

## The systemic approach to the communicative silence.

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### Abstract

According to implicit theories of communication as well as to Shannon-Weaver mathematical theory, silence does not communicate. On the contrary Watzlawick holds it communicates, on the ground that every behavior communicates. Besides, according to Anolli, silence helps to communicate. The systemic perspective, relying on observer's inferential process allows to catch the emergence of the communicative value of silence in an interactive system.

### Résumé

Selon la théorie mathématique de l'information de Shannon-Weaver, le silence n'est pas une communication. A l'inverse, considérant que tout comportement est une communication, Watzlawick tient le silence pour une communication. Par ailleurs, Anolli considère que le silence aide à communiquer. La perspective systémique, reprenant ces observations, aide à comprendre la valeur communicationnelle du silence dans un système interactif.

### 1. Introduction

It rarely happens to find an approach identifying silence with a communicative act. This is an odd matter: *the silence that communicates* is too counter-intuitive as to be accepted without problems. A superficial analysis identifies silence with *absence* or even with *negation* of communication or, at the latest, with a temporary pause of the communicative process. At a deeper level of analysis silence induces psychological interpretations: it points to an inner process like introspection or meditation or, vice versa, it can be viewed as an index of pathological communication or aggressiveness.

Yet silence is a great communicative vector. Particularly two outstanding authors have analyzed it according to these terms: Watzlawick [See Watzlawick *et al.*, 1967], claims that every behavior is communication and also silence, being a behavior, is, *tout court*, communication. Anolli [See Anolli, 2002], maintains that silence is a strategic way of communicating, belonging to category of non-verbal communication (NVC). The two positions, instead of becoming integrated, are strictly contrasting. Anolli criticizes severely:

the conceptual overlap between behavior and communication, radicalized by Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, [that] has implicated baleful theoretical consequences; since you make coincide communication and behavior, everything becomes communication (also the most accidental and unaware action) and you don't have any possibility to understand what are the ownerships and the specificness of the communication as such[...]. This perspective is a heavy inheritance of the behaviourism and, if the person is reduced to a "black box", also the same concept of communication fades away and becomes simply useless [Anolli 2002].

But, how silence can communicate? Is it only a physical phenomenon that could be subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis, or is it a psychological construction, vaguer, fleeing, of eminently qualitative nature?

### 2 - Implicit Theories of Silence

Now let's consider silence, for what intuitively is, in its physicalness, in its phenomenology, for how it is revealed to our senses. Let's say accordingly that *any issuing source of acoustic perturbation is in silence when in any moment and in any way it keeps silent*. But to establish that it is silent there's the need of somebody that pointing out again this silence, that is to say an observer.

Therefore, a source, from which you expect a noise, keeps silent. An expectation is delineated, that is a psychological construction: "I expect that a entity behaves in a certain way and I behave accordingly." But, staying in the physical world, more precisely of

acoustics, the first problem we must face is the following: is silence only absence of noise? For classical physics the answer is positive: the source that *is in silence* is the one which does not emit energy. In these terms the matter seems closed. Anyway silence is not only the action of silence by the source, but also the action, even passive, of an observer subject pointing out this state. For him/her it is of great importance to point out that the source does not emit noise or sonorous energy.

Coming from a “nineteenth-century”, energetic, view of phenomenon to a more informational view, you could investigate whether in the time following the instant in which the source stops emitting, that is to say it keeps silent, this circumstance increases the information content of the system constituted from the same source and from the observer that acts as a receiver. The central function of the observer is expressed in the crucial passage from the role of simple witness of the issuing activity of sonorous energy by the source, to the one of *receiver* of energetic-informational content. Therefore, he/she detects not only issued energy, but transmitted information. This activity is not anything else than communication, that is transmission of information.

Silence can now be studied through more rigorous conceptual tools, such as mathematical theory of communication of Shannon and Weaver [See Shannon and Weaver, 1949]. The latter could, in principle, enable us to verify if silence communicates, if we could measure how much it increased, without noise, the informative content of the observer that points out again a pause of transmission. If we could establish with precision that, starting from  $T_0$ , the moment in which the source has stopped uttering a signal with a code known to the observer, to  $T_1$ , the moment in which it has started again to utter, the same observer would have a real informative differential, then we could claim that silence communicated. This paradigm, however, cannot be applied to all sources. The problem arises from the fact that, in many cases, silence communicates only because it is associated to communicative deliberateness (within some limits attributable also to an animal source, not human). For a source lacking deliberateness (a diapason, a projectile, a vibrating rope or a more complex source), the survey of communication is banal: it is sufficient to notice again a great deal of signal, without noise, in the receiver. If this signal is not present, the response is definitive: silence has not communicated.

