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'The Unspeakable'.
Linguistic, Social, and Cultural Functions of a Concept and its Philosophical Tradition of Wittgenstein, De Saussure, and Peirce for 'Silent Speech' and 'Silence'

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Abstract: Why do we say that something is unspeakable, even though we know the issue well? We find in many cultural contexts the classification of something as 'unspeakable'. Using semantics and semiotic theory separating between 'concept', 'sign', and 'reference object of the sign' in several cases where the 'unspeakable' is described, we will discuss the functions of 'the unspeakable' as a cultural phenomenon. Philosophers use the term frequently with reference to their culture. In our article we will look at the socio-cultural conditions of the concept of 'the unspeakable'. While it seems that this concept is universal, functions and meanings of this concept vary depending on the cultural settings. We will examine in this article the functions of this concept comparing the use of it in different cultures with religious and mythological impact expressed in this concept. Furthermore, we will look at the linguistic settings that allow us a construction like 'the unspeakable' to be used as a representation for something not spoken in speech, but existing in another cultural or transcendental sphere. We will show that the expression serves as a semiotic replacement for issues that could be articulated, but due to cultural limits like religion or myths as act of cultural censorship should not be articulated in speech.
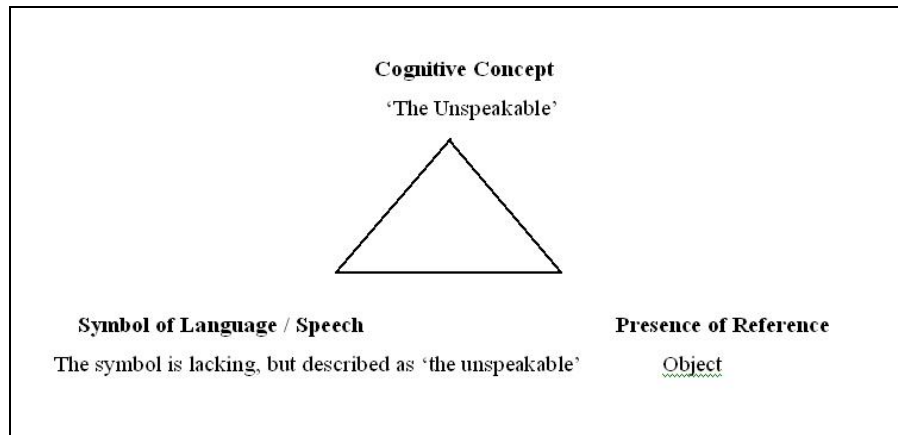
Introduction

Why does someone say about something that it is unspeakable? When we have a notion about something and are able to articulate a statement about it on a judging meta-level for example in the phrase "This is unspeakable", we should assume that the thing we are talking about is something we can articulate in speech. But obviously in many cultures the mentioning of this quality is a common feature applied to specific situations and objects. On the other hand we can ask if such a notion, especially when occurring in different countries, can be used as an indicator for a specific linguistic setting that gives us important information about the cognitive preposition of any linguistic utterance. Research covering all aspects regarding the phenomenon of 'the unspeakable' does not exist. On the contrary, the contributions of research for this topic are selected analyses presented as a conglomerate from various fields of research. Smith published *Unspeakable Acts, Unnatural Practices: Flaws and Fallacies in "Scientific" Reading Instruction* 2003.[1] McHale's *Unspeakable Sentences, Unnatural Acts: Linguistics and Poetics Revisited* (1983) is an early contribution to the phenomenon of 'the unspeakable' in literary settings.[2] The linguistic disposition of 'the unspeakable' was evaluated by Dierickx in 1991.[3] Yamaguchi investigated into 'unspeakable sentences'.[4] Kane wrote in *The Language of Silence: On the Unspoken and the Unspeakable in Modern Drama* about 'the unspeakable' in literary texts.[5] Tyler's *The Unspeakable: Discourse, Dialogue, and Rhetoric in the Postmodern World* was the first book to be published focusing on the conditions of discourse in postmodernity.[6]

Case Studies: 'The Unspeakable' and Its Cultural History

Theoretical Reflections – A Semiotic Paradoxon and a Short Cultural History of its Applications

'The unspeakable' is used in many cultural settings for something that cannot be spoken due to taboo or the majesty of it. The absurd situation consists in the contradiction that the descriptive expression of 'the unspeakable', which is a meta-linguistic expression, indicates that the described issue is on the one hand recognized and cognitively analyzed, but on the other hand it contains a judgment that states that it cannot be put into words. This paradoxon can be described in semiotic terms as the non-existence of the symbol of the language and the presence of the cognitive concept, while claiming the presence of the reference object. We use the semiotic triangle to demonstrate this situation:

Cognitive Concept

'The Unspeakable'

Symbol of Language / Speech

The symbol is lacking, but described as 'the unspeakable'

Presence of Reference

Object

The Semiotic Triangle for the Concept of 'the Unspeakable'

