – for example, changing word-order, or choosing specific words to say something. Several paronomastic images used by Jakobson are illustrative of the poetic function. On this matter of phatic speech, Burgess (1965) views this as ‘speech to promote human warmth’. It is the small talk between people, whether that is face-to-face or otherwise, for example, via electronic means. While the metalingual communication pertains to talk about grammar, pronunciation or the giving of instructions (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1992), the conative function consists of the effect the message has on the addressee’s feelings or attitudes. It is also assumed that the conative involves some degree of imperative or vocative language, such as ‘leave me alone’. In any communicative event, it is claimed one of the functions takes precedence to a greater or lesser extent over the others. As Jakobson says the verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the ‘predominant function’. Ergo, the full meaning of the illocutionary act is dependent to a significant degree on the context, code, or means of contact, and the resultant combinations which ensue. Importantly, the meaning of a message is grasped in the total act of communication, which entertains distinct extralinguistic factors. While in Saussure’s work there is a distinction between langue and parole, with langue taken as the systematic homogeneous aspect of language, and parole the
individual use and variation, in Jakobson, we find the link between signifier and signified loosened to take better account of the role the latter plays. In his 1960 paper ‘Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics’, Jakobson acknowledges the indebtedness for his model of communication to Bronislaw Malinowski’s concept of phatic communion (see Ogden et al, 1923). In the latter, this use of language sustains a social relation through ritualised formulas such as greetings, chit-chat or small talk. Despite the apparent vacuity of utterances, the emptiness of contact serves as a technical function, to test the system itself, to test the medium not the message, as Marshall McLuhan (2005) famously put it. For example, the uttering of the question: ‘Hello, do you hear me?’ is devoid of content as such as it merely tests that the system is working. We find this explanation hints at the emptiness of such content because in the very act of prolonging of dialogue there is an implicit demand for the interlocutor’s constant attention. What is left is a sense of constant contact without content. The phatic function is akin to the metalingual function in that the former checks the efficiency of the channel, while the latter is used by interlocutors to assess whether the same code is used. It is viewed by Jakobson as ‘an indispensable element of concerted human action’.

**Baudrillard contra Jakobson**

Writing in the tradition of surrealism and Situationalism, Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) formulates a thought-provoking albeit ultimately pessimistic critique of mediated-communication (Genosko, 2012). His theoretical model resonates a great deal with Pinter’s dramas which we will analyse later in this essay and much with the disquieting problems of the isolated individual of our age – the current focus of Stiegler’s philosophy of media and communication. Contra Shannon and Weaver’s model of communication (1949), Baudrillard (1981) writes that
communication is something essentially other than ‘the simple transmission-reception of a message’ (p. 169). In summa: Baudrillard insists simulacra have won out. In an extreme sense, there is nothing other than phatic communication. In Seduction (1990, p. 163-66), Baudrillard outlines his view of the zero degree of contact or tele-phasis and claims that the phatic function of language is used to establish contact and sustain speech’s formal dimension. This is relatively straightforward except it is taken in a hypertrophied sense, in the tele-dimension of the communications networks. And psychoanalytically, contact for contact’s sake is the deceptive empty form – akin to Lacan’s ‘parole vide’ - through which ‘language seduces itself when it no longer has anything to say’ (Federici et al, 2005). For Lacan, empty speech occurs when the subject appears to be talking in vain about someone who, ‘even if he were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire’ (Lacan, 1977). Put another way, information for information’s sake obliterates the prospect of transparent or unmediated communication. Phatic communication has this dysfunctional form at its heart, as this function is irremediably tied to the simulacrum’s systemic dysfunctionality. In short, it dominates the channel and undermines transparent communication. There is mention of this in Alain Badiou’s notion of the reign of opinion or phatic discourse and echoes of it are found in Giorgio Agamben’s motif of ‘communication without having anything to communicate’ (Heron, 2008, p. 48). Such a motif views pure communicability as that which dissolves the received differences between ‘man’ and ‘animal’ in the pure opening of voice. Writing against the terror inherent in the code – which Jakobson’s model of communication grants primacy to – a code that privileges the sender over receiver and the refrain that maintains their relation, and translates the univocity and legibility of messages - Baudrillard bleakly critiques the way such a code excludes ambivalence and domesticates signs. Here the phatic function is a ‘simulation pact’ based on tele-
phasis or ‘contact for contact’s sake’ – nowadays found in texting, email, chat, etc. Omnipresent and vapid, tele-phasis symbolises a veritable implosion of meaning and communication. Baudrillard rejects the claim that the semantic content of a message is always legible and univocal. In the sense this is what one finds in Pinter’s dialogues and amidst the menacing, sinister silence, full of ill-intent, in the ambivalence of exchange. Language is actually employed to keep thought at bay. It lies. On this, Steiner in his *Language and silence: Essays on language, literature, and the inhuman* (1967, p. 150-151) discusses the matter clinically and decisively, insisting:

