

CHAPTER 1

The First Word Was Silence

I can hear the silence,
and through it individual sounds.
—Eva Figes, 1987

Origins have piqued the curiosity of philosophers throughout the ages. From the origin of the universe to the origin of the human species, scientists, scholars, sages, and poets have set forth propositions to explain the birth of particular phenomena. Possibly, the most sought-after origin is the quest to understand how language began. Although theories of the origin of language abound, few mention or develop the role of silence. In 1948, Picard provided a notable and early exception when he wrote:

Speech came out of silence, out of the fullness of silence. The fullness of silence would have exploded if it had not been able to flow out into speech. . . . There is something silent in every word, as an abiding token of the origin of speech. And in every silence there is something of the spoken word, as an abiding token of the power of silence to create speech. (Picard, 1948/1952, p. 24)

Picard was unable to fathom an origin of language that did not rely on the hand of God, but he did recognize that, “Speech and silence belong together” (p. 36).

The expressive qualities of speech and the silencing aspects of communication permeate our everyday presence as well as our rich historical past. Understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between silence and communication can contribute to our understanding “of the limits and power of language” (van Manen, 1990, p. 112). For example, we are told that “our ancestors constitute a living legacy for life in the 20th century” (Mortensen, 1991, p. 273) and that knowledge of language development or at least the “ecological conditions that made it possible” (p. 274) will help us “to understand elements of stress, strain, struggle, and strife in the social fabric” (p. 273). To seek the relationship of “communication, conflict, and culture” (Mortensen, 1991, p. 273) through exploring early linguistic development is a laudable goal. As Aarsleff (1982) points out, it is a goal that can eventually contribute to the development of knowledge concerning human nature.

It is equally important that our theories of the origin of language pursue questions concerning the origin of silence. Seeking the source of silence may provide sketches of the past that reflect the present and may have bearing on the future. Exploring silence as a fundamental part of communication, culture, and conflict may illuminate the complex nature of social relations. It is time to develop theories about the origin of silence and explore its continuing presence in our everyday lives.

Feminist theories provide uniquely promising advantages for exploring the origin, meanings, and functions of silence. These theories demand the inclusion of individuals who have been erased from historical accounts concerning the origin of language. In addition, feminist theories call for an uncovering or recovering of historical interpretations. Furthermore, feminist theories address bifurcations that are discursively created and artificially dissect phenomena like language and silence. I will briefly address each of these theoretical advantages for studying the origin of silence.

First, early theories of the origin of language not only marginalized silence, but also marginalized women and, to a lesser extent, children. Focusing on the invisibility of women in language origin theories, Spender (1980) writes:

It is a mark of the sexism of linguistics as a discipline that in all the research which has been done on the history of language the question of the role played by women in its production and development has received virtually no attention; indeed such a question has not even been asked! (p. 32)

Thus, the inclusionary aspect of feminist theories should provide a place for women and children and other marginalized individuals within a discussion of silence and language.

Second, feminist theories encourage disrupting old theories in order to uncover their connections with a patriarchal politics. By doing so, the complacency with which women and silence have been marginalized in theories cannot sit comfortably in the corner. Daly (1973) argues that emancipation for women is dependent on uncovering “the silence about women’s historical existence since the dawn of patriarchy” (p. 93). Thus, the goal of historical recovery held by a feminist perspective should provide a means to explore historical doctrines on silence as discourses rather than as dogma.

Finally, feminist researchers encourage the reversal of “figure-and-ground relationships” in order to break through constraints imposed by “taken for granted assumptions” (Putnam, 1982, p. 6; also see Dervin, 1993). The terms, *figure* and *ground* are artistic metaphors that are used to explain what is privileged, emphasized, or accented as opposed to

what is marginalized, or reduced to being a supportive background. The reversal of figure and ground, for feminist theorists, is designed to uncover patriarchal implications. For example, feminists suggest that males have been privileged or positioned as *figure*, while women are marginalized and positioned as the *background*. With respect to communication, we can think of verbal language as *figure* in relation to nonverbal language as *ground*. Overcoming this general division can be achieved by acknowledging verbal and nonverbal communication as one system of symbolic expression (Langer, 1942; Liska, 1984). Yet this system of communication may still privilege itself in relation to silence by viewing symbolic expression or discursive practices as the vital and sparkling stars set against a vast black space of silence.

Reversing figure and ground, however beneficial, results in the privileging of one construct over another, which fails to release us from the bifurcation of two terms (e.g., silence and language). Derrida (1967/1973, 1967/1976) proposes that after the figure/ground reversal is achieved, researchers should extend beyond the reversal and attempt to escape the dichotomy altogether by creating a third term that both contains and escapes the present dichotomy.