In the case of a source endowed with communicative deliberateness the problem is more complex. According to Shannon and Weaver, also if you could point out again that from the quoted instant  $T_0$  in which the source has stopped uttering, to the instant  $T_1$ , in which it started again to utter, the overall informational content for the receiver has not changed (if he/she didn't receive an other signal), you could not surely state with certainty whether the source has not transmitted at all, or it hasn't wanted to transmit. The intention of not transmitting could, if received, constitute a message by itself. On the other hand, it has transmitted, or it has not transmitted, *tertium non datur*. Therefore, for the sources involved you could not apply the mathematical model of communication, since you can't exclude that the suspension of transmission of information has been effected just to communicative purposes, as if it were equivalent to a further transmission of messages. The source could keep silent in a deliberate and voluntary way to reach a particular communicative end. The receiver, in turn, could decode the deliberateness of silence and answer with a feedback, that is with information of return, to allow the primary source to react. Also silence as feedback is ambiguous: in fact if the source **A** keeps silent and the receiver **B** keeps silent as well, because he/she does not utter a feedback toward **A**, the latter could not distinguish whether **B** has kept silent deliberately and voluntarily to communicate or having received the informative content of silence, or if he/she was still waiting an explicit signal, that is encoded and clean.

Therefore, when there has been silence between two deliberating devices, there is not way through the mathematical theory to understand if this silence has been effectively a vector of information. The deliberativeness, circumscribing the communicative silence to man, gives the phenomenon to psychology. But also in this field there are many objections and contradictions. The first difficulty comes from the fact that, usually, it is only silence of the source to be noticed as such. The attention is focused on the source, that is expunged from the context and separated from the possible observers. The latter plays a fundamental role, the one of certification of the possible communication. The state and the responsibility of silence is attributed instead only to the subject, in apparent communicative suspension. But the action of focusing the attention on the only silence of the agent, isolated from the environment, prevents from the possibility of understanding and evaluating the motivation itself of silence. The reason for silence is an absolute remarkable fact. A solitary silence without addressees and without purposes is not conceivable, at least in the field of the normality. It may be turned toward the inside, but to maintain that a subject communicates with himself through silence is hard to demonstrate. The environment, banished from the naïve theories, dealt with by Shannon and Weaver as source of noise, that is to say of non-communication, becomes instead determinant if you consider all systems communicative when silence takes place. Let's take as a definition of *communicative system* the one identifying it with a *physical or social environment where an interaction among its components, endowed with appropriate skills, takes place.*

## **2- Theories of communicative silence**

We mentioned two theorists, in the domain of psychology, dealing with communicative silence. Anyway each of them exposes himself to many contradictions. They partly explain communicative silence, but they leave unsolved a lot of problems.

### 2.1- "One cannot not communicate"

Paul Watzlawick, prestigious psychotherapist of the Mental Research Institute of Palo Alto in California, the first to speak about communicative silence, with the colleagues Beavin and Jackson, has invented the aphorism: "One cannot not communicate"[Watzlawick, Beavin, Jackson, 1967]. This fortunate aphorism, defined by the authors "the first meta-communicative axiom" so much quoted, but often off the point and misunderstood, has become a paradigm of the communicative silence. The conceptual connection that leads Watzlawick to affirm that even silence is communication, unfolds through genial intuitions, but also hasty approximations: he sensed that in a communicative context are important not "...only words, their configurations and their meanings [...], but non verbal concomitant facts, as also the body language" [ib.]. It derives that "all the behavior, not only the speaking, is communication"[ib.], he holds that behavior and communication are practically synonymous. With the general aim of axiomatizing the communication, he analyzes the typical communicative act, underlining a particular bipolarity, and, drawing on Gregory Bateson, who finds a level of *news* and a level of *order* [1951] in each communication, he enunciates his third communicative axiom that argues this bipartition:

*Each communication has a content and a relationship aspect in a way that the second classifies the first and is therefore metacommunicative.*

the communication consists in two levels, the former the content, the latter the relationship. This latter would not be anything else than metacommunication, that is communication on communication. Silence, now, is classified as a typical relational element:

