

*man:* Between our words, I will trace your presence.

*woman:* Listen! Quiet! Just Let's be quiet!

You know it's only when I rest, that I sense your presence.

You *say* this space in which you and I now move is empty, but *I* sense others here. Can't you feel their presence?

*man:* Perhaps it's only us, unseen and disembodied as we are, that you can feel.

*woman:* Well, I don't think we're alone at all. There are *others* here. It's not just you and I. This?... this isn't empty, at all.

*man:* Berlin, 1955. Evening, and the building around him is quiet, the office workers long departed. High above, the empty cars of a paternoster lift circulate, endlessly. Far below, in rooms insulated from the sounds of the city; occupying a world in parenthesis, a young radio producer runs his hand over the surface of a studio console, salvaging small clippings of audio tape.

Each fragment contains a pause, a breath, the shape of a thought. Each represents a hesitation, a withholding; a lacuna, edited out from some or other speaker's utterances. He sweeps the clippings into a small tin. Pockets it. Later, he will splice these fragments together, to create a recording composed not from words, but from the gaps between them.

Now, he sits alone, reflecting that he has covertly become a collector of silences, in a country and at a time where every silence is like an unexploded bomb, peopled not by absence, but by presences denied.

*woman:* The son arrives at his father's house in the early afternoon, noticing that the garden is beginning to fill with weeds. The house as he enters it, is quiet, but he senses his father is there, inside. He will talk to the old man, today. Will tell him, at last, that instead of a recollected childhood of words exchanged, it is all the words withheld, that he now remembers: the frequent spells when he, the father, withdrew and would not speak either to the son or to his wife.

Living as he does these days amid other, ever-growing gaps, it is doubtful whether the father can remember those earlier interruptions in the discourse of family life, but as a child, the son had lived amongst the silences his father had created, had inhabited the gaps produced by the father's withdrawal.

Silence breeds silence and the son imbibed the father's habit, became practiced himself in the art of withholding, until non-disclosure became a way of life. Was more the father than he cared to know; answered silence with silence, became the man; reserved.

"Why did you behave this way?", the son will ask his father now, but the old man will not, cannot answer and will only look at him questioningly. It is safe to ask now, because there will be no answer, only further silences.

*man:* New York, 1991: the composer sits by an open window, in an apartment overlooking a busy thoroughfare. He speaks to an interviewer as traffic rolls-by, below.

'Noise,' he says 'is always different. When we overlook the noise around us we mistake it for silence and we neglect to understand that no two "silences" are the same. What we think of as silence is always full of noise.'

*woman:* Growing to adulthood, the son found himself compelled by encounters, which somehow spoke to his own memories of earlier, incomprehensible silences; discovering their echo in other, unexpected places, experiencing a frisson of recognition each time he did so.

He too became a connoisseur of gaps, of intervals; all the while, drawn to discover what might be found therein. His compulsion leading him to recently vacated rooms, where absences hung quietly like overcoats, expectant, waiting to be claimed.

*man:* An image surfaces; a 4x3 window of grainy black and white; a movie playing in the mind's eye. The image flickers into life. A domestic interior, post-war Japan, framed in wide-shot by a *movie*-camera's lens. It reveals a bride-to-be on the verge of leaving her family home.

She exits, but instead of following her story, her narrative, the camera unexpectedly chooses to return, lingering in the unoccupied rooms of the house. Contemplating, each in-turn, mirrors and the forms of empty chairs.

*woman:* Where once the son had perceived only absence, only silence, he now found that both had form; that the silences between lovers were not equivalent: superficially identical, they were capable of signifying both deep contentment or separation and loss.

He understood that conversation was created as much from the pauses between words as by the words themselves and if a conversation, then why not a text. If a conversation, then why not a human life?

*man:* ISBN 0956569218, circa 2010. The author has embarked on an act of calculated violence; an act of destruction which he hopes will also prove revealing. Taking the leaves of a book he loves, taking up a scalpel, he begins to cut into the skin of each successive page. Gaps in the text proliferate. The *Street of Crocodiles* becomes a *Tree of Codes*. He continues to cut, neatly excising words, so that not even their ghosts remain, creating a multitude of carious gaps, which cannot be spoken and cannot be named.

Meanwhile, in a land that is not his own, a poet, deafened himself as a child, writes at night about a subjugated country that becomes deaf, because to hear is to be complicit. An act of defiance. A deafness of denial, comprised not of silence, but of what must not be heard.

*woman:* Home: the template for all the silences, all the gaps that followed. He, the son, has come home, to a site that for all its familiarity, is nonetheless the hardest to perceive.

Even as he sits with his father, unspeaking, holding the old man's hand, father and son both drifting back to their respective childhoods, fresh silences begin to emerge between them: an ever-growing, untraversed terrain and the son reflects that far from framing absence, these silences are freighted with all that remains unsaid; all that is now unutterable between the two.

*man:* ... And you and I? In the gaps? Between our words?

*woman:* between *our words*? ...you and I are *becoming*.