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Talk and Silence: Instantiations and Articulations

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abstract This paper considers the desire for unity, reconciliation and consensus underpinning three models of talking – namely, 'the meeting', 'the dyadic love relationship', and 'the psychoanalytic session'. We highlight the three domains' shared intellectual and historical heritage wherein talk is seen as a mode of achieving unity (of the group, of the dyad, or of the self) and conversely 'silence' is seen as pathology. Through looking at the role of silence in the works of Lacan, Joyce, and Beckett, we then examine how conversations with a collective, an Other, the self, etc. can all be enriched by ambivalence, antagonism and, in particular, silence. In contrast to the conventional understanding, silence is not the 'end' of understanding, but rather a new beginning. From this perspective, silence can be the basis upon which we can begin to imagine a principled relationship with the Other.

Introduction: Talk about Talk

In this paper we will examine distinct perspectives on the role of 'talk' in the relationship between self and other. We will argue that one way of interpreting the desire underpinning the imperative 'to talk' in contemporary society is to see it as a desire for reconciliation, unity, and consensus, a desire that often artificially reconciles difference and antagonism. Our main aim is to elaborate the desires underpinning various models of talking – namely, 'the meeting', 'the dyadic love relationship', and 'the psychoanalytic session' – and to show how they misrecognise the democratic, therapeutic and creative potential of silence. Silence is often in contemporary literature defined relationally as a condition the Master imposes on the Slave, as a force that renders 'women,' 'the subaltern' and other Others unable to 'speak' for themselves. While we do not wish to undercut the regressive effect of 'being silenced', this paper concludes by examining silence from a different point of view; from the position that 'talk' can sometimes silence the Other and lead to epistemological regression, disguised as reflexivity, into the 'self'. We will also look at how silence can inspire creativity in the self, as well as a tolerance for ambivalence, indeterminacy, and difference.

The specific examples we will use to illustrate this point about the desire for unity underpinning the contemporary imperative to 'talk' are; 'the meeting', 'the dyadic love

relationship', and 'the psychoanalytic session'. First, we will look at 'the meeting' as the archetypical model of the collective conversation. Second, we will look at the similarities between the desire for consensus underpinning the meeting, and the desire for unity in the love relationship – the archetypical model of the self-Other conversation – which, within contemporary culture's idealisation of romantic love, means conversation can become what Sennett calls a '*destructive Gemeinschaft*' (Sennett, 1977) or an oppressive 'absolute sincerity' (Bauman, 1991: 204). Third, we will also look at how, contrary to Freud's intent, the notion of the 'talking cure' within the medicalised model of psychoanalysis sees 'talk' as a means to achieving a unified ego and conversely sees 'silence' as a pathology. In the final section, we will examine how conversations with a collective, an Other, the self, etc. are all enriched by living with ambivalence and antagonism.

Meetings and the Desire for Consensus with the Collective Other

An important theme in the history of organisations since the French and American Revolutions is that of the generalisation and dissemination of the principles of the Democratic Revolution. In other words, the various ways through and by which the principles of the governance of power by communication and agreement become generalised beyond the central institutions of the legislature to become co-extensive with other diverse parts of the social and body politic. The prime example is broadening and deepening the franchise from 'men of property' to 'common men', to women, to colonials. Our interest in this context, however, is the extension of a form of communication developed in the core institutions of parliamentary democracy to the wider society. The key institution is one which was first identified by the mutually admiring gazes of the French and American Revolutions, represented in Alexis deTocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville and Mayer, 1969); namely 'the meeting'. The most fundamental institution that deTocqueville identifies in *Democracy in America* is not the House of Representatives, or the Senate, Governors' or Mayoral offices, but 'deliberative assemblies': informal meetings of diverse publics, town hall gatherings of community and interest groups of all sorts that convene and dissolve to discuss issues, and to form agreement on a collective course of action.

The standard rules by which meetings in the diverse organisational forms of modern society are conventionally governed are set out in *Robert's Rules*, a text which has come to prescribe the 'international style' of the rational form of communication in modern meetings. *Robert's Rules of Order: Pocket Manual of Rules of Order for Deliberative Assemblies* ([1876] 1970)[1] was first drawn up by a US Army Engineering officer, Henry M. Robert, who, when called upon, found himself ill equipped to preside over a church meeting. His military duties transferred him around the US, where he found what he described as 'virtual parliamentary anarchy' since every member from a different part of the country had differing ideas of correct procedure. 'To bring order out of chaos' he

1 First edition, 1876; revised editions: 1876, 1893, 1915, 1943, 1951, 1970, 1981, 1990, 2000. *Robert's Rules* is available on the internet at [http://www.constitution.org/rror/rror--00.htm]

wrote *Robert's Rules of Order*. Through *Robert's Rules,* the military tradition of a bureaucratically ordered, hierarchical command structure and the mathematical precision of engineering, are brought to bear on the egalitarian and residually anarchistic forms of American democracy. The *Rules* synopsise and standardise parliamentary procedure to make the basics of parliamentary procedure available to the public and to organisational life beyond the formal institutions of the legislature. *Robert's Rules* expresses a methodology for mediating and resolving social conflict, facilitating and legitimating decision making, optimising collective resources and expediting collective action. They quickly became the standard procedure for the conduct of 'deliberative assemblies' – meetings – voluntary, commercial, charitable and legislative.