Is Silent Speech Impossible? Limits of Speech in Semiotics: Wittgenstein's Silence and de Saussure's Condition Tacite

Starting from Ludwig Wittgenstein, who applied logical reasoning to the question of what we can say resulting in his universal last sentence "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, we can discuss if this is a sentence applicable to the cognitive capability of single human and the human's language. This sentence faces a semiotic condition between speech and world and describes the limits of the world as communication by language. It is a logocentric position similar to the rhetorical theories that put the word (*logos*) in a position of power. Wittgenstein equalized limits of the signifier language and the signified world. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Wittgenstein, who considered the limits of one's language as the limits of one's world, here also wrote on meaning (4.026): The meanings of simple signs (words) must be explained to us if we are to understand them. With propositions, however, we make ourselves understood.[7] Wittgenstein also concluded that what cannot be said is only representable in silence (7): 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence'. In other words: 'The unspeakable' might exist, but it is not representable in words.

Asking the question 'How is silent speech possible?' focuses on the aspect of communication between persons by speech without sharing meanings. Of course not, we can say, if you do not know the meaning of a word, you cannot speak about it and cannot communicate it. A whole speech of meaningless words wouldn't work at all in communication. The research regarding concepts of meaning that are considered to be necessary for the success of any speech is virtually endless; even whole disciplines like semiotics are dedicated to it. We will here not ask for

meanings as categories of speech communication; on the contrary, we will ask for the conditions of a communication via speech, which doesn't depend on the concept of meaning as inherent part of the spoken speech. The expression 'the unspeakable' stands for such a speech mode. We define here speech as anything that can be spoken and communicated by language. Regulative systems of speech like rhetoric exist for practical and educational use of speech and for persuasive interest. Grammar and linguistics disciplines describe or explain how speech is practiced according to linguistic rules.

Philosophers expressed the idea that thinking is 'silent speech'.[8] So Peirce quotes Plato, who used the expression 'silent speech' for thought:

> "Thought, says Plato, is a silent speech of the soul with itself. If this be admitted immense consequences follow; quite unrecognized, I believe, hitherto. But it is a vexed question whether this be true; for some respectable philosophers maintain that thought must precede every sign, without admitting for an instant the possibility of an infinite regress. Yet that an infinite is not always impossible is shown by the fact that Achilles does overtake the tortoise. If we seek the light of external facts, we must certainly find only cases of thought in signs; plainly no other thought can be evidenced by external facts. But we have seen that only by external facts can thought be known at all. It appears, then, that the only thought which can possibly be cognized is in signs. But by definition thought which cannot be cognized does not exist."[9]

According to Godefroy's Dictionnaire de l'Ancienne Langue Française, a sign (signe) is a chose sensible qui éveille l'idée d'un être ou d'une manière d'être, en vertu d'un rapport naturel ou d'une convention.[10] In the manuscript *Elements Fondamentaux - Unité Linguistique* de Saussure wrote that in the whole 'semiologic system' (*système sémiologique*) 'fundamental elements' (*elements fondamentaux*) exist as the opposite of the 'abstraction from this silent condition' (*abstraction de cette condition tacite*).[11] De Saussure used the term 'linguistic unit' (*unité linguistique*) in one of the fragments of his manuscripts.[12] A *universal speech* must have common features, among them first of all the possibility to exist without meanings. It must be unique and without any reference except to itself. This is the point where such a language would loose its 'ground of functioning as a language'. Radically concluded, such a speech would need not to be subject to an analysis of linguistic fields, it would be necessary to exist with a universal and unique definition and function; it would also be

necessary to be original, but also unchangeable as speech. Furthermore, such a speech would have the quality to be similar for all humans regarding the way they learned the language, the way they speak the language, and the way they understand the language.

The cultural history of languages shows us that this was never the case and languages, even though they are from different families and trees, show as a basic feature the development to separate from each other. Examples are here, the Romanic languages in southern Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire or the different dialects of Arabic after the Islamization of Arabic countries. 'Silent speech' reduces language to an absolute 'world of thought'. This speech would have to be autonomous without a reference function to areas out of language and, even though it has to be considered to be unique and universal, without any reference to any other language. Such a language would lack any quality of communicability. In religious concepts of the Middle East we find ideas regarding the power of language as a religious instrument, e.g. in the Jewish-Christian tradition in the description of Babel, where the humans started to speak their own language, or in the Christian writings of the *New Testament* fighting for the *logos* as religious bound. Another example is the Islamic tradition of the identification of the Arabic language as a religious language.

