

Must We Say What We Mean?*

Egon Bittner

Bittner, Egon. 1977. Must we say what we mean? In *Communication and Social Interaction*, ed. P. F. Ostwald, 83–97. London: Grune and Stratton.†

The recognition of the decisive importance of communication for the understanding of the distinctly human in human behavior is as old as the study of man. The term ‘communication’ refers to the processes and relations of signification between appearances in which humans alone among the species are thought able to partake competently, as distinct from processes and relations of causal contingency to which humans, together with all other material objects, are subject. The earliest interest in these matters was confined to the study of solemn expressions, thought to contain messages of divine revelation or of ancient wisdom, which, by means of learned interpretation, could be made to yield hidden meanings. Through such inquiries man could be made cognizant of and summoned to a form of existence for which he was uniquely fated. Over time, less exalted texts than the Holy Writ or the Homeric epics became the targets of interpretive glossing, and secular philology developed as the precursor of modern communication studies.¹ Throughout its history, the investigations of utterances, signs, expressions, accounts, and of communications of every kind were aimed at the elucidation of authentic meaning on the supposition that the evident content had to be taken, in some essential way, as incomplete or inconclusive. In other words,

* Editor’s [Ostwald] note: During his tenure as a Research Sociologist at Langley Porter, Professor Bittner, now at Brandeis University, helped many of us who are concerned with the vague borderlines between those phenomena considered to be ‘normal’ and those called ‘pathological’. The inclusion of his present essay in Part II of this book does not mean that he is speaking about psychopathological phenomena *per se*, but rather that it is to serve as a link between the elements of communication and the problems of communication.

† We thank Elsevier and Deborah Seys for permission to reprint this paper, and Samir Mahfoudh at Elsevier for his advice.

correct understanding was thought to demand as much attention to the implicit communication as to the explicit communication.

The realization that communicated content is not fully contained in its manifest presentments is, of course, still alive today. It not only guarantees the continued presence of literary criticism as a respectable undertaking but is indispensable to history and jurisprudence. No historian could possibly make any sense of the ledger of a medieval trading company without reading into it things it does not contain; nor could a judge adjudicate a claim arising out of a contract without reference to unstated conditions. Indeed, a moment's reflection readily reveals that in the communication processes of everyday life one listens to what is said in relation to nonstated implications, and in speaking one may safely assume that the not spoken will not be missed.²

However, despite its time-honored origin and standing practice, interest in the structure and role of the noncommunicative in communication has been relatively neglected in modern studies. This chapter discusses the presence of noncommunication in human communication, beginning with instances as simple as the distinguishing of a telephone's ring and concluding with the consideration of communicative networks in which deliberately calculated information denial is the norm.

DISCONTINUITIES AND PAUSES

We are able to distinguish the ringing of the telephone from the ringing of the doorbell – assuming they have the same sound – because the former consists of sounds of known duration interrupted by silences of known duration. Hearing the telephone ring, we listen to both the sounds and the silences; yet the silences, in themselves, are nothing different than what takes place when the phone does not ring.³ This everyday situation illustrates a simple and quite arbitrary arrangement of communicative and noncommunicative elements in a message. Naturally, the noncommunicative elements 'mean something', but they do so only in relation to the sign in whose company they appear; moreover, we might say, provisionally, that it is the sign that draws attention to their role in the structure of the message, and that no communicative claims can be made for them outside of this context.

The proposed distinction between communication and noncommunication is terminologically awkward. The former clearly refers to processes involving signs or signals for purposes of information transfer; the latter refers to the absence of those forms in communication. The sympathetic reader will bear in mind that those absences are treated as specifically significant in their own right. Accordingly, noncommunication will always refer only to the outward appearance of certain elements of communicational practice.