Insofar as the *Rules* have become highly generalised if not universalised feature of organisational life of modern society – from the Community Council to the Boardroom, to the trade union and left-wing faction meeting – they are a vital moment in the expansion and institutionalisation of the democratic revolution. Meetings organised according to *Robert's Rules* have become a familiar and basic staple of the everyday life and workaday culture of modern organisations. They represent the extension of Parliamentary democratic procedure beyond the confines of the legislature, and reciprocally the meeting culture of everyday life of organisations feed back into the regeneration and the legitimation of parliamentary democracy. As with the institution of Parliament, the meeting functions as a methodology for rationally governing the organization by both resolving conflict between different parties within the organization, and simultaneously, by harnessing and optimising the creative energies of the various parties comprising the organisation.

An exemplary instance is the role of the meeting in the private business corporation, as this is the site of the most trenchant sources of conflict in modern society – the conflict of interest between Capital and Labour. An important theme in contemporary industrial relations and management science holds that industrial conflict can be reconciled harmoniously at the level of the individual firm. In the wider society, corporatist 'social partnership' agreements are painstakingly hammered out and worked up from meetings between shop floor and management, through unions and employers organisations, to political parties and the legislature. The 'share-holder' societies and 'social-partnerships' of Blair's UK and throughout the EU – as well as the healthy body politics of the late modern liberal capitalist democracies – are premised ultimately on the democratic structuring function of the meeting.

Thus, the meeting contains within it two opposing tensions: that which optimises the creative energies of the parties involved, and that which seeks to reconcile opposing interests in the interests of power. We see the clearest material correspondence of this desire for consensus in the phenomenon of 'the Minutes', an abstracted report of agreement purportedly arrived at, reified and fetishized as an objective record compiled by a 'recording secretary' a split sub-species of the subject of the Chair, that fixes the basis of the next meeting. In some ways, the process of minute-taking reflects the best of the democratic impetus towards compromise and process. For instance, positions dissenting from the majority view may be recorded in the minutes, and criticisms and revisions of the minutes are invited at subsequent meetings. However, from another

point of view, the final version of the minutes can become fetishized as an objective record of 'consensus' which retroactively imposes consensus on the collective. For instance, the chair has control over the pace of the meeting and the length of time dedicated to dissent, and therefore dissenting views run the risk of being inadequately represented or expressed in meetings if the chair judges to be irrelevant to the collective decision-making process (expressed, for instance, in the claim of 'time constraints'). In this way, the Minutes can at times gloss over so much that actually went on – the Minutes themselves become a symptom of the problem of the collective body of modern organisational life and its continuing neurosis and disorders: namely that consensus is imposed on the meeting, that a unity of desire and purpose, agreement, order, is superimposed on the collective body.

While bureaucratic, legal-rational and instrumental discourses are seen as essential to the efficient achievement of the ends of goal-oriented modern organisations, they are equally the source of stultification, motivational disturbance, failure to adapt and innovate, and inertia. Our point here is a more fundamental Weberian argument that is underdeveloped in Habermas's less subtle, undialectical rational-linear schema: that rules and procedures in meetings have tended to become rigidly institutionalised. The way in which procedures in deliberative assemblies have tended to become rigidly institutionalised is illustrated by a well-known scene from the Monty Python film '*Life of Brian'* wherein a radical faction, The People's Front of Judea, are conducting a meeting, convened in accordance with *Roberts Rules of Order*:

> John Cleese character (Reg, the Chair): 'Right now, Item Four: Attainment on world supremacy within the next five years. Francis, you have been doing some work on this?'
>
> Michel Palin Character: 'Yeah, Thank you, Reg. Well, quite frankly, siblings, I think 5 years is optimistic unless we can smash the Roman empire in the next 12 months.
>
> Twelve months, yeah?
>
> Twelve months. And let's face it, as empires go, this is the big one. So we've got to get up off our assess, and stop just talking about it!'
>
> All: 'Hear hear!'
>
> Eric Idle character: 'I agree. It's action that counts, not words, and we need action now!'
>
> John Cleese character: 'You're right, we can sit around here all day, talking, passing resolutions and making clever speeches; it's not as if one Roman soldier…'
>
> Michael Palin: 'So let's stop gabbing on about it, it's completely pointless, and it's getting us nowhere,'
>
> All: Right!
>
> Eric Idle: 'I agree, this is a complete waste of time'.
>
> Judith (breathlessly enters) 'They've arrested Brian!'
>
> All: What?
>
> Judith: They've dragged him off; they are going to crucify him!
>
> John Cleese: 'Right. This calls for immediate discussion. A completely new motion! New motion: That there be immediate action, once the vote has been taken, in the light of fresh information from sibling Judith…'

> Judith: 'Reg, for god's sake, it's perfectly simple. All you have to do is go out that door now, and try to stop the Romans from nailing him up. It's happening Reg, it's actually happening, Reg! Can't you understand? Arrgh!'
>
> John Cleese character: 'A little ego trip from the feminists.'

This is funny because it speaks to a 'truth' we all recognise. What it highlights and plays with is the bureaucratisation and juridification of *Robert's Rules* – a tendency towards formal rationalisation that runs counter to the initial intention to promote and facilitate the flow of communication and thus aid in the institutionalisation of substantive rationality in normatively binding agreement (as opposed to an art of interpretation). This fetishisation of method apparent in the Monty Python example extends far beyond the parameters of the meeting, but rather is a symptom of our emphasis on technical procedures and the formalistic organisation of knowledge. The John Cleese character's refusal to act until a motion and a vote is taken paradoxically impedes rather than facilitates the functioning of collective decision-making.

Contemporary critiques of the subject challenge the rational version of the subject presumed by the institutional form of the modern meeting. First, challenges to the rationality, coherence and unity of the subject call into question the subject's capacity to be present to itself in the first place, and thus the assumption that the subject has unmediated access to its own desires. In Young's words, "subjects all have multiple desires which do not cohere; they attach meanings to objects without always being aware of each layer or their connections . . . I cannot understand another as he or she understands himself or herself, because he or she does not completely understand himself or herself" (Young, 1990: 310-311). In short, constituting the desires of the 'we' is difficult if those of the 'I' cannot be adequately represented.