*Something of the lies and sadism will settle in the marrow of the language. Imperceptibly at first, like the poisons of radiation sifting silently into the bone. But the cancer will begin, and the deep-set destruction. The language will no longer grow and freshen. It will no longer perform, quite as well as it used to, its two principal functions: the conveyance of humane order which we call law, and the communication of the quick of the human spirit which we call grace.*

**Pinter and phatic communication**

At first glance and for the most part, Pinter’s *Apart From That* is a short, scathing sketch lambasting the way people say little almost nothing in everyday utterances on the mobile. It is well known that Pinter was highly critical of mobile phones and held a considerable aversion and disdain for the way people use them to communicate. The aforementioned dialogue clearly is influenced by Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, in which Vladimir and Estragon are compelled to prolong their conversation, while waiting for Godot. Yet, whereas the phatic interjections appear vacuous in *Apart from that*, in Beckett’s play the characters do indeed hold
some form of minimal exchange of content. While Beckett’s silences intimate the
disintegration of language, Pinter’s silences are infused with affect and a pregnant
transmission of meaning.

Briefly summarised, in the exchange, two characters Gene and Lake are found
communing via mobile phones, saying little almost nothing apart from that seems
like banal concerns. Although repeated references are made to an apart from that
the precise content is left unsaid. The discussion continues despite interruptions
and communication breakdown and ends left hanging in the air, without resolution.
It concludes with the unsaid yet to be uttered and for good reason because Pinter
often ends in silence, he explains, as he has no answers to afford us. This is
our lot. When the sketch was included in Pinter’s People in 2007, which was
comprised of sketches and monologues, circumstances were changed to present
the communication between two patients in hospital (Phillips and Kevin Eldon),
one patient in traction, the other on an intravenous drip. Here the spectre of decay
and death is silenced through phatic communication. When we look at Apart From
That again and consider mobile telephony we can imagine Gene and Lake wrapped
up close to their mobile phones, hibernating incommunicado. One imagines Gene
and Lake alone, staring into the abyss, amidst the chaos and noise of a bustling
city, with their silences insinuating various affects such as confusion, uncertainty,
and sadness. Although facing the abyss through terminal illness, the patients
remain steadfastly focussed on the mundane. In this instance, when Gene inquires
into Lake’s well-being what he is really doing is establishing a phatic relation
to Lake with the sole intention of ascertaining if the means of communication is
working – as Jakobson explained above. Taken in this way, it would seem Pinter’s
point is that the medium itself rids the message of content, despite the efforts to
convey messages with existential content.

Phatic communication thus pertains to the channel: it is found in the
expression ‘I can't hear you, you're breaking up’ in the middle of a conversation. Lake asks Gene ‘How about you?’ To wit Gene replies ‘Oh you know ... all things considered ...’ Lake sympathises with this and adds: ‘I know. But apart from that ...?’ In inquiring into something other than the apart from that one can infer that Gene is uttering the conative or imperative function, which dominates the structure of the speech event - since the dialogue is clearly directed to Lake. As Jakobson insists the intended message of an exchange cannot capture the full meaning of the verbal event because the content of the communication is dependent on the context, the code, the means of contact, and other configurations. The meaning of a message is enclosed in the total act of communication, with the semantic elements of the message insinuated amidst other extra-linguistic factors (Bradley, 2012).