The activity or the inactivity, words or silence, they all have the value of the message: they influence the others, and the others in their turn, can't communicate but answer to this communication, in this way they are communicated in as well. It should be very clear that the

mere fact that you don't spike or there in not mutual attention it is not an exception referring to what as been said. [1967]

Silence influences as activity. It influences the others, who "they can't but answer." Silence, therefore, communicates that you *want or don't want others communicate or non communicate with us*. This is the relational aspect of the silence, and thus its real communicative content: "With my silence I want you understand that I want you communicate or not communicate with me". The message of silence is a metacommunication or, more correctly, an invitation to interpret. Watzlawick however does not seem interested in this inferential process that silence produces in the interlocutor, neither in the intrinsic ambiguity of silence that precedes this inference.

Watzlawick takes for granted that silence communicates, in a perfectly comprehensible and clear way, a clear message of demand of an as much well defined behavior, which exemplifies the "typical influence on others behavior." The examples of the restaurant and of the airplane are now famous:

The man looking fixedly in front of himself while having breakfast in a crowded fast food, or the airplane passenger sitting with his eyes shut, they are both communicating they don't want to talk with anybody, they do not want anybody to talk to them, usually people understand a message and answer in a proper way leaving them in peace [id].

"I do not want you disturb me" the silences of the man to table and of the airplane passenger seem *to shout*, without any possibility of misunderstanding for the "people sitting near him that usually understand the message." Actually, many examples of this kind of silence whit never ending interpretations exist. But you may ask: silence, the refusal to answer, the will not to speak and not to act, the stillness (called by Watzlawick *postural silence*), even if correctly understood by the interlocutor, are act of communication because they are simply metacommunication, or because they carry through other communicative channels, for example on the non-verbal one, messages on the content and the interaction? According to Watzlawick silence is enough to communicate, or are there other channels, activated from silence, which function as vectors of the clear message caught by the interlocutor? It is the essentially relational nature of silence the function of the vector, or does a complementary process, operated by an other communicative source, exist? It is the silence of the table companion, or his mechanic chewing and swallowing which dissuades the people sitting near him to ask for the classical saltcellar? Are his eyes, his closed mouth or stiffness and the tension of the passenger to utter the "don't disturb, please"?

## 2.2 - The strategic silence of Anolli

Anolli considers silence from a different point of view instead. First of all he goes on separating conceptually behavior from communication and this from interaction and information. He distinguishes the systems of significance and of human signalling in verbal and non verbal [2002], underlining both the semantic synthony, in which both systems would concur to give only one meaning, and the relative autonomy, in which each system would concur autonomously and specifically according to a criterion of modularity. The functional dissociability is the possibility to have different communicative outputs in the same act. The unitary management of the semantic autonomy, given by the modularity, by the relative autonomy of the verbal and non-verbal communicative systems is guaranteed by the process of semantic interdependence, that is the result of the semantics above quoted. Summing up: more systems can transmit different parts of the communicative act with specific meanings, that to say autonomous, but complementary, at the same time. The semantic interdependence guarantees the unitarity coherence of the communicative act enabling men to "proceed to the attribution of different weights to the single components individuals" of the same act.

From this point of view, silence, as a non verbal communication, is a strategic way of communicating and a precise series of meanings refers to this modality. First Anolli holds that the communicative value of silence is emphasized by its ambiguity. Nevertheless you may see an ambiguity in ambiguity: it is not clear if for ambiguous you mean multi-purpose, that is to say if it may assume, from time to time, a positive or negative value, which may confirm or not a given situation, or if the ambiguity of silence gives way to the next process of interpretation and significance from the interlocutor. Its meaning would not be immediately perspicuous, but it would claim the interlocutor to an interpretative process to attribute value and meaning to silence. We must underline that is not perfectly clear the moment in which silence gets its meaning, since there may be the coexistence of two different meanings: one of the subject and the other of the interlocutor.

In one case or in the other, its communicative value, positive or negative, is characterized accord the communicative relationship given. One of the first characteristics given to silence by Anolli is that it pinpoints, for instance, the value of the relationship since it may be the clue of a very good relationship or of an intense communication, featuring thus the existing relationship. It puts in evidence the emotional content, fully supporting the emotional function of the non -verbal communication. It is the clue, which communicates a particular emotional state, for instance, to interacting partners and to other observers. It may also consist in a negative sign "of a bad relationship and of a worsened communication." Also here it signals not only an information about the quality of the relationship, but communicates the same quality to the agents and to the content.