In the ancient classical rhetorical theory 'meaning' is also a category of the physical activity of the speaker. Cicero in *De Oratore* (2, 182) uses the expression 'signification of the face' (*vultus pudoris significatio*) for the orator.[13] In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4, LXVII) the signification (*significatio*) is something that is more left in suspicion than placed in the speech (*oratio*). As a rhetorical tool this signification is related to 'the unspeakable', but rhetorical tools are artificial means for the persuasive use of language.[14] The ancient Greek language has many expressions for 'the unspeakable'; under the headword *adiêgêton* ('indescribable') is written in *Suda*: "That which is not able to be narrated in full through an excess of evil, so as to become an 'indescribable' evil". In the entry *anaudos* ('silent', 'voiceless') of *Suda* the following phrase is mentioned according to Sophocles and Iamblichos: "Also *anaudeton* ('unspeakable'), not to be told, forbidden, ineffable." And I would not say anything is unspeakable." "He was silent and dripping with tears at the shame of what had happened to him, ashamed to tell of the incident"." In the entry *aporrêta* ('unspeakable things', 'things not to be spoken') is written in *Suda*: "They used to say *aporrêta* to imply prohibited things, not only forbidden ones." And they are saying things that should not be spoken to our enemies." Aristophanes writes this in Thesmophoriazusae. (Aristophanes)." In the entry *apophêmon* ('unspeakable') is written in *Suda*: "The uneducated and unlearned tongue is adroit in the results it can achieve in one way and another, and yet it slips into the unspeakable and the blasphemous." In the entry *arrêton* ('accursed', 'harmful') is written in *Suda*: "But *arrêton*

logon ('unspeakable word') means a bad word, one which should not be spoken. Sophocles writes: "how on earth do I tell an unspeakable story?" (Sophocles, Ajax 214). Having written of or even done something more unspeakable than unspeakable things and beyond evils. "Who then would not hate an excess of unspeakable behavior which surpassed all others?" The word is used also for that which is incomprehensible, such as "the incomprehensible miracle of Your conception, oh You of virgin birth." *Ôra* ('care', 'heed') is an entry, which is translated as 'concern' and the term is used as follows in *Suda*: Aelian writes: "for a man who breaks oaths and has no concern for divine matters, who lives in deceit and falsehood and never says anything healthful and from there gains unspeakable wealth ...". In the entry *Psithuristou Hermou kai Erôtos kai Aphroditês* ('Whispering Hermes and Eros and Aphrodite') this explication was written in *Suda*: "What Theseus was the first to do, as Zopyros says, since Phaedra, as they say, began to whisper to Theseus against Hippolytos, slandering him. But others say that Hermes was called the Whisperer for a more human reason, because people meeting there (sc. at his temple) used to devise unspeakable deeds and to whisper to each other about what they wanted to do."[15]

Meaning as Limit of Speech in Linguistics and Semiotics: Peirce's 'Breaking the Silence'

Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* (3.203) stated: "A name means an object. The object is its meaning ('A' is the same sign as 'A')".[16] Especially theoretical linguistics focuses on semiotic relations between the theory and the linguistic phenomena they intend to explain. Chomsky in his theory considers it possible to analyze language without a reference to its content and regardless of meaning and differentiation between individual languages; Chomsky reduces linguistics to a mathematical and structured framework under the surface structure; the mathematical structure dominating the language makes it possible to present a universal theory. Here the ideological impact is similar to the meaningless speech; but as a theory it is self-referencing. It is out of the area of falsification or justification by evidence. Dryer answered the question 'What is basic linguistic theory?' as follows: "The expression "basic linguistic theory" (following R. M. W. Dixon) refers to the theoretical framework that is most widely employed in language description, particularly grammatical descriptions of entire languages. It is also the framework assumed by most work in linguistic typology."[17] The integration of linguistics into semiotics is quite useful as a meta-system. Tsur regards "language as a hierarchy of signs: the graphemic string signifies a phonological string, which signifies units of meaning, which signify referents in extra-linguistic reality. Our linguistic competence urges us to reach the final referents as fast as possible. Poetic language draws attention to itself, that is, to the hierarchy

of signifiers. In manneristic styles there is a greater awareness of the separateness of signifiers than in non-manneristic styles; hence their witty or disorienting effect." (Tsur 2000: 751). O'Gorman wrote that "the well-known opening line of Aristotle's Rhetoric, where he defines rhetoric as a 'counterpart' ('*antistrophos*') to dialectic, has spurred many conversations on Aristotelian rhetoric and motivated the widespread interpretation of Aristotle's theory of civic discourse as heavily rationalistic. This study starts from a statement in the Rhetoric less discussed, yet still important, that suggests that a visual aspect inheres in Aristotle's theory of rhetoric."[18] Pietrandrea stated that "sign linguistics has always had to deal with the notion of iconicity because sign languages are much more iconic than vocal languages. Formal sign linguists have often tried to explain iconicity apart from descriptions of sign language, considering it as contradictory to the arbitrariness that must rule language organization as a natural consequence of the autonomy and the separateness of language."[19]

In a letter to Lady Welby Peirce describes 'Secondness' and 'breaking of the silence' by the noise as 'an experience'. Peirce figures out in an imaginative journey in a balloon, when a piercing whistle is the initiating sound for the feeling of suffering:

> "The type of an idea of Secondness is the experience of effort, prescinded from the idea of a purpose. It may be said that there is no such experience, that a purpose is always in view as long as the effort is cognized. (...) The piercing whistle does not allow you to think or do anything but suffer. So that too is absolutely simple. Another Firstness. But the breaking of the silence by the noise was an experience. The person in his inertness identifies himself with the precedent state of feeling, and the new feeling which comes in spite of him is the non-ego. He has a two-sided consciousness of an ego and a non-ego. That consciousness of the action of a new feeling in destroying the old feeling is what I call an experience. Experience generally is what the course of life has compelled me to think. Secondness is either genuine or degenerate. There are many degrees of genuineness. Generally speaking genuine Secondness consists in one thing acting upon another, -- brute action. I say brute, because so far as the idea of any law or reason comes in, Thirdness comes in. When a stone falls to the ground, the law of gravitation does not act to make it fall. The law of

> gravitation is the judge upon the bench who may pronounce the law till doomsday, but unless the strong arm of the law, the brutal sheriff, gives effect to the law, it amounts to nothing. True, the judge can create a sheriff if need be; but he must have one."[20]

Peirce in *Four Methods of Settling Opinion* (MS 189 (Robin 366, 371,333): Writings 3, 24-28. May-June 1872) described the repressive methods of political and religious powers, among them the action of forcing silence on others and censorship as means of power:

> "Then, let all men who reject the established belief be terrified into silence": "Let the will of the state act then, instead of that of the individual. Let an institution be created which shall have for its object to keep correct doctrines before the attention of the people, to reiterate them perpetually and to teach them to the young, having at the same time power to prevent contrary doctrines from being taught, advocated, or expressed. Let all possible causes of a change of mind be removed from men's apprehensions. Let them be kept ignorant, lest they should learn of some reason to think otherwise than they do. (...) If the power to do this be wanting, let a list of opinions be drawn up to which no man of the least independence of thought can assent, and let the faithful be required to accept all these propositions, in order to separate them as radically as possible from the Influence of the rest of the world. This method has from the earliest times been one of the chief means of upholding correct theological and political doctrines, and of preserving their universal or catholic character. In Rome, especially, it has been practiced from the days of Numa Pompilius to those of Pius Nonus. This is the most perfect example in history, but wherever there is a priesthood—and no religion has been without one—this method has been more or less made use of."[21]

Silence versus Speech Communication

One of the most absurd features of communication is the fact that no clear definition of this word exists either in a historical perspective or in present linguistics. Communication is associated with a lot of belief systems or mind concepts or serves as technical category. Presenting a

theory, we claim that in communication there are general features that we can show. When asking for the purpose of a general communication theory, we can take the variety of different mind concepts regarding communication as an argument for its evidential need. Spirkin interpreted in his work *Dialectical Materialism* consciousness, language, and the function of communication as essential parts of labor activity later developing to a medium to express intrinsic human psychological needs: "From the very beginning human beings have been involved in social contexts of different degrees of complexity and they remain so, because this is the setting for both their labor and leisure, even when they think of themselves as isolated. Endless invisible threads link them with the life of the socium. The whole essence of the human being, including his consciousness, is communicative by its very nature. And this ability defines the essence of consciousness and also its vehicles, the individual and society."[22] Walther wrote: "Computer-mediated communication offers special opportunities for examining language and communication theory, in that online discourse is immune to many nonverbal communication elements that may confound language effects in speech. The role of language in communication technology research has been cyclical, with recent research refocusing on language data as evidence of humane computer interaction effects. Future research directions are suggested."[23] Monge discussed the role of communication and communication theory in the globalization processes stating that "communication phenomena intimated related to globalization".[24] Erdur and Seylan stated that "current standards on agent communication languages explain communication by changes in the mental states of agents. It is rather a striking issue that none of the popular agent middleware adheres to this semantics in a formal way."[25]

Peirce places silence and darkness being opposite to thoughts: "There is no reason why 'thought', in what has just been said, should be taken in that narrow sense in which silence and darkness are favorable to thought. It should rather be understood as covering all rational life, so that an experiment shall be an operation of thought. Of course, that ultimate state of habit to which the action of self-control ultimately tends, where no room is left for further self-control, is, in the case of thought, the state of fixed belief, or perfect knowledge."[26] Peirce in *What is a Sign* figured out a situation of persons not sharing the same language:

> "In intercommunication, too, likenesses are quite indispensable. Imagine two men who know no common speech, thrown together remote from the rest of the race. They must communicate; but how are they to do so? By imitative sounds, by imitative gestures, and by pictures. These are three kinds of likenesses. It is true that they will also use other

signs, finger-pointings, and the like. But, after all, the likenesses will be the only means of describing the qualities of the things and actions which they have in mind. Rudimentary language, when men first began to talk together, must have largely consisted either in directly imitative words, or in conventional names which they attached to pictures. The Egyptian language is an excessively rude one. It was, as far as we know, the earliest to be written; and the writing is all in pictures. Some of these pictures came to stand for sounds,—letters and syllables. But others stand directly for ideas. They are not nouns; they are not verbs; they are just pictorial ideas."[27]