Daly (1973) advises women to rely on the verb "being" in an effort to overcome the marginalization of nonbeing. Moving toward a third term, Dervin (1993) extends Daly's advice by suggesting that "being" can be achieved by addressing "the elusive moments of human communications" (p. 53). In particular, Dervin tells us to focus on the verbs, "the in between, the doing, the making, the experiencing" (p. 52), where the artificial dichotomies become one. Thus, we need to explore the silencing aspects of communication and the expressive aspects of silence. This kind of exploration is in agreement with the sort of synthesis that Glennon (1983) and numerous other feminist theorists call for, where "all of life will be a continual, becoming, unfolding dialectical process" (p. 271).

The quintessential example of the privileging of one term over another is apparent in the obsessive search for the origin of language to the neglect of the search for an origin of silence. Over and over again, scholars have attempted to pinpoint the specific situation or conditions that gave rise to the words and gestures we employ today. Bickerton (1981) points out that early theories of the origin of language suffer from their reliance on a Cartesian mind-set. Subsequently, most language-origin theories split verbal from nonverbal communication (Condillac offers an exception—see Aarsleff, 1982; Peaden, 1993). Even if the theories overcome this initial bifurcation (i.e., verbal/nonverbal distinction), they often fall victim to the practice of conceptualizing silence in a *literal* sense, without addressing the *epistemological* and *ontological* aspects of silence (van Manen, 1990).

APPROACHES TO SILENCE

Van Manen (1990) organizes approaches to silence into three categories; literal, epistemological, and ontological. Literal approaches to the understanding of silence view the phenomenon as the space between the words. These silences can be awkward or poetic, chilling or rebellious. They function in a variety of ways (e.g., as the silent treatment, tender concern, forceful condemnation, comfortable intimacy, shared understanding). The literal approach to silence may be the most prevalent in communication scholarship (see Jaworski, 1993, for a review of literal approaches to silence).

The epistemological approach to conceptualizing silence is grounded in Polanyi's (1958, 1969) philosophy of tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the phenomenon of knowing without being able to articulate what we know. At times, we may discover that we are unable to articulate an experience, but others are capable of expressing it for us. At other times, the experience simply cannot be described in everyday language and only the talents of an artist can render it visible. Finally, van Manen (1990) suggests that the unspeakable aspects may only be temporary and as time passes we may be able to express the experience or knowledge. It is also possible that we choose not to express certain experiences.

The third approach to silence, the ontological approach, is "the silence of Being or Life itself" (van Manen, 1990, p. 114). Here van Manen draws from Bollnow (1982, as cited in van Manen, 1990), who describes the silence of life as instilling a sense of awe and inspiration "that fulfills and yet craves fulfillment" (van Manen, 1990, p. 114).

In addition to these three approaches to understanding silence, one more perspective must be added. An *ideological perspective*, which is distinct from the previous three approaches, is necessary to illumine the silencing of marginalized groups of people. Scholars from the critical school, the postmodern school, and a variety of feminist schools of thought recognize the complex and oppressive aspects of ideological silence. The scholars and activists holding these perspectives have been most vocal in recognizing the power of silence to also act as resistance. In the search for a moment where language and silence coincide giving rise to each other, it is necessary to draw upon the rich body of feminist scholarship that views silence as ideological, as a powerful aspect of oppression and possible means to emancipation (e.g., Ardener, 1975; Daly, 1973; Jamieson, 1988; MacKinnon, 1979, 1989; Penelope, 1990; Rich, 1984). Other discussions of the silencing nature of certain forms of communication can be found in the works of critical and postmodern scholars (e.g., de Certeau, 1986; Deetz, 1992; Habermas, 1979; Fou-

cault, 1966/1973, 1976/1990, 1978). In addition, many scholars combine perspectives in order to address the power of silence (e.g., Jaworski, 1993; Weedon, 1987). The struggle for people to be heard over oppressive governments or patriarchal practices must not be overlooked in this review of the origin of language theories and the subsequent discussion of silence and expression.

BACK TO ORIGINS

It is true that many scholars suggest that it is a futile endeavor to expend energy on the search for origins, as the result can always be challenged and the answer may be elusive (Derrida, 1967/1976; Foucault, 1966/1973, Kristeva, 1981/1989; Mortensen, 1991; Raffler-Engel, 1988).¹ Yet I do not seek out a definitive truth about a specific origin; rather, I seek out any possible foundational situation that might express how silence and linguistic/gestural communication coincide—how silence may be expressive and how expressive activity can be silencing. Furthermore, it has been argued that to seek alternative origins is to provide a sense of hope that possibilities for changing and ameliorating the current social order can and do exist (Lerner, 1986).

Hekman (1990) suggests that both feminist and postmodernist discourses “challenge the modern episteme at its roots” (p. 190). Yet the “roots” of language (i.e., the origin of language) have not been challenged from a feminist perspective. Before searching for the origins of expressive silence and the silencing of expression, it is necessary to review what has been privileged in this theoretical quest.

ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE THEORIES

Origin of language theories are numerous and varied. Past explanations range from the Divine to the genetic, from physiological to neurological, from emotional cries to infant babbling (Hewes, 1973). Some theories rest on the serendipitous discovery of words; others are grounded in elaborate theories of survival and economics. Various linguistic theories suggest that language originated with interjections, songs, imitation of natural sounds, or imitation of tool sounds (Stross, 1976). One theory even suggests that primitive people needed language to facilitate hunting and therefore language was born. Theories of the origin of language were so numerous that by 1866 the Société de Linguistiques de Paris refused to accept any additional papers dealing with the topic (Aarsleff, 1982; Gans, 1982; Hewes, 1973; Hockett, 1960).

Major scientific and philosophical advances of the mid-1900s

spurred researchers toward new attempts at explaining the enigmatic origin of language.² In spite of this flurry of theoretical activity, no scholars explored the origins of silence. Perhaps scholars assumed that before there were words and symbolic gestures there was a void—silence—and that the development of language would not affect that silence. Silence was and generally is perceived as a passive background to the noisy activity of communication.

Mortensen's (1991) recent contribution to the field of language origin studies makes room for silence as a phenomenon that reaches beyond the pauses between words. He writes:

the selection of those who speak is at the expense of nonspeakers. What matters in the long run is not simply the survival of the expressively most fit but also the disappearance of the least articulate. From an evolutionary standpoint, the most basic principle of communicative competence involves nothing less inclusive than the total magnitude of what is lost or gained from what is expressed or left unexpressed. (p. 287)

It is also important to note that communication competence may play a lesser role in the silencing of groups of people than some scholars might imply. Articulate individuals have been literally silenced (e.g., through executions) and virtually silenced (e.g., through imprisonment or exile) merely due to their affiliation with marginalized groups; and communicatively incompetent people have been privileged due in large part to their affiliation with a privileged group. Nevertheless, the sentiment that the unexpressed is equally important to the expressed is worthy of note and has not escaped the attention of postmodern scholars.

Philosophical moves toward a postmodern understanding of the world led Foucault (1966/1973) to explore not only the origin of language, but its ironic conclusion that to seek the origin of the species is to reveal its end. Nevertheless, Foucault provides a detailed account of the origin and development of language (as understood by Classical scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), which is grounded in the concepts of *proposition*, *articulation*, *designation*, and *derivation*.

The *theory of proposition*, also called the *theory of the verb*, argues that words do not become language until they contain a statement of proposition. Drawing from the work of Destutt, Foucault (1966/1973) suggests that:

The yell of the primitive man [sic] in a struggle becomes a true word only when it is no longer the lateral expression of his [sic] pain, and when it has validity as a judgment or as the statement of the type "I am choking." . . . It is in fact the proposition that detaches the vocal sign from its immediate expressive values and establishes its supreme linguistic possibility. (p. 92)

Drawing from Hobbes, Foucault explains that it is the verb that establishes the proposition.³ Subject and object can both be contained within the verb. The verb, acting as *language activity*, moves beyond the simple primitive expression. Relying on the work of Condillac and Destutt, famous linguists of the Port Royal, Foucault explains that all verbs can be reduced to the verb *to be*.

The *theory of articulation* suggests that the naming of things (i.e., the noun) is certainly important to the development of language, but is secondary to the verb *to be*. Without statements of proposition or affirmation the noun would be virtually useless or at least terribly difficult to develop into language. Thus, the first stage of articulation rests on the notion that verbs represent both process and relationship, which allow for displacement. Language is equated with the articulation of sounds or cries of expression. But what phonemes may have designated the verb *to be*? What phonemes might have designated *language activity*?

The *theory of designation* resulted in a proliferation of etymological activity and a search for the universal or root phoneme(s) that capture(s) the essence of language. Foucault (1966/1973) suggests that

the theory of roots in no way contradicts the analysis of the language of action, but is to be found within it. . . . Roots are those rudimentary words that are to be found, always identical, in a great number of languages—perhaps in all; they have been imposed upon language by nature in the form of involuntary cries spontaneously employed by the language of action. (p. 107)⁴

Foucault (1966/1973) argues that the general theme of the Port Royal theorists collapses into a needs orientation.⁵ For Foucault, the story of two hungry men, who articulate their needs before they are so overcome by hunger as to cry out, represents a possible origin of language as understood from a Classical perspective. The linguistic question then is how this meaningful representation of hunger develops into a rich and complex form of discursive activity. The critical question is why Foucault relies on two men to exemplify his position at the expense of women. I will deal with each question in turn.

The *theory of derivation*, as developed by Condillac, suggests that the representation can be recalled and attached to some other element that is similar in some fashion to the first thing or process named. Thus, the Classical theorists advanced the notion of resemblance through rhetorical devices. Three forms of rhetoric were considered especially pertinent to the derivation of language. They are “synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis (or metaphor, if the analogy is less immediately perceptible)” (Foucault, 1966/1973, pp. 113–114). For example, “it is no longer a particular oak that is called a *tree*, but anything that

includes at least a trunk and branches . . . *night* came to designate, not the end of this particular day, but the period of darkness separating all sunsets from all dawns. Finally, . . . everything was called a *leaf* that was as thin and flexible as the leaf of a tree" (p. 113).