According to Anolli, there is already an interactive context and a communicative relationship, for example a couple, an emotional bond, a conflictual relationship as that between boss and clerk. Silence is used to underline, to increase the communicative value, both in a positive or negative sense, of a content already defined by the relationship, for instance affection, friendship, feeling of dissatisfaction, that silence shapes. Anolli does not think that the strength of the silence comes from its ambiguous content, leaving opened the possibility of an opposite and contrary alternative, foreshadowing a positive answer, which is in the air, but may turn into refusal, or vice versa, an irrefutable no, which may turn into a yes. For Anolli silence may be positive or negative in some circumstances, but he does not make any hint about a dynamic tension between positive and negative, which refers more to the interlocutor than to the agent of silence the responsibility of the significance and of the ensuing feedback [2002].

An other function is that of *evaluation*: silence points out and strengthens the consent or, on the contrary, the disagreement, the disapproval. Here the ambiguity of silence is even more marked, since the result of the process of significance refers to the inference of the interlocutor. The interaction begins with an explicit demand and the answered silence strengthens the ambiguity. Other signs often strengthen the value of silence. Besides, attributing different weights to the many components of the communicative act, the interlocutor must understand the so called algebraic value of module, he takes charge to attribute coherence and unity to multifaced messages, consisting on silence and parallel non verbal communication, by means of an autonomous inferential process.

Anolli mentions an other process, the one of *revelation*, that to say the skill to make clear, or opaque, an informational content. This is the case of the silence of the accused, who keeps silent trying hard to hide something already known. This may be also the case of someone in silence to confirm someone else inference: "you are right, what you are saying is true." At last the function of activation is a subjective one: a flag pointing a subjective state of man. To be silent while concentrated or absent minded: is the psychological silence dimension already

seen, even though Anolli probably refers to the attention superior mental processes, in their positive and negative extremes [2002]. This is, substantially, his pragmatics of silence.

The silence is also governed by social rules. The *rules of silence*, a complex whole of social standard, intervene as elements of socializing process. Since the silent context occurs essentially in a group and its use, characterized by ambiguity, exposes to some crucial situations in human interaction, according to Anolli there is a process of socialization to silence that makes man assimilate and interiorize circumstances, rules, habits, customs, behaviours and ability about silence interpretation and use, since his birth. A sort of *silence licence*, considering the danger of his inappropriate use, especially when the relationship among agents of communication is uncertain, vague or ambiguous. There is not need of silence when the relationship is based on a clear level, while, in more difficult and awkward relationships, silence is often a resource, a shelter, an anchor of salvation. Anyway there is not doubt that the use of silence makes interaction more uncertain, but richer and involving. An other characteristic of the communicative silence is that of being used in circumstances where there is a different social power among the agents of the interaction: silence is the most frequent subordinate's way of communicating. In Western cultures this is taken for granted and usually the most important one speaks; on the contrary in Eastern cultures, the so-called collective cultures aiming at the relationship more than at the individuality, silence does not mean dissymmetry, but reflection, meditation and circumspection.

### **2.3- Usefulness of the communicative silence**

Let's make a step back and ask if it make any sense to consider silence under the communicative point of view and if it is useful to consider an apparent and momentary situation of silence among interlocutors as communicative. According to Watzlawick we may consider communicative the silence of those who want to communicate that they don't want to communicate. Or probably silence may express an attitude, suggest an intention, show agreement or disagreement, attention or absence mindness. They are all cases of inferences to deal with a process different from the silent act.

As a matter of fact the two models are not very helpful. So you need an approach which saves the conceptual earnings of the two models, but overcomes the schematic relationship between two deliberative agents, even if multiple (in a relationship of *many to many*). It is not easy to widen the attention of the global communicative field, the proper conceptual tools and to detect the silent content where someone else sees emptiness. According to someone else silence is a bad communication, *miscommunication*. That's wrong: according to Anolli's elegant definition of miscommunication it would be "to say not to say" [2002]; we better say that the communicative silence is "not to say to say". Someone considers silence a rare but certainly communicative phenomenon, secondary that's why useless to be studied. But in the social and relational systems silence is not rare, it represents a fundamental way of subjective communication, which often comes out into pathological or in anyway signs of discomfort, uneasiness, stress, mobbing. The systemic perspective can analyze the organization, not as a static structure, but as a system inside the environment and in constant interaction with it, made up by parts in mutual interconnection and interdependence. The communication is a main element of the system as it enables the exchange between the external and internal interfunctionality. That's way we speak about of the strategic value of communication: it can't exist an organization which is not able to face communicative problems.