Regardless of its nature, every communicative act consists of the transfer of essentially discontinuous information. A sign acquires its proper sense only when and insofar as its boundaries are discernible, setting it off as an entity within the medium that carries it. Even when a hearer of an utterance was not present at its outset or does not stay to its conclusion, he attends to it – if he attends to it – as having a putative beginning and end. We refer to instances of speech in which beginnings and endings cannot be determined, as ‘ranting’, a term implying the absence of meaning.

The boundaries of words must be observed with particular care because of the agglutinative properties that inhere in them. Thus, for example, a competent speaker of the English language knows how to say ‘sawhorse’ so as not to be heard as referring to a tool and an animal in incongruous association. The speaker’s aptitude in this regard is matched, of course, by a corresponding aptitude of the hearer. The conventions concerning pacing and spacing are quite generous in admitting variety. Ambiguities often can be resolved with the aid of semantic content, and faults at the point of production, e.g., as in the case of a stutterer, can be corrected at the point of reception. Nevertheless, this tolerance has limits, as any uninitiated person attending a tobacco auction can experience. In any case, while listening to the spoken words, we must hear the silences that separate them. These silences are clearly significant even though no claims of independent signification can be made for them. The pause between ‘saw’ and ‘horse’ means nothing in itself, yet its presence or absence in an inventory of my possessions changes my assets substantially.⁴

It seems that the presence of noncommunicative pauses in communication draws little attention to itself under ordinary circumstances, nor is the production of such pauses the result of conscious effort. Instead, their presence lends speech its normal cadence and gives the printed page its standard appearance. But when the norm of pacing is breached by a hiatus of uncalled-for duration, the pause becomes a target of interest. The unduly extended pause is perceived as something other than merely the criterion mark distinguishing between two words; it begins to require some sort of special understanding in its own right. The pregnant pause, as it is sometimes called, is the epitome of the role of the noncommunicative in communication. Though it consists only of a modification in the temporal dimensions of normal silence, it clearly possesses semantic value. It modifies what is said in various ways, depending upon its location in the message, and thereby immensely augments a speaker’s repertoire of expressions. It plays a decisive role in making jokes funny; when used by a skilled orator it can communicate more effectively than any spoken utterance. Moreover, a person can employ silence expressively by deliberately refraining from responding to a challenge or a question by choosing to remain mute in situations where participation appears to

be expected.⁵ Standing mute and the pregnant pause represent methodical uses of the noncommunicative in communication.

However, both can occur in ways less completely or not at all under the speaker's control. As in the use of the deliberate pause, the speaker is not perceived in these instances as merely not saying anything; rather, he is viewed as groping for words, thinking it over, embarrassed, caught unaware, or in other ways not quite adequate to the demands of the situation. Whether intended or inadvertent, silence in a communicative context that draws attention to itself always invites its hearer to listen to something that is not conveyed in words; it always calls for some interpretation of its meaning.

Since such interpretations are standardized, however loosely, skilful speakers can cause pauses to be perceived as inadvertent, in order to create a desired impression. For example, a person may pause before giving an answer, to create an appearance of more careful consideration in the reasonable expectation that the silence preceding his utterance will be interpreted in the intended sense. Such minor deceptions are quite common and they are possible because noncommunicative conduct in the context of communication has a conventionalized meaning. Of course, resolute listeners are not deceived by the ploy, but this does not deprive speakers of the opportunity to use it.

ELISIONS

In some instances, pregnant pauses substitute for words that are thought to be better left unsaid. Nevertheless, elisions usually represent a separate species of the noncommunicative in communication. Though their presence may occasionally be tagged by placed silence, far more often it is not. Most elisions involve more or less optional reduction in the redundancy of speech; probably, their presence varies considerably depending upon the extent of preexisting understanding among conversationalists. The interesting aspect of this is that when what needs not be said *is* said, it is heard as implying more than its ostensive content. For example, the utterance 'There he was!' in connection with some account, does not merely clarify the whereabouts of someone whose presence was already mentioned; it emphasizes it and suggests that the observation should be viewed with surprise or consternation. Of even greater interest is the required elision of those terms that in a formal sense are clearly and necessarily affiliated with an utterance but that are heard in ways appropriate to the circumstances only when they are not spoken; were they to be spoken, the intended meaning would likely be confounded. For example, a person shouting, 'police', is heard to be calling for any policeman; but a child crying 'mother', is heard to be calling for its own mother.⁶ However, had the child made this fact explicit by calling, 'my mother', it