Thus, the Classical School of thought and specifically the theorists of the Port Royal generally perceived the origin of language as a leap from the primitive expression to an articulation of the *language of activity* (i.e., the proposition, the verb), to naming (although some theorists posited that naming preceded the verb), to a designation of meaning, and finally, to a derivation of the term to represent other distinct, yet similar elements and processes. An important aspect of this Classical understanding of the origin of language is *naming* (Foucault, 1966/1973; Langer, 1942/1951). And in this naming came an ontological presence over that which was named.

It is ironic that women have not been *named* as contributors to the creation and development of language. They are virtually invisible in the past and current hypotheses of language origin. Their lives are silenced as if they did not and do not exist. It is time to ask the question that Spender (1980) claims has not yet been asked: What role did women play in the production and development of language?

The following rendering of the origin of language draws in part from the Classical School's criteria of conditions for the origin of language as well as evolutionary, etymological, and ecological models. Further, it advances a feminist position, which rejects the general Classical School of thought that views language solely as the representation of reality and embraces the position that communication both *reflects* and *creates* our realities and that women did indeed participate in the creation of language/silence. The expressions *language/silence* or *silence/language* are ways of denoting that the two phenomena exist simultaneously in a shared space, influencing each other.

A FEMINIST RENDERING OF THE ORIGINS OF SILENCE/LANGUAGE

The present rendering of the origin of language, and with it silence, follows the Classical tradition by first establishing the basis for the *expression of the proposition*. In order to do that, it is important to situate prelinguistic people in an evolutionary frame. An evolutionary model is well supported by primate studies (Berstein, 1970; Chevalier-Skolnikoff, 1982; Ettinger, 1977; Gardner & Gardner, 1969; Gerswind, 1970; Hockett, 1960; Jay, 1965; Lieberman, Philip, Crelin & Klatt, 1972; Osman-Hill, 1972; Tanner, 1981; Tanner & Zihlman, 1976). I will take the lib-

erty of highlighting primate studies that emphasize the mother/infant relationship, which may contribute to the development of expressive activity. This choice is justified in the following sections.

MOTHER/INFANT RELATIONSHIP: A MODEL FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

There are several close relationships within any human society, including maternal/filial, paternal/filial, sibling relationships, mate relationships (be they heterosexual or homosexual relationships), and friendships, just to name a few. However, I will argue here that the most likely candidate to support the development of the *expression of the proposition* is the maternal/filial relationship. Before proceeding, I must make two points quite clear. First, my use of the mother/infant relationship in no way supports that women are “naturally” maternal. Nor do I intend any reverse chauvinism. Instead, I base this choice on several premises drawn primarily from evolutionary propositions and primate studies.⁶

The mother/infant relationship as a model for language development is conducive with several origin of language theories. In 1942, Langer suggested that the infant’s ability to prattle and chatter is a key component in the development of language. The bubbleluck or babbling theory of 1943 proposed by Thorndike suggests that baby babbling leads to vocalization, which in turn leads to word formation. An explanation for this process is not provided in Thorndike’s theory (Hewes, 1977). Neither is the process fully developed by Langer. Nevertheless, Langer offers an intriguing theory that both draws from and extends Classical arguments on the topic. I will return to her criteria for language development later.

More recently, Carini (1970) extends the baby babble theory and attempts an explanation for the development of language. First, he suggests that it was necessary for an infant with the neurological and physical capabilities of babbling to mature and have an offspring with the same linguistic potential. A healthy mother/infant relationship then provides an environment conducive to vocal play. The infant babbles and the adult mimics the babbling in association with whatever the child might be doing. Carini provides an example of his own child using nonsensical words while rocking in a certain fashion. The sound is imitated by the parents and comes to mean “rocking a certain way.”

This theory can be criticized on several counts, yet it also provides insight into the early relationships that were most conducive to developing and learning language. It can be criticized from the Classical perspective in that the nonsensical word fails to move beyond the stage of

articulation. It can be criticized from environmentalist and ecological viewpoints in that it does not afford a substantial need or motive for language to develop. It can be criticized from an etymological standpoint in that there are no traces of the specific nonsensical play word provided by Carini in modern language. However, it does provide support for the notion that language originated and developed within the nurturing relationship. This lends support to Revesz's (1946/1956) contact theory, which suggests that social contact is a necessary condition in the development of language. Thus, a nurturing and close relationship is crucial to understanding the development of language, yet in a very different way from Thorndike's or Carini's hypotheses.