Communication is not only an objective organizational datum; it is also a psychological subjective element regarding communicating subjects and their interlocutors, plus the objective structure of the firm. Therefore communication is to be analyzed from both points of view: objective and subjective. As far as regards the last one we must still find opaque areas for a full understanding, and silence is one of them. Among the organizations is even less

considered than in the scientific community: just a few people observe it, fewer study it, even though a lot of men and structures practice it. It is very hard to catch and interpret silence among the organizations; there is a sort of reluctance to watch the inner side as they are scared to find out that this communicative processes point out inefficiency and conflict. The organizations should be aware of these processes, of their birth, development and outcome; how to intervene to avoid the warped and degenerative reasoning within their own relational system.

### **3- New theoretical approaches to the communicative silence**

What shall we need? Basically a method which widens the analysis to all communicative field being able to point out and analyze the described processes. We have mentioned the Systemics as a discipline which, through the concept of *system*, could give a new model of comprehension, as an instrument able to give a more integrated and less punctiform description of communicative relationships. Thus a communicative system could represent the whole of elements, of the attributes and possible communicative relationships among the same elements. This would be a static, embryonic, version, of the concept of system, which could at most explain the plurality of the possible relationships, but still considers the interaction as a relationship one to one, or at most one to many. The real and complete qualitative leap given by Systemics is constituted by the possibility of considering all elements endowed with common properties. In this case all elements would be potential communicators, endowed with the faculty of communicating, and if practiced, these abilities would be able to influence the state of all constituting elements of a system, changing attributes and relationships. The change of the attributes of any component of the system, that's to say the change of the single one individual, would be reflected in those of all the others, and in this way the system would change. This change lets come out a systemic property not present before. This property was not present before and was not detectable considering only the elementary relationships among the components of the same system.

We confirm that, when we talk about relationships and interactions, we basically refer to communicative phenomena. Now, if, according to this approach, we observe an interactive system in apparent suspension of the communication, we could analyze the reticular changes of the attributes, and after decide if these changes are function of the communicative content of the system. This content may also be considered in terms of production and circulation of meaning. In this case the system of relationships is *isomorphous* to context, as a matrix of meanings. A relational systemic approach could give account of the creation of the meaning, and so of communication, inside an interactive system using the device of silence as a communicative vector.

#### **3.1 - Methodological elements of systemic approach**

The systemic approach is not a methodology in a narrow sense, but we can use Minati's method based on *micro*, *macro* and *mesoscopic* levels as he describes them in an introductory text to Systemic Emergence [2004]. The model is made up by three levels:

1- This level individuates the system through its borders, its elements, the attributes and the relationships among the same elements. This individualization phase may be considered as a typical *micro* description, since it describes single punctual actions, elementary features, relationships caught in their stillness. Examples of a micro description are the position and speed of a Mobile, the composition of a social system as an organization, the chart of a firm, the script of a drama. It describes a single relational element, each element of the group, each component of an organization (*microscopic level*).

