

京大過去問 1992年 第1問

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On television, when someone is interviewed on the screen who is a long way away, there is sometimes a blank-faced pause, a beat of two, before he replies to a question. (1)This is the time it takes for the end of the question to rebound from the satellite. It looks odd, because it seems to be a part of our politeness to reply at once; a silence suggests that we think it a silly or rude question.

You learn this time-lag when you try telephoning via satellite. When you speak you hear a faint echo of your last words. The person on the other end has begun to replay, hears your echo and stops, thinking you haven't finished. But if you allow a beat of two the result is very queer, as well as passionless: 'The dog died — died,' one, two, 'When? — When?', one, two. The pause makes personal communication almost impossible, although probably it is all right for the transmission of facts. It is as though, in order to make human contact, we verbally have to tread on each other's heels.

At all events, that seems to be the case in England; not so in Australia. I first noticed this in England, among Australian friends. When I finished speaking they paused, before they replied, as though what I had said was being sifted for rubbish-content. Then I began to suspect they were just not very bright. It was only when I reached Australia that I realized this pause was a national characteristic; that, far from being rude, it was their form of politeness. They wish to make sure that you have entirely finished before they speak. (2)It is as though they had invented a way, perhaps made necessary by the vastnesses of their country, of communicating, as though by satellite, long before the things were ever fired into the sky. It can be worrying, if you are not used to it. For this silence is preceded, it is important to understand, by an apparently blank and earnest attention. There is no recourse to those restless signals of agreement or disagreement; nose-scratchings, ear-rubbings, crossing and uncrossing of knees. They would regard these as attention-seeking, rude, and they are extremely polite people. They sit passive, as though in class, thinking their own thoughts. It is terrifying. (3)I had not realized how much we in Britain take part in a conversation when not speaking. Without that encouragement, unless you are self-obsessed, you begin to hesitate.

Not all Australians employ the satellite-pause, but enough to attract my attention. Perhaps our wildlife has affected us, we are made jumpy by the nervous ways of our sparrows, the speed of

our mice; whereas Australians are unconsciously calmed by the slow wing-flap of black swans, made still and patient by wallabies' sleepy eyes. (4)Nevertheless, I would never have dared to generalize in this way if the whole business of the Australian pause was not ritualised, formalised on Australian radio; with, to the English ear and imagination, disconcerting results. Imagine a pause of two slow beats after a politician has answered a question, before the interviewer asks the next one. Imagine it, and you will soon hear, in nearly audible English, that the interviewer is silently calling him a liar. Imagine a pause of two beats, or more, after a recorded report from some distant trouble-spot. To our imaginations comes a picture of the producer desperately signalling, behind his glass panel, 'Wrong report!'

Perhaps they are right. Perhaps we fill the dangerous gap too quickly, hysterically, which is why they suspect us of effeminacy. But relations between the sexes, in Australia, require another chapter.