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS SILENCE

Human infants have the capacity of expressing their biological needs through crying. This crying triggers a physiological reaction in adult human beings. The heart rate and blood pressure of the adult human increases and is accompanied by persistent feelings of annoyance and irritability (Frodi, 1985). A less than loving care-taker might escape this unpleasant situation by leaving. However, if the crying is affecting the entire community, as Frodi's (1985) work indicates, then something must be done. For example, a mother may have discovered that as she picked up the child and walked or rocked the infant the crying ceased. This phenomenon could be related to soothing intrauterine motion. It may be that walking or rocking a baby dates back to prelinguistic times. Most modern parents can attest to attempts to silence an infant through walking or rocking motions.

Expression of the Proposition

Imagine a mother with the neurological and physiological requirements for language. She might begin adding sounds to the rocking motion or they may have developed concomitantly. Had an early hominid mother made the sound 'sh' when the child cried and discovered it had a soothing affect she may have repeated it. The expression *sh* represents the *expression of the proposition* "to be quiet." It is important to note that the rocking motion equally expresses the proposition "to be quiet."

Sh is a logical choice for the linguistic representation of silence for several reasons. First, according to the work of Lieberman (1975) early hominids may have had less difficulty articulating voiceless fricatives or affricates (i.e., consonants sounds that do not depend on a vowel sound for articulation—e.g., *ch*, *sh*, *j*).⁷

Second, linguistic etymologists argue primordial roots rarely disap-

pear from a language because they have been transmitted, transferred, or blended into so many other derivations. Thus, the root becomes frozen in time, a linguistic fossil of sorts (this notion is credited to Mary Foster as cited in Stross, 1976). Without a doubt, *sh* is apparent in modern languages in vocables from *hush* to *Shalom*. The *sh* sound calls for quiet and tranquillity and has been derived into numerous other meanings. Furthermore, the sound produced by the noise *sh* is linked to soothing sounds (whether one imagines wind or water) resulting in a natural sound symbolism, as discussed by Swadesh (1951, 1959).

In addition, the classic works of Susanne Langer (1942) and Kenneth Burke (1966) place the significance of humanity in symbol-making, symbol-using, and symbol-abusing activities. Specifically, Burke states that "Man [sic] is a symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal . . . inventor of the negative or moralized by the negative" (p. 16). "To be silent" is also consistent with Burke's (1966) notion that language originated in the negative, especially the hortatory negative. That is, the expression "be silent" (e.g., *sh*) is to command that one shall not cry out.

In addition, Liska (1984) draws from Burke's notion of the negative and argues that the first symbol must certainly have been that of the negative of absence. The notion that the first *abstract* symbol required a nonreferential concept is consistent with the proposition *sh*. Silence is not something that early humans could point to.

Finally, *sh* meets the criteria set forth by Gans (1981) who claims that the first word of significance must have had the characteristics of an ostensive (i.e., a word that can both represent itself as well as command itself). Gans provides the example of "Run!"—*run* may indicate the act of running as well as the command that one should "Run!". His examples are self-admittedly weak since they are already established arbitrary symbols within a well-developed language. In other words, Gans asks himself and leaves us wondering where "Run!" came from; it seems to materialize from nowhere.

Although the root (i.e., *sh*) itself is common to several modern languages, I do not suggest that *sh* is the only term to be associated with this activity of calming an infant. For example, the clicking sounds that comprise the language of the Sandawe and Hadza nations of Northern Tanzania (Clarke, 1982) as well as the !Kung nation of the Kalahari (Marshall, 1958) may have been used to quiet the cries of a discontented infant. The purpose instead is to establish the *expression of the proposition* that is "to be silent."

However, neither the mother/infant relationship, nor the production of the sound *sh* or other equivalent sounds or nonverbal substitutes (taken in isolation), secures the development of language (verbal or non-

verbal). Nor do these hypotheses suggest the ecological or environmental impetus for the development of language. Although, as Langer (1942) suggests, the “need” may be the unique human desire to “express” oneself. Nevertheless, in order for an expression of proposition to move toward a symbolic state, the Classical scholars argue that it must establish *articulation*, *designation*, and *derivation*.

Articulation

If a sibling or any other member of the community showed interest in and an understanding of the expression of proposition, (e.g., *sh*), articulation could be achieved. As stated earlier, it is quite common for siblings to show intense interest in the mother/infant exchanges among chimpanzees (Goodall, 1971; Jampel, 1984; Jay, 1965; Rumbaugh, 1977). We would expect no less of human children. If the human children imitated the sound with the same reference point, that is, if they said “sh” to quiet the same infant, then the proposition has been articulated, its meaning carried to another member of the community. Yet language is still not complete.

Designation

To extend beyond the initial articulation, the same expression of proposition must be extended to other reference points. For example, if the interested siblings of other caregivers in the community took up the use of *sh* to quiet other infants, then the meaning of the articulation would be sedimented. *Sh* is designated as the sign for silencing infants. This designation still fails to complete the level of symbolicity needed for language. It needs to be derived from the original referent to a similar yet distinct situation. In other words, it must maintain its meaning while developing to a more intense level of abstraction.