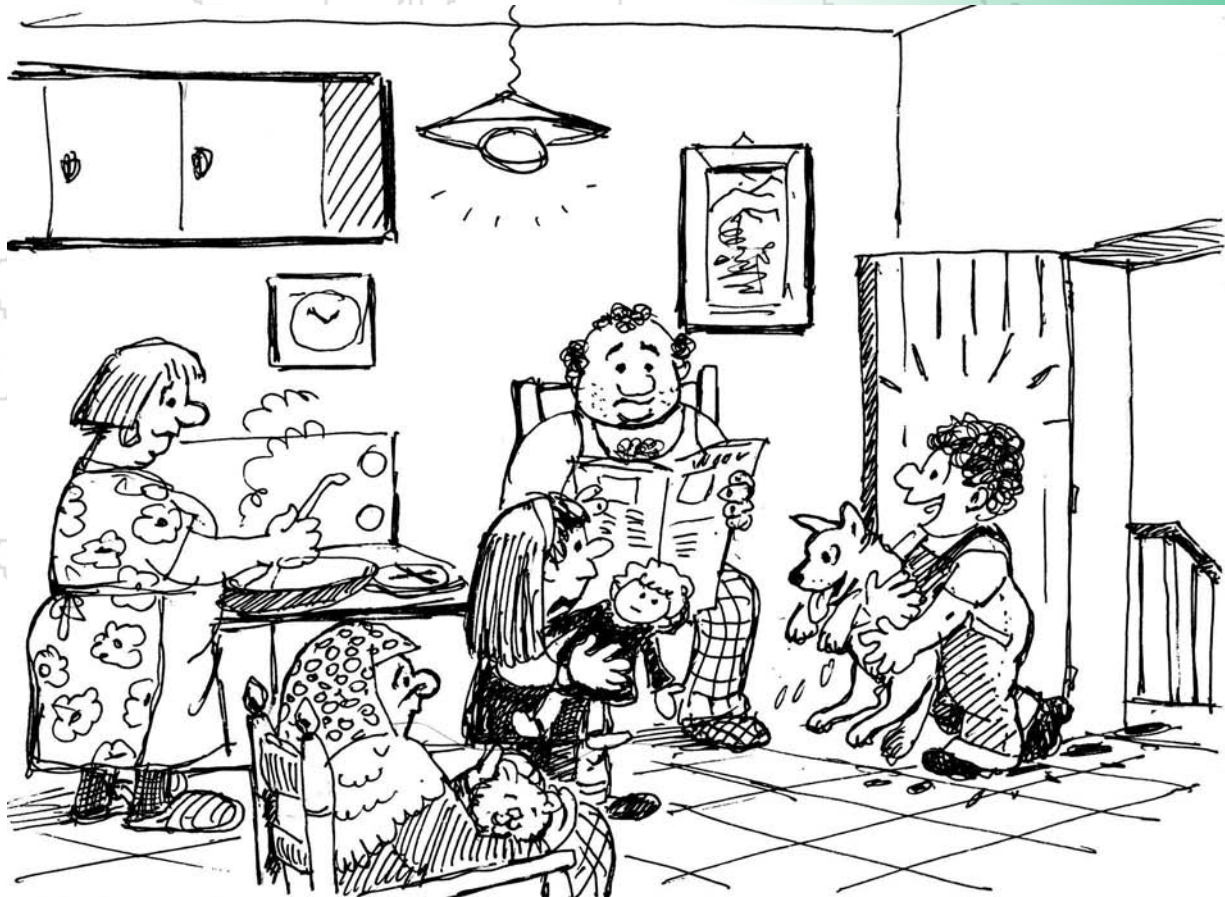
2- This level caught the average effects of the system. It is equivalent to the *macro* description, basically a phenomenological description: what you may see, what it appears to

be as a mean composed by many variables. An example may be the buzz of the crowd as average effect of countless overlapped conversations (*macroscopic level*).

3- The level is meant to catch the emergence of eventual systemic properties deriving from the interactions of the elements, observable only according to a *macro* level, as previously described. It also catches the possible aggregation of parameters endowed with dynamics, the so-called *order parameters*, not observable within the *micro* description.

A similar three-level model could be used for the analysis of the communicative silence in the relational systems. The first level could consist in a preliminary identification and description of the communicative system, of its components or of the respective roles of actors and observers, of the relational net itself, of the state of the interactions. A macro description basically constituted by an analysis of the average effects of the system could follow: that's to say the description by means of Shannon and Weaver's theory. Finally you can get inside in the real level of description of emergence of a communicative content constituted by the circulation of meaning which is created through the net of inferences of the observers-actors. This the real level of emergence of systemic properties that in our case give rise to creation and circulation of meaning and communicative content through the use of silence and the circularity of its inferential interpretation.

The picture exemplifies what said. The drawing represents a family in a domestic context. All characters seems to be silent, besides of pictorial ambiguity. The drawing could have more elements, but their increase would not change its complexity. A father, a mother, a grandmother, a son and a daughter seem to be portrayed. Everybody seems to keep silent attending to his own occupation: the father is reading, the mother cooking, the daughter is looking after the doll, the grandmother pats the cat and the son breaks into with a little dog, probability found in the road.





For Shannon and Weaver everybody is silent and is not communicating: there is only silence. For Watzlawick the father probably wants to read in peace, or the grandmother to sleep without being disturbed; the daughter would still look after the doll and the mother keep on cooking. The Watzlawick meta-communicational silence inform of the relationship and is acted by all subjects: everybody is doing something and does not want to be disturbed, but actually any systemic property does not seem to emerge.