would surely have been heard to imply some kind of urgency concerning its parent rather than itself. Thus it would appear that, in communicative contexts, in order to make known what we mean we must refrain from expressing it fully, lest we be taken to mean something else.

Elisions constitute a vast and varied domain of noncommunicative practices in communication. It must surely be known to all that every utterance in ordinary language contains materials heard though not spoken, whose presence is gleaned from context and background. But it is probably less well appreciated that what is left unspoken is omitted not just for reasons of convenience or practical necessity, but out of constraints of obligation. In other words, in normal communicational practice, some material can be expressed appropriately only by eliding all terms of explicit reference to it by implying it, and such material will be 'heard' correctly only when it appears as implication. This is not to say that a speaker may not make inquiries about implications; but in the absence of justifiable motives for such inquiries, the inquirer runs the risk of being judged frivolous, disruptive, or even offensive.⁷ An example of an ordinary conversation between friends will illustrate the point.

- A. 'Mary was again impossible today.'
- B. 'Again?'
- A. 'Yeah, she is always picking on me.'
- B. 'Do you mean again or always?'
- A. 'Drop dead! You know damn well what I mean.'

Most observers could readily explain how and why this conversation went awry, which attests to the fact that they, like A and B, expect, and are prepared to respect conversational conventions that bar certain questions. A could have said that, 'Look, 'again' and 'always' are not incompatible; I meant both', without being improper conversationally; but within existing schemes of conversational obligations A did not owe this explanation to B, and by impertinently formal questioning, B violated A's right to make a remark against the background or supposition he was entitled to take for granted.

As discussed thus far, elisions involve terms or parts of utterances that can be specified on demand. In ordinary communicative conduct, speakers are either required or entitled to employ elisions, as the case may be. Although utterance of the elided terms or parts would constitute an unwonted and disruptive intrusion, it is not impossible, i.e., elisions function to some extent like pronouns. One could conceivably manage without ever saying 'it' or 'they', although his speech would be extraordinarily cumbersome and quite confounding.

However, normal communicative behavior also contains noncommunicated contents that cannot be specified under any circumstances, even though such content demonstrably matters to the intention and apprehension of the expression. Ordinary language, as distinct from formal language, consists of terms and expressions that possess open horizons of implication.⁸ This statement not only acknowledges the low standard of precision that characterizes everyday speech; it also involves the stronger claim that the actual meaning of all expressions resides only partly in lexical elements and depends for the rest on the conditions of their use.⁹ To put it simply: We can never say precisely and exhaustively what we mean, yet when we speak, secure in the knowledge that the one to whom we will speak will understand, paying proper attention to the communicated and to the noncommunicated.

NONCOMMUNICATION IN COMMUNICATION

Without suggesting that the proposed treatment is exhaustive, three considerations appear to be important in the study of the role of noncommunication in communication, which go beyond pauses and elisions. The first concerns the fundamental condition of interpersonal understanding; the second has to do with indexical properties of expressions; and the third deals with the curtain of expressive control. These considerations will be discussed in what follows, by drawing on the work of scholars who have made seminal contributions to their elucidation.