Derivation

Derivation may have occurred due to ecological and environmental conditions. As Mortensen (1991) suggests, our ancestors lived in a time of struggle with constant life-and-death situations. This premise has led numerous authors to discuss the cultural imperatives of language development (see, e.g., de Laguna, 1927/1963; Revesz, 1946/1956). One of those situations comes with the meeting and avoidance of predatory animals. It would not have been so bizarre for one member of the community to warn others that a predator was near by. Nor would it have been strange to call for silence as women, children, and men hunted for small game. Lerner (1986) points out that large game hunting was probably a

very rare activity and an unlikely candidate as the impetus to language or silence. Nevertheless, a nonverbal counterpart to *sh* could have existed (for example placing the index finger over one's lips) and could have been viewed at a distance during hunting. *Sh*, in its linguistic or nonverbal form, may also have been extended as a warning to noisy siblings in order to protect the sleep of infants or adults. This warning may well have taken the form of the proposition for them "to be silent." Thus, the proposition is moved along the continuum of arbitrariness (see Liska, 1984). *Sh* is extended well beyond its original referent (i.e., the crying infant) to a new referent (i.e., a dangerous situation for the whole community). Grace de Laguna's (1927/1963) cooperation theory is grounded in the notion that environmental and ecological conditions of both conflict and cooperation led early hominids to encapsulate a predicative form of communication or a sentence-word. Furthermore, she argues that this form of cooperation increased the survival rate of early hominids.

Thus, language (i.e., both gestural and verbal) is born in the expression of silence and silence is heard through language. This ironic rendering provides the feminist insight so crucial to understanding the world as a "dialectical unfolding process" (Glennon, 1983) as constant "be-ing" (Daly, 1973). It disturbs the complacent acceptance of dualisms in the study of language origin theories. However, this feminist rendering of the origin of language/silence, as explained thus far, can be challenged for its failure to deal with the more violent aspects of human life. Mortensen (1991) censures theories that do not deal with the violent aspects of life as "largely watered down, domesticated, or overly pacifistic explanations of human communication" (p. 274). The challenge to address the violent aspects of life and language is dealt with in the following section, not so much because I believe that all societies are like islands developed from violent volcanic eruptions, but because violence is an issue that we cannot afford to ignore.

VIOLENCE

As suggested in the previous section, Mortensen (1991) challenged scholars to deal with the violent aspects of the origin of language. Yet, before this call was issued, a theory of the origin of language as grounded in violence had already been published. This particular theory makes Mortensen's attempts at revealing the relation between language and violence pale in comparison. The theory under discussion was developed by Girard (1972/1977). It is a postmodern piece of writing that might make Stephen King cower. Girard's theory, without a doubt,

would not be described as a “water-downed pacifistic” explanation of the origin of language/silence.

Girard (1972/1977) argues that violence is an inherent human condition. It is violence, he tells us, that gave rise to the origin of language, the origin of silence, and the origin of institutions. He believes that humans do not have an instinctual ability to organize through hierarchies. Subsequently, he believes conflict and strife are commonplace. As rivalries increase, individuals are polarized within the group. Certain members are perceived as the cause of the crisis. These individuals are usually the weakest members of society. They may be “diseased, crippled, of strange appearance or origin—apt to arouse the suspicions of the group” (Gans, 1981, p. 11). In other words, Girard relies on the concept of *other*. The *other* heightens the hostility of the group, whose aggression results in a collective murder. Following the murder, the community witnesses the results of their actions in silence. Girard perceives the lifeless body as a signifier, an articulation of the fear, the hatred, the frustration, and the loathing that culminated in the group murder. The silence that follows is described as “sacred.” Girard envisions these early prelinguistic people as so moved by their own actions that they establish a ritual that reenacts the scenario. The ritual reenactment relies on a substitute for the human victim (i.e., the sacrificial animal). This, Girard argues, is the origin of institutions. As the first organization, religion is established based on the reenactment of the first murder. “It is in this context as well that Girard situates his brief remarks on the origin of language, which he sees as emerging from ritual reproduction of the cries accompanying the crisis and murder” (Gans, 1981, p. 12). In short, this theoretical position suggests that the ritual sacrifice is the foundation of organized religion (the first institution) and the ritualized cries are the origin of language while the ritualized pauses between the cries are the origin of “sacred” (i.e., meaningful) silences.