Critics of such a model point to the argument that the number of distinct parts constituting a total communicative event cannot be decomposed so readily. On this line of reasoning, this is because the communicative event is continuous and dynamic. The Jakobson model is criticised precisely for its linearity and sequencing of relation: from the addresser to the addressee, an unalterable ‘unidirectional sequencing’ (Chang, p. 177). What is extracted from the message, from the absurd, phatic exchange of the inessential between Gene and Lake is an element which challenges Jakobson’s model of phatic communion. Although the language passes for communication, there is something unsettling about the dialogue. Something jars and sticks in the throat: what we find is an economy of affect (affects such as anxiety, confusion, bewilderment), an event and performance of power as puissance, a stammering and stuttering (begaïement de la langue as Deleuze and Guattari say) or an in-between. For Basil Chiasson (2010), interpreting Brian Massumi and Deleuze, the role of affect informs Pinter’s work as it is through ‘the direct, mutual involvement of language and extra-linguistic forces’ (Massumi, 2002, p. xix) that meaning can be construed as a material process, an ‘expression
Pinter: held incommunicado on the mobile

of forces acting upon each other'. We can say that an ordinary conversation and the everyday are seldom just that, because spoken language is replete with the unsaid, the unable to be said at that time, the unspoken: it is in this silence that a dark sense of foreboding leaks out cancerously. Pinter's work explores such contortions of language to the nth degree: expressions are hammered and bent out of shape, no longer transparent, no longer signifying what they usually signify. In Apart From That, what is lurking underneath the clichés in daily conversation is the ever so slight hint of an unwelcome 'elephant in the room' or 'weasel under the cocktail cabinet', a certain malignant presence pregnant with misfortune and foreboding. On the other side of the phatic spectrum, and taken in a phenomenological sense, it can equally be argued that an affective relation exists, a showing of empathy, a determination to simply be there for the other: in other words, the simply saying of something is as equally important as the said. In Levinisian language, in Pinter's dialogue, and despite the apparent lack of explicit meaningful communication, Gene and Lake show each other that they are present and for the other.

Cliché

Yet the lines in Apart From That are simple enough. They are packed with everyday interjection words: the same kind of chat one hears often on the train, bus or in the street. But in-between Pinter's lines there is something that hints at the unsaid. He has a knack for ostranenie – the making strange of ordinary patterns of linguistic representation – a point picked up by Jakobson who urges artists to make the ordinary uncanny in his famous definition of the artist's task, 'to make the ordinary strange' (Bruner, 1983).

In the mobile phone dialogue, it would seem the topics of death, disease, illness and the horror of war are too traumatic to confront directly. Such topics are
not part of the game of *the everyday*. Matters of the hell of the world are better blocked from transmission. Yet, in the sketch underneath the empty words, there is the hint of our throwness, an utmost impossibility welling up; a final last laugh. *It is there* in every word and utterance. More than this, it is that which envelops and nestles itself in every gasp, vibration of sonic matter, in every breath. It is that thick black melancholy which hovers above every interlocution. Listening in every dormant, brooding silence, it is enmeshed in the subtext and shadows shrouding silence. The quiet repose is deafened by rowdy, unwanted guests. It is a terse and austere form of expression, in which all is denuded. In the masterful use of a poetics of silence in the dramas of Pinter and Beckett is a silence that pours like water into ‘a sinking ship'. *Apart From That* is apart from one’s mortality. The unsettling part is that I’m speaking on the mobile but *apart from that* I have nothing meaningful to say.

Texting for its own sake is the phatic function of language *par excellence*: it is the maintenance of an affective bridge. Think of the button on Facebook or other social networks which is used more often than not to reply viscerally, however trivial, inane or inconsequential, to convey at least that one is present and understands that other people are too in front of their luminescent screens, alone and isolated, communing incommunicado. The mobile phone becomes the device through which short, phatic communications sustain social contact and convey affects, however virtual, rather than the means to confront, challenge and exchange fundamental ideas and beliefs. Mobile communication is therefore affective and phatic through and through, by its very intentionality. It is this which Pinter picks up on to show how phatic language can play a pivotal, albeit deleterious role in human relations. People use communication devices not to conceal their thoughts but to hide the fact *from themselves* that they have none. This criticism is not new, and it is not just an attack on the stupidity of everyday talk, the talk of *the they*. It
is found in Voltaire, who claims we have language to conceal thoughts from each other. Voltaire is usually attributed as saying:

*Men use thought only as authority for their injustice, and employ speech only to conceal their thoughts.*