According to Anolli silence intervenes in an already established communicative relationship, so it would make sense to examine a running relationship and then interpret the ambiguity of the silence acted as an answer. The mother, for example, could ask to her son: “do you like what do I am cooking?” but the son seems to elude such a question and keeps on asking with a speechless insistence: “I have found it in the road. Can I keep it?”, provoking, at the same time, the apprehension of the grandmother for the predictable furious quarrels between the new guest and his beloved cat. Anyway is a silence intended as an answer.

These are microdescriptions: they describe punctual actions and bilateral relationships at the most. You cannot catch the average effect, nor any emergence of meaning. Yet the same drawing leaving unchanged the other subjects’ speechless expressions, could radically change its meaning if the action of the son changes. Let’s in this way, in perfect silence, he gets closer to the cupboard to catch the jar of jam. The mother would not stop the action of the son and her silence would be accepted by the conniving grandmother but unborn by the little sister that considers her father speechless denial as dissent and disapproval. But the continuous silence of the mother could provoke a further ulterior cycle of inferences, each of them modifying the state of the elements of the system. Therefore a communicative circularity emerges, technically similar to the previous one, but actually very different.

The macro description points out only a stopping inexpressive phase of silence. It is the recurrent use of the inferences which let the communicative content to come out. Not the silent behavior of each participants to the relationship. There is a circularity and a mutual variation of the attributes in any element. Each relationship modifies the others which are taking place: if the mother would have given a sharp reply, the father would have kept reading, the daughter playing, the grandmother snoring. The process of extensive silence and circular communicative inference makes emergent a situation of tension or harmony, that to say a second degree property, that is the exact communicative value of the silence in that system. Everything without even a single phoneme! In both cases it is verified the condition put also by Sperber and Wilson [1986] in order the context be considered as communicative: the *manifesteness* of silence, its perceptibility and its inferibility, well documented in the same moment any other observer gives any other meaning to the system. The attribution of the meaning is in fact its *emergence*.

#### **4- Conclusions**

If we accept Watzlawick’s thesis according to which each communication has a side of content and another of relationship they both coexist and cooperate to the comprehension of the message, we could then maintain that in front of a relational module characterized by silence, this takes the *metacomunicational* function, while the signs of the context and the NVC integrate and complete the message.

Coming back to the example of the airplane, passenger’s anguished silence points out his dislike of talking; but his fear is expressed without any doubt by his stiffness, his posture, the terrified gaze, some shivers, his sweat forehead. The signs of the context will complete the message in its interactivity: flying is different from being happily landed. According to Watzlawick “the passengers neighbours grasp the meaning and answer in the proper way

leaving him in peace”; maybe in their function of interpreters they will be pushed to leave in peace or to reassure him as soon as the airplane will land.

Although Watzlawick’s model of silence enjoys big popularity, it is a silence *without content*. We better say that Watzlawick deals with a systemic perspective, but, attracted by agent’s communicative perspective, does not catch the importance of the observer, that is the crucial element of this approach instead.

For Anolli silence communicates, not directly, but through its modal function instead. Through it an already individualized situation is specified, emphasized, valued. Or it becomes a great regulator of the social relationships: a sign of degree, status and power. We do not think Anolli gives to silence a communicative skill outside a situation or relationship already determined.

Actually both models do not openly show how silence can communicate, even though interested in communicative silence and dealing with it in the larger context than in the simple source, that is in a system of communication. They want to demonstrate that it generally communicates, because everything communicates; but if everything communicates, nothing communicates too. Or, you may give to silence a strategic value, peculiar of its ambiguity or polarity, but this value is given to a running communicative relationship and silence, because of its polysemy, only specifies colours, qualifies, characterizes the relationship in act. We only have to infer the value of the polarity, but this only regards an intrapsychic element of evaluation of the receiver even though with the function of observer on whom silence is acted. We are not saying that the two models do not permit the classification as a communicative act; but there still is an indefiniteness to dissolve with more convincing argumentations.

According to the systemic perspective silence communicates instead; but it needs an inferential process to communicate. In a closed system the observer must transmit an open feedback. In an open system the feedback may be further silence that starts the circularity of the inferential process determining the emergence of the global communicative meaning. The circularity is also the descriptive criterion of the opening level of the system. In this case the opening level is synonymous of expectation of communication and of creation of meaning for all components of the system.

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