

# **Philosophical Approaches to Communication**

## **Introduction**

The current interest in communication studies is understandable given the proliferation of communication technologies that are part and parcel of today's world. However, while this interest tends to focus on the media applications of communication technologies, the concept of communication that underlies these technologies remains unexamined. The purpose of this text is to provide an overview of the different aspects that are entailed by the concept of communication.

The early theories of communication adopted a relatively simple model to explain the process of communication. Known as the process or linear model of communication, it assumed a sender who transmitted a message to a receiver; in a slightly more complex version of this model, the sender encoded a message that was transmitted to the receiver who in turn decoded it to understand the message. Understanding the message entailed that the receiver would be able to understand what the speaker intended to mean when he/she communicated his/her message. Although popular, this model of communication is too simple as it fails to take into account the situation within which communication takes place: communication is not an abstract activity dislocated from a context of conventions, rules or a way of life.

The goal of this book is to highlight the role of the context in the process of communication. Although the study of communication includes the domain of non-verbal communication (kinesics, paralanguage, proxemics, chronemics, and haptics) I am focussing mainly on linguistic communication. However, in the case of C.S. Peirce and

Umberto Eco I outline their accounts of perception in so far as these provide the basis for understanding their semiological theories.

The concept of communication has a number of characteristics: it always takes place within a context of production (chapters 1 to 3), of reception (chapters 4 to 6) and of action (chapters 7 to 10). Although the writers I am focussing on tend to prioritise one characteristic rather than another, this is not to say that they ignore the other features. It is merely that for the purpose of analysis that I have placed each writer in the category where I consider his work to be particularly influential. Some of the themes dealt with by these writers could be better placed within other categories, in the interest of clarity, I have placed each writer in the area where he is widely held to have made the strongest contribution. A general theory of communication would necessarily include all these characteristics in a comprehensive account.

Chapters 1 and 2 tackle the founding fathers of structuralism and semiology, F. de Saussure and C.S. Peirce respectively. Saussure has tended to be the source of inspiration for Continental theorists, while Peirce has provided the intellectual background for American theorists. Nowadays however, theorists of communication and philosophy cannot afford to ignore either of them and in some ways they can be said to complement each other. One major difference between the two is that while Saussure focussed exclusively on language as a system of signs, leaving the application of his insights to others, Peirce widened his theoretical enterprise and attempted to explain the nature of all signs starting from the non-linguistic and culminating in the linguistic.

With Saussure's writings I examine the two basic principles for the study of language. These are the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign and the principle of difference. The consequence of these principles is that language is no longer considered as representational i.e. as a mirror of the world, but as a system that constructs the world. The world does not come to us already neatly parcelled out, with language 'picturing' or representing it, but rather, the network of differences that make up a language in effect constitutes the world. To argue for his case on what the appropriate study of language should entail, Saussure introduces a number of conceptual distinctions, such as the distinction between *langue* and *parole*, value and signification, the synchronic and diachronic and the syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects of language. I end the chapter by showing the pervasive influence of Saussure's concepts upon a number of disciplines.

The writings of Peirce examine the nature of signs from a different perspective. Whereas the background to Saussure's study of signs was that of linguistics, the background to Peirce is that of mathematics. From mathematics he became convinced that the only way to understand a sign was by applying a triadic conception of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. A sign establishes a connection or what he calls an Interpretant (Thirdness) between a quality (Firstness) and a thing (Secondness). In this chapter I continue to develop Peirce's theory of signs together with the way basic signs can be combined into more complex ones. The chapter ends with an overview of Peirce's pragmatism that connects the meaning of a concept to its consequences and the method of dialogue in the production of knowledge.

In chapter 3 I outline the views of Michel Foucault. Although not typically associated with communication studies, some of his views contribute interesting insights to the philosophy of communication. The first part of the chapter provides an in-depth description of one of his major theoretical innovations in both philosophy and communications, namely the theory of discourse. Following this theoretical elaboration, the next sections describe Foucault's archaeological reading of the history of madness and the histories of knowledge since the Renaissance. In these archaeological studies, emphasis is placed on discourse and epistemes. The next sections are marked by the shift in Foucault's writings from archaeology to the genealogical readings of incarceration and sexuality. In the genealogical writings Foucault moves away from an analysis of discourse to the relation between discourse and institutional sites. The context of discourse becomes important since it enables him to highlight the relationship between power and knowledge.

In chapter 4 I turn my attention Umberto Eco. I start with his generalised account of signs and codes as the foundation for the study of culture, and its development into a set of overlapping concepts, namely, communication and signification. On Eco's account, while communication describes the transfer of information between machines, signification entails the insertion of humans in the process of communication. In the next sections I examine the concepts of abduction, the role of labour in the production of signs, and Eco's distinction between the dictionary and the encyclopaedia. After this generalised theory of signs, I examine Eco's contribution to semiology and literary interpretation

through the twin distinction between Model Authors and Model Readers, and Open and Closed texts. The last section of the chapter is an application of Eco's semiological theory to the James Bond novels.

In chapter 5 I turn to the philosophy of Jacques Derrida and the philosophy of deconstruction. I first examine Derrida's critique of two popular accounts that consider language as either representing the world or expressing mental states. This is followed by a discussion of Derrida's deconstruction of the spoken-written contrast in the writings of Plato and Saussure. With these readings in mind, I then return to Derrida's analysis of language where he develops the concept of meaning in terms of *différance* and his generalised notion of writing, *arche-writing* or *grammatology*. I close the chapter with an examination of both Derrida's reading of speech act theory as formulated by J.L. Austin and his subsequent engagement with John Searle.

The hermeneutics of H.G. Gadamer is the topic of chapter 7. As with deconstruction, hermeneutics is also concerned with the processes of interpretation. The first section of the chapter offers an account of Gadamer's interpretation of the history of hermeneutics in an attempt to show the historical displacement of hermeneutics by science. This is followed by Gadamer's critique of natural science as being the sole repository of truth that justifies its claims on the strength of the use of a specific method. Gadamer proposes an alternative account where prejudice and authority – tradition – are revived to counter the hegemony of science and its claim to truth. In the subsequent sections, I develop Gadamer's account of the understanding of the processes of interpretation in terms of

what he calls the ‘fusion of horizons’. The chapter ends with two more sections, the first dealing with interpretation as a form of dialogue that follows the model of question and answer, and the second with language as the very foundation of human existence.

In chapters 7 to 10 I examine communication from the point of view of the things done or performed by participants in the act of communication. I start chapter 7 with a discussion of J.L. Austin’s theory of speech acts. Austin starts by drawing a sharp contrast between ‘constative’ and ‘performative’ utterances i.e., between statements that describe things or events and those whose utterance (in the right circumstances) is also a doing. He then comes to realise that formulated in this way, the opposition is untenable. He therefore re-configures performatives and descriptive statements within the broader theory of speech acts. It should be pointed out that although it is customary to use the label ‘speech act,’ this generic term subsumes all forms of communication, including writing and gestures.

In Chapter 8 I turn to H.P. Grice, whose work focuses on the study of language from the point of view of the speaker’s intentions in the communication of meaning. After analyzing both the role of the speaker’s intention to mean something and the recognition of that intention in the act of communication, I go on to look at Grice’s account of those contexts within which an utterance can be true, though misleading. This account anticipates Grice’s later theory of the maxims of conversation and his reflections on conversation. In the final part of the chapter I examine Grice’s stance on the relation between logic and conversation.

In Chapter 9 I examine John Searle's elaboration of speech act theory where he focuses on the intentions speakers have in communicating, together with the rules that make the communication of such intentions possible. This elaboration of speech act theory takes as its point of departure an analysis of speech acts in terms of their reference and predication. Searle also identifies the conditions that make speech acts possible, as well as formulating a taxonomy that shows the difference between the various speech acts. This makes it possible to both classify speech acts and examine the more complex types. The next section describes Searle's discussion of the context – as a network and as a background – of speech acts. The chapter closes with an account of the way language functions in the construction of social reality.

In Chapter 10 I focus on the writings of Jurgen Habermas who places communication at the heart of his attempts to provide an explanation of the way social order is maintained and society reproduced. I open the chapter with a detailed investigation of the processes involved in acts of communication and I follow this up with an account of the way breakdowns in communication are repaired in discourse. The next sections examine the relation between communication and social theory and Habermas's declared aim of inserting communication within a social context distinguishing between the different types of action (communicative, strategic and instrumental) as well as between the lifeworld and the system. I close the chapter with Habermas' analysis of communication within the narrower sphere of ethical discussion.



It is therefore possible to conceive of a science *which studies the role of signs as part of social life*; it would form a part of social psychology and hence of general psychology; we shall call it *semiology* (from the Greek *semeion*, 'sign'). It would investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them. Since it does not yet exist, one cannot say for certain that it will exist. But it has a right to exist, a place ready for it in advance. Linguistics is only one branch of this general science of semiology. The laws which semiology will discover will be laws applicable in linguistics, and linguistics will thus be assigned to a clearly defined place in the field of human knowledge. (1983: 15-16)

## **Saussure on the Structure of Communication**

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is quite rightly considered the founder of structural linguistics and his posthumously published work *Course in General Linguistics* (1983) formulated the general principles for the scientific study of language. His goal was that of establishing the scientific credentials for the study of language so that linguistics would no longer be judged as 'speculative', and instead acquire a certain degree of prestige as a discipline.

In general, it could be said that Saussure revolutionized linguistics by proposing a new method for the study of language. This method focused on explaining the way language as a system functioned to generate meanings that are subsequently communicated; it was the system used for communication - rather than the actual things communicated - that was prioritized. This insight into the workings of language led to the further realization that the model of language could also be used to understand the way non-linguistic systems functioned.

The influence of Saussure upon a number of key thinkers cannot be underestimated and his model was adopted by different generations of thinkers from a spectrum of disciplines such as structural philosophy (Foucault), structural literary theory (Barthes), and

structural anthropology (Levi-Strauss). It is no exaggeration to claim that the structural revolution of the 1960s traces its origins to the *Course in General Linguistics*.

In this chapter, I shall (a) outline the innovations that distinguish Saussure's approach to the study of language from the historical and comparative approaches of his predecessors. In the next section, I shall introduce (b) Saussure's founding concepts on the arbitrary nature of the sign followed by (c) the principle of difference. The final sections examine (d) the conceptual innovations that justify the status of linguistics as a science, and (e) the developments that ensued in other domains.

## **1.0. Historical background**

The context within which Saussure's study of language unfolded was dominated by two main ways of studying language: (a) the first phase was that of comparative philology or comparative grammar that took as its starting point the work of Franz Bopp on Sanskrit in 1816; (b) the second phase occurred at around 1870 when questions concerning both the historical origin of words and methodology were raised.

Culler (1985: 53-70) points out that these developments in the study of language were themselves reactions to the theories proposed by the seventeenth century Port Royal Grammarians and the theorists of the eighteenth century. Both - for different reasons - justified the study of language on the grounds that by studying language it would be possible to understand human thought, and, consequently acquire a deeper understanding

of the human mind. The Port Royal Grammarians considered language to be a picture or a mirror of thought, so that by studying language one would in fact be studying the laws of reason, laws that are common to all humans, and therefore universal. The underlying assumption was that speech and grammar had a rational foundation. Commenting on the Port Royal Grammarians, Saussure acknowledged their contribution to the study of language in their emphasis on the synchronic dimension of language (1983:82).

The eighteenth century theorists (for e.g. Condillac) found the emphasis of the Port Royal Grammarians on the synchronic study of language as unsatisfactory. They felt that the study of thought or reason first required knowing how ideas originated out of sensation. The search for origins is the pattern of western civilisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth century: it was argued that to understand the nature of something – linguistic, political, or psychological – one must discover its origins. In the case of language, the eighteenth century attempted to explain linguistic signs and abstract concepts by reducing them to their non-linguistic origins in gestures, actions and sensations. By understanding the origins of language it was believed that one could understand the nature of language and therefore the nature of thought.

The nineteenth century theorists of language rejected the concerns with language and mind. The word was no longer considered a sign that represented something and linguistics turned to comparative studies. With Franz Bopp the object of study became the form of words and by comparing forms from different languages a pattern was identified that would explain its historical evolution. The interest in comparing forms of

different languages was the result of the discovery of Sanskrit by European linguists who noticed a number of similarities between Sanskrit, Greek, Germanic and Latin. Instead of trying to find an original primitive meaning that would be the basis or foundation for different expressions, the goal of linguists became that of finding similarities between different languages. By identifying the similarities between different languages it was realised that each language followed its own internal laws. Although Saussure appreciated the work of the comparative grammarians he is clear that they did not succeed in establishing linguistics on a scientific basis since they failed both to identify what it was they were studying and to recognize the implications of their own work (1983: 3).

There were two other major influences upon Saussure. The first was the work of the Neo-Grammarians who at around 1870 began to lay the foundations for the proper study of language<sup>1</sup>. The Neo-Grammarians argued that the laws that governed changes in sounds functioned without any exceptions. Culler explains

...the principle at stake – of change without exceptions – is crucial, for reasons which perhaps none but Saussure understood. The absolute nature of sound change is a consequence of the arbitrary nature of the sign. Since the sign is arbitrary, there is no reason for a change in sound not to apply to all instances of that sound; whereas if sounds were motivated ('naturally' expressive, like *bow-wow*) then there would be resistance, depending on the degree of motivation, and exceptions. There are no exceptions because, given the arbitrary nature of the sound and its phonetic realizations, change does not apply directly to signs themselves but to sounds, or rather, to a single sound in a particular environment. (1985: 65)

The second influence upon Saussure were the developments that took place after 1870 when the Neo-Grammarians attempted to establish the historical evolution of languages using the results of their comparative accounts. Their goal was therefore the reconstruction of a language historically, which, though important did not satisfy Saussure for it confused the synchronic with the diachronic aspect of language. By

focussing excessively on historical reconstruction, the Neo-Grammarians did not understand the nature of what they were studying: in effect, they had forgotten to ask the question of how language functions. Saussure realised that by returning to the question of the sign as representational, the crucial elements that would transform linguistics into a scientific study could be identified. However, his use of the concept of representation differed from that of the earlier eighteenth-century linguists since it involved the sign as representing a particular meaning that differed from another meaning within the linguistic system. Of the Neo-Grammarians he wrote

The achievement of the Neo-Grammarians was to place all the results of comparative philology in a historical perspective, so that linguistic facts were connected in their natural sequence...at the same time, there emerged a realisation of the errors and inadequacies of the concepts associated with philology and comparative grammar. However, great as were the advances made by the Neogrammarians, it cannot be said that they shed light upon the fundamental problems of general linguistics, which still await a solution today. (1983: 5)

Although comparative studies were the intellectual context within which Saussure was working, his work returned – with modifications – to the work of the eighteenth century linguists (Culler, 1985: 69-70). He re-introduced the study of language in terms of the study of signs but instead of studying signs in isolation from each other, he argued that signs can only be studied in relation to each other. Furthermore, his focus on the methodology needed for the study of language also reveals an indirect answer to the question concerning the connection between language and mind: the operating principle for the functioning of language as a system that generates meaning is its power to differentiate. And this process is not only an aspect of language but is, in fact, a description of the way the mind operates so as to understand meaning.

## **2.0. The Nature of Language**

Linguists, according to Saussure, had failed to establish what it was that they were trying to study: they ‘never took very great care to define exactly what it was they were studying. And until this elementary step is taken, no science can hope to establish its own methods.’ (1983: 3). As a result of this failure, linguistics could never aspire to the status of a science and could therefore not achieve the respectability that it deserved. Saussure was determined to change this but he first needed to identify those features that are essential for the functioning of a language. The difference between a language and noise is that noise does not communicate anything whereas a language communicates ideas. In order to communicate ideas there must be a system to which the ideas belong, and since there is a system, there are therefore a number of conventions that govern the way the signs are used to communicate ideas. Language is therefore a system of signs.

To argue for the thesis of language as a system of signs – as opposed to language as a mirror or as representing the world - Saussure gives importance to rejecting the nomenclaturist theory of language. According to this view, the meaning of a word is the object that it names so that the relationship between a word and an object is one of naming or labeling. The Biblical narrative of Genesis that portrays Adam as naming the objects of the world shows how ingrained within our cultural psyche this view of language is. This view presupposes that there is a radical separation between language and the world: objects – whether material (‘table’, ‘dog’) or abstract (‘love’, ‘happiness’) exist independently of language, and are named by it.

There are several difficulties with this theory. For a start, the most obvious one is that if this theory were true, then translating from one language to another would be a relatively easy task: all one has to do is to change the words from one language to another. But anyone who remembers their translation exercises at school will remember that it was a difficult task because each language had a different way of talking about the world. For example, if one had to translate the French word 'aimer' into English, one would have to see the sense with which it is being used, for 'aimer' can mean either 'to love' or 'to like' in English. Another difficulty with nomenclatures is the way they ignore the passage of time: according to this view, over time the name or label changes but the meaning or concept remains the same. The concepts, as language-independent entities, would be immune to historical evolution. But, in actual fact, the history of language is full of both concepts changing their meanings and words changing their form: the word 'silly' used to refer to a happy and blessed person but with time the meaning changed and in the sixteenth century it referred to an innocent and helpless person, today, the word 'silly' is used to refer to a foolish person. And just as the concept changed its meaning, the name also changed with its central vowel modified (Culler, 1985: 22).

## The Sign

What Saussure's criticism of language as naming shows is that the relationship between words and meaning is not as clear cut as one might have presupposed. It is in this light that we can perhaps understand the introduction of the terminology of 'signs' by Saussure into the study of language. His use of the term is narrower from the way it is used in

everyday life, as when, for example, we say that the dark clouds are a sign of the approaching rain. Saussure uses the term ‘sign’ to mean the combination of a sound (a spoken word) or graphic inscription (a written word) together with a concept or a meaning. Although Saussure uses the terminology of ‘signification’ and ‘signal’, contemporary writers have replaced these terms with ‘signified’ and ‘signifier’ respectively. I am following this practice.

We propose to keep the term *sign* to designate the whole, but to replace *concept* and *sound pattern* respectively by *signification* [signified] and *signal* [signifier]. The latter terms have the advantage of indicating the distinction which separates each from the other and both from the whole of which they are part. We retain the term *sign*, because current usage suggests no alternative by which it might be replaced. (1983: 67)

Although for the purpose of analysis these two components can be differentiated, it should be pointed out that they can never be found independently of each other. Within a language, a sound or graphic inscription always has a concept or a meaning attached to it. Saussure pointed out that for the linguist it was the psychological aspect of communication that should be given absolute priority; it was the meaning that speakers wanted to communicate rather than the sounds that were produced that are important. By analogy, Saussure argued that the instrument used to transmit the Morse Code was secondary to what was communicated. Despite the emphasis on language as a tool for the communication in general, Saussure goes on to privilege the spoken medium over the written one. This is odd because, given his claim that the medium is not important then both the spoken and the written should be on an equal footing. Derrida (Chapter 5) will later seize upon this inconsistency.



Saussure's fundamental contribution to the study of language is the principle of the arbitrary nature of the sign:

The principle stated above is the organizing principle for the whole of linguistics, considered as a science of language structure. The consequences which flow from this principle are innumerable. It is true that they do not all appear at first sign equally evident. One discovers them after many circuitous deviations, and so realizes the fundamental importance of the principle. (1983: 68)

By 'arbitrary', Saussure is claiming that there is no intrinsic or necessary reason as to why a particular sound is connected with a particular concept. This is why the connection is described as 'arbitrary': the signifier 'long' has nothing long about it, just as there is nothing dog-like about the signifier 'dog'; and just as 'cactus' means a particular type of vegetation there is no reason why this vegetation could not have been called anything else. There is nothing in the vegetation, no essential property, that obliges a person to call it with a particular signifier; it could be equally called, 'toots' or 'plat' so long as communication between members of the community is successful. This latter point is important, for despite the arbitrary connection between signifier and signified, Saussure insists that there is no question of a person changing the meaning of a sign at will (as Humpty Dumpty does in *Alice in Wonderland*). It is the linguistic community that has the power to change the meaning of signs not the person; arbitrary does not mean an individualistic free for all.

The only possible exceptions to the principle of the arbitrary constitution of the sign are those of,

(a) onomatopoeic words where the sound is similar to the meaning so that the signifier ‘cookoo’ means or represents the bird because the bird produces the sound; (b) interjections: when, as a result of some injury, a person says ‘ouch’. The sound is a natural production. Saussure rejects both: in the case of onomatopoeic words, there are too few to even remotely make up a language (and even the naturally produced sound is an approximation) and the fact that there are so few re-enforces the arbitrary thesis. Interjections are dismissed outright without consideration.

By arguing for the arbitrary nature of language, Saussure realizes that he has placed the study of language on a non-rational foundation. To counter the tendency of equating to arbitrary with individual, Saussure re-iterates the fact that languages are a historically constituted social institution. It is therefore up to him to explain both how changes occur and why languages are relatively stable. Saussure offers four reasons that account for the stability of language:

(a) Since the sign is arbitrary and therefore non-rational, there can be no (rational) discussion about whether to change it or not:

One can, for example, argue about whether monogamy is better than polygamy, and adduce reasons for and against...But for a language, as a system of arbitrary signs, any such basis is lacking, and consequently there is not firm ground for discussion. No reason can be given for preferring *soeur* to *sister*, *Ochs*, to *boeuf*, etc. (1983: 73)

(b) The sheer number of signs within the linguistic system makes it difficult to change:

A system of writing, comprising between 20 and 40 letters, might conceivably be replaced in its entirety by an alternative system. The same would be true of a language if it comprised only a limited number of elements. But the inventory of signs in any language is countless. (1983: 73)

(c) The fact that the system can only be understood by ‘experts’ means that the masses are unaware of it and cannot, therefore, change it. ‘Any such change would require the intervention of specialists, grammarians, logicians, and others. But history shows that interference by experts is of no avail in linguistic matters.’ (1983: 73)

(d) As an institution language differs from all others: while institutions require the involvement of a certain number of people, language is used by everybody; it is hard to get everybody to change a language but it is even harder to get an individual to change an aspect of it,

Legal procedures, religious rites, ships’ flags, etc are systems used only by a certain number of individuals acting together and for a limited time. A language, on the contrary, is something in which everyone participates all the time, and that is why it is constantly open to the influence of all. This key fact is by itself sufficient to explain why a linguist revolution is impossible. Of all social institution, a language affords the least scope for such enterprise. It is part and parcel of the life of the whole community, and the community’s natural inertia exercises a conservative influence upon it. (1983: 74)

However, given that the reasons for the stability of language are so compelling, explaining change turns out to be a rather difficult task and in this respect Saussure’s reasons are quite weak. It is, again, the arbitrary nature of the sign that accounts for change: ‘A language is a system which is intrinsically defenseless against the factors which constantly tend to shift relationships between signal [signifier] and signification [signified]. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign.’ (1983: 76) Saussure does introduce a limitation upon the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign, since without any limitation there would be chaos rather than a functioning

linguistic system. Arbitrariness in language is limited by the fact that as a system, language is a complex and sophisticated phenomenon and this cannot be the result of complete arbitrariness. Holdcroft argues that this justification is weak for the fact that a sign is constructed systematically does not make it any less arbitrary. (Holdcroft, 1991: 93-4)

Although Saussure was aware of the radical implications of his view on the arbitrary nature of signs, it was only in the 1950s that these implications became central tenets to a number of different disciplines. One could say that Saussure is the precursor of the movement broadly known as constructivism, for, on his account, language constructs or organizes reality rather than reflect or name what is already articulated or categorized. This is why, for example, the English word ‘river’ means a large moving body of water, whereas the French word, ‘fleuve’ means both a moving body of water and the entry of the water into the sea. The point is that each language constructs or organizes the world differently.