In conclusion, our first point is that 'the meeting' in contemporary organisational culture is premised on the rational ideal that 'talk' leads to consensus, or the belief that through adhering to formal rules and procedures, collective decision-making or a consensus can be achieved or at least be approximated. However, this is not to disavow the democratic intent behind this ideal of collective consultation, or the need for meetings, for clearly meetings are necessary, and in many instances the only forum where individuals have an opportunity to have 'a voice' within certain organisational structures.

The Dyadic Love Relationship: 'Talk' and the Desire for Unity with the Other

This notion that 'talk' leads to unity is of course not only relevant to work life, but is even more applicable to personal life. Specifically, we are driven by the imperative 'to talk', to have 'free and open communication'. This imperative towards 'absolute sincerity' (Bauman, 1991: 204), to talk out conflict, not only applies to meetings, but applies to our most intimate relationships. In our intimate love relationships we are also taught to 'talk it out', 'express ourselves', 'bare our souls', and we are expected to aspire to unrealistic standards of intimacy and communication with our significant others in our lives. We are expected to, in Bauman's words, "'open oneself up' to the

partner, to share with the partner the whole, the most private truth about one's inner life, to be 'absolutely sincere' to hide nothing, however upsetting the information may be for the partner" (Bauman, 1991: 204). Sennett calls this imperative to bare one's soul '*destructive Gemeinschaft*'.[2] For him, it is founded on the belief that "identity may indeed be freely construed by talking, that there is no 'society' as something different from intimate transactions" (Sennett, 1977: 196). Bauman describes this idea that continuous self-revelation and self-disclosure forges intimacy as "identity building through confession" (Bauman, 1991: 204), and characterises this unrealistic version of intimacy as 'destructive communion'.

Bauman's and Sennett's description of the 'destructive communion' and the oppressive dimension of 'absolute sincerity' echoes Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic: the self cannot be fully conscious unless it is recognised by an other; "self consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel, 1961: 248). However, being recognised by another requires that we recognise the other as self as well; we must first acknowledge the other. The danger is that acknowledging the other can lead to a confusion of boundaries between self and other, or in simple terms, we can get so caught up in, or lost in the other that we lose the self. The self must thus find a balance between the recognition of the other and assertion of the self, and must maintain a balance, a tension, a midpoint between self-assertion and recognition; they must "recognise themselves as mutually recognising one another" (Hegel, 1961: 249). However, in Hegel's dialectic, when two selves meet, this balance between self-assertion and recognition goes through imbalances, and the two integral moments of self-consciousness (assertion and recognition) become separated; and one self begins to negate, kill or erase the other. Here is where the classic master / slave struggle begins, and inequality emerges between the master and the slave, for in Hegel's view the self does not want to recognise the other.

For instance, 'absolute sincerity' is a call for recognition, in that it requires the partner to listen, but also self-assertion, because it requires the partner to accept and give agreement. In Bauman's terms, this places an enormous burden on the partner because "the partner is asked to give agreement to things which do not necessarily arouse his or her enthusiasm, moreover, he or she is asked to be 'sincere', and 'honest' in reply" (Bauman, 1991: 204). Thus, this idealised model of absolute intimacy enslaves both individuals, posits an overly harmonious version of 'oceanic oneness', and obscures antagonisms, differences, and ambivalences. As Bauman says:

> The destructiveness of communion sought by the partners in love is caused first and foremost by the implication of reciprocity. To sustain the animus, to go on seeking genuine mutuality – one needs the courage to face the possibility of drawbacks and reversals. One must also learn to live with the shortcomings of the partner. Once aimed in both directions, intimacy makes negotiation and compromise necessary. And yet it is precisely negation and compromise which one or both partners may be too impatient, or too self-concerned, to bear lightly. After all, two distinct often

2 The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies introduced the term *Gemeinschaft* in his classic work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. For Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft* describes a romanticised version of intimate relations exemplified in the community, family and neighbourhood in contrast to the instrumental, rationalist nature of *Gesellschaft* exemplified in the city, the state and the organisation. Sennet points us to the darker dimension of the imperative to bare one's soul in the intimate relations of *Gemeinschaft*.

> contradictory personal projections must be accepted and affirmed simultaneously – a task always difficult and often impossible. (1991: 204-5)

Put another way, versions of the dyadic love relationship which ultimately seek to close the gap between subject and object, and articulate difference as something that has to be overcome, are doomed to failure. This is not to say that all attempts at achieving a strong communication should be abandoned, but rather that such formulations must take account of the inevitable antagonism of the social, the impossibility of 'fixing difference', the contingent character of identity, and of the fragmented, multiple and conflicting desires of the subject. The problem with complete mutuality, merging, oceanic oneness, is that it lies outside the symbolic order.

In concluding this section, how do we construct a principled relationship to difference, to the Other, that keeps the Other alive in his/ her Otherness, and resists closing the subject-object gap in favour of annihilation on the one hand, or total identification and merging with the Other on the other hand? One way is to recognise the limits of 'talk', and the impossibility of the 'complete' reconciliation' of antagonism. The problem, in Hegel's terms, is how to "cancel the opposition but preserve the difference" (Hegel, 1961: 359). Irigaray alludes to this when, in formulating sexual difference, she suggests that we tend to "consummate with or consume the other" (Irigaray, 1987: 35), by consummating or merging with the Other and denying difference and incorporating it as part of the self, or by consuming the Other, annihilating or devouring it. Instead she suggests that we should retain a sense of the wonder we first experience when encountering difference: "Wonder might allow (the subject and the object) to retain an autonomy based on their difference, and give them a space of freedom or attraction, a possibility of separation or alliance" (Irigaray, 1987: 82). This autonomy is based on the recognition that the interval between the subject and the object should not be crossed, but rather the gap should remain open so that one is never consummated/ consumed by the other. This gap, this space makes the inevitability of difference, of discontinuity, of the antagonism of the social. It is only in the preservation of this space that a tolerance of difference can be formulated.