Peirce in the *Lowell Lectures* (1903) wrote that a silent resistance exists as one of the relations to other existents:

"Let us begin with considering actuality, and try to make out just what it consists in. If I ask you what the actuality of an event consists in, you will tell me that it consists in its happening then and there. The specifications then and there involve all its relations to other existents. The actuality of the event seems to lie in its relations to the universe of existents. A court may issue injunctions and judgments against me and I not care a snap of my finger for them. I may think them idle vapor. But when I feel the sheriff's hand on my shoulder, I shall begin to have a sense of actuality. Actuality is something brute. There is no reason in it. I instance putting your shoulder against a door and trying to force it open against an unseen, silent, and unknown resistance. We have a two-sided consciousness of effort and resistance, which seems to me to come tolerably near to a pure sense of actuality. On the whole, I think we have here a mode of being of one thing which consists in how a second object is. I call that Secondness."[28]

Semiotics and Linguistics: Language as Carrier of Meaning

Cognitive science assumes that meaning exists, when cognitive actions participate in linguistic activities. Davis wrote in *Meaning, Expression, and Thought*: "Very little attention has been paid to cogitative speaker meaning. So the inadequacy of extant analyses should hardly be surprising. What is remarkable is that despite the evident similarities

between cogitative and cognitive speaker meaning, the two have been analyzed in radically different ways."[29] Language is a concept that consists of meanings associated between written phonetic expressions and graphics positioned in a specific way organized according to commonly shared rules among the persons that use it. Language enables us to describe objects and processes *in praesentia and in absentia*, existing or not existing. Language acts in several ways to represent meaning. In the paradigm of grammatical changes we can see how meaning changes by altering the grammatical position. In the second example the grammatical disposition has changed; here also two different concepts of 'mean' as negative quality and "to mean" for the quality of having a meaning exist. Wittgenstein described this situation for natural languages as follows in his *Tractatus* (3.323):

> "In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification—and so belongs to different symbols— or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way. Thus the word 'is' figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; 'exist' figures as an intransitive verb like 'go', and 'identical' as an adjective; we speak of something, but also of something's happening. (In the proposition, 'Green is green'—where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective—these words do not merely have different meanings: they are different symbols.)."[30]

In the following paradigms for the change of parts of speech in the case of the concept of 'meaning' we demonstrate the change of the concept in the speech mode of the *logos*; the concept can easily be realized in different parts of speech.

Verb	*I am great.*
Noun	*The greatness of the person*
Adjective	*The great person.*
Adverb	*The person is greatly known.*
Preposition	*With the greatness …*
Conjunction	*When this person was great, …*
Interjection	*How great!*
Verb	*I mean the person.*
Noun	*The meaning of the person*
Adjective	*The mean person*
Adverb	*The person is meanly here.*

Preposition	*With the meaning*
Conjunction	*When I meant this person*
Interjection	*How mean!*

Paradigms of Change of Parts of Speech. The Example of Concept 'Meaning'

De facto each part of speech for the concept 'meaning' represents meaning as a reference. A part of speech represents a specific esthetical category related to a linguistic category (part of speech). Meaning is here narrated in speech in the mode of the *logos.* In the speech as *mythos* 'the unspeakable' has its meaning represented in another descriptive way; for example in the Greek mythology the gods with their specific actions and features are carrier of 'the unspeakable' in the speech mode *mythos.* With the dichotomy of speech as *logos* and speech as *mythos* we can also explain when someone makes a statement like "This is unspeakable." The thing or issue represented exists in the cultural sphere of the speaker; it is something cultural, e.g. a religious or mythological topic. So it can be only expressed in the related speech mode *mythos*, while in the speech mode *logos* it remains unspeakable.

Action	*Verb*
Entity	*Noun*
Attribute of Entity	*Adjective*
Attribute of Action	*Adverb*
Condition of Entity	*Preposition*
Condition of Action	*Conjunction*
Emotion/Comment	*Interjection*
Esthetical Category	*Linguistic Category*

Meaning as Reference. Between Esthetical Categories and Linguistic Categories

In original manuscripts of de Saussure we find the statement that phonetic and grammatical modifications only occur in the discourse language (*langage discursif*) in his manuscript *Lieu de Modiufications: Le Discursif.* Deprivation from language in the language of several cultures has been used as a powerful tool of control. In its most radical form Orwell in the novel *1984* demonstrated the replacement of a language against a language of radical conformity to the ideology it supported. Historically backwards looking, it seems that the possibility of a universal and unique speech or language is impossible. It also seems that such a language is not desired, since it does not allow a person to express and communicate the view of the world of this person. Lack of meaning of a language means the loss of its reference system. Such a language is a language deprived from

knowledge. 'Silent speech' is spoken by an *idiotes*, who is deprived from a democratically organized society. A totalitarian power will always try to deprive persons from speech and communication except for its own aims. Marcuse wrote on reasoning and totalitarian systems:

> "As a habit of thought outside the scientific and technical language, such reasoning shapes the expression of a specific social and political behaviorism. In this behavioral universe, words and concepts tend to coincide, or rather the concept tends to be absorbed by the ward. The former has no other content than that designated by the ward in the publicized and standardized usage, and the ward is expected to have no other response than the publicized and standardized behavior (reaction). The ward becomes cliché and, as cliché, governs the speech or the writing; the communication thus precludes genuine development of meaning."[31]

The religious and mythological meaning of 'the unspeakable' and 'silence' in Wittgenstein's work is determined by the idea that the limits of speech are the limits of knowledge; Wittgenstein uses here the expression 'the limits of my language ('die Grenzen meiner Sprache') mean the 'limits of my world' ('Grenzen meiner Welt'). Here we can also translate the limits of language as the transcendental or religious area, which is inaccessible. Silence in the concept of 'the unspeakable' in the work of Wittgenstein is the consequence of his logical discourse in the *Tractatus Philosophico-Logicus* culminating in the conclusion 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence' ('Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen') (7). 'The unspeakable' here is the area, which lacks words, but it is a representation of the thinking. Prior to his conclusion Wittgenstein write in the *Tractatus Philosophico-Logicus* (4): 'The thought is the significant proposition'. Wittgenstein closed his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* stating that the unknown cannot be subject to language. In other words: 'The unspeakable' cannot be subject to speech or language. Silence is the reference sign for the unknown. Noise is the linguistic category indicating that communication is disturbed. A silent speech, a word that doesn't refer to something else but the mind, is a paradox in itself: It destroys the linguistic purpose of communicability, it is only self-reference to itself, and it eliminates the transfer of knowledge in any communication. Wittgenstein writes in his *Tractatus* (4.022):

> "Man possesses the ability to construct languages capable of expressing every sense, without having any idea how each word has meaning or what its meaning is—just as people speak without knowing

how the individual sounds are produced. Everyday language is a part of the human organism and is no less complicated than it. It is not humanly possible to gather immediately from it what the logic of language is. Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the body, but for entirely different purposes. The tacit conventions on which the understanding of everyday language depends are enormously complicated."[32]

But the use of speech also takes part in the process of the historical change of languages and meanings. We could also call the use of speech a tool for the development of this process. Historically the oral speech was subject and object of the change of language, later the written speech in written languages became a document for the change of languages serving as a record of this change. Beyond 'the unspeakable' is not a speculative area of the philosophers, a transcendental place, or a religious sphere; 'the unspeakable' is the area where we are thrown back to the limits of our own language and our own speech. Marcuse in One-Dimensional Man wrote on language: "To be sure, any language contains innumerable terms which do not require development of their meaning, such as the terms designating the objects and implements of daily life, visible nature, vital needs and wants. These terms are generally understood so that their mere appearance produces a response (linguistic or operational) adequate to the pragmatic context in which they are spoken."[33]

'The Unspeakable' as a Cultural Phenomenon

'The Unspeakable' as Object of Comparative Linguistics in Poetry and Mass Media Writings

The expression 'unspeakable' is used in common language for something not speakable or incapable of being uttered or adequately described. In terms of the philosophy of Peirce we have a speech situation where something exists, but a meaning referencing to the object as a sign cannot be attached to the object. What knowledge do we have about such an object that is incommunicable? From a linguistic perspective we can say that such an object and its qualities go beyond the limits of the linguistic features of language. Such a situation is quite easy to be figured out: we are not able to describe a visual impression, for example a city seen from the bird perspective, in all details matching with what we can see. 'Silent speech' means that a speech is performed according to the

rules of linguistics, but semantic or semiotic processes are not applicable; the language is not communicated or phonetically expressed and a representation is not available. Unspeakable speech can be the silent speech of thoughts. 'Unspeakable' in Dutch means *onbeschrijfelijk, afschuwelijk* (*slecht*), *niet uit te spreken*, in French *inexprimable, épouvantable, innommable, indescriptible*, in German *unbeschreiblich*, in Greek απερίγραπτος, ανείπωτος, ανέκφραστος, αποκρουστικός, αηδιαστικός, σιχαμερός, ακατονόμαστος, αχαρακτήριστος, in Italian *ineffabile, inesprimibile*, in Portuguese *indizível, execrável*, in Russian невыразимый, непроизносимый, ужасный, in Spanish *indecible, inenarrable, incalificable*, in Swedish *outsäglig, obeskrivlig, usel, avskyvärd, under all kritik, som inte kan uttalas*, in Chinese 无法形容的, 可怕的, 无法以言语表达的, in traditional Chinese 無法形容的, 可怕的, 無法以言語表達的 , in Korean 말도 안 되는, 말할 수 없는, 몹시 나쁜 ,in Japanese 言語に絶する, 口にするのもいやな, 口に出せない, ひどい , in Arabic لا يوصف, (صفه) يعجز عنه الوصف, رديء جدا and in Hebrew עברית.[34]