In his studies of the phenomenology of everyday life, A. Schutz explored the conditions under which the subjective meaning constituted in individual consciousness can acquire intersubjective currency.¹⁰ He argued that the concepts of socialization, culture, language, and the like, as they appear in modern social science, do not account for the way they come originally into play in human life. In order for these structures to matter in the way they are said to matter, a problem that precedes them must be solved. After all, it is undeniably true that persons do not have access to others' consciousness in the way they do to their own; whereas what I know, think, or feel is given to me in a direct and unmediated way, the inner life of others is only inferentially evident. The drawing of those inferences, Schutz proposed, is founded on the *general thesis of the alter ego*. It involves the simple supposition on the part of ego that the consciousness of alter is in all essential aspects identical with his own, and that both stand within the same stream of time. The posited coincidence does not suffice, however, to obliterate differences originating in perspective, outlook, experience, interest, and many other factors. These difficulties are surmounted by a cognitive structure Schutz calls the *reciprocity of perspectives*. This involves two suppositions: first,

the exchangeability of standpoints, providing that if 'alter' took the place of 'ego', he would see things as 'ego' actually does; second, the congruence of relevance, providing that the ways 'ego' and 'alter' see things from their respective standpoints overlap sufficiently to warrant a consensus adequate for most practical purposes.

It is of principal importance that these structures not be thought of as intellectual achievements of persons in search of ways to live with one another, nor as pledges made to advance the cause of coexistence. The contrary is the case: Far from being the product of social life, they are a priori conditions for it; in fact, their validity is presupposed even in scholarly debates concerning their validity, albeit not necessarily in the proposed formulations. Note, also, that two conversationalists cannot vow to one another to observe the rule that one's inner life is pretty much like that of the other, without already assuming that it is so. Note, further, that the manifest aspects of communication do not disclose the functioning of these structures even though their presence is always implied, as reflections about the very possibility of communication clearly reveal.

Proceedings from the studies of Schutz, H. Garfinkel and H. Sacks turned to the investigation of conversational practices. Their observations that are of main interest here concern the indexical properties of expressions (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970). The feature of indexicality has been a problem of long standing in the history of logic; it has been known since classical antiquity that the properties of truth and cogency can be assigned to certain statements only under some circumstances. Despite a great deal of work on the problem it remains troublesome, and concern with it can be found in the studies of modern philosophers of such varied orientations as Peirce, Husserl, Russell, Goodman, Bar-Hillel and others. Whatever the present status of the problem might be in logic, Garfinkel and Sacks conclude that in 'studies of the formal properties of natural languages and practical reasoning, the properties of indexicals ... remain obstinately unavoidable and irremediable' (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970: 349). It should be made clear that the reservation concerning indexicals is quite distinct from the protection of relevance a statement receives from the *ceteris paribus* clause. Whereas in the latter the impact of factors of circumstance is set as constant and thereby suspended, the former specifically involves reference to actual circumstances as warranting the sensibility and validity of utterances. This means that insofar as expressions of natural language possess indexical properties, speakers who use them are implicitly directing their interlocutors to take into account the facts of the occasion as certifying and completing the intended meaning of the spoken words – facts, however, that cannot be inventoried or systematized. Such referents may involve matters as varied as the degree of acquaintance between interlocutors, the business at hand, temporal constraints, material aspects of the

situation, considerations of decorum, shared knowledge, imputations of motives, and so on. Furthermore, not only do these noncommunicated, implied references vary from case to case, but it cannot even be said that the entire domain of potentially relevant implications for any particular occasion can be enumerated, or that those implications clearly intended by speakers coincide with those understood by listeners. All that can be said is that competent users of ordinary language always 'say' more than they speak, and that they are safe in the assumption that they will be thus 'heard'. Indeed, they will take umbrage when their remarks are given a literal interpretation. Actually, it is impossible to construct a remark, no matter how simple or complex, which when uttered would not, at the very least, set the addressed person to imagining, suspecting or wondering about why it was addressed to him, here, now. He may well know the 'objective' sense of an expression like 'The house is green', but the grasp of the intended sense of the uttered remark calls for the attention to the setting of its occurrence. (Of course, it is possible to study such expressions in their idling and unengaged forms, but this is surely not the aim of the study of communication; at best, it might be considered as a treatment of expressions in their specimen forms.) Whether the amenities of human communication permit the possibility of framing expressions whose sense is exhaustively contained within them is a moot and intriguing question. Even if it were possible, however, it is quite clear that common linguistic practice not only does not aspire to this ideal but is constrained to avoid it. In other words, we speak incompletely not because we are sloppy, but because we are supposed to – and could not help it anyway. Unfortunately, those who believe linguistic competence to be fully embodied in the spoken message are likely to miss the fact that competent speakers carry a tune in which a vast and varied reality resonates.