The Fantasy of 'The Integrated Ego' through 'The Talking Cure'

Psychoanalysis, at least in the way it has been medicalised, also believes in the possibility of unifying the divided parts of the ego through talk. This fantasy of integration apparent in contemporary self-help rhetoric is to some degree attributable to the tendency for orthodox psychoanalysis to subscribe to an overly unified notion of the ego and the faith in the success of psychoanalysis as the 'talking cure'. If the principles of democratic deliberation promise to resolve conflict and optimise the energies of the modern social body – even notoriously troublesome industrial and commercial bodies – then the same is true of the individual member's body. Freud's revolutionary science of psychoanalysis shows that at the level of the individual body there are violent and debilitating intrusions into the normal life of sufferers: neuroses, which are symptoms of underlying tensions and conflict between Id and Superego. These symptoms can be relieved and neuroses 'cured' by a therapeutic intervention of rationalised communication. As in the fundamental transformation of parliamentary democracy,

psychoanalysis rests on premises that mirror and extend the fundamental transformative institutions of parliamentary democracy, namely that violent inner conflict in the mind of the subject can be averted and 'cured' by representation and transference. Previously silent and inarticulate forces, unconscious conflicting desires forcibly repressed and giving rise to violence and madness are represented through psychoanalysis: they are voiced and given expression, negotiated and come to terms with. Through the process of the 'talking cure', the subject could let their unconscious 'speak', become reconciled with the divided parts of him/herself, and thus achieve a more unified, harmonious and organised ego. The therapeutic intervention that makes this reconciliation and reorganisation of the ego possible is Transference, through the mediating institution of the Analyst who convenes the meeting and acts as an objective, impartial, and neutral arbiter.[3] The transference of conflicted desires onto the analyst in the formally structured forum of the psychoanalyst's clinic is the micro level equivalent of the organised meeting at the mezzo, and the Parliamentary session at the macro social level.

If 'the meeting' is the structuring unit of social relations in the discourse of organization, then 'the session' is the pivotal social encounter in the discourse of psychoanalysis. Our argument is that not only did both emerge in the same epoch (towards the end of the nineteenth century); they also share the same discursive 'gene pool' (i.e. the transformative institutions of parliamentary democracy). Building on this, we can interpret both the meeting and the session in new and interesting ways by analysing each phenomenon in terms of the other. So, for instance, corresponding with *Robert's Rules*, the standard (and standardising) code regulating and governing the conduct of the analytic session is the *Rules of Practice of the International Psychoanalytic Association* (IPA) drawn up by Freud himself in several papers on technique, e.g. 'On Beginning the Treatment' (1913) and others, collected in *Standard Edition XII*. This Code of Practice was institutionalised by the constituent member organisations of professional psychoanalysts such as the British Psychoanalytic Association (BPA) and the Societé Psychoanalytique de Paris (SPP).

Significantly, throughout his exposition of the principles of psychoanalysis, Freud has recourse to the metaphor of democratic institutions – and to the institution of the meeting in particular – to illustrate his theory. In the *Introductory Lectures* (Freud, 1933) and in *Civilisation & its Discontents* (Freud, 1930), he uses the example of a disorderly intruder interrupting a meeting, his being ruled out of order by the Chairman, and eventually his being excluded by doormen, to illustrate the rational governance of the irrational forces of the unconscious by the social institutions of the superego. In Freud's theoretical exposition it is the structural position of objectivity / neutrality that the analyst occupies in relation to the analysand, his symptom, and his trauma, that enables the phenomenon of Transference. The analyst is 'in the Chair'; s/he[4] is the 'Chairman' or simply the 'Chair.' In the session [as in the meeting] everything is 'addressed to the Chair', 'passes through…', is aired and circulated – transferred – to, by and through 'the Chair.' The analyst is an ear on the chair who 'gives a hearing to

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3 This reflects the chairman's objectivity as set out in *Robert's Rules*: "If the chairman has even the appearance of being a partisan, he loses much of his ability to control those who are on the opposite side of the question" (Robert, [1876] 1970: s58).

4 Although for Freud it was, of course, a 'he'; the same applies to Lacan for that matter.

the conflicted discourse of the subject. S/he occupies a structural position of separation and distanciation from the analysand – seated alongside the patient on the couch, a little behind, facing away from, eyes averted from the analysand. In the symbolic order and imaginative structure of the psychoanalytic session, the analyst is indifferent to the subject matter of the analysand. 'Psychoanalysis', Lacan says, "is a relationship which, by its very rules, excludes all real contact" (Lacan, 1994: 14). All this is analogous to the position of the Chair presiding over the meeting. Even if psychically, empirically, the participants are seated round a table on identical chairs, the Chair occupies a place apart in the symbolic order and imaginative structure of the meeting – a place of remove and distance from the subject matter, a position of relative objectivity, neutrality.[5]

Like a Chairman, the issue (trauma, and associated feelings) must be fully aired. Conflicting emotions are transferred onto the analyst, and the repetition of these conflicts represented now in a new social relation, enables rememoration.