Creation myths implement the creation of language. In the Chinese culture for example in the *Dao de Jin* 'the unspeakable' is described as something, which was turned to language by naming through the *dao* (*Dao de Jing 32*). In the *Dao de Jing* is written about the speaker that he/she does not know (*Dao de Jing 56*). In the *Dao de Jing* is written (*Dao de Jing 70*) that 'words are easy to understand and easy to practice. Yet nobody understands them or practices them. My words have an origin; My actions have a principle."[35] The brothers Grimm had in their dictionary *Deutsches Wörterbuch* the entry 'unaussprachlich' und 'Unaussprachlichkeit', words used in the 19th century and replaced in contemporary German by 'unaussprechlich' und 'Unaussprechlichkeit'.[36]

Looking at totalitarian systems with an authoritarian power we can say that language can be abused to support the power. Silence of speech is also a means of political power, when applied to other people in the society. The 'spiral of silence' is a political science and mass communication theory by the political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann asserting that a person is less likely to voice an opinion on a topic if one feels that one is in the minority for fear of reprisal or isolation. In *Bullying 'a Culture of Silence'* (*BBC News* November 16 2006) is written that persons attacked by bullying should speak out loud and break the silence:

> "Anti-bullying week starts next Monday
>
> Many young people witness bullying at school but do not tell an adult, a survey suggests.
>
> The Anti-Bullying Alliance said more than half of seven to 18-year-olds polled had seen another young person being bullied during the past year.

> The survey of 1,143 pupils in Britain found 38%
> did not attempt to get help and 14% did not want to
> be a "snitch"."37

The taboo is often marked with the expression 'the unspeakable'. Scott wrote in *Speaking the Unspeakable* published in the *New York Times* (June 6th, 1998):

> "In corporate conference rooms, in dentists' chairs and over dinner, the continuing news about both Viagra and Monica Lewinsky appears to have accelerated a change in the way many Americans speak about a subject that some would prefer be barely spoken about at all. In recent months, the subject of sex and the language describing sex acts and sex organs have been nudged a few inches closer to the conversationally commonplace. Many Americans say they have found themselves using words they would never previously have used, discussing erectile dysfunction at dinner parties, talking to their children about adultery, laughing (uncomfortably) at sex jokes told in the presence of people like their bosses. (...)."[38]

The religious implications of the writing of this news are passed upon the cultural settings and rules for issues, which are allowed to be the object of speech.

The Linguistic Settings of 'the Unspeakable' in Case Studies of Songs and Poetry

'The unspeakable' is linguistically described as a negation of the quality to be speakable; it is an indefinite metaphor; it is not possible to have any concrete qualities attached to this qualification. From a cognitive perspective, the classification as unspeakable is either related to the inability to say something caused by the lack of any reference to something in a language (natural) or due to the social limitations and socio-cultural codifications expressed in the language of a culture. Caranfa discussed philosophical silence and spiritual awe.[39] In common language the expression 'conspiracy of silence' exists. *Wikipedia* wrote that "the expression conspiracy of silence, or culture of silence, relates to a condition or matter (...)". A 'conspiracy of silence' occurs as a part of censorship: "The expression conspiracy of silence, or culture of silence, relates to a condition or matter which is known to exist, but by tacit communal unspoken consensus is not talked about or acknowledged. Commonly such matters are considered culturally shameful. Taboo subjects may be indirectly discussed via the use of politically correct code

words, or euphemisms."[40] We shall look now at several cases in contemporary mass media to see how 'the unspeakable' is used as a paraphrasing word for a social taboo. In *The Diwan* Abu'l-Ala wrote about his personal silence:

> "Silence
>
> CIX
>
> The shadows come, and they will come to bless
>
> Their brother and his dwelling and his fame,
>
> When I shall soil no more with any blame
>
> Or any praise the silence I possess".[41]

In the *Carmina Burana* (17 Freidank, 23 Gesang), written around 1215/33, the expression *redlich* ('speakable') occurs.[42] *Redlich* not only means that something is speakable, but also that it is well spoken according to the guidelines of the society and its values. Other examples show us how the concept of 'the unspeakable' reflects specific cultural values of the society, which are based on religious beliefs. The U.S. rock musician Tom Petty in the song *Refugee* described a culture of silence in the late 70s in the USA concerning homosexuality and the outsiders it produced, where silence was necessary for the concerned persons. Petty expresses this, when writing "we don't talk much about it."[43] This is an example for a *taboo* regarding sexuality applied to the paraphrases of the 'unspeakable' based upon the cultural norms and religious traditions. The rock musician Danzig in his song *Unspeakable* summarized things forbidden to be done and described as 'the unspeakable'; among them are questioning the existence of a god or authorities saying "Don't ever call the unspeakable. Don't you ever."[44] The religious implications of the lyrics of Danzig refer to the 'unspeakable' as a *taboo* based upon religious conditions.