### **3.0. Identity and Difference**

Given Saussure’s argument on the arbitrary connection between the signifier and the signified, how does language function as a medium for communication? How is it that both a signifier and a signified can be identified as the same despite variations of, (for example) the tone of voice? A word or sentence might be uttered with a different tone of voice and yet be identified as the same word or sentence. The innovative solution that

Saussure offers is that the identity of the sound (signifier) or the meaning (signified) is established relationally or negatively by a process of difference.

In the case of signifiers, the phoneme – or the basic unit of sound - is recognized because it differs from other sounds within the linguistic system; the letter /b/ can be pronounced in a number of ways and still be identified as /b/ as long as the different pronunciation does not overlap into the letter /p/. The extent to which a signifier is considered identical depends on its not being confused with another signifier; in other words, a sound can be considered functionally significant in a language only to the extent that it can be contrasted with other sounds from the spectrum of sounds within a language.

The argument from difference also holds for signifieds: the meaning of a signified depends on its being different from other signifieds within the linguistic system. A signified has a identity constructed out of its relations to other signifieds, so that the meaning of ‘man’ is, ‘not woman’, ‘not boy’, ‘not lady’, ‘not youth’ and so on. What is important in understanding the signified ‘man’ is not that of finding some essential property or characteristic that belongs to all men, but to know that ‘man’ is the product of a system of distinctions. The linguistic system that Saussure is proposing constitutes a flexible grid between signs but one where the borders are precisely established by their negations. Saussure is helpful in elaborating this crucial point by using the game of chess as an analogy. How do we know the significance of each piece? We know the significance of the king not because it is made of wood or of plastic and neither because

it is bigger than the other pieces; rather, the identity of the King is established because we know the value of the King within the game of chess. This value is that of being able to move one square in any direction (and who must be checkmated so as to be defeated) as opposed, for example, to the Queen who can move in any direction and for any distance (and who can be killed without the game being lost). And just as the King has an identity in relation to the Queen, the meaning of the King is also established in relation to the other pieces.

Holdcroft (1991:125) clarifies that the differences between terms in a relation are different in respect of something, but it must be emphasized that not all differences necessarily give rise to an opposition. The terms 'dog' and 'table' are different but not opposed to each other. The emphasis is on belonging to the same domain: if one says 'x is a male' then clearly 'x is not a female'. These terms exhaust the gender domain but not all terms within domains are necessarily exhausted: if one says 'x is not Monday', it could imply any other day of the week. The point is that not all differences give rise to opposites, but those differences that do are significant for otherwise there would be an endless number of differences without significance. To have differences that are opposed to each other, the binary set must have some underlying similarity; thus, while 'man' and 'woman' are opposed, they are similar in that they are both human.

So far, most of the examples used to describe the relational aspects of signs have involved words and this might lead one into thinking that Saussure's theory applied solely to vocabulary. However, he points out that the relational aspect also applies to the

grammar of language so that the difference between a word in the singular and a word in the plural is precisely a relational distinction: the singular ‘night’ has its identity as opposed to the plural ‘nights’. ‘In isolation, *Nacht* and *Nächte* are nothing: the opposition between them is everything...[linguistic] ‘units’ and ‘grammatical facts’ are only different names for different aspects of the same general fact: the operation linguistic oppositions.’ (1983: 120)

In sum: the identity of a sign is the product of its differential relations within a linguistic system. This is why Saussure claims that ‘in a language there are only differences, with *no positive terms*.’ (1983: 118). On this account, language is a system of signs that refer to each other: these are locked in a (relatively) stable network of contrasts that give them their vocal and conceptual identity. And while all differences are relational, it is not necessarily the case that all relations are differential. Saussure had used the example of a train timetable to argue for the differential nature of the sign: just as a train has a place in a timetable that opposes it to another train (the 8.15 train to Zurich as opposed to the 8.30 train to Zurich) likewise a sign has a place in the linguistic system that opposes it to other signs.

Let us examine the problem of identity in linguistics in the light of some non-linguistic examples. We assign identity, for instance, to two trains (‘the 8.45 from Geneva to Paris’), one of which leaves twenty-four hours after the other. We treat it as the ‘same’ train, even though probably the locomotive, the carriages, the staff etc. are not the same...the train is identified by its departure time, its route, and any other features which distinguish it from other trains.’ (1983: 107) <sup>ii</sup>

## **4.0. Key Concepts**

## *Langue and Parole*

Although it is common to think that speech is natural to humans, Saussure argues that it is not the spoken word that is natural to humans, but rather the ‘faculty’ of language for it is this faculty that explains the possibility of learning a language at all. Clearly, Saussure distinguishes between natural language [the faculty of language], a particular language (langue) and speech (parole). The latter two are subsumed within the category of natural language:

[l]inguistic structure [langue] is only one part of language, even though it is an essential part. The structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty. At the same time, it is also a body of necessary conventions adopted by society to enable members of society to use their language faculty. (1983: 9-10)

Langue is the system of rules that the individual absorbs as he/she learns a language: it is the inherited body of linguistic knowledge that enables the continued existence of the community. Parole, on the other hand, is the externalization of this internalized system: it is the expression of the individual’s thoughts through a physical medium i.e., larynx. The importance of the langue-parole distinction is that it provides Saussure with the possibility of identifying what the proper object for the scientific study of language. The analysis of parole cannot constitute a science for it is not what one should know so as to claim that one knows a language. Rather, knowledge of a language involves knowing the rules that enable a speaker to combine words in the language. Again, the analogy taken from the game of chess is fruitful: to learn how to play chess, it is not necessary to observe and study every move that was played in the history of chess, but more importantly, that one learns the rules that enable each piece to move in the game.



However, although langue constitutes the primary object of linguistic study, the importance of parole should not be underestimated. There are three reasons for this importance: (a) parole as face-to-face communication enables language to get consolidated into a social system; (b) parole describes the free choice with regard to word selection that the speaker is permitted from within the available system; (c) parole shows how changes can take place within langue, in effect performing the ‘double’ function of providing an explanation for the relative stability of the linguistic system but also of its openness and possibility of change.

Godel (in Holdcroft, 1991:20-21) proposes an excellent classification of the characteristics of langue and parole:

<i>Langue</i>	<i>Parole</i>
Social	Individual
Essential	Contingent
No active individual role	Active role
Not designed	Designed
Conventional	Non-Conventional
Furnishes a homogeneous subject matter for a branch of social psychology	Furnishes a heterogeneous subject matter studied by different disciplines

The utility of distinguishing between langue and parole can be seen in the way each has developed into a separate branch of the linguistic study of sound. Langue has developed into the discipline of phonology, while parole has developed into the discipline of phonetics. In the case of the latter, it is the actual physical event that is considered important, while in the case of the former, what is studied is the functional difference

between signifiers within the linguistic system. And the same point can be applied to ‘meaning’: a sentence establishes its meaning in relation to other sentences (langue), but two utterances (parole) of the same sentence might have a different meaning on account of the tone and the context.

### *Synchronic and diachronic*

It is obvious that language is continually in evolution and subject to historical and contingent forces. These changes make it difficult to pinpoint what it is we are supposed to study in language and yet, Saussure argues that such a study is both possible and necessary. To explain the effect of time and history upon a language he introduces a distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics.

The situation with the study of language is paradoxical: if signs are historical – the product of a community at a particular time – then how is it possible to study language as a (relatively) stable system that enables communication to take place? To put this in another way: if a language is evolving and changing how is its’ functioning to be studied? The solution to this paradox is that of conducting an ahistorical analysis: in other words, to transform language into an object of study one must ‘step outside’ language in order to be able to observe it. Despite the element of change that a language undergoes, it must be ‘frozen’ in time so that the relations between signs within the system can be studied. The synchronic study of language focuses precisely on the interrelationship between signs at a particular moment within the linguistic system. In effect, this is another result of the

arbitrary nature of the sign: since there is no essential or necessary meaning that is inherent in a sign and since the meaning is derived from its relationships to other signs, then it is the way signs function within the total system at a given moment that enables them to be studied: 'a language is a system of pure values, determined by nothing else apart from the temporary state of its constituent elements.' (1983: 80)

Saussure describes the difference between synchronic and diachronic linguistics:

*Synchronic linguistics* will be concerned with logical and psychological connections between coexisting items constituting a system, as perceived by the same collective consciousness.

*Diachronic linguistics* on the other hand will be concerned with connections between sequences of items not perceived by the same collective consciousness, which replace one another without themselves constituting a system. (1983:98)

The two domains are mutually exclusive and for Saussure it was synchronic linguistics that had absolute priority: synchronic linguistics constituted the scientific study of language since it entailed the study of the psychologically real units of the linguistic system as opposed to diachronic linguistics that studied the successive relations or evolutionary development of linguistic units. The latter is irrelevant to the study of language, so much so that it is from synchronic statements that diachronic statements can be derived. It is not changes in sounds that lead to changes in the system but rather, the other way around. When a signifier acquires a new phonetic association, the old form and the new form differ but are used interchangeably by speakers. From a phonological point of view, they retain the same functional identity within the synchronic system, but over time one of the forms is dropped even though the synchronic system that supports that form remains the same. Diachronic changes can only be explained by reference to a series of successive synchronic systems.

When it comes to explaining the origins of change, Saussure realizes that changes take place in parole, in the actual performance of language. The linguistic system reacts and adjusts to these changes: clearly, it is not the system that causes the changes, but in order to understand change one needs to know the synchronic system. The point that Saussure vehemently opposes is the idea that there is an intrinsic goal towards which change in language is directed towards, i.e., a teleological movement of language. When a language changes from one state to another it is not the result of some goal but the result of a reaction to changes that happen outside language. It cannot be claimed that language changes from one state to another in a progressive evolutionary steps

While Saussure uses morphological and grammatical examples to explain the way the linguistic system adjusts to changes, he admits that it is much harder to explain semantic changes. Culler (1985) offers an explanation,

Suppose one were studying the change in the meaning of *Kunst* in Middle High German between roughly 1200 and 1300. What would be synchronic and what diachronic here? To define change of meaning one needs two meanings and these can only be determined by considering synchronic facts: the relations between signifieds in a given state of the language which define the semantic area of 'kunst'. At an early state it was a higher, courtly knowledge or competence, as opposed to lower, more technical skills ('list'), and a partial accomplishment as opposed to the synoptic wisdom of 'wisheit'. In a later stage the two major oppositions which defined it were different: mundane versus spiritual (Wisheit) and technical ('wizzen') versus non-technical. What we have are two different organizations of a semantic field. A diachronic statement would be based on this synchronic information, but if it were to explain what happened to 'kunst' it would have to refer to non-linguistic factors or causes (social changes, psychological processes, etc.) whose effects happened to have repercussions for the semantic system. For the analysis of language the relevant facts are the synchronic oppositions. The diachronic perspective treats individual filiations which are identifiable only from the results of synchronic analysis. ( 45)

However, it should be mentioned that although Saussure favored the synchronic approach to the study of language it would be inaccurate to say that he dismissed entirely

nineteenth century historical linguistics, since he also attempted to develop a methodology for both historical and comparative linguistics.

### *Syntagmatic and paradigmatic*

While we have spoken so far about the relational aspect of signs within the synchronic linguistic system, this relational aspect is developed by Saussure into a further set of concepts: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic (or associative). The difference between the two is that syntagmatic relations involve a 'horizontal' axis of meaning whereas the paradigmatic involves a 'vertical' axis of meaning. 'Syntagmatic relations hold *in praesentia*. They hold between two or more terms co-present in a sequence. Associative relations, on the contrary, hold *in absentia*. They hold between terms constituting a mnemonic group.' (1983:122)

Syntagmatic relations occur when elements can be combined sequentially. With syntagms, there is a relation between what goes on before or after. As examples, Saussure uses, 're-read' and 'God is good' (1983: 121), where in the case of the first both items are syntagmatically related to each other while in the case of the second, the 'is' is related to both God and 'good'. On the other hand, paradigmatic relations occur when there are similarities of form and meaning and Saussure outlines *three instances*: (1983: 124)

- (1) The sign 'teaching' is associated with 'to teach' and 'we teach' so there is a common or similar element between the idea or concept and the signifier.
- (2) The sign might be associated with a series such as verbs with the '---ing' ending, such as 'singing', 'laughing', etc.
- (3) The sign might be associated with a series that has a similar meaning, such as 'lecturing', 'educating' and 'teaching'.

It is clear that the way the series is constructed differs according to what is being compared. Series (2) is constructed according to the grammatical structure of the sign while series (3) is constructed according to the contrast between the similarities of meaning.

The problem with Saussure's views on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations is that while he is clear that paradigmatic belong to the domain of langue he is unclear about the position of syntagmatic relations. But if we recall Saussure's claim that paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations are mutually interdependent, then the conclusion would be that they both belong to langue: 'Syntagmatic groups formed in this way are linked by interdependence, each contributing to all. Linear ordering in space helps to create associative connections, and these in turn play an essential part in syntagmatic analysis.' (1983: 127). The interdependence of the syntagms and the paradigms within the field of langue is further highlighted by Saussure's example of the syntagm 'un-do' which is a combination of 'un' and 'do', but is also paradigmatic in its contrastive relation to other possibilities such as un-pick. These processes can be described in the following way: in

the case of syntagms there is a relation of combination where one combines elements together; in the case of paradigms there is a relation of selection where one chooses one element instead of another.

While the analysis of syntagmatic and paradigmatic associations has so far concentrated on words it would be a mistake to think that Saussure restricted his analysis to phonemes and morphology. These relations were also applied to the syntactical level, to sentences. While the uttering of a sentence would clearly belong to domain of parole, it was also clear that their analysis belonged to the domain of langue. In the case of a sentence, the same relations of combination and selection take place; in a syntagmatic relation words can be combined to produce a sentence and the meaning is not evident until the final word has been uttered. To know the meaning of the sentence 'the cat sat on the...' we must wait until we hear or read the last word, 'mat'; with this word the sentence is complete and the meaning is generated. Syntagmatic relations are spatial ones with one word following the other. But it is also important to note that not all possibilities can be realized: it is not possible to say 'the cat sat on the sea' or 'the cat grumbled'. Knowing the syntagmatic possibilities influences our paradigmatic choices. Paradigmatic relations differ from syntagmatic ones in that each individual word in a sentence is selected by the speaker out of a series of potential words. In the sentence 'the cat sat on the mat', the speaker might select 'rat' or 'dog' instead of 'cat' or he might select 'table' instead of 'mat'. The sentence context conditions the choices that are possible for the speaker, and - according to what is selected - a different meaning is generated. The paradigmatic relations of sentences show that the meaning of a sign is constituted by what is absent;

the sign 'cat' is present while the other signs that could replace it are absent from the sentence and yet part of the linguistic system that makes the sign 'cat' possible.

### *Value and Signification*

Another set of concepts that Saussure introduces are those of value and signification: while the value of a sign is determined by its place within the linguistic system, 'signification' does not refer to the functioning of the linguistic system but to the way it connects to the world. The difference between value and signification is derived from the distinction between langue and parole: values are the elements that acquire an identity within langue, while signification describes the relationship between the utterance and the world. In the case of signification, it is the 'extra' linguistic element that comes into play<sup>iii</sup>.

Saussure explains the difference between meaning and value when he describes the difference between the English sentence 'I saw a sheep' and the French sentence 'J'ai vu un mouton'. The two sentences are the same in terms of their signification, in the way that they both refer to a particular animal in the world. Signification describes the speaker's relation to a state of affairs in the world. But the value of the terms 'sheep' and 'mouton' differs within the English and French languages: in the case of English, when sheep are eaten the meat is called mutton, while in the case of French, mouton means two things, the meat itself and the animal<sup>iv</sup>.



## **5.0. The Impact of Semiology**

The impact of Saussure's work did not take place for some time. It first received recognition by Claude Levi Strauss who adopted the linguistic method for the domain of anthropology. When one speaks of the structural revolution that took place in the late 1950s the structuralism mentioned was in fact another name for semiology. Although the labels 'structuralism' and 'semiology' are frequently interchanged, it should be pointed out that despite studying similar phenomena, there is a fundamental difference between them. Whereas structuralism was concerned with discovering what is common or universal to a large number of phenomena, semiology had no interest in seeking out any universal structures. While Levi-Strauss used structuralism to find the universal structure of the human mind that lie behind the various and numerous myths, Barthes's semiological analysis of myth focussed on the historical and the specific i.e., on the way a society constructed certain myths to legitimise its power. In the interest of simplification I am retaining the practice of using both labels synonymously.

Human actions differ from events that take place in the natural world because whereas the latter can be just described in terms of the causal relations between them, in the case of human actions, what is distinctive about them is that they have a meaning. And, since there is a meaning, then there must be a system that generates the meaning that is to be communicated. Semiology comes into being as the study of those systems that generate meaning and for semiologists, what is important is the study of the system as a whole since it is the system that determines the distinctive meanings of objects or actions.

What Saussure realised is that the linguistic system can be used as a model for studying non-linguistic systems; these non-linguistic systems - fashion, food, music, and human behaviour among others – also function as systems of sign that generate meanings. It is because of the crucial insight into the arbitrary nature of the sign that the study of non-linguistic systems becomes possible. In the case of clothing, for example, within a particular culture, it is not the material used that is important but the meaning the clothes communicate, a meaning that is socially understood: this is why a short skirt and a long skirt communicate different meanings. Clothes are not merely functional i.e., something to wear, but are part of a system of signification. It is common knowledge that in western cultures, white clothes are appropriate for weddings; this is a form of social knowledge that we understand and take for granted. The task of the semiologist is to bring out the rules that make such social knowledge possible and communicable.

Many times we think that what we do – the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the signs of affection we show – are expressions of our ‘natural’ or our ‘authentic selves’. However, semiology shows that what we frequently take as ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ is in fact conventional: the arbitrary nature of signs highlights the importance of the social and communal at the expense of the individual. There are a very small number of signs that one can consider to be strictly ‘natural’: (for example) there is no culture or society in the world where slapping someone in the face is considered a warm and friendly greeting. But apart from this small number, most signs are conventional so that, for example, while

in some cultures a handshake is considered a greeting, in others a kiss on the cheek is the appropriate form of greeting. The difference is purely one of convention.

For any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit, or on convention, which comes to the same thing. Signs of politeness, for instance, although often endowed with a certain natural expressiveness (prostrating oneself nine times on the ground is the way to greet an emperor in China) are none the less fixed by rule. It is this rule which renders them obligatory, not their intrinsic value. (1983: 68)

It is the degree of sophistication between signs that make up the various domains subject to semiological analysis. Culler (1985: 99-103) groups these domains into four categories:

(a) signs that are used for direct communication: these vary between relatively simple signs such as those of language, the Morse code, Braille and those that communicate specialised information such as the periodic tables, traffic signs, road signs, logical and mathematical symbols. For these sign systems there are codes that enable one to decode these signs to find out what they are communicating. As these codes are formulated with the purpose of communication it is not so difficult to understand the processes through which they are made to signify something, but the upshot is that they do not form such an interesting study.

(b) signs that are used for the communication of open ended phenomena: the best example of these signs are those used in aesthetics – literature, music, painting - where the codes are not easy to formulate. Unlike the codes used for direct communication, these codes are not explicitly specified: there are no books that tell you how to understand art since the nature of art is such that it experiments with the codes that are

used to produce it. There is a constant process of self-undermining and questioning so that a work of art is considered 'original' when it breaks free from the established codes of its time; and once this becomes the norm, the process is repeated until it is usually replaced by another aesthetic code. The difficulty in finding the codes of art are usually what makes this an interesting semiological study.

(c) signs that are used for the communication of values and beliefs: this broad area of semiology includes social practices such as rituals, etiquette, fashion, food, hobbies, etc. The underlying premise of research conducted in this area is that everything humans do has an inherent social meaning. Objects do not just have a functional value but also a semiological value: the choice in the type of accommodation one buys is not merely a question of functionality, of having somewhere to live, but also includes an important communicative dimension. While people have an implicit understanding of the meaning of the objects and things they consume, the semiologist reconstructs the system that generates these meanings. The semiologist makes the operating system explicit.

(d) signs that are used in the social and natural sciences: this is an unlikely domain for semiological analysis because what is important for these sciences is that they are able to establish a causal relation between objects and events. When such causal relations are established we have entered the domain of truth. The semiologist however is concerned with other matters when studying these sciences: he/she is not questioning the truth or falsity of such discourses but rather examining the way signs have meanings associated with them. A semiological study of astrology is not interested in whether it is true that the

stars have an effect on a person's life; rather, the semiologist is interested in the system that attributes a certain meaning to the position of a planet.

## **6.0. Critical Remarks**

The work of Saussure has not passed without critical examination and a number of objections have been raised about his work. One particular objection concerns the connection between the linguistic system, on the one hand, and the non-linguistic world, on the other. Saussure provides no account of the way these two different realms are connected together. Fiske (1990: 44) points out that Saussure neglected this aspect concentrating more on the intra-linguistic relationship between terms, while the semiology of C.S. Pierce (Chapter 2) explained this connection. In addition, Culler (1985: 33) defends Saussure on this point arguing that the distinction between signification and value was intended to show that there were two kinds of meaning, a relational one where the meaning or value of a term is defined by its place in the linguistic system and a meaning that is the result of signification where the meaning depends upon the context of actualization of utterances.

There are also problems with Saussure's 'internal' account of language. Peter Serracino Inglott (1995) argues that explaining the nature of language as a self-enclosed system of signs does not necessarily entail excluding reference to the world. Furthermore, the Saussurian model leads to the more serious difficulty in making it impossible to explain the way language is learnt. Strinati (1995: 94-5) also points out that the Saussurean

distinction between *langue* and *parole* is inadequate for it assumes that *langue* represents the social dimension of language while *parole* represents the individual use of language. The problem is that Saussure places speech and writing on the side of *parole* and it is obvious that these are also social and not individual phenomena; and it was Saussure who recognized that the only way to learn about the rules of *langue* was indirectly through *parole*. As Strinati points out, it is not possible to understand *langue* independently of *parole*, i.e., of its particular uses.