> Each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the (traumatic) event by which it was provoked and in arousing the accompanying affect, and when the patient had described that event in the greatest detail and had put the affect into words. (Breuer and Freud, 1950)

This 'act of becoming aware' is an important part of the work. It is by this means that the 'talking cure' is effected: the airing of the problem – verbalisation of the trauma and the associated affects (feelings) is an important part of the process – akin to the centrality given to 'debate' in *Robert's Rules* – but in and of itself it is not sufficient. What is sought is to precipitate the subject's understanding towards deciding what sense to attach to the original event (Lacan, 1994: 18). This is how a Chair works. But it is not the whole job, according to Lacan and indeed to Freud; the conclusive work of the art of psychoanalysis is rememoration; reorganising the significance of the events remembered.

Both the meeting and the session exhibit similar processes of institutionalisation. The meeting in the bureaucratisation and juridification of *Robert's Rules*; the session in the medicalised institutionalisation of psychoanalysis as a technique bounded by technical rules (as opposed to an art of interpretation). Both processes of institutionalisation were driven by a modernist privileging of Reason and a desire for a unified – or at least unifiable – subject: that agreement can be reached, closure achieved, consensus obtained between opposed groups, the right decision agreed upon, truth arrived at by perfect clarity of communication, expounded by Habermas's Universal Pragmatics, and the Ideal Speech Act. As we have seen, one material correspondence of this desire is the phenomenon of the Minutes, in which participants sometimes do not recognise 'their' meeting. Just as each new meeting begins with a review of the previous meeting, each therapeutic session begins with a 'review' of the previous session and possibly a revision or reinterpretation of the material. This is not always successful, however, either in the meeting or in the session, as clients may not recognise their self in the abbreviated interpretations of the artless analyst. And just as the minutes superimpose

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5 This is explicitly addressed in *Robert's Rules* wherein it is stated that the Chairperson "In referring to himself he should never use the personal pronoun; he generally says, 'the chair', which means the presiding officer of the assembly" (Robert, [1876] 1970: s58).

an order on the collective body and gloss over and are silent about so much that actually went on, so too it is with the subject of psychoanalysis, where from another perspective there is no such order and consensus.

Silence in Lacan

In this section of this paper, we will consider how developments in (and deconstruction of) psychoanalysis as it was becoming institutionalised, especially the contribution of Jacques Lacan, can present a novel perspective on 'the meeting' in particular, and organising in general. Aligning with the special issue's theme, we will focus on the issue of silences and narrative breakdowns (cata-hexes) in the session and, by extension, in the meeting. For instance, some of the failures of clinical psychoanalysis, Lacan suggests, stem from Freud's own tendency to skip over the time intervals in which the event remains latent in the subject. In short, he annuls the times for understanding in favour of the moments of concluding which precipitate the mediation of the subject towards deciding the sense to attach to the original event. Freud himself, let us be clear, vacillated between seeing the unconscious as ultimately impenetrable, the subject as irredeemably split and enigmatic, and psychoanalysis as an art that was doomed to end in disappointment, and the overly rational medical model of the subject, psychoanalysis as an extension of scientific method, and the belief in the possibility – probability even – of achieving a 'cure.' But whereas Freud's genius was in maintaining these two diametrically opposed paradigms in dynamic dialectical tension, after the master's death the dominant form that psychoanalysis assumed was the rational medicalised model. It was this that Lacan opposed.

When Lacan began his training and practice of psychoanalysis, the SPP followed strictly the traditional Rules of Practice of the IPA. These Rules of Practice had the status of laws amongst the constituent members of the IPA. Amongst the fundamental Rules are: (i) analysis lasts for at least four years; (ii) analysis consists of at least four or five sessions per week, and (iii) a session lasts for fifty minutes. The rule governing the length of sessions was intended to govern (limit) the analyst's theoretically unlimited power. The analyst was not supposed to manipulate the time s/he devoted to a patient through arbitrary changes, and the patient had the right to speak for a length of time agreed in advance, even if s/he chose not to exercise that prerogative.

The breakaway group of which Lacan was a founding member, the Ecole Freudienne de Paris (EFP), was committed above all else to rescuing the spirit of Freudian psychoanalysis from the professional hegemony of medicine psychiatry and clinical psychology. In addition, part of Lacan's strategic plan for the EFP was for himself to exercise influence in shaping the new method (which he saw as being more true to Freud) by being Training Analyst to most of the school's members. Lacan found himself beholden to the IPA rules of clinical method, although the Rules were in danger

of becoming a constraining bureaucratic procedure, and adherence to them would limit his ability to influence the emergence of the EFP.[6]

Lacan broke the IPA rules. Long before he practised what came to be known (or infamous, depending on one's point of view) as 'short sessions', he used the technique of 'variable sessions', where he closed sessions as he saw fit. He thereby revised the rule protecting the patient's right to speak, and put the all-powerful analyst in the position of interpreter in the transference relationship. Lacan justified his breaking the rules on theoretical grounds: shorter and less frequent sessions produce a sense of frustration and separation in the patient. The point was to turn the transference relation into a dialectic by halting a session at certain significant words in order to reactivate unconscious desire.

"The unconscious needs time to reveal itself," Lacan agrees, but the question is: "how is this time to be measured" (1994: 77) ? Not by the precision of the clock, Lacan says, if only for the reason that "the malaise of modern man does not exactly indicate that this precision is in itself a liberating factor for him" (*ibid.*). We get a better idea of how to conceive of time in the discourse of psychoanalytic practice "by comparing the time [required for] the creation of a symbolic object with the moment of inattention when we let it fall" (*ibid.*). Lacan's style then, unlike *Robert's Rules*, was deliberately provocative, duplicitous and incomplete, and this created "a text that is difficult to enter and ultimately impossible to master" (Grosz, 1990: 17). Importantly, this mirrors the unconscious itself.