While for Hermann Melville (1971) ‘all profound things and emotions of things are preceded and attended by silence’, as silence is deemed a general consecration of the universe, the only voice of God, or for Pico Iyer for whom silence is a divine voice, an eloquent sound, one that envelops words, for Pinter, silence is not so much a response to the ineffable: it is something more mundane, less other-worldly, more concrete and finite. It is the mirror opposite of this divine solitude and communion. It makes a racket. Earlier in his career, Pinter insisted there were two principal different forms of the idea of silence. The first is the straightforward case of when no word is spoken. It is the absence of content. The other is when one finds ‘a torrent of language’ precisely in the initial absence. As he says (1977):

*This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t.*

In this sense, Pinter seems to be dramatizing the unsaid behind the platitudes of small talk. Despite the clichés propagated by hearsay: there is also something else pertaining to alterity, perhaps undecidable, something more to be gleaned. The point is that conversations are invariably laden with a crust of meaning of a much more existential register and cadence. Behind everyday dialogue – salutations, talk of the weather - there is a desire for a deeper level of cultural and intercultural communication – which sometimes indirectly intimates at being-towards-
death. Meaning is buried deep within a ‘language cloud’ of chatter, nonsense, evasion, with silences engaged in power games, political statements, refusals, grudging consents. At the limit of the spoken word, there is the agonised silence: intimidation itself. Skeptical of the literal denotations of words, Pinter says one should look deeper for the implications and what is left unsaid. There is clearly a preoccupation with silence throughout Pinter’s corpus: it is the incommunicable that is always intimated. In a very important sense, Pinter suggests we communicate in the three following full stops … ‘in our silence’. Underneath the conveyance of unadulterated information is a conscious and deliberate use of orders, responses, solicitations, silences to express, often articulating unsavory power relations. The obverse of this is a masquerading of dialogue to conceal one’s true thoughts, a point which Victor L. Cahn (1993) picks up upon and insists language is infused with the unanswerable. To ward off this confrontation, we deploy questions, awkward, intermitted pauses, silences, and repetitions to hold on to power. Pinter’s characters in plays such as The Caretaker (1960) rely on colloquialisms, professional jargon, and convoluted word patterns as they twist and spasm in ever complex power relations. In Mountain People (1988), Pinter critiques the oppression of governments against the populace, in particular the suppression of the Kurds in Turkey in the 1980s. The following monologue of the officer taunting his prisoners is instructive, as it plays on the idea that even orders laden with the threat of violence and reprimand are seldom transparent and communicable. It would appear even the brute nature of such language fails to get its intended message across. Pinter attacks the abuse of power in this monologue, affirming the right to silence of the victims. (1988, p. 255-256):

*Now hear this. You are mountain people. You hear me? Your language is dead. It is forbidden. It is not permitted to speak your mountain language in this*
place. You cannot speak your language to your men. It is not permitted. Do you understand?... It is outlawed. You may only speak the language of the capital. That is the only language permitted in this place. You will be badly punished if you attempt to speak your mountain language in this place. This is a military decree. It is the law. Your language is forbidden. It is dead. No one is allowed to speak your language. Your language no longer exists.

Here taking the perspective of the abused, silence is not a failure of language per se but a refusal to use language as a communicative conduit to those in power. For Pinter it would seem the structures of domination and power in dialogue often keep truth-statements at bay. Silence is silent through this very domination. In this respect, that one learns to speak in one’s own name is no easy task. In this it seems it is Pinter’s point to suggest that it is not up to the master to legislate when the oppressed are at liberty to speak. Towards the end of *Mountain Language* (Pinter, 2001, p. 22), the following dialogue is heard. Silence is present. Yet one its own taciturn level, it refuses to budge, conform, to be complicit in wrongdoings.

Guard: Oh, I forgot to tell you. They’ve changed the rules. She can speak. She can speak in her own language. Until further notice.

The Old Woman remains still.

Sergeant: Look at this. You go out of your way to give them a helping hand and they f**k it up.