The fact that expressions evoke impressions is almost too trivial to mention; yet this simple truth received extraordinary elaboration in the ethnographic work of E. Goffman. He reminds us that people 'live by inferences in their dealings with the physical world, but it is only in the world of social interaction that objects about which we make inferences will purposely facilitate or hinder the inferential process' (Goffman, 1959: 3). In other words, things that look like socks, trees, or windows are taken to be the objects they seem to be, but someone who appears to be a physician offering help may be an impostor and a hypocrite. The traffic of expressions and impressions among humans involves, uniquely, the criterion of sincerity. Though Nietzsche argued that the problem of sincerity is a specifically modern preoccupation, a fundamental fact remains: What is in a person's mind and the expression that corresponds to it need not coincide semantically. Goffman refers to the transition from the one to the other as impression management, and he demonstrated that its success depends on an elaborate array of devices involv-

ing expressive control, scenic elements, and teamwork, regardless ‘whether an honest performer wishes to convey the truth or whether a dishonest performer wishes to convey a falsehood’ (Goffman, 1959: 62).

SECRETS AND SECRETIVENESS

We seem to have moved a full circle. Beginning with the teachings of Schutz about the leap of faith through which we make ourselves available to one another as essentially identical, sentient beings, we have moved through the investigation of Garfinkel and Sacks, indicating that the actual sense of our interaction and communication can be determined only by reference to the actual circumstances of our coexistence, on to the realization attained through Goffman’s conclusion that in the pragmatics of social purpose the mind retains its inviolate integrity.

It would appear, then, that in gaining access to each other, we retain the right and power to evoke such access when we wish. But perhaps, the most telling genius of society is that our secrets are no secret. *That* we withhold things from one another – and often *what* we withhold – enters our communications. How it does, and how it matters deserves brief discussion.

The Trappist monk’s silence and cowl not only separate him from the world but also serve notice that he has turned his mind to a more perfect communion with the transcendent Creator. The particulars of his secret devotion are not known to us, but his pose and piety claim our respect. Similarly, the silence of the Pythagorean disciple was imposed as a social condition, with the didactic aim of fostering sharpened perception and wisdom. In every case of dramatic withdrawal, the religious or intellectual virtuoso has a distinctly public character. There is mystery in all those things, but presence of mystery is not hidden; in fact, its presence is often strenuously emphasized. The exalted forms of privacy have their secular correlates in ceremonies of deference. Modesty, tact, honor, confidence, hospitality, respect, and so on, all require restrictions of promiscuous expressiveness. In complying with such restrictions, a person adheres to a standard of personal dignity for the recognition of which he advances a public claim: he refrains from saying something that might otherwise be regarded apropos.

The ritualized forms of communicated noncommunication ordinarily elicit respect, and often admiration. However, the moral claim that can be made for the form of noncommunication known as secrets is tenuous, at best. The decorous preparation of a surprise birthday party is accepted as correct, thanks to the triviality of the occasion. Generally speaking, the darkness of prevarications can be lightened by benign purposes. The practical skill involved in the withholding of information in diplomacy, commerce, and certain competitive games attains moral

neutrality solely on the assumption that participants voluntarily accept the risks associated with it.