But even though Lacan breaks the rules and deliberately subverts the conventions of the international style of psychoanalysis, his own style of analysis continues to be developed in terms of the metaphor of the meeting, though not entirely a meeting conducted according to *Robert's Rules*. The analyst is no longer modelled after the Chairman, but plays a much more expanded, powerful and controlling role, corresponding perhaps to the role of 'General Secretary' s/he becomes the *Sujet Suppose-Savoir* (the subject supposed to know). The analyst, Lacan says,

> plays a recording role by assuming the function, fundamental in any symbolic exchange, of gathering … *la parole qui dure* [the lasting word]. As a witness called to account for the sincerity of the subject, depository of the minutes of his discourse, reference as to his exactitude, guarantor of his straightforward, custodian of his testament, scrivener of his codicils, the analyst participates in the nature of the scribe (like a recording secretary). But above all, he remains the master of the Truth of which this discourse is the progress. It is he above all who punctuates its dialectic. He is the judge of the value of this discourse. (1966: 98)

Akin to an Executive (or overly interventionist) Chairman, the analyst punctuates the discourse of the meeting: s/he hears the contribution, judges its value, and admits it or not in the discourse. The session under Lacan's chairmanship is a meeting in which the

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6 According to Roudinesco (1997), Lacan gave three lectures on this to the SPP, but he chose not to publish his position as it would set him at odds with the IPA, and in separate correspondence he assured the IPA and others that his procedure was experimental, and further that he had 'normalised' his practise (when clearly he hadn't). Apart from his presentations to the SPP and his professional correspondence on the matter, Lacan is quite explicit in his challenging the Rules governing time and the conduct of sessions in *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1994).

Chairman silences the speaker, as a Judge silences a witness in a courtroom. But the silence that the analyst imposes is intended to provoke a more 'truthful' contribution when the meeting/ session resumes.

The second way in which Lacan uses silence is not by silencing the analysand, by abruptly interrupting his/her discourse and terminating the session, but by the analyst remaining silent him or herself when the analysand expects to hear a communication from him/ her. The analyst is the Sujet Suppose-Savoir, but s/he refuses to speak, to provide an interpretation of the analysand's revelations. Instead s/he remains silent, indifferent, as though s/he had 'turned a deaf ear' to the subject's discourse – which in fact in a sense s/he has, as the subject's discourse is 'empty'. The analyst's silence – his/ her refusal to give an interpretation – is itself an interpretation, an eloquent interpretation of the analysand's narcissistic discourse, intended to have the effect of enabling the analysand to hear for him or herself with his/ her own ears the silence – the emptiness – of his/ her own construct echoed in the analyst's silence. This, for Lacan, the confrontation of the subject with the inner silence of the self, the emptiness of his/ her own constructions of him or herself, his/ her de-centredness, might be the proper beginning of the 'talking cure'.

This is the radical import of Lacan's breaking the IPA rules about the timing of the analytic session. Whereas the Rules (Robert's and the IPA's) stipulate that the timeframe is fixed in advance, independently of the Chair, the Chair being responsible for timekeeping, in Lacan's session the analyst takes control of time and wields it as an instrument. One reason for this is that the subject can wield time against the analyst, and more importantly, ultimately against him or herself, just as in Parliament obstructionism and filibustering can become Opposition tactics to slow down and block the legislative process. By unilaterally taking control of time, the analyst disarms the analysand:

> The suspension of a session cannot *not* be experienced by the subject as a punctuation in his progress. We know very well how he calculates its coming-to-term in order to articulate it upon his own delays, or even upon his escapist refuges, how he anticipates its end by weighing it like a weapon, by watching out for it as he would a place of shelter. (Lacan, 1994: 78)

The analyst's intervention, his/ her abrupt silencing of the analysand's discourse, or his/ her own deliberate silence is calculated to eliminate ambiguity:

> It is a fact, which can be plainly seen in the study of the manuscripts of symbolic writings, whether it is a question of the Bible or of the Chinese canonicals, that the absence of punctuation in them is a source of ambiguity. The punctuation, once inserted, fixes the sense; changing the punctuation renews or upsets it; and a faulty punctuation amounts to a change for the worse. The indifference with which the cutting up of the timing interrupts the moments of haste within the subject can be fatal to the conclusion towards which his discourse was being precipitated, or can even fix a misunderstanding or misreading in it, if not furnish a pretext for a retaliatory act of guile. (Lacan, 1994: 78)

In view of the decisive importance of punctuation by silence in Lacanian psychoanalytic practice – silencing the analysand or the analyst's silence – silence must be judiciously and precisely applied. What guides its application? What is it that the analyst listens for? According to Lacan, the analyst gives his attention to "the empty word and the full word" (1994: 15).

The subject's introspective account of him or herself, which appears to be full – profound, articulate – is in fact empty: the verbose narcissistic discourse of the loquacious subject's imaginary construction of him or herself. In contrast, Lacan turns our attention to 'empty words', i.e. those words whose absences are an indication of the unconscious. The empty word is paradoxically also the 'full' word, in that it is full of the emptiness of the subject's account (i.e. his/ her unconscious). The analyst orients to the 'fullness' of the word so as to reveal its emptiness, or rather, to enable the subject to 'hear for him or herself' the emptiness of his/ her own word. Thus, for Lacan, the role of therapy is to restore the 'full word' to the patient, which occurs when the patient recognises him or herself in the unconscious. The analyst does this – tries to precipitate the subject's discourse towards truth – by punctuation, by interrupting the subject's discourse, by cutting him/ her off abruptly – Time up!