Language is used performatively to sustain power structures. Between words, silence means something has happened and it is not yet the time to speak. To return to *Apart from that*, there are two obstacles which block unmediated communication. The first is the existential problems of silence; the second,
the technical problem of transmission of meaning via mobile phones. The interlocutors are close yet so far away. In some sense, Pinter seems to be saying that the claustrophobic closeness to the other *qua* other makes one convulse. Echoing Wittgenstein's claim (1922/2010) that: 'what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence,' Pinter (1998) describes the function of speech as a deceptive 'stratagem to cover nakedness'. In 1962, in a discussion on the poverty of communication, we find Pinter thinking deeply about the terror of silence. He writes:

*I think we communicate only too well, in our silence, in what is unsaid, and that what takes place is a continual evasion, desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves. Communication is too alarming. To enter into someone else's life is too frightening. To disclose to others the poverty within us is too fearsome a possibility.*

We seldom hear speech as it is a necessary 'avoidance, a violent, sly, and anguished or mocking smoke screen' which invariably controls the other. The obverse of this is that in true silence we come closer to vulnerability. In *Writing for the Theatre* (1977), Pinter insists that it is from silence that language struggles to emerge:

*You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpansive, giving little away, unreliable, I, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises. A language, I repeat, where under what is said, another thing is being said.*

Underneath what is said, for Pinter, another matter is uttered. Words obscure
silence. Silence is therefore akin to a minor tongue; it is the foreign language within language; it contorts and strains language and forces it to stutter and stammer. Stammering occurs in this silence. It is generative of new grammatical or syntactic powers: it makes language delirious. In similar ways, the philosopher David Wood (1990) considers indirect communication as a perlocutionary act – the carrying out of an existential perlocution. He writes (1990, p. 110): “To understand how indirect communication is possible we must grasp what it is about ordinary communication that is being changed.” Silence propels language to the limit of what can and cannot be uttered. As words create silence, the latter suspends meaning and exhausts language. At the limit of what can be said there is a confrontation with silence. Silence is both a dramatic and rhetorical strategy. It is a deliberate rhetorical strategy, a ‘desperate rear guard attempt to keep ourselves to ourselves’, as Pinter says. If language is a fragmentary and incomplete medium to express anxiety and incompleteness, it is also a way to stall conversation.

Silence and Japan

The silence found in communicative behaviour in Japan is defined largely by Confucianism. The chin (沈) of chinmoku (沈黙) signifies a moving in, a meaning which differs from the original meaning to hang down. The moku (黙) suggests a mixing of black and dog, a silent dog. Silence and speech form a continuum of communication. For example, silence communicates through reticence, ambivalence, situational logic. Several interesting senses of silence are found in Japanese proverbs or kotowaza - (see Nakane, 2007; Loveday, 1986; Fischer and Yoshida, 1968, p. 37-39) - such as ‘if there are many words, there will be much shame’, ‘close your mouth and open your ears’. Others include ‘one treats one's mouth like a guarded jar’, ‘mouths are to eat with, not to speak with’, ‘if there
are many words there will be much shame', 'the tiger in one's mouth destroys oneself', 'a person of many words has little refinement', 'those who know do not speak, those who speak do not know', 'honey in the mouth, a sword in the belly'. Such kinds of kotowaza indicate the cultural role and philosophical import silence has in Japanese communication strategies. On this account the Pinter pause seems at odds with the intended meaning encapsulated in the kotowaza ‘iwanu ga hana’ ('to say nothing is a flower' or 'silence is wisdom when speaking is folly'). Indeed, Yamada (1997, p. 17) notes that the kotowaza ‘only the belly speaks the truth’ suggests the ideal communication model is one among interlocutors precisely without talk. In Silence, the Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance (1980), Bernard P. Dauenhauer considers discourse as precisely arising out of silence. It is the latter that prepares the way for discourse to appear and ‘allots it room in which to appear’. Before the word there was silence. And according to Tannen (1985, p. 94), shared between intimates, silences are shared as an interpersonal bond. This is the silence of that ‘sweet silent thought' found in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30, that perfect rapport between intimates without words. All of this seems very far from the existential dread looming in Pinter’s plays and prose.

**Alphonso Lingis**

The philosopher Lingis suggests that ‘genuine’ communication takes place on a much deeper level of social relation. If the spoken word ossifies thought, congeals relations, stratifies and blocks the conveyance of meaning without explicit articulation, and despite the feverish desire for instant communication, as we are always enshrouded by the ‘clangor of the world’ (Iyer), Lingis (2013) claims that in our great urban technopoles, there is indeed a need to withdraw, to go incommunicado as it were, from the clamour of being with others. He writes:
Today one half of humanity has assembled in cities where whenever people are talking to others, facing them, they talk into cell phones, there exists a powerful drive for solitude.