Others, such as the Marxist critic Volosinov lament the total of recognition of the role of ideology in Saussure's theory of language and in particular of his concept of *langue*. As opposed to Saussure's view of *langue* as a stable system that is the condition of the possibility of meaning, Volosinov argues that meaning is produced in the process of ideological struggle: meaning is the site of a contestation between different groups within, ranging from class, race, profession, gender etc. There is no homogenous structure of language that produces the same meanings within a society but rather a number of different groups that read different meanings into signifiers. And this has important consequences for the meaning associated with a signifier can have a significant effect on the actions and behavior of these groups (in Schirato and Yell, 2000:26)

Despite these criticisms, Saussure's theory of signs rightly highlights the centrality of the context in the production of meaning. In the process of understanding the way meaning is generated, Saussure's analysis of language highlighted the social dimension of language: insofar as the members of a community use units of meaning to communicate between

each other, then this community has constructed a system of signs each of which has a distinct meaning precisely for this purpose.

In this chapter, I have outlined (a) the historical background within which Saussure develops his linguistics and followed this with (b) an examination of the nature of the sign and (c) the underlying principles that accounts for the generation of meaning. The rest of the chapter is taken up with (d) the conceptual distinctions introduced by Saussure and with the way (e) his innovative ideas have become central to the semiological analysis of non-linguistic domains.

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<sup>i</sup> The Neo-Grammarians Hermann Osthoff and Karl Brugman wrote, ‘every sound change, in as much as it occurs mechanically, takes place according to laws that admit no exception. That is, the direction of the sound shift is always the same for all members of the linguistic community except where a split into dialects occurs; and all the words in which the sound subjected to the change appears in the same relationship are affected by the change without exception. ( in Culler, 1985: 65)

<sup>ii</sup> Holdcroft (1991: 97) uses this analogy to argue that if a train needs to connect with another train to reach its destination this is clearly a case of a relationship that is not differential but rather a positive one, precisely the opposite of what Saussure is claiming.

<sup>iii</sup> Using an economic model, Saussure makes two claims about the way something is given a value: first, if two dissimilar things have an equal value they can be exchanged so that, for example, one can buy a magazine or a sandwich for 2 Euro; secondly, if two things have an equal value then they can be compared, so that ten Euros can be exchanged for 16 U.S. dollars. (1983: 113). In the case of language, a word can also be exchanged with another word or idea, or it can be compared to other words. But to know the value of the word, one must be able to relate it to other words within the linguistic system; the possibility of exchanging a word with another word can only be realized if one can compare and contrast it to other words. It is clear that the value of a sign is the result of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between signs within langue.

<sup>iv</sup> Saussure elaborates, ‘The French word *mouton* may have the same meaning as the English word *sheep*; but it does not have the same value. There are various reasons for this, but in particular the fact that the English word for the meat of this animal, as prepared and served for a meal, is not *sheep* but *mutton*. The difference in value between *sheep* and *mouton* hinges on the fact that in English there is also another word *mutton* for the meat, whereas *mouton* in French covers both.’ (1983: 114)

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by “semiosis” I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. (Houser and Kloesel, 1992-1998b:411)

## **Peirce on the Dynamic Life of Signs**

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was a philosopher and logician whose writings range across a number of different areas of philosophy from perception to science, metaphysics and religious experience. However, the questions that really interested him were those concerning meaning and reference and his theory of signs or semiotics offered a framework that accounted for them. The centrality of semiotics to his philosophical writings cannot be understated and Peirce claimed that the only way he could approach these philosophical subjects through semiotics<sup>iv</sup>. Unlike Saussure who focused solely on linguistic signs and their binary relations, Peirce’s theory of signs and its triads were applied to both linguistic and natural realms.

Peirce’s general theory of signs grew over the years from the basic triads into a classification of ten signs and ultimately into a complex one of sixty-six kinds of signs, which through various combinations led to 59,049 types of signs. The latter system is highly sophisticated and it is not the point of this chapter to delve into the details of that typology. The domain of Peirce’s theory of signs is composed of ‘speculative grammar’, ‘critical logic’ and ‘speculative rhetoric’. Speculative grammar deals with the formal conditions of signs, while critical logic concerns the relations of signs to objects, raising



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the question of truth; speculative rhetoric studies the necessary conditions for the transmission of meaning from the sign to its interpretants. This chapter focuses on speculative grammar with its emphasis on the necessary conditions for the production of signs, and on speculative rhetoric with its emphasis on meaning situated within a pragmatic context.

Throughout his lifetime, Peirce produced a prodigious amount of material and this is available in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (1931-1958). The main source that I am using is the shorter *The Essential Peirce* Vol. 1 and Vol. 2 (Houser and Kloesel, 1992-1998) where one finds two of his crucial papers: ‘On a New List of Categories’ (1867) and ‘A Guess at the Riddle’ (1887-1888). Currently, there is an ongoing project to reorganize his writings in a more chronological order that should culminate in a thirty volume set - some of which have already been published - called, *The Writings of C.S. Peirce*.

Although Peirce’s semiology is not restricted to linguistic communication, but to the broader field of interpretation, his influence upon theorists of textual interpretation is such that an account of his philosophy deserves examination. In this chapter, (a) I first outline the categories that are fundamental to his thought, followed by (b) an account of his theory of signs; (c) the next section develops the account of signs showing how their possibilities of combination, while the final sections examine (d) the role of pragmatism as a tool for the examination of meaning, and (e) the method that should be used for the acquisition of knowledge.

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## **1.0. The Categories of Mathematics and Phenomenology: Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness.**

One of the most enduring influences upon Peirce was the philosopher Kant who had attempted to unify philosophy into a system of categories that had a logical foundation. Peirce admired this systematic attempt and likewise attempted to organize philosophy into a systematic order that would reflect the whole structure of knowledge. His categories were an alternative to the Kantian categories and he continually refined them throughout his life. His point of departure was the need to revise logic itself since he considered the way it was formulated as inadequate. Unlike Frege and Russell, Peirce believed that logic is derived from mathematics and that mathematics was the foundation of any philosophical system: in effect, logic was applied mathematics. Peirce is today considered one of the founders of modern mathematical logic

The difference between logic and mathematics is that the goal of the latter is to establish the necessary relations of hypothetical constructions, together with their conclusions, independently of whether these apply to anything real or ideal. On Peirce's account, it is this concern with everything that situates mathematics at the pinnacle of knowledge: 'Mathematics...is the only one of the sciences which does not concern itself to inquire what the actual facts are, but studies hypotheses exclusively.' (1992-1998b: 35) Mathematicians are indifferent as to whether the objects of their study are real as can be

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seen by the study of imaginary numbers, such as the square root of -1, an ‘impossible number’.

On the other hand, the goal of logic is that of right reasoning and, since it is concerned with the rightness or wrongness of reasoning, it should be considered a normative science, i.e., with how one should reason. Given the equation of logic with rightness, Peirce considered logic a branch of ethics: ‘A logical reasoner is a reasoner who exercises great self-control in his intellectual operations; and therefore the logically good is simply a particular species of the morally good.’ (1992-1998b: 200-201)

Since mathematics focuses on working out the necessary consequences of propositions, all other disciplines depend upon it.<sup>iv</sup> Just as Kant had devised twelve categories that could explain how it is possible for us to experience objects, Peirce attempted a similar strategy, but reduced the twelve to three more basic ones. The three categories were derived mathematically and the whole point was to show that these categories can be applied to any and all objects and topics, irrespective of whether they actually existed or whether they were just a possibility. If it is possible to think about something, then the categories must be applicable to it. It is in this specific sense that the categories should be considered universal. The universality of these mathematically derived categories shows that they apply equally to cars, airplanes, Achilles and centaurs. The inclusiveness of mathematical thinking demonstrates why it is foundational.

Pierce derived the categories from the study of graphs that was proposed by J.J.Sylvester. If you place a dot or point on a white piece of paper you have a first, but since the dot or

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point is contrasted with the paper you have a second (the black dot and the white paper) and the connection between them is a Third (the black dot relates to the white background) to someone. The use of graphs to exemplify the categories is better illustrated with more dots: when you have two dots on a paper, the mind supplies the connection between them. Peirce's use of graphs demonstrated some of the basic points of his categories: no matter how many dots and lines are added these can always be reduced to the basic two dots and one line schema ( . - . - . = .-. ) . To show that the three Categories cannot be reduced to two Peirce uses the example of the relation of giving: A gives B to C. If A gives B to C, this action cannot be reduced to three sets of dual relations ( (a) A connecting to C ; (b) A connecting to B; (c) B connecting to C ) since all these would show are three disconnected events rather than a single act of giving. So too, when it is a relation between four, these can be reduced to two sets of three.

Take *giving* for example. The mere transfer of an object which A sets down and C takes up does not constitute giving. There must be a transfer of *ownership* and ownership is a matter of Law, an intellectual fact. You now begin to see how the conception of representation is so peculiarly fit to typify the category of Thirdness. (1992-1998b: 171)

Peirce's argument is that this reduction or 'derivation' is neither psychological nor linguistic but mathematical. His categories are interconnected: the First produces a Second that entails a Third: he called them the 'cenopythagorean' categories (ceno is Greek meaning 'new') because his thinking was similar to that of the Pythagoreans who believed that mathematics was concerned with the structure of reality, unlike the contemporary view of number as concerned with quantities.

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After mathematics, Peirce considered philosophy to be a fundamental study but, unlike mathematics, it was concerned with what is real. On the other hand, the difference between philosophy and the other sciences is that unlike the other sciences, philosophy does not require any special equipment or laboratories, but can be practiced by anyone, ‘the kind of philosophy which interests me and must, I think, interest everybody is that philosophy, which uses the most rational methods it can devise.’ (in Waar, 2001: 15)

Phenomenology (or as called by Pierce also called ‘phaenoscropy’ by Peirce) is the first branch of philosophy: it is concerned with whatever appears before consciousness, from perception to imagination to conception. Since its domain is fairly broad – anything that appears before consciousness – it also includes aspects that would not usually be analyzed (hallucinations and illusions). The truth of what appears is, so to speak, put on hold and is therefore not an issue. Peirce describes the task of phenomenology vividly,

the initial great department of philosophy is phenomenology whose task it is to make out what are the elements of appearance that present themselves to us every hour and every minute whether we are pursuing earnest investigations, or are undergoing the strangest vicissitudes of experience, or are dreamily listening to the tales of Scheherazade (1992-1998b: 147)

Peirce’s fundamental categories are those of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness: since they were the basis for his new philosophical system, he had to show that these categories were universal, irreducible and complete.

First is the beginning, that which is fresh, original, spontaneous, free. Second is that which is determined, terminated, ended, correlative, object, necessitated, reacting. Third is the medium, becoming, developing, bring about. (1992-1998a: 280)

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Whether existing or not, it is always some ‘thing’ that is being considered and in this respect is independent of anything else. This is the idea of Firstness. When we think of something, we can oppose it, or think about it as different from something else. Secondness is this otherness, this negation of Firstness. The category of Thirdness connects the two distinguishable objects: it mediates between them. Waar writes,

The relation of a first to a second, however, brings with it the notion of mediation; that is, of setting two objects in relation to one another. This introduces the third category, which is that mode of being that derives its identity entirely from it relating two objects to one another. For example, when a fox chases a rabbit, the relation of chasing can be distinguished from both the fox and the rabbit. Moreover, this relation is what it is purely by virtue of the relation between the fox and the rabbit. (Waar, 2001: 10)

It is useful to think of the categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness as roughly the domains of possibility (what might be), of actuality (what is) and of potentiality, probability and necessity (what could be, would be or should be). This triad is analytically broken down for methodological purposes as in fact the three are found together: while Firstness is the abstract possibility of a sensation, feeling or quality in an agent, it is experienced as Secondness in a particular object, existing in the world as a token or particular instantiation of a type; it is the other of the agent. Thirdness connects the first (sensation, vague feeling) to the second (the Object) to generate a meaning: Thirdness is the category of classes of types: a particular object (Second) belongs to a type or class of objects that have a function within a society.

Firstness is a *quality*, Secondness is *effect*, and Thirdness is *product*; and Firstness is possibility (a *might* be), Secondness is actuality (what *is*), and Thirdness is potentiality, probability, or necessity (*could* be, *would* be, or *should* be, given a certain set of prevailing conditions)’ (Merrell, 1995: 38).

The Firstness of perception is not that of something that we are immediately conscious of: it is chaotic, formless, pre-conscious and elusive, ‘Stop to think of it, and it has flown!

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What the world was to Adam on the day he opened his eyes to it, before he had drawn any distinctions, or had become conscious of his own existence...' (1992-1998a: 248). It is the realm of the possible. Secondness is the domain of 'facts', of 'brute actuality': it is 'eminently hard and tangible. It is very familiar too; it is forced upon us daily: it is the main lesson of life.' (1992-1998a: 249). While in the course of walking in the street, the pavement remains a sensation that we are hardly aware of. The moment we slip it becomes a Second: we are now aware of it as other, as something hard. We should remember that Peirce's Firstness is always about possibilities that can be actualized into Secondness, rather than Secondness replacing Firstness as though one is superior to the other. Thirdness takes place when we pick ourselves up: we have realized what happened and acted upon it. It is 'the representation mediating between these two that is preeminently third.' (1992-1998a: 250)

The condition that makes Firstness possible is that of "nothingness" – which is to be differentiated from negation. Peirce writes,

We start,...with nothing, pure zero. But this is not the nothing of negation. For *not* means *other than*, and *other* is merely a synonym of the ordinary numeral *second*. As such it implies a first; while the present pure zero is prior to every first...it is the germinal nothing, in which the whole universe is involved and foreshadowed. As such, it is absolutely undefined and unlimited possibility – boundless possibility. There is no compulsion and no law. It is boundless freedom. (in Merrell, 1995 : 69)

It is evident that phenomenology is devoted to the universal features that can be found in all phenomena. Since the categories are derived from mathematics and these categories are universal, then they must also apply to phenomenological objects. However, instead of applying the categories that are fundamental to mathematics, Peirce opts to show that

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the same categories can be derived from phenomenology. The Firstness of phenomenology is the fact that it is there, it is present without reference to anything else: it would be consciousness of 'just an odor, say the smell of attar.' (1992-1998b:150) The second feature of phenomenology is that a First is opposed, contrasted or connected to something else. The Category of Secondness describes the singularity of the object, its otherness. The Category of Thirdness connects the First and the Second: the smell with the flower we call 'rose'. Although each category is distinct whatever appears before consciousness includes all three categories.

Abduction is Peirce's novel contribution to logic and his theory of signs. While deduction and induction have been given much attention, Peirce introduces this third mode of reasoning that takes place prior to deduction and induction.

Deduction is defined as an argument such that 'in the long run of experience the greater part of those whose premises are true will have true conclusions.' (1992-1998b: 298). On the other hand, although with induction it is not necessarily the case that true premises will lead always lead to true conclusions, 'it will in the long run yield the truth, or an indefinite approximation to the truth, in regard to every question.' (1992-1998b: 298). Abduction is defined as 'a method of forming a general prediction without any positive assurance that it will succeed either in the special case or usually, its justification being that it is the only possible hope of regulating our future conduct rationally...' (1992-1998b: 299)



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Abduction is the process of grouping a number of facts together that impress the person. The facts are combined with others until an explanation can be offered. At this stage, a hypothesis is proposed and if the hypothesis is true, then the facts have been explained. Deduction involves examining the necessary consequences of a hypothesis: if one is proposing a certain hypothesis, then within the framework of that hypothesis, we should be able to ascertain what must follow. A trivial example of a hypothesis is that if it has been raining, then necessarily the street must be wet. Induction is that process of checking whether the way things are corresponds to the way it has been hypothetically proposed. Again, the actual wet road confirms the hypothesis that it has been raining. At this stage, the ‘theory’ conforms to the facts. Peirce writes that an abductive inference suggests that something may be, deduction shows that something must be and induction shows that something is (1992-1998b: 216).

Abduction falls within the category of Firstness and it can be described as a ‘creative guess’. It is the preliminary hypothesis that is subsequently confirmed or rejected: slipping on the wet pavement, we – for an instant – don’t know what is happening until we realize that we have slipped. The initial hypothesis is confirmed as we look around sitting on the pavement. Abduction, like Firstness, concerns the domain of the possible: these possibilities are not only unusual events (like slipping on the pavement) but a part of our everyday life - it is the process that takes place from the vague sensation of Firstness to the actuality of Secondness: from the vague sensation of hardness to the actuality of the pavement. Peirce writes,

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‘Looking out of my window this lovely spring morning I see an azalea in full bloom. No, no! I do not see that; though that is the only way I can describe what I see. *That* is a proposition, a sentence, a fact; but what I perceive is not a proposition, sentence, fact but only an image, which I make intelligible in part by means of a statement of fact. This statement is abstract; but what I see is concrete. I perform an abduction when I [so much] as express in a sentence anything I see. The truth is that the whole fabric of our knowledge is one matted felt of pure hypothesis confirmed and refined by induction. Not the smallest advance can be made in knowledge beyond the state of vacant staring, without making an abduction at every step (in Merrill, 1995: 57)

## 2.0. The Nature of the Sign

Peirce uses Locke as his point of departure and develops a highly sophisticated account of signs (the term *semeiotic*’ is derived from the Greek word for sign ‘*semeion*’, though the ‘e’ is dropped and an ‘s’ is added nowadays, to produce *semiotics*). Given Saussure’s background in linguistics, his account of signs focuses on their arbitrary and conventional nature; on the other hand, Peirce’s background in the natural sciences directs his attention toward ‘natural’ signs and subsumes conventional signs within the category of natural signs. The branch of *semiotics* that studies the conditions that transform something into a sign i.e., their formal character, is called ‘*speculative grammar*’.

A sign is defined as, ‘anything which stands *for* something *to* something. What the sign stands *for* is its object, what it stands *to* is the interpretant. The sign relation is *fundamentally* triadic: eliminate either the object or the interpretant and you annihilate the sign.’ (1992-1998a: xxxvi)

This definition highlights three fundamental and interrelated features of a sign:

(a) a representamen (that is itself sometimes confusingly called a sign);

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(b) an object that the representamen is related to and

(c) the interpretant (not to be confused with the interpreter) as the activation of the meaning of a sign.

The process of semiological activity moves along this triad: a representamen is associated with an object that is connected by or through the interpretant. In turn, the object and the interpretant have the possibility of being transformed into another sign for other objects and interpretants. Corresponding to the representamen-object-interpretant triad, is the Firstness-Secondness-Thirdness triad: while the First is independent of everything else, the Second is related to something else and the Third connects the First and Second. The Category of Thirdness is important in that it generates the interpretation of the sign: the sign-object relation requires an interpretant to have a meaning or significance. To say ‘the sun is shining’ requires an interpretation that could focus on the sentence as an explanation of what the words mean, or on my suggestion that we go swimming, or on my pleasure that summer is approaching. Unless a sign can generate these further interpretations then it would have no significance. One might say that the significance of a sign depends upon its effects, upon the interpretants it produces.

An important feature of Peirce’s account of signs is that they are always embodied: in other words, there is always some ‘vehicle’ that he calls the ‘ground’ or ‘representamen’ that function as a sign. The material in which signs are embodied range from mental states (dreams) to metal (road-signs) or wood (chairs), to the entire universe (as a sign of God). However, this embodiment has its constraints as not every feature functions as a

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signifying one: the material of a signpost is not important, but that the representamen is clearly indicated as a tunnel and not a one way road is important.

In the relationship between the representamen and its object, the sign is passive since it is the object that determines the representamen without the representamen having any effect on the object (the quality of Redness is the result of the apple not the other way around). On the other hand, in the relationship between the representamen and the interpretant, the representamen plays an active role since it determines the interpretant (the quality of redness ‘imposes’ itself upon the interpretant).

An important and fundamental characteristic of Peirce’s theory of signs is the notion that it is the nature of signs to continually generate new signs: the interpretant can enter into a new sign-relation thereby becoming an object that will function as a sign for another interpretant. Eco has labeled this process ‘unlimited semiosis’ (1976: 69) and it refers to the way a sign is associated with a certain meaning that in turn activates other meanings.

Merrill highlights the dynamism of signs:

...a sign’s “life” is precisely *the essence of what it is like to be a sign*. Signs are relatively insignificant unless they are translates, bearing witness to the ongoing *semiotic* process.

Take, for instance, the solitary term “atom”. From an “impenetrable sphere,” throughout the centuries it became, among other things, like the “solar system,” then like a “smear” or a “cloud,” and finally no more than a statistical matrix. “Atom” never rested on its laurels; it was always on the go; and it still is. With respect to a sign in a particular culture at the same point in history, consider philosopher Hilary Putnam’s (1988) example of “gold.” What does it mean for the physicist who pushes the electrons of an “atom” of “gold” aside to get to the nucleus, the high school chemistry teacher who has pedagogical interest in “electron shells,” or the jeweler, the prospector in the jungles of Brazil, the newly engaged dreamy-eyed couple, the coin collector? In fact, bring to mind the numerous transmutations of terms such as “cigarettes,” “guns,” “flag,” “U.S. Constitution,” “harassment,” “gays,” “abortion,” “racial prejudice,” “cholesterol,” “polyunsaturated fats,” and so on. How complex, how rhizomic, how apparently “chaotic,” this *semiotic* rush, this sparkling, shimmering race of signs.” (1995: 70)

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Peirce does not allow for the ultimate meaning of a sign, since a sign can always be ‘translated’ into another sign. The process of semiosis is on going and to talk of a final meaning or of a grand Sign would be to talk about something outside human life. This is why it is fruitful to say that when a person interacts with a situation, the person – as a thinking, feeling being woven into the web of semiosis – responds by producing more signs. The airplane flying overhead might mean an inconvenience to the person living in the flight path, summer holidays to the student, and pollution to the environmentalist. The same sign can produce different interpretants.

In Peirce’s view, the universe is an endless process of signs generating more signs. But for signs to generate meanings it is necessary to have interpreters – a sign must be a sign of something for someone. There are many things that are signs but for them to function as signs there must be interpreters to generate the interpretant:

Mayan hieroglyphs are signs, no doubt, and we can assume they once enjoyed a set of relatively developed interpretants. But remaining to this point in time largely undeciphered and undecipherable by present-day archeologists, they have not produced a massive body of interpretants *for* some group of interpreters *in* our cultural milieu. They are a set of signs in search of their fulfillment. (Merrell, 1995: 93)

It is the interpretant that accounts for the dynamism of signs, for once a sign has an interpretant, then it has the potential for transformation into another sign. Semiosis is a process that is always on the way to something else and in this process, the sign is transformed into something other, something different from what it was before.

Peirce’s definition of signs is broad precisely because it is intended to include within it almost everything, since almost everything can function as a sign. On his account, the

entire universe is ‘perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs.’ (1992-1998b:394) Given the breadth of his definition, Peirce’s understanding of the world differs greatly from that of, say Aristotle, for whom the world can be understood by reference to substances, essences and purposes. Aristotle’s world was fundamentally a static one, while Peirce, on the other hand, offers a dynamic vision of the world that can be explained in terms of events, processes and happenings.