It is because the word of the subject is in fact empty that the analyst has ears 'in order not to hear' and that is the source of the classic formula of the analyst's vague, even absent minded attention; for the analyst knows already that the subject's account is empty – white noise. What is it then that is the object of the analyst's attention? S/he must learn to use the punctuation of the subject's discourse by controlling the timing of the conclusion of the session so as to regulate the yield of his/ her ears: to not listen to the empty word, but to hear in the empty word, the full word, in other words to pick up (amidst the noise of empty words) what is to be heard. And it is the silence that is most eloquent.

From the Decentred Subject to the Decentred Organization: from Lacan to Beckett and Joyce

Lacan's identification of the eloquence of silence in the psychoanalytic session is mirrored in the broader philosophy and literature of existentialism, best represented in the work of Beckett and Joyce. The ontology and epistemology of existentialism that Beckett shares with Lacan is their recognition of the Real, the Lack, underpinning all collective and subjective forms of life. Initially this radical unfixity of the world, its ultimate groundlessness and meaninglessness, is terrifying and psychosis inducing. But it is also emancipatory, as we are no longer in thrall or beholden to teleological accounts of the world. Thus, what appears to be the end of things – silence, darkness, madness – is in fact the beginning. Beckett's *The Unnamable* 'concludes' with a descent from an increasingly hysterical and incoherent babble into an abyss of silence, but the encounter with the terrifying and psychosis-inducing silence that seems to mark the end, in fact occasions a new beginning. The narration, which appears as the discourse of the insane, trails off: "perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my own story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (Beckett, 1958: 414).

Throughout his career Beckett played endlessly with silence as a way of engaging with what Lyotard refers to as "working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*" (1984: 81). This 'postmodern' moment, as articulated by Lyotard,

is axiomatically devoid of Enlightenment grand narratives (of which, we might remind ourselves, the meeting, the psychoanalytic session and the romantic dyad are but pragmatic instantiations). Put another way, Beckett is preoccupied with how to express silence through sound, or of how to escape the inescapable signification that accompanies the words he wants to use abstractly. According to Finney "[h]is fictions are the progressive record of his fight to subdue language so that the silence of the Real might make its presence felt" (1994: 842). For instance, the male lead in *Assumption* (1929) is locked in a self-imposed silence, while Belacqua, the anti-hero in *More Pricks than Kicks* (1934), aspires to stasis and silence. Beckett's attempt to escape from the representational nature of words is mirrored in his subversion of the 'rules' of theatre, characterisation, plot and narrative; what is 'important' is routinely dismissed and the trivial becomes the momentous (pages of a script can be devoted to 'mundane' activities like making a sandwich). And Beckett possibly originated the postmodern fashion for puns, paradox, allusion, repetition, and inversion, as a (hopeless) attempt to disrupt the predictable semantic effects of language and as a way of marking the primacy of effect over intelligibility. In Beckett's bleak view of human existence – as encapsulated in the opening sentence of *Murphy* (1938): "The sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" – we delude ourselves into thinking that things are changing in order to avoid the harsh truth that life is fundamentally repetitive. Moreover, many if not most of the characters in his novels and plays believe in an illusion – that they are making progress; an illusion that Beckett lures his readers and audience to share and then recognise.

One of the literary and philosophic 'fathers' shared by Beckett and Lacan is James Joyce. That Joyce was the single most important influence on Beckett is well known, and if not readily apparent, it is explicitly stated by Beckett on numerous occasions. But after Freud (obviously!) and perhaps George Bataille, the most important influence on Lacan is arguably Joyce. In his formative years as a young medical student in Paris, Lacan was one of a small select audience present for Joyce's first readings of Ulysses. Lacan had a lifelong interest in Joyce, whom he regarded as an intellectual fellow traveller and trailblazer. He was fascinated by parallels that he saw in their biographical life-courses – cosmopolitan intellectuals with provincial roots and with fraught paternal relations. References to Joyce appear throughout Lacan's oeuvre, but especially in the later work. He discusses Joyce in his Seminar in 1973-74, and devoted his entire seminar to Joyce the following year, 1975-76. What Lacan takes from Joyce is the insight that what appears to be the discourse of the insane – the seemingly incoherent, irrational language, its enigmas and silences, may be superabundantly eloquent and over-determined with meanings. In Joyce, Lacan says, you can see how language is perfected when it knows how to play with writing. In Joyce's work,

> the signifier 'stuffs' the signified ['vient truffer'] literally 'to garnish with truffles'. It is because the signifiers fit together, combine and concertina – read Finnegans Wake – that something is produced by way of meaning ['come signifiée'] that may seem enigmatic, but clearly is closest to what we analysts – thanks to analytic discourse have to read – slips of the tongue – lapsis [para lapsis]. It is as slips that they mean something, in other words that they can be read in an infinite number of ways. But it is precisely for that reason that they are difficult to read, are read awry, or not read at all. (Lacan, 1998: 37)