In his 2013 lecture ‘Communication and Silence’, Lingis insists that one travels well when one leaves language behind. Without words, without a common tongue, one encounters the other and is other for the other. Alone in a foreign land, without the comfort of a shared tongue, one appeals to the other for help in one’s very comportment. One’s nakedness before the other, unmasking the false identities of personhood reveals one’s essential singularity. On this account, silence is singular. It is mine and yours: sometimes a prison, a home, a violence, a torture house. Language conceals thoughts fabricated in silence. In his lecture, Lingis says: “Words do not attach to the singular, apparition or event, but designates what is common to a succession of past and future apparitions of events.” If silence is refuge and sanctuary, conversation pulls us from the possibility of insight, and from the uneasiness, attractions, desires, lusts anxieties, mounting pleasure of bodies, as Lingis puts it. Discussing the web of closed relations enmeshing the subject, he writes:

We subject ourselves to demanding words, oppressive, words, abrasive words, stinging words, biting words, cutting words. Words that construct us, lacerate us, humiliate us, sicken us, mortify us.

For the phenomenologist (Lingis, 1994), noise is that which is internal to and disruptive of rational discourse. For it is in voices which tremble with emotion, and crack with tears, which expose shame, sorrow and anger, that render the speaker present and knowable to the listener. One imagines Lingis analysing Pinter’s plays
and agreeing that the noise of the world is so very alien from the humanist rational discourse of philosophy and science (Lingis, 1994, p. 80). Contra Serres' notion of rational communication (1992), Lingis insists language is much more than the ideal speech communities of the linguists and philosophers. Behind abstract meaning, there is a gamut of idiosyncrasies undermining the abstract message for rational communication, which necessitates the repression of background noise, as the unsayable that forms the backdrop to the world, as noise. As he says: 'the particular timber, pitch, volume, and tonal length of the words being uttered, the particular color, penmanship, and typeface, of the visible patterns' (Lingis, 1994, p. 77). In this notion of noise and the murmur of the world, there is something above and beyond the idle talk in everyday discourse and communication. It is not so much that the message is lost in the interference and confusion of background noise, as murmur and the background noise are both essential to the total speech act. Writing against the ideal city of communication maximally purged of noise (Lingis, 1994, p. 12) and contra Serres, Lingis critiques the view that the 'maximal elimination of noise would produce successful communication among interlocutors themselves maximally interchangeable' (1994, p. 78). In silence, for Lingis like Pinter, there is evidence of a character's will to communicate. Even as no words are spoken, in other silent spaces there is a torrent of language: the expectant silence of waiting. The Pinter pause... represents such a subtle or elliptical form of dialogue. In this way, silence is an escape from cliché as it disrupts the flow of narrative and provides an unsettling pause, an absence of communication laden with meaning. It is an example of a circuit breaker, the vacuoles of non-communication of which Deleuze speaks of in his critique of order-words and the compulsion to speech and reiterate everyday speech (Bradley, 2012). Deleuze and Guattari write: 'We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present' (1994, p. 108).
In his masterful *Language and Silence* (2010), Steiner discerns a trend towards the retreat from the word in modern literature as the violence of war makes mankind speechless. As Kazuyoshi Oishi (2007, p. 111) puts it: “With the death of Logos, we have lost the traditional order of language and the authoritative mode of communication.” Steiner claims the world of Auschwitz lies outside speech because it is outside reason. One cannot utter the truth of it because ‘to speak of the unspeakable is to risk the survivance of language as creator and bearer of humane, rational truth. Words that are saturated with lies or atrocity do not easily resume life’ (p. 182). On this account, language is dethroned, no longer sovereign, the repository of humane rationality, value and truth. In poetry, Steiner finds the limits of the expressable, the threshold of meaning. But even poetry itself is contaminated; its composure and comportment to the world affected by modern technology because the quality of silence in language is ‘organically linked’.

Discussing portable technology such as mobile phones or the Walkman and its effects on young people, he explains (Cerf, 2011):

You and I are sitting here, in this house surrounded by a garden, where there is no other noise other than the sound of our conversation. Here I can work. Here I can dream and try to think. Silence has become a huge luxury. People are living in a constant din. There is no more night in cities. Young people are afraid of silence. What will become of serious and difficult reading? Is it possible to read Plato while wearing a Walkman? I find this very worrying.