Pragmatic Functions of 'the Unspeakable' in Social Contexts: The Religious and Mythological Dimension of 'the Unspeakable'

We can describe the mythological perspective of 'the unspeakable', when we have a look at speech: The ancient Greek culture distinguished between speech as *logos* for a concrete speech and speech as *mythos* for an indirect speech mode. 'The unspeakable' is a mode of speech, which cannot be expressed in plain language, in *logos*. 'The unspeakable' is a representation of the *mythos.* At this level 'the unspeakable' is as representation of the mythos connected to the cultural settings and meanings, which are deeply decoded in the literature and art of a culture. The *mythos* itself expresses a form of speech in the ancient Greek language

besides the *logos.* The myth itself can express something unspeakable. Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies* (1957) analyzed the myth in contemporary issues and made an important contribution to the understanding of myth; the myth is a form of the speech mode *mythos.* A myth itself helps us to interpret the myth: Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, served among the gods of the Greek mythology as messenger to all the other gods. Zeus communicated messages wearing winged sandals and hat, while holding a magic wand. Zeus was also the god of thieves and commerce. The narration of the myths is in any culture a mode of expression, which enables the narrator to tell unique cultural values and preserve them, while forming them in this specific setting of the myth.

Functions of the linguistic expression 'the unspeakable' depend highly on cultural context. In many cases it is an expression used for something beyond the level of human experience like spiritual or religious experience. Also phenomena beyond the border of spiritual and religious order of a society can be named as 'unspeakable' and a description of a taboo. 'The unspeakable' is also used as an expression for something that is beyond the potential of linguistic expressions. In philosophy it has a fixed place with reference to the awe caused by something sublime. The 'awe' of the philosopher can cause 'the unspeakable'. 'The unspeakable' is a rhetorical category of signification, since it is descriptive, while eliminating the actual contents of 'the unspeakable'. While obscurity in rhetoric is used for something not clearly expressed by linguistic means, 'the unspeakable' is a category that emphasizes that something cannot be put into words. It is a tool for mystification. On the contrary, a judgment by *logos* is a result from a cognitive activity; a judgment implies that the object or event considered 'unspeakable' is at cognitive level already described and describable, while at the level of speech it is not describable. So the semiotic triangle we used to describe the concept 'the unspeakable' between the *sign* (the symbol of the language), the *reference object of the sign*, i.e. the real situation or event it refers to, and the *cognitive representation or concept* in the mind is broken at the points connecting language with the concept of the mind and the reference object. We have no relation between the sign and the reference object, while a clear concept and the judgment about the concept on a meta-level as 'unspeakable' exists. The term 'the unspeakable' covers a variety of functions in cultural life: Besides serving as an expression for the complete inability to say something, it is used to express a verdict, a cultural *taboo*, the metaphorical construction for something that has to remain silent. The expression is not used to cover a medical or physiological condition connected to the unavailability of appropriate words. Philosophers and scholars engaged in the liberal arts and humanities were among the groups that used the expression reflecting conditions of human existence.

Conclusions

We can show the linguistic, social, and cultural functions of the concept 'the unspeakable' when we interpret 'the unspeakable' as an element of the *mythos.* Here we have the unique religious and mythological impact of the concept 'the unspeakable' implemented in a speech mode, which is performed indirectly. In the philosophical tradition of Wittgenstein, De Saussure, and Peirce 'the unspeakable' is not practiced, since philosophers traditionally rely on the speech mode of the plain speech using the *logos.* But of course philosophers were aware of the existence of myths in their culture and the *mythos* as a speech mode; examples of the discussions of myth we can find in Plato's dialogues. Also the field of philosophy of religion is concerned with this issue. The use of the expression 'silent speech' for thinking reminds us of this application of the *mythos* as a speech mode. In the form of the myth 'the unspeakable' becomes at the surface level of the language a told narrative, but as speech in the form of the *logos* it is not available and only signified and mystified as 'the unspeakable'. But on the contrary, formed as a myth of a culture for example in a religious or a mythological setting 'the unspeakable' is communicated successfully. This speech mode seems to be the preferred mode of speech, when cultural contents shared among a social group needs to be communicated in its specific cultural and traditional settings. The linguistic function of the concept 'the unspeakable' is the communication of the concept; as we have seen, the preferred speech mode is here the mode of the *mythos*; the social and cultural functions of this concept depend like the linguistic function on the specific cultural values of a culture expressed in literature and arts. Religious and mythological values are communicated in this mode.

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