The following table (Merrell, 1995: 80) reveals the several different sub-classes of signs.

<b>Ø</b>	<b>Representamen (R)</b>	<b>Object (O)</b>	<b>Interpretant (I)</b>
	<b>FIRST</b> The sign of itself as	<b>SECOND</b> The relation of the sign to its “semiotic object” is dependent upon	<b>THIRD</b> The sign’s relation to its ‘semiotic object’ in relation to its interpreter is that:
<b>FIRSTNESS</b>	<b>QUALSIGN</b> A feeling of quality prior to consciousness of it.	<b>ICON</b> Some quality the sign shares with its “semiotic object”	<b>TERM</b> Of a stated quality
<b>SECONDNESS</b>	<b>SINSIGN</b> A particular sign, a <i>token</i>	<b>INDEX</b> Some actual relation between the sign and its “semiotic object”	<b>PROPOSITION (SENTENCE)</b> Of a statement relation the sign to is “semiotic object”
<b>THIRDNESS</b>	<b>LEGISIGN</b> A general sign, a <i>type</i>	<b>SYMBOL</b> Some relation between the sign and its “semiotic object” to its interpretant	<b>ARGUMENT (TEXT)</b> Of an interpretation (using logic, reason, or rhetoric) by conventional means

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In the case of the Representamen, the sign can be a quality, an individual object or a general type.

(a) First: the Representamen as Qualisign is a feeling, sensation or the vagueness of something that we cannot identify as something existing. The First of a perceptual object is the 'qualisign': the 'quali' is a quality such as redness or sourness. Since redness or sourness do not exist on their own, for them to function as a sign they must be embodied in objects. Despite being embodied, the quality itself as a sign is not affected by the object (1992-1998b: 291).

(b) Second: the Representamen as Sinsign. When the Representamen is a second, it is a sinsign or a token: it is singular so that it functions as a sign by being 'an actual existent thing or event' (1992-1998b: 291). A sinsign is the sign of a thing or event that exists now in isolation from other signs: it is a sign of something or an event that we are conscious of.

(c) Third: the Representamen as Legisign. Legisigns usually signify as a result of conventions, habits or laws (e.g. traffic lights) and they include classes or types. They become legisigns as a result of their being repeated. It is language that best exemplifies legisigns because language entails the use of general terms such as 'dog' or 'car'. A general term or type applies to all particular instantiations or tokens, such as this dog and this car. The word 'dog' is a general type a legisign, but each time the word is uttered, the

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utterance is a token of the type, an instantiation of it. In addition, the event of uttering the word 'dog' does not influence the type 'dog'. Peirce writes that a legisign is 'not a single object, but a general type...thus the word "the" will usually occur from fifteen to twenty-five times on a page. It is in all these occurrences one and the same word, the same legisign. Each single instance of it is a replica. The replica is a sinsign.' (1992-1998b: 291)

In the case of Objects, the sign can be an icon, index or symbol.

(a) Firsts: Objects as Icons. The iconic sign functions as a sign by virtue of resembling or being a likeness to an object. Icons 'serve to convey ideas of the things they represent simply by imitating them.' (1992-1998b: 5) Among these are included photography, paintings, maps and caricatures. Other icons include resemblances even to objects that do not necessarily exist, such as a picture of a unicorn. However, Peirce does point out that the terminology or 'likeness' or 'resemblance' is too restrictive if it is used to mean only a correspondence between a physical likeness and its object. Iconic signs include:

(a) images where the image resembles the object to such an extent that they can be considered as one: the image is like the object without any difference from it

(b) diagrams which resemble their object but are different from them. The resemblance could be of parts, or of the structure of the object (for example, the diagram of a house and the house).



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(c) metaphors: when signs that are not usually found together are combined in a sentence, the relation between them generates a metaphor. It is not usual to associate a human being with a lion, but in the sentence ‘Charles Borg is a lion’, a man is said to resemble the qualities that are associated with lions.

An icon functions as a sign irrespective of whether the object exists or not, and irrespective of whether it is interpreted or not. The road sign of a tunnel functions as a likeness of a tunnel, even if there is no tunnel or anyone to interpret it; a sign that functions as a warning ‘do not enter’ still signifies a warning, whether it is at the entrance of a field or whether it is lying in a heap of scrap. There is no way of knowing whether there is anything more than just the sign functioning.<sup>iv</sup>

Can there be such a thing as a ‘pure’ icon? If icons belong to the category of Firstness, and if this category is independent of everything else, then a pure icon would be a Qualisign, a pure sensation or feeling without any connection to a consciousness (since consciousness would transform it into a Sinsign). The notion of a pure icon is therefore only hypothetical and Peirce calls them ‘hypo-icons’ since he believed that there was always a conventional element involved. Take (for example) maps: although maps are supposed to be ‘just’ a resemblance or likeness of the terrain that they are maps of, they too have a conventional element in that there are rules that tell us how to use the map as an icon. So too, when icons are defined as ‘resemblances’ this does not carry with it the negative connotation of being without value: on the contrary, icons are valuable insofar

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as they enable us to learn since by studying features of the icon, it is possible to learn more about the object. By observing a map, we can learn more about the terrain; by examining a photograph, we can learn more about a building.

(b) Second: Object as Index. A sign is indexical if there is a natural or causal relation between the sign and the object; such a relation or connection is existential since it involves actual existing objects or events. Indices direct our attention to the object as when the weather cock directs our attention to the wind blowing; they function like pronouns since they point to something and their ‘force’ is such that they connect an object to our senses and to our memory (since we remember having experienced such a connection). So, for example, when we hear thunder we know – because we remember our past experiences of thunder – that lightening is the cause of it.

I see a man with a rolling gait. This is a probable indication that he is a sailor. I see a bowlegged man in corduroys, gaiters, and a jacket. These are probable indicators that he is a jockey or something of the sort. A weathercock *indicates* the direction of the wind. A sun-dial or a clock *indicates* the time of day. Geometricians mark letters against the different parts of their diagrams and then use those letters to indicate those parts. Letters are similarly used by lawyers and others. Thus, we may say: if A and B are married to one another and C is their child while D is brother of A, then D is uncle of C. Here A, B, C, and D fulfill the office of relative pronouns, but are more convenient since they require no special collocation of words. A rap on the door is an indication. Anything which focuses the attention is an indication. Anything which startles us is an indication, in so far as it marks the junction between two portions of experience. Thus a tremendous thunderbolt indicates that *something* considerable happened, though we may not know precisely what the event was. But it may be expected to connect itself with some other experience. (1992-1998b: 8)

Peirce describes the indexical sign as something ‘which it could not have if its object did not exist, but which it will continue to have just the same whether it be interpreted as a representamen or not.’ (in Merrell, 1995: 84) The weather cock is a sign of the direction of the wind; it ‘depends’ upon the wind and will point somewhere independently of whether

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the person is looking at it or not. As with icons, indices still signify irrespective of whether there are interpreters: a can with a bullet hole still functions as a sign of a bullet shot irrespective of whether there is anybody to interpret it. While indices refer to actual things or events, these do not necessarily occur in the external world, as they could just as easily be occurrences that take place within our minds (as in dreams or mathematical constructions).

There are two kinds of indexical signs: genuine indices (or ‘reagents’) point to actual existing objects or events and these indexical signs have a natural connection between them. On the other hand, degenerate indices do not point to actual existing objects but are mental or artificial. A prime example of a degenerate sign is a symbol since there is no natural connection between the sign and the object, even though it still points to the object.

some merely stand for things...while others may be used to ascertain facts. Of the former class which may be termed *designations*, personal, demonstrative, and relative pronouns, proper names, the letters attached to a geometrical figure, and the ordinary letters of algebra are examples. They act to force the attention to the thing intended. Designations are absolutely indispensable both to communication and to thought. No assertion has any meaning unless there is some designation to show whether the universe of reality or what universe of fiction is referred to. The other class of indices may be called *reagents*. Thus water placed in a vessel with a shaving of camphor thrown upon it will show whether the vessel is clean or not. (cited in Merrill, 1995: 85)

The question once again is whether there is such a thing as a pure index and clearly since a genuine index describes the relation between a sign and an actual object, then a pure indexical relation would be one without any human involvement in it. This - Peirce acknowledges - is ‘impossible’, for it is impossible to know the world as it is independently of humans; furthermore, even if it were a case of genuine indices there

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is always an element of human psychology since the human mind associates one event with another (association by contiguity). Pointing with our fingers to an object seems to be a prime example of a pure index, but the rule which tells us that a finger points to an object does not tell us which object it is pointing too. Peirce calls these ‘sub-index’.

(c) Third: the Object as Symbol. A symbol has a meaning by virtue of its habitual associations: symbolic signs ‘or general signs...have become associated with their meanings by usage. Such are most words, and phrases, and speeches, and books and libraries.’ (1992-1998b: 5) Symbols are signs that are conventionally and habitually related to their object (for example, a flag is conventionally associated with a country, and words are conventional agreements to use them in a certain way: the word ‘dog’ and the animal dog. The best examples of symbols are natural languages (English, Maltese), formal languages (mathematics, logic) and artificial languages (the Morse code, braille).

Linguistic signs are a prime example of symbols:

any ordinary word, as “give,” “bird,” “marriage,” is an example of a symbol. It is applicable to whatever may be found to realize the idea connected with the word; it does not, in itself, identify those things. It does not show us a bird, nor enact before our eyes a giving or a marriage, but supposes that we are able to imagine those things, and have associated the word with them. (1992-1998b: 9)

The relation between symbolic signs and objects is the product of human minds: the symbol has nothing in common with what it refers to. While an icon might resemble something real or fictional and an index points to something independently of semiotic agents, symbolic signs depend entirely on minds. It is humans who agree to use a symbol in a certain way, to use the sign ‘dog’ to refer to particular dogs or to the category or class

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of dogs. Symbols are conventional through and through. The difference between the symbol and icons or indices is that symbols depend upon the interpretant: since anything can function as a symbol, the symbol needs an interpretant, a meaning to function as a sign. Symbolic signs as interpretants or meanings can generate other interpretants or meanings.

Symbols grow. They come into being by development out of other signs, and particularly from likenesses or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of likenesses and symbols. We think only in signs. These mental signs are of a mixed nature; the symbol-parts of them are called concepts. If a man makes a new symbol, it is by thoughts involving concepts. So it is only out of symbols that a new symbol can grow. *Omne symbolum de symbolo*. A symbol, once in being, spreads among the peoples. In use and in experience, its meaning grows. Such words as *force*, *law*, *wealth*, *marriage*, bear for us very different meanings from those they bore to our barbarous ancestors. (1992-1998b: 10)

The Sign as Interpretant can be a word, proposition or argument. The final classification concerns the way signs relate to the interpreter: the interpreter can ‘read’ the sign in terms of its qualities, its existence or generality. Peirce considers this classification similar to the division in logic between terms, propositions, and argument.

(a) Firstness: the Interpretant as Term or Word (a rheme). The word functions as a possibility, ‘such and such a kind of possible Object. Any rheme, perhaps, will afford some information; but it is not interpreted as doing so.’ (1992-1998b:292) A term represents the possibility of a type of object and as a term (e.g., dog) it cannot be true or false.

Although a sign is symbolic this does not mean that there are no traces of iconicity and indexicality in them: the iconic aspect involves the similarity or resemblance evoked in the agent by other uses of the sign and the indexical aspect involves what the sign points

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to (for the agent). The sign ‘dog’ functions iconically because it resembles other times that the person used the sign, and it functions indexically when it points to any associations, real or imagined (a real dog ‘causes’ us to say ‘dog’ or when we remember our dog and start talking about it) that we have of it.

(b) Secondness: the Interpretant as a Dicent Sign (a sentence or proposition). The interpretant is the ‘dicent’ and propositions are the best models of dicents since it is of a proposition that one can say that it is true or false. A proposition combines ‘rhemes’ into a whole, such as ‘the dog is sleeping’ and this proposition describes whether something exists or not. A sentence is composed of a number of symbols strung together: in ‘the sun is shining’ the ‘sun’ here functions chiefly in an indexical way – it is about the sun – and the verb functions in a iconic way since it resembles other instances of when the sun shone<sup>iv</sup>.

(c) Thirdness: the Interpretant as Arguments. The function of this sign is to arrive at a conclusion as a result of dialogue and argumentation. Here, language – as the most developed of signs – is used as a tool to further communicative exchanges in the form of reasoned arguments.

A word on its own – the first of Thirdness – is a word that has the possibility of being combined with other words. At this stage, we could say that the word still needs to be realized, its potential as yet unfulfilled. This fulfillment begins when it is placed within the context of a sentence since solitary words are useless for communication. The

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sentence is the second of Thirdness: in ‘the sun is shining’, the sun is seen as shining, a quality is attributed to a subject. The third of Thirdness is the condition of possibility for dialogue and communication: our utterance, ‘the sun is shining’ might lead to a discussion of the depletion of the ozone layer and the resulting increase in skin related problems.

The use of symbols carries with them a background, a form of life. Symbols communicate - directly or indirectly – the values and beliefs of a community. Given this implicit background knowledge, an utterance will never be able to express a complete context: it is always possible for more to be communicated. Peirce’s account helps to explain the way signs proliferate and multiply: from icons to indices to symbols to icons again and so on. When a symbol is a term it has the potential to generate other symbols: the term ‘Shakespeare’ is not just about a particular person but carries with it a network of cultural associations. So too, just as a term can generate a profusion of signs, a sentence can generate texts: the sentence ‘The war on terror must be won’ generated a multitude of discourses – economic, political, military - that together make up the intertextual world.

### **3.0. The Combinations of Signs**

Given the three different classes of signs each with their own types, Peirce thought it was possible to combine them to account for all possible signs. In principle, this should have amounted to twenty-seven possible signs, but given certain rules of combination these are

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reduced to ten classes. The two rules for the classification of the signs is that (a) there is one from each of the tables: one from the representamen, from the object and from the interpretant; and (b) a ‘lower’ level sign cannot be combined with one from a level above it. So (for example) a qualisign, icon or rheme cannot combine with any above it, and a sinsign, index or dicent cannot combine with one from the list above it. Schematically, this is what the rules of combination allow<sup>iv</sup>:

Interpretant	Object	Sign-Vehicle	Examples (from CP 2.254-263 1903)
Rheme	Icon	Qualisign	“A feeling of red”
Rheme	Icon	Sinsign	“An Individual Diagram”
Rheme	Index	Sinsign	“A spontaneous cry”
Dicent	Index	Sinsign	“A Weather Cock”
Rheme	Icon	Legisign	“A diagram [type]”
Rheme	Index	Legisign	“A demonstrative pronoun”
Dicent	Index	Legisign	“A street cry”
Rheme	Symbol	Legisign	“A common noun”
Dicent	Symbol	Legisign	“Ordinary proposition”
Delome	Symbol	Legisign	“An argument”

1. Rhematic iconic qualisign. This is the most basic and fundamental level of signs: it is the minimum of information processed by the human body in terms of its biological structure from the pre-First ‘world’. The formless-ness of the ‘world’ is the condition that makes any sensation and experience for humans possible.

2. Rhematic iconic sinsigns. This sign includes within it qualisigns and, since it is as yet unrelated, it is chiefly iconic. Peirce’s example of a ‘self-contained diagram’ (Merrell, 1995: 132) is an individual copy of a map that is not related in the agent’s mind to other maps (since it is one replica among others) and neither is it related to the territory that it



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is a map of. The map is a self-contained entity. Merrell gives an example of rhematic iconic sinsigns,

Some unintelligible squiggles on a subway wall in some unknown language can contain the possibility of symbolic signs, but as such they are *for* us related to nothing; they are no more than meaningless marks. At this juncture they enjoy interaction with no semiotic agent conscious *of* them *as* signs *of* something *that* have such-an-such characteristics, hence they are devoid of a well-wrought symbolic interpretant. If they vaguely resemble, say, a bow-tie, they can make up an ironic sinsign. But they do so only insofar as the squiggles-tie connection has not (yet) been established, for the icon is at this point no more than self-contained, without relation to anything else. (1995: 132)

3. Rhematical indexical signs. These signs are pointers that direct the attention of the interpreter. A scream – or as Peirce calls it ‘a spontaneous cry’ – directs the interpreter to the person screaming without knowing why he or she is screaming. Given certain contextual cues, the interpreter can probably figure out why the person is screaming since the context conditions our expectations of what might be about to happen (‘look out!’ as we are walking past a building site). At this stage, the reaction to the sign is spontaneous and therefore, there is no full blown conscious awareness of the sign as a sign.

4. Dicent indexical signs: the indexical character of this sign is that of causality where there exists a natural connection between the two events. The direction of the weathercock is the effect caused by the wind: when we look at it, we learn about the wind. As the nature of a sign is to incorporate, and not eliminate, other signs, this indexical sign retains the iconic aspect in that the direction of the weathercock is like the direction of the wind.

Merrell elucidates,

a photograph, when related to that of which it is a photograph, functions in indexical fashion. But it cannot so function without its iconic quality that endows it with the wherewithal for its indexicality. An image of Madonna on the cover of a magazine at the news-stand can be at a glance tacitly acknowledged as Madonna, without any explicit relation consciously and conscientiously established between sign and object. But the image, to be seen *as* a photograph, involves indexicality – without there (yet) being any words (symbolicity), either evolved in the mind or expressed, regarding the image.’ (1995: 132-3)

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5. Rhematic iconic legisigns. These are signs that establish a relation between a sign and an aspect of the object: the image of cutlery displayed on a door is a sign of a place to eat, a restaurant or diner. The cutlery is like the cutlery found in any kitchen but they represent food. So too, other signs of this class include onomatopoeic words that are like the object: the sound of ‘cuckoo’ resembles the sound of the cuckoo bird (it is different in the case of the written ‘cuckoo’ since the written sign does not resemble the cuckoo bird).

6. Rhematic indexical legisign. Although this sign points to something else, there is a sense of absence, of deferral. The pointing does not have to be immediate as when the weathercock points to the direction of the wind. This class of signs includes demonstrative pronouns (this, that) and other place markers (here, there). Using these signs also enables one to talk about something implicitly, to talk about absences (‘I didn’t do that’). Signs of this type are legisigns because they involve a degree of generalization: they are a type as opposed to a token of a thing. ‘*The* shout of “Hullo!” is an example of the ordinary variety,---meaning, not an individual shout, but this shout, “Hullo!” in general---this type of shout.’ (1992-1998b: 297)

7. Dicent indexical legisign. These signs can be of two kinds: linguistic and non-linguistic. Both the linguistic and the non-linguistic are general or routine but not necessarily conventional. In the case of linguistic signs, the generality of a legisign is displayed in everyday expressions (‘how you doing?’, ‘o.k.?’). The indexical element of these signs can be seen in the way they are used to connect with other people - as

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greetings, or acknowledgements – whom we are familiar with. The iconic aspect is the resemblance or likeness of these expressions with other similar expressions. In the case of non-linguistic signs, communication in the animal world displays these generalized patterns of behavior that are innate: bees perform the Waggle Dance not because they have learnt it from other bees, but because nature has programmed them (instinct) to communicate in this way.

8. Rhematic symbolic legisigns. These signs are words or general terms, usually nouns ('table' or 'television'). They are generated in the interpretant by virtue of the semiotic agent's previous experience of them: having in the past used the sign 'chair' with a chair, this association is memorized and upon future experiences of a chair one is able to retrieve the sign 'chair' from his memory. Since these signs are the exclusive domain of humans, there is something in the person's memory bank that predisposes them towards using these signs. The activation of these signs requires both an interpretant and objects that are particular instantiations of the general term; thus (for example) the general term ('chair') can be applied to an infinite number of particular chairs of all shapes, sizes and colors.

9. Dicent symbolic legisigns are sentences or propositions. From a single sign a series of responses are enacted that combine signs into a whole. This stage can be considered as a preliminary conversation. Propositions in formal language ( $2+2=4$ ) belong to this category and while a proposition might seem context-free, it is always embedded within a linguistic context.

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10. Delome Symbolic Legisigns are arguments whereby one moves from premises to conclusions: ‘an Argument is a sign whose Interpretant represents its Object as being an ulterior sign through a law namely, the law that the passage from all such premises to such conclusions tend to the truth.’ (1992-1998b: 296)

#### **4.0. Pragmatism, knowledge and dialogue.**

Peirce’s ideas on pragmatism (renamed pragmaticism in 1905) are chiefly discussed in ‘The Fixation of Belief’ (1877) and ‘How to Make Our Ideas Clear’ (1878). Although the term pragmatism was coined by Peirce as a way of testing the content of concepts, propositions and hypothesis within science, its range of application was broadened to both logic and philosophy. The idea behind pragmatism was that the investigator of concepts adopts an experimentalist approach, an approach similar to one used by scientists in laboratories.

Pragmaticism forged a link between the understanding of a concept and the consequences of that concept. To understand a concept, to know what it means, entails that it has some observable effect: ‘Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.’ (1992-1998a: 132). This formulation of the pragmatic maxim suggests that if a person can provide all the conditional propositions (if one did A, then one can observe B) related to the concept, then if one

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applies them to the object, one can predict the results or consequences: ‘To say that a body is heavy simply means that, in the absence of opposing force, it will fall....what we mean by the force itself is completely involved in its effects.’ (1992-1998a: 133) For Peirce, the meaning of a concept is nothing but the sum total of possible effects<sup>iv</sup>.