Beyond these instances of secrets, however, lies a large domain of secretiveness that is not regarded as connected with any morally sanctioned purposes.¹¹ Some such secrets are shared and those who are privy to them may regard them as trivial or meaningless, serving merely the purpose of testing trust. More important, however, are the secrets that involve the withholding of embarrassing or ruinous information. Whether secrets serve to give tactical advantage, to solidify the solidarity of some elect, or to fend off disaster, they are socially divisive in their effect. The knowledge that persons have secrets separates them and can introduce distrust among them. Settings permeated by secretiveness inspire scepticism and prudence that sometimes can escalate into an atmosphere of social paranoia. In such settings people do communicate with one another, of course, but it would be the height of folly for anyone to take what he hears at face value. The problem with such settings is not that candor and sincerity are entirely absent, but that no one can ever entirely disregard the possibility that what is said obscures more than it reveals, and therefore all interaction and communication must be attuned to this.

One area of life in which secretiveness has always been rampant is government. As Max Weber¹² wrote, 'every continuously organized regime is at some decisive point a secret regime' (Weber, 1956: 548). The English Privy Council was composed of notables 'bound by an oath of fidelity and secrecy' (Hallam, 1827: 467); the same is true of the cameral administrations of other European monarchies. Americans tend to think that secrecy is more characteristic of European regimes than of the government of the United States, an assumption based on the belief that in democratic politics, reasons of state must be brought into accord with the will of an informed electorate. There exists abundant evidence that this assumption is mistaken. Although it is true that the ideal of democratic sovereignty is, in principle, hostile to governmental secrecy, democratic government insofar as it is closely associated with bureaucratic methods of administration becomes fertile ground for a secretiveness next to which royal prerogative pales into insignificance. To quote Weber once more, 'Bureaucratic administration is inherently always an administration that excludes publicity. Bureaucracy hides its knowledge and activity against criticism, as far as possible' (Weber, 1956: 580). This is so because bureaucracy draws its strength from the putative technical competence of its officials and, above all, from its privileged access to information. Accordingly, the study of modern government as a communication network must be informed by the realization that methodical information denial is the basic maxim determining the content and process of communication among officials, and between officials and citizens. No expression

of any kind uttered by a competent governmental bureaucrat must ever be viewed as wholly untouched by this consideration, and none must ever be thought to be fully explicable without it.

POLICE PROCEDURES

No organ of modern government, apart from institutionalized espionage, is more thoroughly permeated by secretiveness than is the police (Bittner, 1970). The functional justification of this state of affairs is obvious and requires no extended discussion. Since crime involves stealth, candid methods of controlling it would abet the criminal's efforts to elude prosecution. Since information cannot be withheld from criminals without denying to all citizens, police activity must be shrouded in secrecy. The official rationale is augmented by an unacknowledged consideration: Police procedures are supposed to be governed by canons of procedural law protecting the liberties of citizens against governmental usurpation, but viewed from the standpoint of pure expediency, these constraints impede investigatory effectiveness; therefore police sometimes employ shortcuts across the field of constitutional law, the disclosure of which might jeopardize successful prosecution. Additionally, police, like everyone else, desire to conceal their own sloth and trespass, wherever they occur.

All this is well known and is frequently aired in learned literature and in the daily press. It is less well appreciated, however, that the cloak of secrecy that separates the police from the rest of society has an internal structure that is no less forbidding in its overall impact. Thus, while it is true that, in a manner of speaking, the police are a secret society *vis-à-vis* the citizenry, they do not even share their secrets among themselves. Police do exchange confidences, of course, and they do exchange information adequate to maintain a working relationship; at certain times they can be organized into cooperating teams in which all relevant knowledge is shared. But all these instances of communication are imbedded in an understanding that every office worth his salt has – and has access to – information he will not share and is not required to share with anyone. The matter is quite simple: Information is the police officer's stock in trade. What he knows or can learn is directly related to his effectiveness in abating disorder and solving crimes. Insofar as he competes with others for the recognition of his craftsmanship and accomplishments, he naturally will seek to protect his exclusive access to the principal resource of his craft. The most valuable information a police office can obtain comes from persons involved in (or living on the fringes of) illegal activity. Such access usually involves an exchange of secrets for favors and creates a symbiotic dependency of long duration. It must be remembered that in making this kind of information known to others, an officer risks its continued