To Lacan, Joyce is the archetypical example of the modern subject for whom madness, psychosis is not an anomaly, an abnormal state, but rather lives each and every day grappling with irreconcilable paradox, ambivalence and schizophrenia. The ontological and epistemological conditions of contemporary society are such that the subject – and the collective subject, society – is irredeemably, irrevocably split, suspended precariously over an abyss of indeterminacy, contingency and meaninglessness. The genius of the modern subject – exemplified by the genius of Joyce – it that we take these conditions as constitutive of and generative for modern life. What should reduce us to psychic autism and silence in fact are sources of inexhaustible loquaciousness, creativity, and articulate speech. In the seminar the following year on the central topic of the Symptom, Lacan presents Joyce as the symptom – 'le sintome Joyce' is what he calls him. In Joyce's writing especially *Finnegans Wake* (and Lacan is not alone, though he is the best qualified!) he sees the language of psychosis. Joyce himself is sane, though his father, a reprobate alcoholic spendthrift, and his daughter Lucia, a schizophrenic, are not. What is it that saves Joyce from madness? According to Lacan, Joyce's writing is the symptom (the phenomenon that 'covers' the Lack) that saved him from psychosis. Psychosis in Lacan's formulation is the unravelling of the three levels of reality: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the Real. Such a psychotic unravelling may otherwise have happened to James Joyce, Lacan believes, due to the obvious parental insufficiency, the lack of the father. And this lack at the level of the individual's (Joyce's) biography corresponds at the level of the collective subject – modern society, with the radical Lack of the Father, the lack of meaning that would give us ontological security. In Joyce's biography there is a 'deficit' of the real father, and this makes Joyce someone who bears the father's burden, in the sense that he himself has to put forth his name. Likewise, at the level of the collective, modern society has no ultimate grounds to fall back on to guarantee its institutions, but we must still 'bear the burden' and re-produce our own principles and laws. Lacan reads Joyce's oeuvre as an attempt at restoration, just as the psychoanalytic session, the intimate relation, and the meeting are attempts to 'restore' what are imagined to have been a lost unity, a lost consensus. In *Ulysses* the entire culture is called forth to become Father, Joyce remarks, and of course it is not just Joyce's father who is interpolated by the story of an ordinary man's wandering in the city, but the collective Father of modern society. "Joyce remains rooted in the father even as he rejects him", Lacan says (1998: 38). Akin to the collective subject of modern society, Joyce is forced to become his father's support in order to keep him going. Lacan's treatment of Joyce as exemplar of the relation between madness and creativity in the generation of the symptom, mirrors Freud's classic essay on Leonardo daVinci illustrating the relationship between repression (Leonardo's repression of his homosexual desire) and sublimation (Leonardo's artistic and scientific productivity). The case of Joyce is so significant, in Lacan's formulation, because his writing takes the place of his madness, not simply as a sublimation of unconscious desires in the balancing of the economics of the libido, but as the constitutive process of social integration and reproduction: the psychosis-inducing Lack is generative; it generates the especially florid symptom that is Joyce's work. But not only is this the source of creativity, simultaneously it is the process of integration; it draws together and reconciles the divided parts of the individual and collective subject. Through his writing Joyce knits together the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real.

Conclusion: Silence as a means to Living with Ambivalence

We have seen three examples of how 'talk' is perceived as a means to fully overcome antagonisms in the meeting, in a relationship, and in the psychoanalytic session. In the overzealous implementation of Roberts Rules, the ethic of 'absolute sincerity', and the institutionalisation of the talking cure through the rules of the IPA, 'talk' is seen as a means to unify the divided parts of the collective, the couple, and the ego. It is well documented in contemporary literature how this incapacity to deal with difference, to tolerate antagonism, ambivalence and openness is a legacy of the one moment of the Enlightenment project of Reason, expressed specifically through instrumental rationality, which denies its own unconsciousness. Paradoxically, the rigid institutionalisation of rules is itself based on a utopian impulse towards consensus, an impulse that needs to be pursued. Irigaray's notion of preserving the gap (between subject and object), Lacan's practice of narrative breakdowns and silence, Beckett's subversion of rules, Joyce's celebration of the 'eloquence of incoherence' are examples of how various irruptions which would allow for the more 'full' expression of antagonism, the irrational, and the unconscious that may enable us to, in the words of Hegel, "cancel the opposition but preserve the difference" (Hegel, 1961: 282).

This is not to naively celebrate chaos, indeterminacy, and confusion, but rather to point towards how moments of controlled chaos may provide a more 'full' expression of ambivalence. Lukács captures this ambivalence in his claim that we are both "secular, but yearning for the sacred, ironic but yearning for the absolute, individualistic, but yearning for the wholeness of community, asking questions but receiving no answers, fragmented but yearning for imminent totality" (Lukács, 1971: 189). A 'full' expression of ambivalence, like 'full' consensus is however only ever an impossible horizon, a "vanishing point" (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 136) towards which rational discourse may strive, but which it will never reach. However, allowing these moments can perhaps enable more complex forms of representation, but also can enable us to be more reflexive about aspects of organisational and political life which express this desire for reconciliation.

Perhaps the desire for unity and consensus that represents both the best and the worst aspects of our Enlightenment heritage can be used as a means to establishing a new, and perhaps provisional unity in meeting contexts that can be contested, reformed, and renegotiated. This living with ambivalence is an oft-overlooked feature of organisation theory and organising practice. For example, the interest in chaos theory is but one instance of the unease with rationalistic models of organising that we have inherited from the Enlightenment, and illustrates our ambivalence towards modernity's propensity to impose order on chaos. An example of a meeting practice which attempts to reach the objectives of consensus in more dialogical fashion than the imposition of Roberts Rules, but in a way which lies outside the boundaries of formal meeting is given by Schwartz (1998), who implicitly advocates an alternative to the classical meeting when he promotes the idea of 'strategic conversations', which he sees as an extension of "the informal conversations that take place everywhere – in the 'invisible' strategy sessions of the elevator ride, the lunch room or the car pool" (Schwartz, 1998: 222). We might articulate this idea with Spivak's more politically charged position of 'strategic essentialism' which she sees as "a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a

scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak *et al.*, 1996: 214). The deconstruction and reconstruction of modern meeting practices which takes account of the possibilities for a more 'full' representation of antagonism can lead to new, and hopefully more complex versions of consensus, for as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) claim, the deconstruction of existing meta-narratives can, and indeed should, lead to the possibility of a new unity. The irony is that in writing, we are left with the impossibility of representing both silence and its liminal aspects. Silence, in the end, is reduced to punctuation. Period.

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