Since the observable effects of a concept constituted the criterion of meaningfulness of a concept, this also implied what counted as meaninglessness: if a concept has no observable consequences, then it is empty or useless. Peirce’s hope was that by adopting the pragmatic maxim, several questions that had seemed irresolvable, could now be eliminated. In one of his examples, Peirce dismisses the religious concept of transubstantiation as meaningless since it can have no conceivable practical effect. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, during mass, the bread and wine literally change into the body and blood of Christ. Since we know what bread and wine are through their qualities (their taste, texture or color) and since these remain the same after the transubstantiation, then how can we say that they are now the body and blood of Christ? In other words, the same qualities are now supposed to belong to a different substance. If, according to the pragmatic criterion, we understand the meaning of a concept according to its conceivable effects, then the concept of transubstantiation has no meaning: ‘We can consequently mean nothing by wine but what has certain effects, direct or indirect, upon our senses; and to talk of something as having all the sensible characters of wine, yet being in reality blood, is senseless jargon.’ (1992-1998a: 131)

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One might disagree with this view by arguing that the doctrine of transubstantiation makes a difference or has an effect upon a person. Such a view is not Peirce's as the pragmatic maxim is not a psychological tool but a conceptual one: it is not a question of what the doctrine of transubstantiation might have for you or me, but a question of whether the doctrine is conceptually tenable or not. And this is why Peirce proposes experience as the counter weight to all those theorists that have relied exclusively on reason: while we might be led to a conclusion through our reason, experience is the 'test' for whether these conclusions are valid or not. 'In all the works on pedagogy that ever I read...I don't remember that any one has advocated a system of teaching by practical jokes, mostly cruel. That, however, describes the method of our great teacher, Experience.' (1992-1998b:154)

Pragmatism is closely connected with truth for it enables us to differentiate those propositions that are true (since the effects support them), from those that are false (since they run counter to the effects). Talisse and Aiken provide an example

...understanding the truth of the proposition *the cat is on the mat* is constituted by an understanding of the practical consequences of the cat being on the mat – a bowl of milk next to the mat will likely be drunk, mice will avoid the mat, one should expect howls of protest if one wipes one's feet on the mat. Truths have consequences, and to understand those truths, we must grasp the differences they make for our experience. (2008: 61)

Aside from the question of how to sort out those concepts that were tenable from those that should be discarded, Peirce was also greatly interested in the method that should be used for the attainment of knowledge both about ourselves, and about the world.<sup>iv</sup> As a point of departure, Peirce clarifies the difference between being in the condition of doubt

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and being in the condition of belief. While the characteristic of belief is that a person is serene, in the condition of doubt a person is dissatisfied. A person in the condition of dissatisfaction attempts to return to the condition of belief.<sup>iv</sup> (1992-1998a: 114) The reason for thinking about something or conducting an inquiry is precisely to remove that doubt. Once a belief is achieved – whether true or not – then the thinking or inquiring ceases. Peirce's approach differs from the Cartesian approach that proposed doubting everything before one can proceed to a state of belief; rather, the opposite is the case, as one always starts with some belief, but should that belief be challenged by the evidence, then the belief should be abandoned or modified accordingly. There are four ways for settling an opinion:

(a) the method of tenacity is the one where a person adamantly holds on to, and defends his/her ideas. It is the method of 'stubbornness' where one clings to one's belief despite evidence to the contrary. Anybody has the right to believe what they want, but an idea must hold favor with the rest of the community for it to be accepted: without their approval or agreement it would always be difficult to establish whether the belief deserves being listened to or dismissed as something personal. This method fails because it is not very useful in solving disputes since one ignores the views of others or the facts; and if they are listened to, one is disturbed to hear contrary views:

The man who adopts it will find that other men think differently from him, and it will be apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own and this will shake his confidence in his belief. (1992-1998a: 116)

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(b) the method of authority. This is similar to the method of ‘tenacity’ but rather than being individually-centered, it is upheld by an institution such as the state or the church:

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. (1992-1998a: 117)

Something is believed because the authorities say so and whoever disagrees with this belief or idea is plainly mistaken. The problem with this method is it assumes that knowledge is completely in the hands of the institutional authorities who monitor the evidence, eliminating anything that threatens the belief. As a result, any individual who comes up with new ideas is seen as threatening to the order of things. This method eventually fails as an institution cannot control everything all of the time.

(c) the ‘a priori’ method. Descartes thought that he had discovered a method that could eliminate all doubt, a method that would guarantee certainty. On his account, the search for knowledge is the work of the solitary individual using his reason. Any conflict of opinion is settled by supporting those beliefs that we find agreeable i.e., that conform to our reason. If the belief fits into our network of beliefs then we tend to agree with it. This method fails because

It makes of inquiry something similar to the development of taste; but taste, unfortunately, is always more or less a matter of fashion, and accordingly metaphysicians have never come to any fixed agreement, but the pendulum has swung backward and forward between a more material and a more spiritual philosophy, from the earliest times to the latest. (1992-1998a: 119)

As a result, beliefs change according to the times. According to Peirce this method overlaps with the previous two: the solitary person promotes what he/she considers knowledge, i.e., the ‘method of tenacity’, and if these beliefs are accepted as founding



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truths, these truths become ‘eternal’ because of the respect gained by the person who founded them, i.e., ‘the method of authority’.

However, despite the overlap Peirce noticed a big difference between the a priori method and the methods of authority and tenacity: since the a priori method is influenced by what is agreeable to reason, the ‘what’ or the content of the beliefs is determined, by what is agreeable at the time. In the case of the methods of tenacity and authority, the content is determined according to the strength or power of the individual or the institution. Strictly speaking, since there is no discussion of the content but a mere exercise of force, the methods of tenacity and authority should not be considered legitimate methods of inquiry.

The problem common to the three methods is that none seem able to offer a way of providing secure belief because in all three it is we who determine what is to be believed or not. As a result, Peirce thought that a better way would be one where our beliefs are fixed by something independent, or larger than us. If our beliefs were not affected by what we thought about them, then it is more likely that they would provide security.

(d) the dialogical method. This is the method proposed by Peirce where knowledge is achieved by members of the scientific community in dialogue with each other. ‘Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a COMMUNITY, without definite limits and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge.’ (1992-1998a: 52) The advantage of Peirce’s method is that it eliminates

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the following unpleasant situations of perseverance of foolish ideas (tenacity), the pretensions of grandiose persons (authority) or the solitary discovery of truth (the Cartesian method).

Within the context of a dialogue, the movement of ideas between participants who might agree, challenge or defend an idea is essential to its justification and subsequent acceptance. While the method of dialogue ensures that an idea or belief is always open to succeeding developments, at that point in time, by virtue of being shared by members of the community, it remains true.

This is not to say that knowledge is constructed by the members or the community irrespective of reality. On the contrary, reality operates independently of anything that a person or a group might think about it,

There are real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those realities affect our senses according to regular laws, and though our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and reason enough about it will be led to the one true conclusion. (1992-1998a:120)

The interesting thing about Peirce's view on reality is that a number of people thinking about it on their own, will – over time – have a convergence of their thinking. Reality, as a zone of experience 'co-ordinates' the reasoning of these persons into a shared belief. It would seem that eventually a final opinion, a true conclusion would be arrived at. Since the pragmatic maxim applies to 'conceivable' practical effects, and since anything can be rationally examined, at some point in time there would be nothing left to examine. In

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addition, the communal aspect of inquiry also plays a part in ensuring that the ‘true conclusion’ is achieved: a group of investigators each contributing their opinions will eventually – in the process of discussion and debate – overcome any mistakes taken. Peirce’s example of the blind and deaf man highlights this communal process, ‘One hears a man declare he means to kill another, hears the report of the pistol, and hears the victim cry; the other sees the murder done.’ (1992-1998a: 89) Eventually, the two men with their different perceptions of what happened will arrive at one conclusion. The scientific method works by following a process where errors are eliminated the final conclusion is reached.

And while the differences of opinion might delay arriving at the final opinion, ultimately, and independently of the persons, the final opinion ‘imposes’ itself: ‘the arbitrary will or other individual peculiarities of a sufficiently large number of minds may postpone the general agreement in that opinion indefinitely; but it cannot affect what the character of that opinion shall be when it is reached.’ (1992-1998a: 89) The innovative aspect of Peirce’s view is the idea that it is the ‘community of inquirers’ dialogically engaged that acquire knowledge. Unlike the model offered by Descartes of the solitary man who searches for knowledge, the Peircean model for the acquisition of knowledge involves communication between members of the community: knowledge acquisition is a collaborative process. This final opinion can be considered the truth.

It should be pointed out that by the ‘final opinion’, Peirce is not suggesting that we are unable to pass a judgment on whether something is true or false until the final opinion is

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reached. Rather, the search for a final opinion functions as a regulative ideal: it is an ideal because should the discussion be continued, eventually, the final opinion would be achieved. But in practice, this does not mean that we must suspend judgment until it is reached for if this were the case, then it would be unlikely that anyone questioned anything since it would seem that they could never get an answer.

On Peirce's view, then, all advanced thinking depends on one's participation in a linguistic or semiotic *community*. Peirce's stress on the importance of community was a common theme throughout his work, and it increased as he came to understand more fully the importance of convention for semiosis. Peirce appealed to a community of inquirers for his theory of truth, and he regarded the *identification with community* as fundamental for the advancement of knowledge (the end of the highest semiosis) and, also, for the advancement of human relations. (1991-1998a: xl)

## **Critical Remarks**

The impact of Peirce cannot be underestimated and his ideas have influenced a wide range of contemporary thinkers - Sebeok, Eco, Derrida, Davidson, Habermas, Kuhn and Popper - to name just a few. Although he has contributed to several fields, such as ethics and religion, his legacy is ensured in the now established field of semiotics, a field that he is acknowledged as one of its founding fathers. The value of semiotics also lies in its range of application so that it contributes to a better understanding of the more traditional disciplines of epistemology, anthropology, literary theory and linguistics. Furthermore, and in relation to semiotics, Peirce will be remembered for introducing pragmatism or, as he preferred to call it, pragmaticism as a method for the clarification of concepts.

Peirce has also been a major influence upon Habermas who has adopted his ideas to buttress his social and political philosophy. In particular, Habermas transforms Peirce's

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concept of the community of inquirers from that of a regulative ideal that legitimizes knowledge to a ground that functions within actual communities enabling free and open debate within democratic societies (in Edgar, 2006: 119-121). However, in his paper 'Peirce and Communication,' (in Ketner Laine, Kenneth, 1995: 243-266) Habermas comments that Peirce neglects the importance of communication between persons because he focuses on the representative function of the sign. Peirce is more interested in the relation between the sign and the world and as a result, Habermas claims that the interpretant replaces the interpreter who has, in a sense, become invisible, with serious consequences for semiotics and ethics. In 'A Response to Habermas' (in Ketner Laine, Kenneth, 1995: 267-271) Oehler defends Peirce arguing that Habermas' critique is formulated along the lines of his theory of communicative rationality whereby reason is manifested in intersubjective communication. But Peirce did not think that language was an adequate medium for the expression of rationality, as is evidenced by his preference for diagrams and graphs to enable understanding.

Peirce's concept of 'unlimited semiosis' has led some to argue that given that everything is a sign and signs in the process of interpretation produce more signs, then signs contain within them the possibility of unlimited interpretations. Eco (1995: 205-222) rejects this interpretation of Peirce arguing that while there is this potential in signs, these signs do not float freely and endlessly but are situated within a context of relevance. This context of relevance or the 'given universe of discourse' sets the limit on what counts as a legitimate interpretation at a given moment: in other words, it is not a question of anything goes since what is being interpreted always takes place within a framework<sup>iv</sup>.

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Eco argues that both interpretations in general and textual interpretation in particular are subject to ‘habit’: according to Peirce’s pragmatism<sup>iv</sup>, habit lies outside the sphere of interpretation since it is a disposition to behave in a certain way towards something. Habit is closely connected to communities that both regulates and are the source of interpretations. So too, textual interpretations are subject to the habits of the community that ‘decides’ which further interpretations of the text are possible.

Finally, Sebeok’s paper on Peirce entitled ‘Indexicality’ (in Ketner Laine, Kenneth, 1995: 222-242) demonstrates why Peirce rightly considered the index as the most important of type of sign. It is the sign that is used in a large number of disciplines not usually associated with semiology such as biology and ornithology. However, the more important point is that the indexical sign always reminds us of a specific and relevant context. As Sebeok points out these contexts include the features that identify a person as a member of a group, a region, a social situation or an occupation; they can point to a person’s personality, psychology or physiology.

In this chapter I have given a broad overview of Peirce’s writings focusing chiefly on his theory of signs. The first section (a) shows the mathematical and phenomenological basis of his theory of signs, (b) followed by a detailed account of the nature of signs. The next section (c) develops Peirce’s account of combinations of signs and with the final section (d) examining his views on pragmatism and knowledge.

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Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (1978: 100-101)

## **Foucault on Discourse and Power**

Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) writings present a challenge to the way western civilisation has constructed its own identity, an identity that is heir to the values of the Enlightenment. The values of reason, progress and knowledge have been accepted unquestioningly as signs of the maturity of the west so it is no surprise that Foucault's challenge of these foundational values has disturbed many.

Foucault's writings are divided into three phases: the first is commonly known as the archaeological period and the texts include *The Order of Things* (1970) and *Madness and Civilisation* (1993). These are philosophical-historical analyses of the conditions that can account for the emergence of knowledge and madness in western civilisation. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) also belongs to the early Foucault, but unlike his other texts it is not an analysis of any historical phenomena but is a methodological text explaining the concepts that he used in his early writings. The genealogical phase reveals a change of emphasis in Foucault's writings with an increasing awareness of the relationship between power and knowledge in the formation of carceral institutions and in the study of sexuality. The texts included in this phase are *Discipline and Punish* (1991) and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. (1978). In the later writings, Foucault once again

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shifts the direction of his thinking towards the subject or agency and the texts here include *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2* and *Vol. 3*.

It should be pointed out that when Foucault discusses the historical emergence of discourse in the archaeological and the genealogical writings, the time frames he adopts for historical periodization differ from those customarily used within the English speaking world. The historical periods or epistemes that constitute the object of Foucault's attention are those of the Renaissance (1450-1640), the Classical world (1650-1800) and the Modern world (1800-1960).

While his writings have produced a number of theses on the interconnectedness between subjectivity, knowledge and power in modern society, my interest is that of showing the way power communicates through discourse. In this chapter I shall be (a) first elaborating the concept of discourse, followed by (b) an overview of Foucault's archaeology of knowledge and (c) his genealogical analysis of prisons and sexuality; I will finally (d) show the way Foucault's theses on discipline and surveillance are being utilized as a platform for the critique of contemporary social practices.

## **1.0. A Theory of Discourse**

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault presents a theoretical account of his earlier writings such as *Madness and Civilisation* and *The Order of Things*, offering an explanation of the conceptual tools - discourse, episteme and archive – that he had



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employed in these analyses. In this text Foucault both explains what his archaeological method involves and provides a detailed analysis of the concept of discourse. However, the concept of the episteme - that had been central to the earlier writings - is sidelined.

Discourse is defined as ‘the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements...’ (1972: 80) What this definition highlights is the idea that statements are produced within institutions and that these institutions operate according to certain rules that permit some statements and forbid others. These are transcendental in the sense that they are the conditions that make knowledge possible. Clearly a discourse should not be confused either with a way of using language or as an analysis of conversations; it is used by Foucault to define an area of social knowledge constituted by a regulated body of statements. This is why within a particular historical period it is possible to think and communicate in a certain way about an area of knowledge (madness or punishment). However one should not be misled into thinking that there is a uniformity in a domain: the discourse of madness in the nineteenth century differed both from those of other centuries, and within the same period: other institutional sites constructed a different object that was called madness:

the object presented as their correlative by medical statements of the seventeenth or eighteenth century is not identical with the object that emerges in legal sentences or police action; similarly, all the objects of psychopathological discourses were modified from Pinel or Esquirol to Bleuler...One might, perhaps one should conclude from this multiplicity of objects that it is not possible to accept, as a valid unity forming a group of statements, a ‘discourse concerning madness’. (1972: 32)<sup>iv</sup>

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Given that statements are essential to the concept of discourse, Foucault describes the nature of the statement by contrasting it with,

(a) propositions: a proposition is the basic unit of analysis that logicians focus upon. In the study of propositions the content of a proposition is considered as remaining the same throughout different usages; in addition, a proposition depends on truth conditions independently of other propositions. A statement, on the other hand, is dependent on other statements within a conceptual framework for its truth conditions: it belongs to a network of other statements. Foucault offers this example to differentiate the proposition from the statement:

‘No one heard’ and ‘it is true that no one heard’ are indistinguishable from a logical point of view, and cannot be regarded as two different propositions. But in so many statements, these two formations are not equivalent or interchangeable...If one finds the formulation ‘No one heard’ in the first line of a novel, we know, until a new order emerges, that it is an observation made either by the author, or by a character (aloud or in the form of an interior monologue); a silent discussion with oneself, or a fragment of a dialogue a group of questions and answers. In each case, there is the same propositional structure, but there are distinct enunciative characteristics. (1972: 81)

While a proposition as a declarative utterance represents or describes states of affairs as true or false, a statement does things, producing certain effects. Statements are analysed from the point of view of its functioning. So as to highlight their function or effect in the world he introduces the term ‘statement-event’.

(b) sentences: a sentence is typically analysed by linguists from the point of view of its syntax, of the ordering of units with the sentence. A statement can also have an order or sequence to it but need not be a sentence: it is possible to order words into a certain

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sequence such that although it would not count as a sentence it would still count as a statement,

When one finds in a Latin grammar a series of words arranged in a column: *amo, amas amat*, one is dealing not with a sentence, but with the statement of the different personal inflexions of the present indicative of the verb *amare*... a classificatory table of the botanical species is made up of statements, not sentences (Linnaeus's *Genera Plantarum* is a whole book of statements, in which one can recognise only a small number of sentences); a genealogical tree, an accounts book, the calculations of a trade balance are statements...an equation of the *n*th degree, or the algebraic formula of the law of refraction must be regarded as statements...lastly, a graph, a growth curve, an age pyramid, a distribution cloud are all sentences: any sentences that may accompany them are merely interpretation or commentary. (1972: 82)

From the aforementioned examples, it is evident that statements are not necessarily linguistic. Foucault's analysis of the statements takes place in terms of their functions both at a semiological level and at the level of the relations between statements within a discourse.

(c) speech acts: although there is an overlap between the statement and speech act since they both produce effects, they are not identical. Speech act theory as proposed by Austin (chapter 7) and Searle (chapter 9) offers an analysis of the speech acts of everyday life (promising, commanding) in terms of their success. However, while a successful speech act usually consists of a number of statements, for Foucault, a statement can be analysed individually in terms of its effects and is situated within a certain historical period. McHoul and Grace offer an excellent example to highlight the difference between speech acts and statements,

Can we say, for instance, that there is equivalence between 'I promise' (when it is said as a proposal of marriage within the *discourse* of medieval romance) and 'I promise' (when it is said as an agreement to meet for lunch)? Perhaps these are equivalent speech acts (strictly, they are both 'commissives'), but each is a different statement. The two statements occur in totally different social 'technologies' and historically formed discursive practices. Each, if successful produces distinct individual human subjects: lovers and lunchers; each, again if successful, (re)creates and maintains political institutions ad different as love and lunch! (1993:38)

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The statement, in sum, is not a stable entity since it depends upon the (varying) conditions of its production within a discourse and which can be put to various uses (from statistics to a literature). McHoul and Grace sum up Foucault's description of the statement as (a) a functional unit; (b) belonging to the domain of knowledge and (c) one of the techniques that institutions use to produce subjects. (1995: 37-38)

Given the centrality of discourse in the acquisition of knowledge the question that Foucault must examine concerns the origin or cause of a discourse. A popular view in the 'history of ideas' is that a particular person, a genius (Darwin or Einstein) is the originator of a discourse. The assumption underlying the 'history of ideas' is that there is a continuity between the great minds of the past who have communicated their ideas successively to each other, culminating in the present. This view implies that the present period – as the culmination of ideas – is superior to the past. Studies in the 'history of ideas' focus on the causes of these ideas, on what led to the originality or creativity of the author. But, paradoxically, as Foucault points out, by focussing on the background causes that conditioned the author, the value and the centrality of the author as the original creator is displaced. Foucault's analysis is critical of the assumptions underlying the history of ideas and this critique is directed at a cluster of concepts that serve to bolster the assumptions of continuity:

(a) the concepts of tradition, influence, development and evolution and spirit. The concept of tradition ensures that the continuity in history can be traced back to certain

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origins – the founding genius – so that what is new and different now leads back to this origin, in effect revealing it to be more of the same, ‘tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals.’ (1972: 21). The concept of influence also explains discourse as a repetition of something previously said where by virtue of causal processes an author is influenced by another across time. The concepts of development and evolution serve to give a unity to a number of discourses: they serve ‘to discover, already at work in each beginning, a principle of coherence and the outline of a future unity, to master through a perpetually reversible relation between an origin and a term that are never given, but are always at work (1972: 21-22). The concept of ‘spirit’ enables a number of discourses to be gathered under the ‘sovereignty of a collective consciousness [and] to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation.’ (1972: 22).

(b) the concept of the genre: genres – of philosophy, science and literature are constructed – within a certain historical period, but can they be applied to past discourses?

after all, ‘literature’ and ‘politics’ are recent categories, which can be applied to medieval culture, or even classical culture, only by a retrospective hypothesis...but neither, literature, nor politics, not philosophy and the sciences articulated the field of discourse, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, as they did in the nineteenth century. (1972: 22)

(c) the book and the oeuvre. The problem with the book is that it is a false unity: would we consider the text of a trial, a novel, a work within the collected writings of an author in the same way? And what is the relationship between two books by different authors and two books by the same author, but constituting a series? On Foucault’s account, a

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book belongs to a network of books that are interrelated to each other; the category of the book as an independent entity is an effect of a particular discourse: 'the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.' (1972: 23) In the case of the *oeuvre* or the complete works of the author, the problem is accentuated in that it is difficult to justify what to place and what to exclude in the *oeuvre*: are the private letters of the author part of the *oeuvre*? The unpublished notes? Those works published under a pseudonym? And what about the works that the author him/herself rejects?

such a unity [the *oeuvre*] far from being given immediately, is the result of an operation; that this operation is interpretative...and that the operation that determines the *opus*, in its unity, and consequently the *oeuvre* itself, will not be the same in the case of the author of *Le Théâtre et son Double* (Artaud) and the author of the *Tractatus* (Wittgenstein, and therefore when one speaks of an *oeuvre* in each case one is using the word in a different sense. (1972: 24)

(d) Marxist or hermeneutic explanations of discourse. These explanations posit an underlying origin that is cause of the discourse: for Marxists, it is the material conditions of the sub-structure that explain the surface or apparent statements of the discourse; for hermeneutic theorists, the text has a secret meaning that needs to be decoded. The problem with the search for origins is that the origins can always be displaced to another further origin. The archaeologist is not interested in either psychological or sociological explanations of ideas. For Foucault, the statements of a discourse are what they are – material manifestations that do not necessitate looking 'behind' them or an act of interpretation. 'Discourse must not be referred to the distant presence of the origin, but treated as and when it occurs.' (1972: 25)

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The analysis of discourse that Foucault proposes is radical in that does not focus on what the writers – scientists, historians, philosophers - are saying but on the rules that make their discourse possible. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault offers a detailed theoretical elaboration of the rules that govern the production of statements and the role they play in the formation of discourse.

In his early descriptions of discourse, Foucault adheres to the constructivist view where discourses create or construct their objects rather than mirroring a pre-existing reality. His goal is to ‘substitute for the enigmatic treasure of ‘things’ anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these *objects* without reference to the *ground*, the *foundation of things*, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance.’ (1972: 47-48) This construction takes place at a particular moment and the analysis of their rules describes the conditions of their historical importance. It is not a question of who is saying something, but a question of what it is possible to say in accordance with certain rules. These rules concern:

(a) the formation of objects: the question Foucault tackles concerns the way an object such as madness comes into being. Its emergence is the result of :

(a.i) mapping out of the ‘*surfaces* of their *emergence*’: to show how objects become identified it is necessary to

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show where these individual differences, which, according to the degrees of rationalisation, conceptual codes, and types of theory, will be accorded the status of disease, alienation, anomaly, dementia, neurosis or psychosis, degeneration, etc., may emerge, and then be designated and analysed.<sup>iv</sup> (1972: 41)

(a.ii) a practice of ‘delimitation’ where the authorities regulate and police which objects belong to which discipline:

[I]n the nineteenth century, medicine (as an institution possessing its own rules, as a group of individuals constituting the medical profession, as a body of knowledge and practice, as an authority recognized by public opinion, the law, and government) became the major authority in society that delimited, designated, named, and established madness as an object...(1972: 42)

(a.iii) an analysis of the ‘*grids of specification*’: objects are classified according to properties or symptoms: ‘these are the systems according to which the different ‘kinds of madness’ are divided, contrasted, related, regrouped, classified, derived from one another as objects of psychiatric discourse...’(1972: 42)

(b) the modalities of enunciation: Foucault describes the process whereby statements are not produced by subjects or persons working independently of each other. Rather, the subject is immersed in a network of discourses<sup>iv</sup>. These are:

(b.i) the right to speak: what is it that gives certain persons the right to speak and have their discourse legitimised?