**Samuel Beckett**

Silence, yes, but what silence! For it is all very fine to keep silence, but one has also to consider the kind of silence one keeps. Beckett, *The Unnameable*, (1959)
In the July 9th 1937 letter to Axel Kaun, Beckett describes English as ‘a veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it’ (1983, p. 171). The Irish poet imagines a literary technique to get at the things themselves, as it were. The mask must be torn off, dismantled, drilled into until something starts to emerge. The craft of the writer is to bore one hole after another into the materiality of language itself until what lurks beneath and behind begins to seep through. In this respect, the writer is a seer, a hearer. Although later dismissing the letter, describing it as “German bilge”, he nevertheless admits he cannot imagine a higher goal for a writer (1983, p. 172) than the boring away at language until the incommunicable enters into words. In *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1923/1993), Beckett suggests that semantic content is found between phrases, in the silence, communicated in the intervals and not always in the terms of the statement. For Beckett it would seem that silence is used as an alternative to language as he views language as an excess. There is no repose ‘in the forest of symbols’ (1983, p. 172) he insists. For Beckett, behind the veil of language lies silence as that absolute zero to which all communication is sent.

I imagine Pinter also burrowing his way into the silence that lurks under the thin superficial meniscus of meaning. Having found it, he grants it a menacing perlocution. As he can’t simply liberate the incommunicable from that ‘terrible materiality of the word surface’ of which Beckett speaks; he can’t simply give it air, resuscitate it, let it speak, or force it to deliver utterances. More than this, he can’t simply represent it in a game of exact equivalence. Responding to the shame of our lot, and the rank complicity in letting power hold sway without resistance, one tears at the veil which conceals and compromises, one rips oneself to bits. Pinter sets the record straight on his attitude toward language in his Nobel Prize speech *Art, truth and politics*, insisting language is a kind of regime of order-words, cliché and hearsay. It is often deployed to keep thought at bay and to
maintain the status quo. Thoughts and counter-thoughts happen but language hides them from unbridled exposure. It is a question of truth and the maintenance of power. The public, for Pinter, are acquiescent in the maintenance of this status quo. What surrounds us, he insists, ‘is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed’ (Pinter, 2005). Pinter concludes his speech by discussing the role of the writer, suggesting the metaphor of the mirror bears close examination to Beckett’s veil. He writes:

_When we look into a mirror we think the image that confronts us is accurate. But move a millimetre and the image changes. We are actually looking at a never-ending range of reflections. But sometimes a writer has to smash the mirror – for it is on the other side of that mirror that the truth stares at us._

Thinking the dignity of man, as that which is nearly lost to us, he adds: “I believe that despite the enormous odds which exist, unflinching, unswerving, fierce intellectual determination, as citizens, to define the real truth of our lives and our societies is a crucial obligation which devolves upon us all. It is in fact mandatory.”

**Conclusion**

The mobile phone is a heuristic trope to think the way in which interlocutors are simultaneously in constant contact and yet completely torn apart from one another. In _Apart From That_ interlocutors talk about nothing as such but it is the fact of being together that wards off the discussion of the ominous horror waiting on the horizon. Facing alterity, it is as if in talking, we _crouch and quail_ through communication, to conceal - disingenuously - the angst of our lot.

It has been suggested that _Apart From That_ indirectly points to the Iraq war
and the horrors taking place in the ancient kingdom to this day, to the heinous acts committed at Abu Ghraib prison and the overall betrayal of her citizens by the British government - in the apart from that. Indeed, scathing in his criticism of the British and American governments, Pinter in his Nobel prize lecture - in what seems tantamount to an act of parrhesia – an act of telling the truth and taking a potentially fatal risk in doing so - seems to decide to utter precisely what ‘must be said’. Yet is not the explicit ‘must be said’ also indelibly tarred by dissimulation? Is not the act of parrhesia – or speaking candidly - the conceit of Pinter who consider his own words as bearers of truth while his characters toil in their menacing silences? This point is instructive as it raises the question of how one passes from the implicit, from strained articulation, from speaking in one’s own name, to issuing a clarion call to those attacked in manifold ways by those in power – in Pinter’s view principally Tony Blair in collusion with the US government who rode roughshod over United Nations resolutions in the build up to the Iraq war. Transposing the apart from that to Japan, it is hard to see the それはそれとしか て as anything other than reference to the continuing danger of radiation leaks from the Fukushima nuclear plant. The silence around this issue is - as they say - deafening.