It is possible that the first communal murder was that of the incessantly crying infant by less than empathetic individuals (see Frodi’s 1985 work for a full discussion of aggression and nurturance related to infant cries). The image of a child’s skull crushed against a cave wall or battered by a flurry of hurled rocks would indeed have given greater impetus for protectors to quiet the cries of an infant. It is also possible that the cries of the infant could have been muffled by the mother’s hand until neither cries nor breath emanated from the child. It is also not beyond imagination to picture a caretaker shaking the child in order to command silence, which all too often results in permanent silence due to brain damage or death. The moment of silence that follows this murderous act may indeed represent Girard’s collective silence, a silence moved to the realm of the sacred by future ritualistic murders (i.e., sacrifices).⁸

Girard's theory is enhanced and challenged by Gans (1981) who argues that the origin of language, silence, and institutions is found in nonviolence, not violence. Gans (1981) suggests that the aggressive act is not consensual and evokes conflict among members, who are caught in a state of both attraction and repulsion. He argues the following hypothesis: "At a moment when all are about to carry out such a gesture, the fear of conflict is such that the gesture is aborted. This abortive gesture, which *designates* its object without attempting to possess it, is then the first *linguistic act*" (p. 35). It is the abortive act that leads to sacred substitutions, not the original murder. It is *intentional* nonviolence, which is achieved through fear of violence (i.e., members fear they will become the object of aggression), that leads to the institutionalization of the sacred silence.

Gans (1981) argues that the first linguistic symbol needed to be an ostensive that "retains the nonviolent symmetry of the original gesture designating the *sacred object*" (p. 102). Yet he is unable to provide us with any other example than the word *run*, which I suppose demonstrates a nonviolent symmetry, but as suggested earlier fails to provide a coherent background for its own selection. Why the sound, phonetic, *run*? It springs from nowhere. Furthermore, Gans tells us that according to Girard's theory in order for discourse to emerge from this situation a mediator between those who desire the object and the object of desire must exist.⁹ Yet once again Gans is unable to imagine who might function as a mediator or protector for the victim. It is quite possible that Gans, like Foucault, has fallen victim to his own sexist language, as he does not include women or children in his discussion. The invisibility of women in the theories of language origin and discourse development not only weakens the theories, but also perpetuates the silence of marginalized people, especially, in this case, women and children.

While Girard and Gans undoubtedly answer Mortensen's challenge for scholars to deal with the violent origins of language/silence, they do so at the expense of women and children. They provide yet another theory (or theories) that silences women through invisibility.

In addition to the invisibility of women, another problem surfaces when these theories (i.e., Girard's theory of violence or Gans's theory of intentional nonviolence) are taken as universal explanations of the origin of language, silence, and institutions. The problem arises from the notion that both Girard (1972/1977) and Gans (1981) set their theories of violence and intentional nonviolence in a firm belief that prelinguistic people feared and hated those who were different. The theories are grounded on the premise of "debased otherness." Yet numerous cultures exist that did not and do not debase those who are different. For example, the Huron demonstrated a propensity to not only accept those who

were different, but to place them in positions of authority. Trigger (1990) suggests that, "dwarfs, . . . often served as Shamans" (p. 13). "The Berdache in the plains Indian society was considered to be a powerful person who combined the attributes of male and female, . . . [and] acquired great super-natural power" (Cohen & Eames, 1982, p. 261). These individuals were respected rather than ostracized. Sexuality was not divided into categories of gender or orientation by many Native American cultures, instead several genders existed and those who may have seemed most unique often presided over sacred rituals. Furthermore, Cherokee men and women shared power, children were treated with respect, and women warriors were honored (see Mooney, 1900/1992). Difference had its place.

Although prejudice against "others" was absent among many Native American cultures, they did indeed have language, silence, and institutions. Thus, grounding the origins of language, silence, and institutions in violent attitudes towards those who are perceived as different does not explain the existence of language, silence, and formal organization among those people who are, at the very least, tolerant toward difference. I am not suggesting that Native Americans are the only people who tolerate and appreciate difference, nor am I suggesting that Native Americans did not act in violent ways in certain situations; rather, I am suggesting that no one universal theory of violence or intentional nonviolence can explain the origins of language, silence, and institutions. Furthermore, to ground a theory in the assumption that all people despise otherness, ironically marginalizes those who did not or do not fear or despise otherness.

Girard's (1972/1977) theory may well explain the origin of language, silence, and institutions for a prelinguistic European community, but it fails to make sense for many other cultures. Thus, origins may be considered specific, relative, multiple, and unique. In other words, many theories are possible and these different theories can co-exist. Although in one community violence may have been the impetus to the development of language/silence; in another community, nurturing and care may have given birth to expressiveness. Each theory of origins can in turn provide possibilities for explaining the past and understanding current social relations—for the theories we create speak volumes about who we are.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ORIGIN OF SILENCE/LANGUAGE

The current rendering of the origin of language, suggests that in the first words we spoke, the first symbolic gestures we made, the first clicks of

language, we articulated silence. This rendering does not totally negate the theories of the Port Royal, nor does it negate the theories of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century etymologists, environmentalists, or evolutionists. Rather, it draws upon certain criteria (i.e., proposition, articulation, designation, and derivation) in order to establish a rigorous grounding for a feminist perspective that explains how silence and language are self-contained. However, this position rejects early notions that summarize the role of language as purely a representation of reality and embraces a notion that any reality we have is bound up in discourse and silence, in expressiveness and lived experience.