[w]hat is the status of the individuals who – alone – have the right, sanctioned by law or tradition, juridically defined or spontaneously accepted, to proffer such a discourse? The status of doctor involves criteria of competence and knowledge; institutions, systems, pedagogic norms; legal conditions that give the right – though not without laying down certain limitations – so practise and to extend one’s knowledge. (1972: 50).



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(b.ii) the institution: the institution as the location or space from which statements are produced:

[we] must also describe the institutional *sites* from which the doctor makes his discourse, and from which this discourse derives its legitimate source and point of application (its specific objects and instruments of verification). In our societies, these sites are: the hospital...the laboratory...the 'library' or documentary field... (1972: 51)

(b.iii) the relation between the subject and the object: the subject can occupy various positions in relation to different objects and domains<sup>iv</sup>. Foucault offers an example,

The various situations that the subject of medical discourse may occupy were redefined at the beginning of the nineteenth century with the organisation of a quite different perceptual field (arranged in depth, manifested by successive recourse to instruments, deployed by surgical techniques or methods of autopsy, centred upon lesional sites), and with the establishment of new systems of registration, notation, description, classification, integration in numerical series and in statistics, with the introduction of new forms of teaching, the circulation of information, relations with other theoretical domains (sciences or philosophy) and with other institutions (whether administrative, political, or economic). (1972: 52-53)

(c) the production of concepts. In his analysis of the way concepts are developed within a discursive field, Foucault's interest is directed at

(c.i) the 'forms of *succession*': Foucault includes two ways in which concepts are organised, '*the orderings of enunciative series*' and the '*types of dependence* of the statements'. The former establishes both the rules between statements, so that inferences, implications and demonstrative reasonings are established in a certain way and the way statements are described sequentially; the latter examines the relationship between statements such as, 'the dependences of hypothesis/verification, assertion/critique, general law/particular application; the various rhetorical schemata according to which groups of statements may be combined, (how descriptions, deductions, definitions, whose

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succession characterises the architecture of a text, are linked together)' (1972: 56-7).

Foucault offers a helpful example of his point:

Take for example, the case of Natural History in the Classical period: it does not use the same concepts as in the sixteenth century; certain of the older concepts (genus, species, signs) are used in different ways; new concepts (like that of structure) appear; and others (like that of organism) are formed later, but what was altered in the seventeenth century, and was to govern the appearance and recurrence of concepts, for the whole of Natural History, was the general arrangement of the statements, their successive arrangement in particular wholes; it was the way in which one wrote down what one observed and, by means of a series of statements, recreated a perceptual process; it was the relation and interplay of subordinations between describing, articulating into distinctive features, characterizing, and classifying; it was the reciprocal position of particular observations and general principles; it was the system of dependence between what one learnt, what one saw, what one deduced, what one accepted as probably and what one postulated.' (1972: 57)

(c.ii) the forms of 'coexistence': these forms include the '*field of presence*', the '*field of concomitance*' and the '*field of memory*'.

The field of presence describes the way some statements belong to or are excluded from a discourse:

it is easy to see that the field of presence of Natural History in the Classical period does not obey the same forms, or the same criteria of choice, or the same principles of exclusion, as in the period when Aldrovandi was collecting in one and the same text everything that had been seen, observed, recounted, passed on innumerable times by word of mouth, and even imagined by the poets, on the subject of monsters. (1972: 58)

The field of concomitance describes those statements that are not part of a discourse but still active:

the field of concomitance of the Natural History of the period of Linnaeus and Buffon is defined by a number of relations with cosmology, the history of the earth, philosophy, theology, scripture and biblical exegesis, mathematics (in the very general form of a science of order); and all these relations distinguish it from both the discourse of the sixteenth-naturalists and that of nineteenth-century biologists. (1972: 58)

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The field of memory concerns those statements that are no longer part of the accepted discourse but that still have a connection through ‘filiation’, ‘geneis’, ‘transformation’ ‘continuity’ and ‘historical discontinuity’ with a particular discourse:

the field of memory of Natural History, since Tournefort, seems particularly restricted and impoverished in its forms when compared with the broad, cumulative and very specific field of memory possessed by nineteenth- and twentieth-century biology; on the other hand, it seems much better defined and better articulated than the field of memory surrounding the history of plants and animals in the Renaissance: for at that time it could scarcely be distinguished from the field of presence; they had the same extension and the same form, and involved the same relations. (1972: 58)

(c.iii) the ‘*procedures of intervention*’: as these procedures are not the same for all discursive formations. It is possible to identify specific formations through the links and unities established between them. Foucault (1972: 58-59) specifies these interventions:

--- the ‘*techniques of rewriting*’: there is a procedure that allows for the rewriting of data from one period (lists and groups) to another in another form (tables of classification).

--- the ‘*methods of transcribing*’ statements so that statements of a natural language are transcribed into a more formal one.

--- ‘the *modes of translating*’: here quantitative statements are translated into qualitative formulations (and vice-versa) so that, for example, statements of perceptual data can be translated into descriptive accounts.

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--- ‘the means used to increase the *approximation* of statements and to refine their exactitude’: by using form, number, arrangement and size of the elements, it became possible to produce a degree of constancy in descriptive statements.

--- ‘the way in which one *delimits* once again’: one intervenes in a discourse either by extending or by restricting the domain of what counts as the validity of statements.

--- ‘the way in which one *transfers* a type of statement from one field of application to another’: in this case, for example, the characteristics used to describe vegetal life are transferred to the animal world.

--- ‘the methods of *systemizing* propositions’: Foucault writes that this procedure has two possibilities; the first is of those propositions that already exist in a separate state but are utilized in a new way and the second consist of those statements that are already part of a discursive formation but re-arranged to form a new whole.

(d) the formation of strategies refers to the way a theory or a theme emerges within a discourse. This depends upon

(d.i) the ‘*points of diffraction*’: these follow a certain sequence. First, as ‘*points of incompatibility*’ opposite objects, concepts or utterances that do not belong to the same discursive formation appear within the same discourse; then, they are established ‘*as points of equivalence*’ as alternatives to the either-or opposition despite being

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chronologically different, or of unequal importance. Finally, they are organised into '*link points of systemization*' so that they come to constitute 'discursive sub-groups' within the total discourse.

...the Analysis of Wealth, in the eighteenth century, was the result (by way of simultaneous composition or chronological succession) of several different conceptions of coinage, of the exchange of objects of need, of the formation of value and prices, or of ground rent; one does not consider that it is made up of the ideas of Cantillon, taking up from those of Petty, of Law's experience reflected by various theoreticians in turn, and of the Physiocratic system opposing Utilitarian conceptions. One describes it rather as a unity of distribution that opens a field of possible options, and enables various mutually exclusive architectures to appear side by side or in turn. (1972: 66)

(d.ii) the '*economy of the discursive constellation*': out of the several possibilities that are available, not all have materialised. For certain objects or concepts to become prominent, a number of choices by the relevant authorities need to be made and this entails seeing other contemporary or relevant discourses.

A discursive formation does not occupy therefore all the possible volume that is opened up to it of right by the systems of formation of its objects, its enunciations, and its concepts; it is essentially incomplete, owing to the system of formation of its strategic choices....we are not dealing with a silent content that has remained implicit, that has been said and yet not said, and which constitutes beneath manifest statements a sort of sub-discourse that is more fundamental, and which is now emerging at last into the light of day; what we are dealing with is a modification in the principle of exclusion and the principle of the possibility of choices; a modification that is due to an insertion in a new discursive constellation. (1972: 67)

(d.iii) the role of the authorities: first, when a discourse is being studied, what is taken into consideration by the authorities is its function in relation to '*a field of non-discursive practices*'. Thus, for example, General Grammar played an important role in pedagogy as did politics in the Analysis of Wealth; there is also what Foucault calls '*rules and processes of application*' where choices can only be taken by certain individuals or groups with the right to speak; '*the possible positions of desire in relation to discourse*' describes the relation of desires of authority to a discourse: usually this relation is

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considered are rightly belonging to fiction or poetry, but Foucault claims that ‘the discourse on wealth, on language (langage), on nature, on madness, on life and death, and many others, perhaps that are much more abstract, may occupy very specific position in relation to desire.’<sup>iv</sup> (1972: 68)

The corpus of texts or other materials that the archaeologist works with is found in what is customarily called the archive. Usually, the value of the archive is that of providing the texts and materials that enable historians to examine their content, to see what they have to say. This is not Foucault’s concept of the archive: rather, he considers it to be the repository of those conditions that made it possible for something to be said. From an archaeological analysis of the statements found in the archive it is possible to uncover the rules that make knowledge within a period possible:

By this term I do not mean the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity....The archive is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events. (1972: 128-129)

The consequence of Foucault’s analysis of the archive is that it reveals both the transitory and (relatively) unstable way in which the statements that constitute knowledge at a particular point in time are produced and, furthermore the way these statements are transformed into new ones (1972: 130). The archive situates what can be known between the continuum of the momentary and the enduring: it does not change every other day, but neither does it last forever.

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While Foucault had explained in detail the way the rules functioned to produce the statements within a discourse, he still had to explain the way a discourse was controlled and regulated. An analysis of the relationship between discourse and power still needed to be undertaken, and in ‘L’ordre du discours’, somehow translated as ‘The Discourse on Language’ Foucault writes, ‘In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures...’ (1972: 216) There are both external and internal procedures for the control of discourse.

The external procedures involve:

(a) an exclusion that is topically oriented: certain discourses are permitted while others are forbidden; at the time of writing Foucault claimed that the areas in which freedom of discourse was prohibited were those of politics and sexuality.

(b) an exclusion based on ‘division and rejection’: a discourse is classified according to the criteria of rationality, so that statements are judged according to whether they are reasonable or unreasonable. Foucault demonstrated this in the *History of Madness and Civilisation*, where discourses were structured according to the division of the sane and the insane; as a result, the utterances of the insane were immediately disqualified.

(c) an exclusion based on the exclusion of the false: Foucault characterises contemporary discourse as dominated by the will to truth. The will to truth – as propositional – is the

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acknowledged mode of cognition and is supported by institutional mechanisms: ‘...it is both reinforced and accompanied by a whole strata of practices such as pedagogy – naturally – the book-system, publishing, libraries, such as the learned societies in the past, and laboratories today.’ (1972: 219) The function of the institutions in modern society is that of perpetuating and circulating true statements while eliminating false ones.

The internal procedures for the control of discourse:

(a) those of the commentary: a commentary is a series of statements about the statements of other texts. According to Foucault, they bring out what is already in the text, but that has not yet been said: ‘[i]t must – and the paradox is ever-changing yet inescapable – say, for the first time, what has already been said, and repeat tirelessly what was, nevertheless, never said.’ (1972: 221) The importance of the commentary is not only that by commenting on a text it remains in circulation, but that the author of the commentary acquires a privileged position since he is able to say what the author struggled to say, or said unclearly.

(b) those of the author: the function of the author is to provide a principle of organisation over disparate texts so that a unity is established. In this way, if a number of texts are produced by the same author over a period of time, and if these texts are very different from each other, their diversity is nullified and subsumed under the name of the author. In contemporary society, the author is a privileged figure on account of the legal status



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and rights endowed upon him/her; but these rights have been historically acquired, coinciding with the emergence of capitalism; in the Middle Ages, for example, literature was enjoyed without the need to establish the identity of the author.<sup>iv</sup>

(c) those established by the discipline: each discipline or subject places boundaries or limits as to what counts as knowledge within that discipline; each subject has certain rules and procedures that allow for the production of new statements. The difference between linguistics and philosophy can be described as the difference between what practitioners in each consider as belonging to their discipline. One of the goals of academic journals and magazines is that of policing their domains. As a result of policing what counts as the knowledge of the subject, other ‘threatening’ knowledge is excluded. ‘Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules.’ (1972: 224)

There are a further cluster of rules that form the third mechanism for the control of discourse:

(a) the ‘rarefaction among speaking subjects’: not everybody is entitled to speak on every subject and only those speakers who are qualified can participate in a discourse. Only those who have been vested with the authority to speak are entitled to do so: this is the domain of specialists. It is the educational system that transforms persons into professional giving them the ‘right’ to talk about certain things.

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(b) rituals: participating in a discourse entails adhering to conventions. Rituals dictate the qualifications that the person must hold to be part of the discourse, the behaviour that is appropriate and the language used within the discourse. 'Religious discourse, juridical and therapeutic as well as, in some ways, political discourse are all barely dissociable from the functioning of a ritual that determines the individual properties and agreed roles of the speakers.' (1972: 225)

(c) the 'fellowship of discourse': the fellowship of discourse refers to those communities that tightly control the preservation and reproduction of discourse, ensuring that the possession of the discourse remains within the community. Within a fellowship, the role of the speaker and the listener are not on a par.

(d) 'doctrinal groups': a doctrinal group differs from a fellowship of discourse in that a doctrine is a sign that its holders belong to a particular class, status (social or racial), national identity, etc. 'Doctrine links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others. Doctrine effects a dual subjection, that of speaking subjects to discourse, and that of discourse to the group, at least virtually, of speakers.' (1972: 226)

(e) 'social appropriation': persons acquire a discourse through the education system. But while in principle, the educational system is open to all, it still operates within a social-

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political framework: ‘...we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. ’ (1972: 227)

There are some far reaching and interesting implications of Foucault’s analysis of discourse. Mills (2003: 71-72) describes the way nineteenth century European botanists travelled to non-European countries with the classification of plant life that was devised by Linnaeus. When they discovered new plants, they fitted their discoveries to the classification of Linnaeus that they were familiar with. It was not considered important that the local people classified plants differently (in terms of their medicinal use, food value, or ritualistic value). It could be said that the local knowledge was colonised by the European botanists who renamed the plants according to the Latin names of the Linnaeus’ system, coupled with the name of the person who discovered them. This supports the argument that the European quest for knowledge has never been a neutral project but is tainted by political expediency. The discursive formations constructed by western botanists had far-reaching political effects for they furthered the cause of colonisation.

## **2.0. Archaeological Analysis 1: the discourse of madness**

In his early writings, Foucault focused his attention on the way knowledge is produced during different stages of western civilisation. The concepts of episteme and discourse are utilized as the theoretical tools with which he conducts his analysis. I have already

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described in detail his concept of discourse and in this section, I will describe his concept of episteme as it is applied in *Madness and Civilisation* and *The Order of Things*.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes an episteme as

the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possible formalised systems...The episteme is not a form of knowledge or type of rationality which, crossing the boundaries of the most varied sciences, manifests the sovereign unity of a subject, a spirit, or a period; it is the totality of relations that can be discovered for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities. (1972: 191)

Within an episteme, a various number of discourses circulate and achieve the status of knowledge on account of their adherence to the underlying rules of a particular episteme; they constitute both what counts as knowledge as well as the limits of that knowledge.

However, what Foucault's analysis strikingly shows us is that although disciplines within a specific period might be different, at the level of the rules there is a striking similarity. Different discourses are conditioned by the same underlying rules operating 'behind' the backs of their authors and each episteme has its own specific rules for the formation of discourses. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault brings out these similarities between natural history, economics, and linguistics:

what was common to the natural history, the economics and the grammar of the Classical Period was certainly not present to the consciousness of the scientist; or that part of it that was conscious was superficial, limited and almost fanciful, (Adanson, for example, wished to draw up an artificial denomination for plants; Turgot compared coinage with language); but unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists and grammarians, employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories. (1970: xi)

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What the analysis of the Classical Period shows is that scientists from different disciplines shared certain assumptions about the world (that it existed out there ‘waiting’ to be mapped) and about what counted as knowledge of the world. These operational assumptions conditioned the scientists without them being aware of it; as a result, we find knowledge in the Classical Period consisting of tables and lists of classifications. By way of contrast, in today’s world, to know the nature of something does not require the search for large quantities of data that is then organised into lists and grids.

In *Madness and Civilisation* Foucault examined the way western culture came to terms with the experience of madness. In this early writing, he still used the terminology of ‘experience’, a term that he replaced in his other writings with the much less subjective ‘episteme’. The analysis of madness focuses on the Renaissance, the Classical Age and the Modern Age so as to trace the different ways that madness was understood and spoken about. The result of this analysis reveals: (a) the emergence of two different categories of thought: the Renaissance distinction between reason and unreason and the Classical distinction between reason and madness, the latter distinction giving rise to the disciplines of psychiatry and psychology; and (b) the demise of the houses of confinement and the birth of the asylum in the eighteenth century.

The Renaissance understood madness as a particular kind of wisdom and strictly speaking it was not called madness but ‘unreason’. It was still conceptualised in relation to reason constituting an interrelationship rather than an opposition. However, the Renaissance also displayed an ambivalent relation to madness as depicted by the Ship of

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Fools with the mad sailing across the canals of Europe (1993:8). The Ship of Fools symbolized, on the one hand, madness expelled from the cities, from reason, but, on the other hand, they – as unreason - were still free to navigate from city to city. No attempt was made either to confine or eliminate them and at times, they were even allowed to enter different towns. The dialogue between reason and unreason was maintained but kept at a distance. Within the framework of Renaissance thinking, the mad were considered as having certain insights into life, into the truths of human existence that were unattainable from a rational perspective. The mad were privileged in that they had access to a different world of meaning, a world that revealed the absurdity of reason. With this mind-set, madness was not considered a disease or an illness and, at this stage, Foucault argues that reason and unreason were still in dialogue, a dialogue that would end with the opposition of reason to madness.

The break occurs in the Classical Age which ‘was to reduce to silence the madness whose voices the Renaissance had just liberated, but whose violence it had already tamed.’ (1993: 38) During the seventeenth century, an assorted number of people – the poor, the sick, the mad, the promiscuous, rebellious children, irresponsible parents – were locked up in the empty leper houses that dotted the countryside of Europe. These houses had originally been built in the Middle Ages when leprosy had posed a problem for public health. Once leprosy had been contained, the leper houses were disused and remained empty; however, and crucially, the way of thinking that excluded those who posed a danger remained (1993: 3). This exclusivist way of thinking resurged with the creation of the houses of confinement from 1656 onwards where the aforementioned individuals

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were obliged to work. Although there was a strong economic incentive to the practice of confinement - since it prevented these people from committing crimes in times of unemployment, while at the same time providing a cheap source of labour in times of employment - Foucault argues that the underlying motive was a moral one (1993: 57). Through the discipline of labour the moral reform of these individuals would take place since forced labour induced a sense of responsibility. The problem was that the mad were unable to follow the work routines; they disrupted the patterns of work within the houses of confinement and this eventually led to special routines being devised for them. The mad were beginning to be identified as a different category from the rest on account of the spectacle they offered through their madness.

Foucault rejects the view that the mad were confined on scientific grounds. Their confinement was justified morally according to this pattern: (a) madness belonged to the category of unreason; (b) it was therefore opposed to reason; (c) it involved a moral choice of unreason over reason; (d) it needed control and administration i.e., it could not be let along, unchecked; (e) it was a form of ‘animality’, a space beyond reason and humanity (1993: 71-78). Given their animal nature, human methods could not work upon the mad, so the only solution left was that of disciplining them; the mad could not be treated either by medicine nor guided by morality.

Apart from the exclusion of the mad on moral grounds, Foucault’s study of madness also takes into consideration the cognitive understanding of madness in the Classical Age. It is not only from the perspective of the practices enacted - as specified in the manuals and

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records of the period - that Foucault's reading operates, but also from the perspective of the theorisation of madness as conducted by philosophers and scientists. They argued that since madness was a deviation from the norm of reason, it was therefore something that reason and science could know. It was recognized as a negative form of knowledge, as unreason. The important point is that for the Classical Age, as an illness, madness still constituted a form of knowledge and attempts were made to identify its varieties with the tables and charts common to this period. The problem the thinkers of this age had to contend with was that, on the one hand, the acquisition of knowledge was that of positive things i.e., to know meant that one could identify and tabulate rationally the object of one's knowledge, but on the other hand, madness constituted a negation of reason, a knowledge that was beyond knowledge. This problem was never resolved by Classical thinkers.

Despite their differences, both the moral assessment and the cognitive considerations of madness shared a common underlying basis that justified the exclusion of the mad. They negated the very reason that the Classical Age upheld. There was therefore no place for madness within the structures of Classical thinking so that the only remaining solution was to exclude them: as a result, the mad remained alone in the houses of confinement.

Despite being segregated from the rest of society, the houses of confinement created a new social problem. The inhabitants living close to them complained to the authorities that they were at risk to illness (1993: 202). The inhabitants remembered that lepers used to be confined in these houses and this generated a fear of contamination. The mad were



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slowly being identified with illness and it was at this stage that the doctor entered the scene, not to help the mad, but to protect the local inhabitants. In effect, madness became medicalized.

In 1793, Pinel liberated the mad from the chains of their confinement and instead created the asylum as the space for the humane treatment of the mad (1993: 243). Pinel in France and Tuke in York are considered the forerunners of Modern Age psychology and psychiatry, for they replaced the system of physical restraint with a system of controls, routines, rewards and punishments, ‘Tuke created an asylum where he substituted for the free terror of madness the stifling anguish of responsibility...’ (1993: 247) Tuke and Pinel considered their practices scientific for the mad were placed in a system of observation where their actions were constantly observed and scrutinised<sup>iv</sup>.

The space of the asylum created a relation between the guards and the patients and this would later develop into the relation between the psychiatrist and the patient. Through the practice of assessing and writing reports on the patients, the asylum was transformed into a medical space. But, Foucault points out, while the entry of the doctor seems to have marked the entry of science into the asylum, the ability to cure was not grounded in medical knowledge but upon on the moral authority of the doctor, who ruled the asylum as a miniature bourgeois society. The asylum was the space

in which were symbolized the massive structure of bourgeois and its values: Family-Child relations, centred on the theme of paternal authority; Transgression-Punishment relations, centred on the theme of immediate justice; Madness-Disorder relations, centred on the theme of social and moral order. It is from these that the physician derived his power to cure... (1993: 274)

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It was the doctor who imposed a regime on the mad using the standard of bourgeois morality which the mad deviated from and to which they must return. Ironically, the fathers of Modern psychiatry admitted that their work was morally inspired: in their respective practices – Tuke used farm work and Pinel used the new asylum - they deployed systems that would ensure the internalization of fear and guilt. The valorisation of science was merely a mask for their moral activities, ‘what we call psychiatric practice is a certain moral tactic contemporary with the end of the eighteenth century, preserved in the rites of asylum life, and overlaid with the myths of positivism.’ (1993: 276).