availability to himself and to the police, generally. Moreover, what a police officer learns in the course of his work is often of highly uncertain value and validity. It consists of hints, clues, hunches, mixtures of truth and lies, and tends to be otherwise ambiguous and unreliable; but it does serve as grist for the kinds of guesswork criminal investigation involves. Such hazy, speculative information is not so much withheld as allowed to remain private and unquestioned among the police for it does not lend itself very well to communication. It works well enough in the mind of the one who possesses it, however, wherein the fluid mixture of bits and pieces combines and recombines kaleidoscopically. One may note, however, that this unquestioned privacy is so by convention, because in other settings, such as those in which the art of brainstorming is practiced, it is precisely that kind of knowledge that furnishes the topics for lively exchanges.

Pervasive information denial among the police has certain untoward consequences. It attenuates organizational control and supervision; the fragmentation of knowledge reduces the sum total that might be obtained in combination; and it effectively prevents the establishment of the kind of record-keeping systems all bureaucracies cherish. But, contrary to what one might surmise, it does not cause communication among policemen to become anomic, nor does it seriously impair the relations of trust between officers who must depend on each other's assistance in situations of danger. This is so because noncommunication in this setting, as in every other setting and in virtually all of its forms, is itself an ordered phenomenon. Far from consisting of communicational blanks of unknown substance and random distribution, far from being merely the white noise of no-significance interspersed among messages invested with manifest meaning, it has for the initiated a well appreciated import, structure, and locus.

Although secretiveness in the police (and in government generally) is of intrinsic interest, its consideration reports more than its own story. The tightknit cooperation of people who tell each other much less about their work than they withhold suggests that structured noncommunication is just as effective in drawing persons together as is communication. Manifestly, its versions are as varied as the modalities of expression we employ in relating to each other. Sometimes, as in the case of pauses and elisions, noncommunication plays the role of the humble servant of communication, merely aiding in the struggle of expressions to embody an intended sense. But this service is reciprocal. Lovers are not the only ones who whisper sweet nothings; malice, expediency, and every other conceivable interest avail themselves of language in just the same way. It is sometimes considered to be a vexing weakness of language that it does not provide us with means of saying fully and clearly that which we wish to say. Logicians since Aristotle have worked assiduously to remedy this shortcoming, and they have succeeded in showing us that if we put our minds to it we can use

expressions such as ‘all, none, some, and, or, if/then’, in a fully determined sense. Beyond that, however, the prospects of cleaning up language are, at best, uncertain. But even if that quest were crowned by success, would it be a Pyrrhic victory? For if a language is capable of embodying fully externalized sense, then it no longer points beyond itself. Instead, the linguistic order becomes sense constitutive in itself. Granted, the language we have and use simulates intention and intelligence imperfectly, but it does so in a way that permits the not-spoken to be drawn into play, and interlocutors are required to take this fact into account. It would be the height of naivete if normally competent language users acted like linguists, attending only to words in their grammatical and syntactic appearances and combinations. If this were the exclusive concern of interlocutors they would be engaged in linguistic exercises, not in speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