Bringing the matter back to linguistic concerns, we can say this: that a fundamental imperative is heard even in the phatic fact of speaking, in the very being-there, in-the-accompanying-the-other-towards-death. In the prior sayable there is something more fundamental that the said. In the saying, there is the essential and weight of the imperative; something distinct from the said. Communication is thus founded at the limit of communication when one must speak, when one’s simple presence is sufficient to speak volumes. It is in listening to the soundless imperative of the other’s presence, that the subject in directed and compelled to respond.
Ending on a positive note, while modern technology effectively jams communication between interlocutors, one can indeed isolate the desire to say something above and beyond the everyday and the banal. From a cursory analysis of Pinter's aversion to the mobile phone, we can demonstrate that there is something lurking around the banal passage of noise. Underneath such everyday chatter amidst the ominous sense of violence, full of dark warnings and reprisals, there is also a faint, lingering hope, a desire for authenticity. Silence is another battlefield for humanity. Although the ever present disruption of communication is in need of deconstruction, the desire for authentic talk is an element which makes us rise above our animality. The conclusion is therefore affirmative in the Deleuzian sense, as it asks of the forces of silence which intensify not diminish life.

Bibliography


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Notes

1 A recurrent trope of substitution and play on words, sometimes reduced to assonance and alliteration.

2 Moreover, for Jakobson, ‘eloquent silence’ plays a central role in all communicative functions, especially in illocutionary speech acts. Part of the fabric of the conative function, eloquent silence operates as a direct or an indirect speech act and as a discourse marker: it calls on the addressee to lead the discourse, to
decide whether to continue or terminate it. As well as being the first verbal function acquired by infants, Jakobson contends that the phatic function of language is the only one which humans share with the animal kingdom (see Ephratt, 2008).

3 Pierre Guirard (1975) contends that phatic communication has a key role in all forms of communion from rites, solemn occasions, ceremonies; speeches, harangues to family conversations or amorous exchanges. Agreeing with Baudrillard, Guirard suggests that content of the communication is less important than the fact of being there and ‘of affirming one’s membership of the group’.

4 In ‘Requiem for the Media’ Jean Baudrillard (1981) criticises Jakobson's model of communication precisely because it excludes the reciprocity and antagonism of interlocutors, and the ambivalence of exchange – the noise resistant to codification. In other words, it excludes the quintessential otherness of the other.

5 One recognises the imperative of silence, but one goes on speaking anyway. Exhausted with speech, and discovering one has nothing else to say, one seeks a way to say precisely that. Susan Sontag (1983, p. 187-188) lamented the constant chatter also: ‘One recognizes the imperative of silence, but goes on speaking anyway. Discovering that one has nothing to say, one seeks a way to say.’ For Sontag, silence can be aesthetic, philosophical, preparatory, meditative, or an ordeal. It is articulated in a decision, indecision, or hesitation before deciding. It might be serious, dangerous, or devious. But it is rarely as it is – silent – as it is not simply a breakdown in communication as such but is used to convey some form of meaning. As Sontag’s point out, silence is inescapably a form of speech. Indeed, as well as having perlocutionary effect (Austin 1962), silent communicative acts possess illocutionary force in the sense that it may ‘question, promise, deny, warn, threaten, insult, request, or command, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction’ (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 6). As a communicative strategy, silence functions as a positive phatic function - used as an effective tool for emotional
defence. It serves as a useful politeness strategy to avoid the confrontation that a verbal expression may ensue (Jaworski, 1993).

Silence is not merely the opposite of speech, but in Japanese also antonymic to ‘noise, motion, and commotion’ (Hedges, & Fishkin, 1994, p. 113). Hedges and Fishkin claim that silence traditionally in Japan signifies ‘pensiveness, alertness and sensitivity’ (p. 113). Through channeling and back-channeling, active listening (sasshi or guesswork) and ‘haragei’ or belly art - as that subtle use of visceral silent communication – ‘a mutually satisfactory outcome’ can be achieved (Kenny, 2011, p. 56). There is also the phenomenon of isshin-dotai (one mind and body) between close couples, or ishin-denshin (a kind of intuition or telepathy), enshrouded by ‘aizuchi’ or phatic communication. One could say following Katsue Akiba Reynolds (2000) that the Japanese language is hyper-phatic in this respect. The other side of this can be equally true. Silence can also signify resistance (Yoneyama, 1999).