Foucault is critical of the commonplace view that the Modern Age brought about an improvement in the lives of the mad. The difference between the Modern Age and the Classical Age is that although the mad were physically imprisoned in the Classical Age, they were free to think whatever they liked. The new ‘advanced’ techniques of the Modern Age placed the mind of the insane under observation: they were not free to think whatever they liked because it was their consciousness, their thoughts that were subjected to therapy.

In *Madness and Civilisation* Foucault traces the emergence of madness from the earlier distinction between reason and unreason to its subsequent transformation into a science that is concerned with individual pathology. It is a central part of his argument that the emergence of this specific view of the mad could only take place within the modern episteme in the interplay of both discursive and non-discursive practices.

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### 3.0. Archaeological Analysis 2: the discourses of the sciences.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault shifts his attention to the historical conditions that enabled man to become both the object (the known) and subject of knowledge (the knower). The concepts of the episteme and of discourse continue to play an important role and his analysis is broadened to cover three discourses within an episteme. While the discourses have changed, the epistemes that frame these discourses have remained the same: the Renaissance, the Classical and the Modern.

Towards the beginning of *The Order of Things*, Foucault quotes a short story of Borges who tells of a 'Chinese encyclopaedia' where the 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel-hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.' (1970: xv) The point that this system of classification brings home is that there are different ways of ordering the world, different ways of including and excluding data. Given that there are different ways of classifying the world, what does this say about the way western civilisation has ordered the world, about the assumptions used in its system of classification? In *The Order of Things*, Foucault answers this question by offering an historical account of the way these systems of classification developed.

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While western science has favoured the disciplines - such as mathematics and physics - that deal with necessary truths, it has tended to look down upon the 'messy' subjects of languages, living things, or economics. Foucault's archaeological thinking is intended to redress the balance: according to the Classical episteme the general categories of life, labour and language will offer an analysis of man as a living, productive or speaking animal; under a different episteme – the Modern one - man will be studied as a biological, economic or philological animal. The innovative point is that while there are dissimilarities between the epistemes, within the same episteme there is a similarity of thinking, a similarity in the conceptual structure that organises the classifications.

The epistemes are not only different from each other but from the point of view of one episteme it is impossible to think with the mind-set of the other episteme: they are incommensurable, which explains why Buffoon in the eighteenth century (the Classical Age) was completely baffled by the Renaissance thinker Aldrovandi's classification of dragons and serpents. The problem is not that Buffoon is superior to Aldrovandi but that the way each saw the world was completely different, conditioned as it was by a completely different episteme.

The epistemes under analysis are the pre-classical, spanning from the Renaissance to the mid-seventeenth century; the Classical Age that lasts until the end of the eighteenth century and the Modern Age that ends in the 1950. Foucault's analysis focuses on the characteristic features of the epistemes without offering an explanation of why the changes between them took place.

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The Renaissance episteme is characterised by resemblances between words and things: a word is like its object. There are four types of resemblances (1970: 18-25)

- (a) the resemblances of things that are close to each other (*convientia*) such as animals and places, the earth and the sea, the body and the soul;
- (b) the resemblance of things based on distance (*aemulatio*) so that the sky resembles the face because it has two eyes (the sun and the moon);
- (c) the resemblances constructed out of analogies where the relations between things are important;
- (d) the resemblances of sympathy which in effect meant that everything could be seen to resemble everything else since all of reality was interconnected. The problem with sympathy was that it had the potential to transform everything into the same; this problem was thwarted by antipathy that counteracted the force of sympathy by setting into motion all of the resemblances.

The underlying assumption of the Renaissance episteme was the world as a text written by God: things resembled each other because God 'signed' them to show their interconnectedness. '*Convenientia, aemulatio, analogy, and sympathy* tell us how the world must fold in upon itself, reflects itself, or form a chain with itself so that things can resemble one another....[but] There are no resemblances without signatures.' (1970:26)

The problem was that it was not easy to know the signature of God and this led to an endless series of interpretations. Knowledge was more a question of guessing rather than

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proving since the relation between words and things was God-given. Renaissance writers sought to find the original ground of meanings, the primal natural and universal language before its break-up into many languages.

In his discussion of the Renaissance, Foucault adopts the much criticized strategy of using relatively minor figures as sources of information. Thus, while a study of the Renaissance would not usually fail to mention the leading figures of the times such as Leonardo or Erasmus (among others), in Foucault they barely get a mention, and are replaced by lesser known figures such as Aldrovani or Ramus.

With the Classical Age, a new form of knowledge or episteme suddenly appears. The language of analogy is replaced with that of analysis:

the activity of the mind...will no longer consist *in drawing things together*, in setting out on a quest for everything that might reveal some sort of kinship, attraction, or secretly shared nature within them, but on the contrary, in *discriminating*, that is, in establishing their identities. (1970:55)

The goal of the Classical episteme was that of representing the world through the method of analysis. Representation took two forms: of mathesis, where objects were measured, and of taxonomia, where objects were ordered and classified (1970: 71-77). The discourse of general grammar studied the representation of words, the discourse of natural history studied the representation of nature and the discourse of wealth studied the representation of needs. The Classical strategy had the benefit of eliminating the infinite resemblances (typical of the Renaissance episteme) with finite differences. Tables of varying degrees of complexity were constructed so as to represent and give order to the

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world; these representations were enacted through a system of signs, where the orderings took place according to those signs that were identical to each other, and those that were different from each other. Signs were therefore related to each other in such a way that there 'is a bond established inside knowledge, between the *idea of one thing* and the *idea of another*.' (1970: 63) In this way, it was believed that definitive knowledge could be acquired with the endless guessing and the prolific interpretations of the Renaissance no longer considered forms of knowledge. The problem with the Classical episteme was that by emphasizing the differences between things and organising these differences accordingly, no value was attributed to the origin of things: in other words, the historical background was ignored.

The interesting feature of Foucault's claim is that while the knowledge these discourses revealed was important to man, man was left out of the picture; he was not represented within the classifications. It was only when the Classical episteme dissolved that the possibility of a science of man i.e., the human sciences, arose.

With the Modern Age the lack of historical interest shown in the classical episteme is compensated for with a renewed interest in the origin of things. In their analysis of nature, classical theorists were unaware that historical considerations were slipping into the tables that they were formulating: it is as though life sneaked in from behind to reassert its importance. The transition from one episteme to another could be detected in the way the early writers attempted to re-insert history into their studies of life, labour and language even though they still employed concepts from the Classical Age. It was

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from about 1795 onwards that the Modern Age came completely into being with Curvier in biology, Ricardo in economics and Bopp in philology.

Within the category of life, the classical discipline of natural history was replaced by the discipline of biology so that function not structure was important; in the realm of economics the classical study of wealth and exchange was replaced by the study of production and of who controlled the forces of production; within the domain of language the classical discipline of grammar was replaced by philology so that emphasis lay on the origins of language. However while biology, labour and language were domains of empirical analysis and therefore sciences, they were not human sciences since the human sciences were interested in what these subjects mean or represent to humans themselves.

In the attempt to acquire their own identity, the human sciences adopted the methods and models used within the sciences: first, they adopted the biological model that used functions for their explanations; then, they adopted the economic model that explained phenomena in relation to conflict and finally they adopted the philological model that sought hidden meanings and interpretations. In addition to this, the human sciences shifted their emphasis from processes that are accessible to consciousness to those unconscious structures that influence consciousness, structures of 'norms, rules and systems.' (1970: 361)

In the mentality of the modern theoretician, the study of phenomena needed to include the historical forces that affected and constituted these phenomena. Deeper forces



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affected these surface phenomena and needed to be accounted for. The important point for Foucault is that these new domains were not just developments of earlier ones but new domains with new concerns:

Philology, biology, and political economy were established, not in the places occupied by *general grammar*, *natural history* and the *analysis of wealth*, but in an area where those forms of knowledge did not exist, in the space they left blank, in the deep gaps that separated their broad theoretical segments and that were filled with the murmur of the ontological continuum. (1970: 207)

The conclusion Foucault arrives at from his analysis of the Modern Age is that it was the age that ‘invented’ the category of mankind as an object of knowledge. This was the period when a number of disciplines – the human sciences - came into being and directed their attention towards humans. The dilemma of the human sciences is that man was both the subject doing the studying and the object of that study. Man is the condition of possibility for the study of man: humans represent themselves within the various human sciences and are the beings that make these representations possible. It is perhaps the label ‘sciences’ that is misleading and Foucault’s point is that the categories used in these sciences to understand humans were created in the first place by the sciences themselves. The scientific credentials of these disciplines turned out to be human creations. This is why Foucault claims that the time has arrived for us to realise that we must awake from our ‘anthropological slumber.’

#### **4.0. Genealogical Analysis 1: the discourse of punishment.**

With both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, Foucault turned his attention to the way changes occurred between epistemes. In his archaeological writings,

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he had failed to take into account the influence of institutions in the transition from one episteme to another. In the genealogical approach, Foucault broadens his analysis to show that non-discursive forces, whether economic, political, social, juridical, or pedagogical, contribute to the formation of epistemes. One concern that receives sustained attention is the interaction between power and knowledge, with the aforementioned texts providing specific applications of the relationship between power and knowledge in the domains of criminality and sexuality.

The starting point of Foucault's re-configuration of power is the critique of what he calls the 'juridical' view of power. Society is divided into those who dominate and have the power and those who are dominated and want the power. The juridical view of power is common to both the left and the right of the political spectrum with the former thinking of it as something that should be seized, with the latter thinking of it as something that must be held on to. According to this view, power is defined in the negative, as a force that says 'no' to everything. For Foucault, this view fails to take into account, the positive dimension of power,

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (1991: 194)

Foucault's re-configuration of power is conducted at the micro-level: relations of power permeate society so that power is not a monolithic overbearing structure but is localised and diffused throughout the social network. Foucault's analytic of power introduces two key characteristics: power is both productive and relational. It is productive because it

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produces new social categories (the criminal, the homosexual) that in turn constitute new objects of knowledge. It is relational because it is generated by the differences between persons, organisations, institutions: the differences between teachers and students, parents and children, the priest and the confessant, the psychoanalyst and the patient. While it is the interaction between them that leads to the production of knowledge, these power relations are characterised by an imbalance of power: some dominate and others are dominated. 'Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations.' (1978: 94) It is those in the dominant position of power that produce knowledge, so that you find many more studies about the marginalised – deviants, immigrants – than you do about those considered 'normal'. It is the uneven distribution of power that transforms an object into an object of knowledge.

The dynamics involved in the acquisition of knowledge lead Foucault into conceptualising the knowledge-power relation as symbiotic. Knowledge and power feed on and into each other, 'power and knowledge directly imply one another;... [such] that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.' (1991: 27) This is a controversial claim because the prominent status of science within western culture has always been justified on the basis of its objectivity, its freedom from the interests of its practitioners. On Foucault's account, power produces knowledge and knowledge empowers.

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The interrelationship between power and knowledge is highlighted in his account of the will-to-knowledge that characterised the modern episteme in the nineteenth century. In order to obtain information, procedures were developed to identify, classify, measure and calculate objects. During the age of imperialism, colonists, travellers, missionaries contributed to the compilation of knowledge about the countries they visited. This will-to-knowledge was not impartial but served the interests of the western colonizing states; it is a type of knowledge that is tied to a particular historical moment in western civilisation, a moment when western civilisation considered itself superior to other cultures and in so doing judging other cultural systems as superstitious and therefore, not worthy of being considered as knowledge (Mills: 71).

In *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* Foucault, evidently more influenced by Nietzsche, understands discourses as the result of power relations and forces. The influence of Nietzsche brings out the fundamental difference in the goals of the genealogist and the archaeologist: while the archaeologist is interested in describing discourses and their production, the genealogist is interested in their historical-institutional emergence. As a result, a critical engagement with institutional-discourses is possible, together with the realisation that things do not have to be as they are, but can always be otherwise. Unlike the traditional historian who considers the goal of historiography as the objective writing of the past, the genealogist is involved in the writing of the past.

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The opening lines of *Discipline and Punishment* offer a striking illustration of the way punishment was handed down in the Classical Age,

On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned 'to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris', where he was to be 'taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds'; then, 'in the said cart, to the Place de Greve, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds. (1991: 3)

Eighty years later, punishment was no longer physical, but took the form of rules and timetables regulating the entire day of the criminal, from when to get up, to eat, to pray, to work and to rest. How did such a change in punishment take place within such a short space of time?

Punishment in the Classical Age necessarily involved brutality and visibility: criminals were punished violently in front of a public since this would serve to reassert the authority of the law. Punishment was read as revenge upon the transgressors for their actions and it always involving torture to a lesser (flogging, branding, etc) or greater degree (public execution). Capital punishment was considered the appropriate punishment for potential regicides since it involved breaking the law both by attempting to commit murder and by attempting to kill the king whose very person represented the law. The savage revenge by the king was justified on the grounds that it was an attack on the law itself. But despite the barbaric spectacle that was intended to highlight the seriousness of the Law, Foucault notes that frequently, public executions were transformed into support for the criminal and the occasion used as a springboard for

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rioting. It became increasingly evident that public execution was not a certain way of re-asserting the sovereignty of the law.

With the Enlightenment it was realized that punishment as brutal force was failing to prevent crime in addition to being inhuman. There was a shift in the way punishment was conceptualised: it was no longer considered an attack upon the sovereign, but upon society as a whole. Rather than the revenge of the sovereign, punishment should strive to re-insert the person into society. The criminal had to be made to understand the nature of his crime: it was the mind not the body that had to be punished. To teach the prisoners the rationality of their punishment, the Modern Age theorists devised a system of connections between the crime and the punishment. It was important that the punishment did not seem to be capricious, for otherwise, social re-integration would be harder to achieve. Punishment was undertaken by a moral impulse, an impulse toward the re-habitation of the criminal.

The prison system as re-habitation replaced the concept of punishment as a spectacle of physical brutality. This involved the maintenance of numerous prisons and a large number of rules that structured and disciplined a prisoner's daily life. The modern penitentiary adopted a whole strategy of techniques for the implementation of its policies ranging from dossiers that noted in detail all the observations made of the prisoner to the establishment of the right of the penal authorities to punish. Central to Foucault's argument is the model of the Panopticon: it was designed as a structure for the complete and constant surveillance of the prisoner (1991: 200-209). The Panopticon was an

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architectural blueprint created by Jeremy Bentham for the construction of a new prison system. In this new prison the behaviour of prisoners would be monitored through a system of windows. The crucial and important feature was that the prisoners would never know when they were being watched by the wardens. As a result they would learn how to control their own behaviour; in effect, the prisoners were their own correctional officers, and the penal authorities hoped that their self-controlling behaviour would become the norm. Although the Panopticon was an architectural blueprint, it represented the model for an emerging type of society and the discipline needed to control it.

Modern disciplinary practices made great use of observational techniques with the prisoner unaware that he was being observed. The filtering of the data collected necessitated a hierarchical system to ensure that it arrived at those at the summit of the hierarchy. The analysis of these observations led, in turn, to a system of evaluations grounded in the Normal: the prisoner was judged to be normal or abnormal with the notion of deviancy as a falling away from the norm. For Foucault, the Modern Age establishes the normal as the basis of judgement in a number of different fields so that those who failed to adhere to the norm could be corrected. The difference between pre-modern punishment and modern punishment is that whereas in the Classical Age a person was punished for his/her actions in relation to the law, in the Modern Age actions were judged in terms of how behaviour related to the norm.

Foucault's critical analysis is directed at the values of the modern age. The bourgeois and their disciplinary drive introduce a specific value system and practices such as fair trials,

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the assumption of innocence, and a rational system for the examination of evidence. But while these worked well for an educated, upper middle classes, i.e., for the class that used it, in relation to the working class, another system of values was adopted, a system that reflected the fear of the bourgeois: social instability. The maintenance of the social order was achieved through surveillance, repression and punishment. For Foucault, the success of the prison system can be found not in the unattainable dream of reducing, let alone eliminating crime, but in its ability to offer a system for the classification of all crimes that in turn justified the intervention and infiltration of power within every sphere of society.

From the violence of the Classical Age to the prison of the Modern Age the change in the implementation of punishment was not the result of an Enlightened view of humaneness (at least this was not its primary objective) but the result of a changing society that made it necessary to think of punishment in terms of control. Foucault is also critical of the liberal-humanist concept of prison that seeks to reform the 'criminal' so as to re-integrate him/her into society. Rather, he argues that prison itself functioned as a model of the way society should be, i.e., a disciplined body. This can be seen from the way spatial locations and time tables were organised not only in prison but in society as a whole: from schools, to factories to army barracks, students, workers and soldiers were subjected to a disciplinary routine that had the goal of transforming them into disciplined bodies.

But how are disciplined bodies created? The vision of a disciplined society could be enacted : (a) through the organisation of physical space with persons were segregated in



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cells, barracks, dormitories, factories and these spaces were organised functionally and placed under supervision; (b) through the regulation of activities: from timetables for worker, prisoners, soldiers and schoolchildren to specific rules prescribing how to write, to hold a gun, to salute; (c) through the use of exercise, especially in the army and the schools, with a view to the maximum efficiency of time; (d) the use of tactics where the co-ordination of individuals working together as a disciplined body became essential. Foucault's analysis of the transition to a disciplined society highlights an important point: discipline and power had been broadened from a state of prevention, of preventing things from happening to that of production: the point of these disciplinary techniques (for example) in the army and the factory was that of increasing efficiency, productivity and skill. In addition, for these disciplinary techniques to succeed, supervision was necessary. A hierarchy of supervisors, each reporting to their respective supervisors, was required for the complete surveillance of the individual (1991: 135-170).

From his analysis Foucault concludes that since the Modern Age there has been a collusion between the social sciences and the state; for the social sciences to function they need the techniques of the state to gather information and create the relevant documentation, while the power of the state in turn needs the social sciences to develop the data into knowledge that can be used to justify the exercise of power. The human sciences were born with 'the modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour...' (1991: 191). The importance of the social sciences – criminology, psychiatry, social worker, and pedagogy – is that they who determine the norm so that anyone who doesn't follow the norm is labelled as deviant.

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In the contemporary world membership within society entails behaving normally and this normality is ensured by a legion of social workers, teachers, doctors and judges. In what Foucault calls the carceral system, all society is a prison, with the actual prison as the most tangible structure of the disciplinary society. 'Normalisation' is now so ingrained within western culture that a whole series of tests, questionnaires, and programs have been established to ensure that citizens are dutiful, children are healthy, etc. The combination of observation and evaluation culminates in the examination: throughout a person's life, examinations – whether for school, for health, or for employment – are held. These examinations are crucial to the functioning of modern societies for they oblige the person to reveal the truths of what they know, of their health, or of their ambitions. In effect, this knowledge is then used to control the person: it might reveal that a student is not apt for a particular course of studies or that a person needs some kind of therapy. The information derived from these examinations is then documented: one could describe this system as an early version of contemporary databases where information is collected and used to construct a profile or identity of the person. A person, in fact, is transformed into a case study and this suggests that he/she is an object of knowledge: social workers, for example, are agents that monitor the norm. Everyday life in modern society is subject to Foucault calls the 'normalising gaze'.

Interestingly, the norm functions as a continuum so that one is a rapist or a petty thief, one's actions are judged relative to the standard of normal behaviour. Unlike the Classical Age when the category of the outlaw lived on the fringes or outside society, in

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the Modern Age there is the category of deviancy, with the deviant as the permanent danger inserted within society. This danger justifies the necessity of constantly surveilling society in the search for potential deviants. For Foucault, we today live in an age of surveillance that has its origins in the Modern Age.

## **5.0. Genealogical Analysis 2: the discourse of sexuality**

Both *Discipline and Punish* and the *History of Sexuality Vol. I*, are genealogical analyses of power and knowledge with each text focussing on a specific object of knowledge, namely crime and sexuality. However, while *Discipline and Punish* focussed on the control of others and had a fixed institutional space (the prison) to enact this control, sexuality did not have a fixed space making it more pliable and conducive to the strategies of power and knowledge. The important point about Foucault's study on sexuality is his emphasis upon the actual discourses of sexuality rather than a study of the development of different sexual practices.

The question Foucault asks is, why did sexuality become the focus of intense scientific investigation in western civilisation? Why is it that Western civilisation developed a science of sexuality, a 'scienza sexualis', whereas in other cultures sexuality developed the erotic arts, an 'ars erotica': the erotic arts are directed towards the intensification of the sexual experience under the guidance of a master; eroticism emphasizes the maximization of sexual pleasure. Sexuality in western civilisation was transformed into a science. It did not focus on the subjective quality of the sexual experience, but on its

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objectivity. The goal of this science was to collect information about a person's sexuality so as to discover the truth of sexuality.

Foucault's central claim is that the modern concern with the sexuality of the person has a pre-modern origin in medieval confessional practices framed within the discourse of sin and salvation. The interiorisation of sexuality has its origins in medieval confession where the penitent expressed the truths about him/herself. Confession was established as the system for the production of truth about the self. Penitents were encouraged, not only to confess their external sexual actions, but also what went on internally, their thoughts, desires, and inclinations that accompanied or were 'behind' their sexual actions. At the beginning, confession was relatively infrequent since the public was expected to confess only once a year so that the monitoring of sexuality could not have been thorough. However, by 1550, this changed and with it a new concept of identity emerged: whereas previously the identity of a person took the form of an avowal, with one's identity guaranteed by those whom he/she knew, identity was formulated in relation to the truths 'lying' within the person, 'for a long time, the individual was vouched for by the reference of others and the demonstration of his ties to the commonweal (family, allegiance, protection); then he was authenticated by the discourse of truth he was able or obliged to pronounce concerning himself.' (1978: 58) Truth, although hidden, was now located within the person. The importance of the medieval confessional system was that it transformed desire into discourse.

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From the Middle Ages to the Modern world, a shift in context frames the discourse of sexuality differently. While the discourse of the Middle Ages was framed within the religious context of sin and salvation, the discourse of the Modern Age was framed within a scientific context concerned with health and illness. The Modern Age transformed the religiously grounded discourse of sexuality into a science of sexuality, a science that aimed at discovering the truth about sex. Despite the different frameworks the dynamics of power in both religious and secular confessional practices operated along the same binary of questioner and questioned,

the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know. And this discourse of truth finally takes effect, not in the one who receives it, but in the one from whom it is wrested. (1978: 62)

By the eighteenth century, sexuality became a target for the authorities since a link was established between what a person did with their sexuality and the administration of society. This connection can be seen in the studies concerning the population, prostitution and the spread of disease. Knowing the sexuality of its citizens provided the information for developing of a politics of the body (anatomopolitics) and for planning the population (biopolitics). The sexualized body became the locus of the study for medicine, psychology and demography, studies that in turn fed into the concerns of the state. By managing sexuality, the state was in effect managing life.