This theory answers Bickerton's (1981) criticism that the early origin of language theories are weak due to their reliance on a Cartesian heritage. Nevertheless, the current rendering holds a place for early theories as well as comparative, evolutionary, and etymological linguistic solutions to the puzzle about the origin of language. Finally, it acknowledges the postmodern concern over the irony of human existence and the violent materialist character of social relations, but most importantly it provides a space for women in one of the most creative and monumental achievements of the human species, the development of language and silence as significant forms of expression.

This approach makes room for Burke's (1966) language origin theory as dependent upon the negative and Foucault's concept that a search for the origin reveals the end. Yet it moves beyond either of these approaches by providing what Burke refers to as an *essential irony* and one that includes women, children, and men. Burke's (1966) concept of irony is discussed in several of his essays. Here I am referring to his essays on the origin of language, which establish irony as essential to language. According to Burke, the rationality of language rests on the negative. In order to say what *is*, we must be able to say what is *not*. Although this irony may be essential, I believe Burke neglected an additional and even more obvious, yet elusive irony. That is, the *essential irony is that the first symbol, the first gesture, the first word was silence*.

Postmodern perceptions of the origin of language focus on the paradoxical and ironic aspects of origin itself. For Foucault (1966/1973) it is not origin that gives rise to history, rather it is "historicity that . . . makes possible the necessity of an origin" (p. 329). Origins are impossible for "the origin is that which is returning . . . the return of that which has already always begun . . . the origin is visible through time; but this time it is the recession into the future" (pp. 330-332). Foucault argues that,

it is not a matter of rediscovering some primary word that has been buried in it, but of disturbing the words we speak, of denouncing the grammatical habits of our thinking, of dissipating the myths that ani-

mate our words, of rendering once more noisy and audible the element of silence that all discourse carries with it as it is spoken. (p. 298, also see Picard, 1948/1952)

Disturbing the discourse is exactly what numerous feminist theorists devote their research efforts toward. Interestingly, simply by including women in theories of language origin, the patriarchal discourse concerning language production is disturbed. Uncovering how language, in general, and its grammatical structure, in particular, acts to silence women, and all marginalized *others* lends itself to uncovering the disguised forms of domination. Furthermore, seeking the origin of language provides us with the origin of silence. An origin that is lived again and again through silenced groups. Although Foucault believes that the "origin of man [sic]" is not to be found in the primordial word, it can be said that in the origin of the primordial word, silence can be found, and there exist the *others*.

Silence can obviously marginalize and oppress members of society, but it can also express protection, resistance, and defiance. It may afford opportunities for emancipation or perpetuate the disappearance of the "other."

The present rendering of the origin of expressive activity (i.e., silence/language) is not without limitations. As argued by postmodernists, any rendering of past events is vulnerable to challenges, as is this interpretation, which should be thought of less as a *theory* and more as a *possibility*—the possibility that silence and language emerged simultaneously and that women played a part, if not a central role in this process.

Silence and language create and re-create our social realities. From interpersonal relationships to the structuring of organizations, silent practices are pervasive and interwoven with linguistic practices. The alternative theory of the origin of language/silence provided here is not only a possibility, but is also a creative expression. Just as Girard's (1972/1977) theory is an expression of one-world view (i.e., that language, silence, and institutions sprang from suspicion and loathing of others), the theory that I propose is yet another selective interpretation of the origin of language/silence. And each of these theories contributes to the creation of our social realities. They are aesthetic expressions. They are narratives dressed as theory (Lyotard, 1984). As a narrative/theory of the origin of language/silence, this *aesthetic expression* speaks of our abilities to *create possibilities* for new social realities. However, the acceptance, rejection, or modification of these social realities depends on the persuasive (or at time coercive) ability of the aesthetic expression, in this case, the narrative. "Narratives . . . are also subject to commodifica-

tion, exchange, and consumption" (Clair, Chapman, & Kunkel, 1996, p. 255; de Certeau, 1984). They are produced and proffered. Furthermore, "The listeners are consumed by the aesthetic narrative. Thus consumption is linked not only to the economic notion of consumer, but also to the phenomenological notion of lived experience as artistic expression" (Clair et al., 1996, p. 255). But as deCerteau (1984) suggests, narratives are not necessarily passively consumed. Nor are they necessarily freely created. Thus, the narratives we live may speak of certain conditions while disguising others (Deetz, 1992; Giddens, 1979; Mumby, 1988). And some stories may be expressed while others are sequestered (Clair, 1993). The issues of power, politics, aesthetics, and economics are all part of the *organizing of silence*.

Although this rendering of the origin of silence/language may result in more questions than answers, it does provide a means of addressing expressive activity without bifurcating the concepts. As Picard (1948/1952) so eloquently put it: "Speech came out of silence, . . . and in every silence there is something of the spoken word" (p. 24). Because they are born of the same breath, these expressive activities give significance to each other. The following chapters of this book will attempt to make clear how expressive activities can be silencing and how silence can be expressive.