It is the aim of the foregoing remarks to show that the elements of noncommunication in communication are themselves ordered phenomena. The assertion is not proven but only illustrated by a provisional inventory of certain of its forms. Additionally, it might be mentioned what these forms have in common. Pauses, pregnant pauses, and elision have a clearly structured locus and thereby an understood relevance in communication. Omissions resulting from good manners may seem not to be of this sort. Yet when I praise a host for the repast he furnished without mentioning that there was not enough asparagus to go around, the omission is not recruited randomly from the infinite variety of things that might have been on my mind on that occasion, but from the more limited set of things that are apropos. The same is true of secrets. Of the variety of things people do not tell each other only those qualify for the designation ‘secret’ that, if revealed, would be regarded as befitting the scheme of obligations that inheres in a specific communicational network. The forbearance of tact and the hiding of information become what they are only in relation to established and respected patterns of information exchange. Outside of these frameworks they do not matter and, since mattering is their form of existence, they have no reality of their own. In this respect, they can be considered akin to the pauses separating the sounds of the ringing telephone. When we say, therefore, that the elements of noncommunication are ordered phenomena, we mean that they are ‘about’ something that is recognized and reckoned with, sometimes clearly and sometimes ambiguously, but always ineluctably related to the communicated. The property of indexicality of expressions states the just-presented case in the obverse: every expression in ordinary language points to an unspoken part, in conjunction with which the

actually intended sense of the expression can be determined, and without regard for which its meaning is, at best, a matter of arbitrary conjecture.

A great philosopher concluded the only book he published in his lifetime with the injunction, 'Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen'. This has been translated, 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' (Wittgenstein 1961). But this is wrong! We are not enjoined to pass over in silence matters we cannot speak about; rather, we are to be silent *about* them. And that is the only way it could possibly be.

NOTES

1. The distinction holds even though it is mainly a matter of relative prevalence. On the one hand, it is said that 'Aristotle needed philological research into constitutions as the basis for his *Politics*' (Boeckh, 1968: 16), on the other hand, Friedrich Meinecke wrote, 'The ideas that had already emerged in antiquity had obscured the real Homer and made him out to be a teacher of secret wisdom and the creator of Greek custom and civilization. Vico removed this veneer and saw Homer as the poetically splendid mirror of a magnificent barbarism' (Aarsleff, 1970). Vico, who lived in the eighteenth century, was himself the heir of Renaissance literary scholarship. Moreover, precursors of modern linguistics can be found as far back as the seventeenth century, and perhaps earlier (Cavell, 1969: 12).
2. Stanley Cavell raised the question, 'Must we mean what we say?' and answered, in part, by urging that we are 'exactly as responsible for the specific implications of our utterances as we are for their explicit factual claims' (Cavell, 1969: 12). The title of this essay takes liberties with Professor Cavell's phrase to indicate that its topic is whether and how expressive forbearance matters in communication.
3. The example is chosen as a tribute to Claude Shannon who, while at the Bell System Laboratory, formulated the foundations of contemporary information theory.
4. It may be mentioned that the wealth of agglutinative possibilities said to have inhered in the Sumerian language furnished the condition for the development of the first form of non-pictorial writing, i.e., for the transformation of auditory signals into their visual correlates (Hawkes and Wolley, 1963).
5. In England, a prisoner at the bar who failed to respond to an indictment and stood 'mute of malice' had 'iron laid upon him as much as he could bear and no more ... till he either pleaded or died.' The rule was abolished in 1772, but only since 1827 is a plea of not guilty entered on behalf of such reprobates (Stephen, 1883: 298).
6. For a most imaginative study of the full range of implications connected with this observation, see Sacks (1972).
7. Harold Garfinkel offers a strong interpretation of this fact and furnishes further examples (Garfinkel, 1964).

8. The distinction is the topic of a large body of literature (Charlesworth, 1961; Rorty, 1967).
9. The connection between meaning and use of expression obviously draws on the teachings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, especially in his *Philosophical Investigations*, where one finds, 'Think of tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue pot, glue, nails and screws. The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities.)' (Wittgenstein, 1953: 6).
10. The account of the teachings of Schutz draws mainly on his *Phenomenology of the Social World* (Schutz, 1967), especially pp. 97–102, and his 'Common-sense and scientific interpretation of human action' (Schutz, 1962).
11. The most illuminating discussion of secrets and secretiveness in the sociologic literature is contained in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Wolff 1950).
12. Author's translation.

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