The question that faced the scientist of the nineteenth century was that of transforming the pleasures that the individual confessed into a science, into a systematic account rather

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than just a collection of random experiences. This transformation took place by following a number of procedures (1978: 65-67):

- (a) '*Through a clinical codification of the inducement to speak*': by using interrogations and questionnaires, the confession was transformed into an acceptable scientific document.
- (b) '*Through the postulate of a general and diffuse causality*': by introducing the principle of sex as the causal origin for all ailments: any illness of a child, adult, old person and even an entire race, could be reduced to a sexual origin.
- (c) '*Through the principle of a latency intrinsic to sexuality*': by considering sex as a something that wanted to remain hidden but could only be extracted through scientific examination.
- (d) '*Through the method of interpretation*': by establishing sexuality as a system of signs that could be interpreted and whose results contributed to the truth.
- (e) '*Through the medicalization of the effects of confession*': by replacing the categories of sin with the categories of the normal and the pathological: with sex understood as an unstable pathological field medical intervention was justified.

The irony of history is that while the Modern Age showed a great interest in questions of sexuality, the period is usually depicted as an age of Victorian Puritanism where any talk of sex was forbidden. Popular opinion has it that the Victorian Age was one that repressed all sexuality to the extent that the use of the word 'sex' was taboo. Foucault calls this alleged denial of sexuality the 'repressive hypothesis' and his strategy is that of

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re-inserting the discourse of sexuality from the narrow period of the Victorian Age to the broader developments that took place within western civilisation from the twelfth century onwards. What one realises is that rather than a repression of sexuality, the Victorian Age reveals a large number of discourses on sexuality, discourses that radiated from a number of institutions. While at the level of everyday life talking about sex was forbidden, Foucault shows that at the institutional level – medical, legal, pedagogic, social, and psychiatric – rather than censorship, there is a multiplication of discourses related to sexuality.

Until the end of the eighteenth century, the married couple were the object of observation and at this stage there was no qualitative difference between violating the rules of marriage and other violations, such as incest, sodomy or homosexuality. These infringements were considered as belonging to the same class of violations. The big change occurred in the nineteenth century when discourses on sexuality assumed that since the family unit was the standard of normality, other sexualities did not belong to the same class as that of the family, but something qualitatively different. In other words, a shift of emphasis took place where other sexualities were noticed, observed and studied. They became privileged sites for the investigation of sexuality (1978: 104-105):

- (a) the hysterical woman whose hysteria was the result of sexual problems and who, as a potential future bearer of children, necessitated investigation.
- (b) the problem of masturbation for the child who should be protected from its dangers.
- (c) the question of reproduction which was vital for the growth of the population.

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(d) the sexuality of adults, which under investigation, revealed an increasing number of 'non-normal' sexual activities, leading to the creation of a new category of sexual beings, the pervert.

The creation of new sexual identities is famously described by Foucault in his elaboration of the category of homosexuality. Strange as it might sound, before the nineteenth century, the homosexual did not exist. This does not mean that before the nineteenth century there were no same-sex relations, but that same-sex relations were considered something one did, as actions. The idea that there is a class of humans whose identity belonged to that of the homosexual is a product of the nineteenth century. What this means is that the homosexual became a type of being, a being who exists in reality and whose homosexuality was the result of something internal (psychological or physiological). In the nineteenth century the homosexual became a type, a class of beings with a particular sexual identity:

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality....The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species. (1978: 43).

As with *Discipline and Punish*, while it might seem that the interest in 'deviant' forms of sexuality had the goal of eliminating them, the impossibility of actually achieving these goals suggests that something else was at stake. The intensity with which campaigns were organised to eradicate masturbation in children, campaigns that could never in fact succeed, indicated that rather than eradication what was intended was control. The various discourses on sexuality were in effect ways of penetrating into society to control



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and monitor the behaviour of the population. By internalising the values and norms of society, an individual becomes his/her own keeper, becomes not only an object of sexual knowledge but also a sexual subject monitoring him/herself according to the norms established within society.

Foucault's criticism of bourgeois sexual values is similar to his criticism of the bourgeois justice in *Discipline and Punish*. The bourgeois concern with sexuality was primarily a concern with the preservation of their own class,

it was in the "bourgeois" or "aristocratic" family that the sexuality of children and adolescents was first problematized, and feminine sexuality medicalized....the bourgeoisie began by considering that its own sex was something important, a fragile treasure, a secret that had to be discovered at all costs. (1978: 120-1)

The bourgeois had an interest in safeguarding and promoting themselves by advocating the heterosexual, monogamous couple as the basis of society and morality. They were not interested in the sexuality of the working class and changes in working class sexuality were enacted only by the end of the nineteenth century.

Foucault's analysis of the functioning of power reveals that power uses communication to control and monitor others. The way power operates makes it seem like a monolithic and inescapable force from which there is no possibility of escape. However, Foucault offers a glimmer of hope. If discourse plays an important role in the communication and transmission of power since genealogy specifically connect the discursive to the non-

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discursive, institutional domains, discourse itself becomes the site of contestation or resistance. It is therefore possible to resist the normalising forces of society. Foucault claims that while power-knowledge has the possibility of its own transmission, there is also the possibility of resisting it: 'discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.' (1978: 101).

## **6.0. Communication as Surveillance: an analysis of contemporary society.**

Towards the end of *Discipline and Punish* Foucault wrote,

our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge (1978: 217)

Although Foucault recognised the emergence of surveillance as a phenomenon in the late twentieth century, he did not perhaps realise the extent to which the technologies used would become such a common feature of daily life that in turn, they, would be transformed into the perfect tool for surveillance. In *The Mode of Information*, (1990) Poster describes the development of communicative technologies in the contemporary world, a development which sees Foucault's Panopticon transformed into what he calls, a 'Superpanopticon'.

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One of the keys to understanding the changing face of contemporary society is the 'database'. Poster's central thesis is that the role and function of the database constitutes a new way of dominating subjects. The database is not a neutral tool, it is not just a new system for gathering information about a person but rather, a system that makes it possible to monitor large numbers of individuals. The use of databases has been increasing at a rapid pace since the 1980s and it is so widespread that it is considered part of the modern world. When we watch a police show on television we expect the investigators to check the fingerprints found at the scene of the crime against their database to see if there is a 'match'. What we do not realise is that collecting information about individuals is not solely a matter of police work, but also a commercial enterprise. Private companies - insurances, hospitals, banks, etc - also collect information that is stored on databases. This has raised a number of worries in the United States and an attempt was made both to regulate database information and to control those who could have access to it. Unfortunately, this attempt was inadequate as the Privacy Act did not apply to a number of institutions (banks and states), and it also failed to create structures to enforce infringements.

In part the widespread development of databases is connected to the pervasive influence of the capitalist system that dominates economic life in advanced modern societies. It might be thought that the new technologies of information would have eliminated the control that capitalism had over the objects it produced: whereas in the past, it was necessary to buy the books or clothes or furniture that one needed, with the new technologies the consumer could reproduce the data him/herself (for example, video and

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DVD recorders; downloading music or films from the net). But, while this may be the case, the search for profit took a different form as the internet itself is today a major source of any type of business transactions.

And this in turn has produced an unintended consequence: when one searches for something from an online catalogue on the internet, one is accessing the database of that company, but as the person conducts the search, he/she is being transformed into a bit of information for another database. Poster writes,

In the home networking information loop, one database (product information) generates another database (consumer information) which generates another database (demand information) which feeds the production process. In this context, the commodification of information creates its own system of expanded reproduction: producers have databases about consumers which are they commodities that may be sold to other producers. (1990: 75)

Poster argues that the technology used in the database constitutes a new form of domination because of its specific form of electronic writing (digital encoding). His argument hinges upon the distinction between speech, writing and electronic writing: such a distinction is necessary because while speech and writing are frequently described in oppositional terms, electronic writing is usually considered an extension of writing, and not as something with its own identifying features. This, Poster contends, is mistaken: the identifying features of speech are presence, face-to-face communication, and small scale social organisation; the identifying features of writing are distance (or absence as the sender is not immediately in contact with the receiver), and a solitary mode as a text can be read on its own (and critically thought about) in a linear and causal manner.

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Electronic writing is different from speech and writing because the framework of electronic language undermines the very foundations of speech and writing. Both of these forms of communication are structured in terms of the spatio-temporal presence or absence of the sender and receiver; electronic language, on the other hand, undermines the distance that underlies presence and absence because it is everywhere and nowhere at the same time: electronic language collapses or undermines the space-time distinction. The database, like the virtual world of computers, can be accessed from anywhere in the world and yet it is nowhere in the world.

The use of the database in contemporary society is a qualitative improvement on the panopticon that Foucault had analysed in *Discipline and Punish*. The function of the panopticon was that of ‘forcing’ prisons to constantly monitor their own behaviour since the building was designed in such a way that the inmates would not know when the wardens were watching them. As a result, (and coupled with the collection of information on the inmate onto a filing system) by repeatedly behaving normally they would become normal and be eventually returned to society, ‘rehabilitated’. Despite the improvement of the panopticon in terms of inmate-warden proportions since only a few wardens were needed to monitor several prisoners, the panopticon was still limited since it relied on a physical structures – the location, the equipment - and a centralised administration for the organisation of the warden supervision, the filing, and the processing of the information. With the database, the physical limitations of the panopticon have been superseded and Poster suggests that we now live in an era of the Superpanopticon.

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In the world of the Superpanopticon not only are citizens constantly under surveillance, but they actively contribute to their own surveillance. Information is collected from a number of sources such as, identity cards, credit cards and driver's licences. However, credit cards are probably the most widespread source of data collection: information is collected about the kinds of restaurants we go to, the magazines and books we read, the clothes we wear, etc, and stored into a database. This information is actively sought by marketing companies as it enables them to construct a profile about the person, a profile that can be used for commercial reasons. And there are companies that pool the data from various databases into a super-database for marketing purposes. It is in this sense that Poster argues, databases constitute individuals, create new kind of subjectivity,

The discourse of databases, the Superpanopticon, is a means of controlling the masses in the postmodern, post-industrial mode of information. Foucault taught us to read a new form of power by deciphering discourse/practice formations instead of intentions of a subject of instrumental actions. Such a discourse analysis when applied to the mode of information yields the uncomfortable discovery that the population participates in its own self-constitution as subjects of the normalizing gaze of the Superpanopticon. We see databases not as an invasion of privacy, as a threat to a centred individual, but as the multiplication of the individual, the constitution of an additional self, one that may be acted upon to the detriment of the 'real' self without that "real" self every being aware of what is happening. The figural component of databases consists in such a self constitution. The innocuous spread of credit card transactions, today into supermarkets, tomorrow perhaps into classrooms and homes, feeds the databases at ever increasing rates, stuffing ubiquitous computers with a language of surveillance and control. (1990: 97-98)

From a political perspective, the database is extensively used to store information and create profiles on those who are involved in any activity that goes against the dominant social order. The information is stored in a database through a list of grids such as age, gender, address, identity card number, social security number, driving licence, phone number etc.

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Since Poster's book was published, the mode of information has made further rapid strides in its application of communication technologies. Some aspects that were only hinted at in his book (for e.g. home networking) have now become commonplace. Commercial shopping with the use of credit cards is now a common fact of business transactions, so that data is collected by the company one purchases from, and by the credit card companies. On the personal level, communication possibilities have been further developed with online or virtual communities, with online instant communication (chat groups) and with online companies ready to provide any service your money can buy (a partner, a friend). There is the further and more insidious intrusion of the technologies of surveillance into the lives of citizens that is given a veneer of justification by claiming that intrusion is necessary to protect their lives (even though they might not have asked for this protection). Indeed, since the attacks of September 11, 2001 the search for potential terrorists has sanctioned the widespread use of information collection and storage: state administrators have been given a free hand into reading emails, listening in on telephone conversations the technology that was supposed to make the world a better place into a global big Brother.

### **Critical Remarks**

The concept of discourse plays a crucial role throughout Foucault's writings with varying degrees of emphasis: after 1971, he virtually abandons the concept until he re-utilizes it in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*. The problem, however, is that in the span of time that he used it, the concept of discourse had a different meaning, and this therefore causes considerable difficulty in interpretation. On the one hand, Foucault argues that discourse

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actively constructs or produces reality (1971: 47-48; also, 1981: 67). This is Foucault at his most constructivist moment: on this account, our perception of the world is constructed by the discourse within which we find ourselves. This raises the serious question of whether there is no reality other than discourse. If this is the case then how would he explain hunger or pain? On the other hand, Foucault also offers a different version of discourse, a version that suggests the existence of a non-discursive realm. In *The Order of Things* he seems to suggest that there could be practices independent of discourse that affect discourse; in order to explain the transition from one episteme to another Foucault realises that certain forces outside discourse need to be taken into account (1970: 50). It is evident that in the later writings, Foucault connects institutional practices and interests with the promotion of a particular discourse. In defence of Foucault, Mills (2003: 56) suggests the early concept of discourse does not describe a sort of discursive idealism. It is not that there is no non-discursive realm but rather that the non-discursive realm - reality - is mediated by language. On this account, language is the 'filter' or 'grid' by which and through which we understand reality.

Foucault's shift towards genealogy with *Discipline and Punish* was intended to show the change from one episteme to another but in this transition the concept of episteme seems to get lost. Gutting (2001:281-282) points out that in *Discipline and Punish* the concept of episteme is mentioned only once. In addition, there seems to be a difference between the episteme of *Discipline and Punish* and that of *The Order of Things*: whereas *The Order of Things* is concerned the epistemological question of the subject and the object, it



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is not the same subject that is being considered in *Discipline and Punish*. The subject under examination is the criminal subject.

Best and Kellner (1991) are generally supportive of Foucault's goals although they point to a number of limitations of his thought. Best and Kellner (1991: 44) defend Foucault against the mistaken view attributed to him about the 'discontinuities' in history. Some have thought that by discontinuity Foucault is suggesting complete and radical breaks between historical periods such that there is no connection between them. However, Foucault argues that each episteme feeds off the previous one: the connection between them is not a causal one, where one is the cause of the other; rather, the connection is one where one episteme is the 'soil' out of which the new one comes about. The point Foucault is trying to emphasize is that there is no teleology of history, no ultimate goal that can be explained in progressive and rational terms. On the other hand, Best and Kellner (1991:70) argue that Foucault's analysis of power with its focus on the way power operates is interesting as it brings out the way struggles of domination occur in relations between individuals and groups; however, this analytic emphasis on the impersonal mechanisms of power fails to take into consideration or ignores those who are in positions of power, such as bankers, the mass media, land developers, etc. And as Ruiz-Miguel<sup>iv</sup> points out, the concept of power in Foucault is so broad that it becomes useless for analytic purposes; while it is trivially true that power can be read into every social situation, such a claim prevents one from achieving any depth or complexity of understanding of the concept.

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The purpose of this chapter has been to show the way Foucault's writings can be read within the context of communication studies. In this chapter, I have shown the way (a) Foucault analysis the relationship between epistemes and discourse in the production and transmission of knowledge; and (b) that he supplements this relationship by grounding it within the context of institutions so that (c) the localization of discourse within institutional contexts necessitates a re-configuration of the power mechanisms operating within them.

Yet death, once it has occurred, and only then, constitutes the one and only referent, or event which cannot be semiotized (in that a dead semiotician no longer communicates semiotic theories). But right up to a moment before it occurs, <<death>> is mainly used as a cultural unit. (1976: 66)

## **Eco on Culture and Communication**

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Umberto Eco (1932- ) is probably a brand name for Italian culture and is well known among the general public for his literary writings, such as *The Name of the Rose* (1983), *Foucault's Pendulum* (1989) and *The Island of the Day Before* (1994). However, it is his writings on semiology – *A Theory of Semiotics*, (1976) *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, (1984) and *The Role of the Reader* (1979) among others - that have positioned him as one of the leading intellectuals in the world today.

Eco was one of the first Italian academics who undertook a serious analysis of popular culture at a time when other intellectuals of both the right and the left considered the association of 'popular' with 'culture' as a contradiction in terms. Culture, in their view, could not be 'popular' (defined roughly as appealing to ordinary people) but rather the preserve of those who understood and appreciated it. This elitist view of culture considered popular culture as having nothing intrinsically valuable to communicate. Although Eco could be loosely aligned with the cultural left, he did not accept this thesis, arguing that popular culture had a contribution to make in the analysis of society.

In this chapter, I shall start (a) by outlining Eco's theory of signs and codes, followed by (b) the crucial distinction between communication and signification. The next section (c) describes the process of abduction as an integral part of (d) the production of signs. This leads to (e) Eco's elaboration of the encyclopaedia. The last sections of this chapter focus on the narrower domain of textual interpretation starting with (f) the distinction between Model Authors and Model readers and (g) open and closed texts. The chapter closes with an analysis by eco of the James Bond novels.

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## 1.0. The Study of Signs

Eco's 'pre-semiotic' career was grounded in the then fashionable structuralism as the method for the analysis of human culture. The central tenet of structuralism was that by using the models of linguistics and communication it was possible to understand human culture in terms of coded and decoded messages between the sender and the receiver. Semiotics is also grounded in the interrelation between codes and messages but unlike structuralism, it does not seek to find an ultimate code - an Ur-code - that would explain all the other codes. Since the structuralist Ur-code is ahistorical, transcending space and time, it remained indifferent to political and social values and could easily be described as conservative. On the other hand, the codes that semiologists are interested in are historical, the products of a culture at a particular point in time: it therefore makes social critique possible.

In *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976) Eco outlined the domain of semiology. Eco's central argument was that semiology is the discipline that makes it possible to study culture as a system of communication since 'the laws of signification are the laws of culture. For this reason culture allows a continuous process of communicative exchanges, insofar as it subsists as a system of systems of signification. *Culture can be studied completely under a semiotic profile.*' (1976: 28). Since the communication that takes place within a culture is the communication of signs, Eco spends a considerable amount of effort explaining the ways signs are produced and the codes that makes the communication of signs possible.

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There are a number of influences upon Eco but the primary ones are those of the founding fathers of both branches of semiological theory, Saussure and Peirce. Saussure had already realised that semiology had the potential for becoming a general science of signs, a science that studied the life of signs within society, with linguistics as the most important branch of this general study. From Saussure, Eco learns that although the connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, once it becomes common usage within a society the relation could be described as ‘necessary’. This ‘necessary’ relation is imposed by the code that regulates the language. Saussure’s concept of a sign ‘is implicitly regarded as a communicative device taking place between two human beings intentionally aiming to communicate or express something.’ (1976: 15)

From Peirce Eco learns that a sign has a meaning even if there is not interpreter: it is the concept of the interpretant that gives a sign its validity. Eco develops the concept of interpretant defining it as a process of ‘unlimited semiosis’: in the process of defining the interpretant one must use other signs, and these in turn require further interpretation and so on. Unlimited semiosis describes the endless possibility of generating meaning. While Eco takes into account Saussure’s contribution he considers Peirce’s contribution to be of broader application (to non-humans) and therefore more fruitful to semiology; Peirce’s concept of the sign ‘does not demand, as part of a sign’s definition, the qualities of being intentionally emitted and artificially produced.’ (1976: 15).

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Apart from these influences, Eco has also adopted insights derived from information theory to formulate his theory of semiotics.

The term /information/ has two basic senses: (a) it means a statistical property of the source, in other words, it designates the amount of information that *can be transmitted*; (b) it means a precise amount of selected information which *has actually been transmitted and received*. '(1976: 40)

The justification for the use of information theory is twofold: (a) it is increasingly evident that concepts derived from information theory have infiltrated and benefited a number of other disciplines with interesting results and Eco hopes that information theory can, likewise, be fruitful for semiological theory; (b) basic communication involves the transmission of information between machines and so this offers, at the very least, a starting point for a model for understanding the processes of communication that involve the use of signals (Caesar, 1999 :55).

Non-human communication is the starting point of Eco's semiological theory. An elementary form of communication of information is that of a petrol gauge in a car marking empty; when the buoy in the petrol tank reaches a certain level a signal is communicated to the petrol gauge. At this stage, Eco is interested in the communication that takes place *before* a person reads the petrol gauge as standing for empty or half-full: the relationship between the buoy and the gauge is said to be one where the former '*stimulates, provokes, causes, gives rise to* the movement of the pointer.' (1976: 33)

To explain the processes of communication prior to human intervention Eco uses the model of a water catchment that he calls the 'Watergate Model', with the water

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catchment functioning as the source or origin of information. This model shows the way codes develop from basic to more complex ones. When the water level rises to a certain point it reaches the danger level of 0 and if this level is reached an apparatus transmits a signal through a channel to a receiver that in turn responds to the signal by sending another signal to the machine that operates the water-catchment (to decrease water in the catchment). A system is created to warn the receiver about the danger: the system consists of a bulb that, when lit, means the danger level 0 has been reached and, when unlit, then the water-catchment is safe. In this case, there is a correspondence between the signifier (lit) and the signified (danger) (or signifier (un-lit) and signified (safe)). This sequence can be described as a basic code. Problems occur when 'noise' (such as a power cut) disrupts the communication possibilities of this code, since the bulb would remain unlit even if the danger level was reached. Safeguards are therefore introduced and this involves a more complex code: another bulb is added so that when bulb A is lit this means safety, and when bulb B is lit this means danger. If there is a power cut then both bulbs would remain unlit so one would suspect that there are problems with the power supply.

But what if the disruptive power supply caused one bulb to light up and not the other i.e., the 'danger' bulb lights up but not the 'safe' one. This necessitates improving the lighting system by adding more bulbs not only to improve security, but also to make more messages possible. The introduction of a code helps organise the various messages that the bulbs can communicate. He defines a code as,

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- (a) A set of *signals* ruled by internal combinatory laws. These signals are not necessarily connected or connectable with the state of the water that they conveyed in the Watergate Model, nor with the destination responses that the engineer decided they should be allowed to elicit. They could convey different notions about things and they could elicit a different set of responses: for instance they could be used to communicate the engineer's love for the next-watershed girl, or persuade the girl to return his passion. Moreover, these signals can travel through the channel without conveying or electing anything simply in order to test the mechanical efficiency of the transmitting and receiving apparatuses. Finally they can be considered as a pure combinational structure that only takes the form of electric signals by chance, an interplay of empty positions and mutual oppositions, ... They could be called a *syntactic* system.
  - (b) A set of states of the water which are taken into account as a set of *notions* about the state of the water and which can become (as happened in the Watergate Model) a set of possible communicative contents. As such they can be conveyed by signals (bulbs), but are independent of them: in fact they could be conveyed by any other type of signal, such as flags, smoke, words, whistles, drums and so on. Let this set of 'contents' could be called a *semantic* system.
  - (c) A set of possible *behavioural responses* on the part of the destination. These responses are independent of the (b) system: they could be released in order to make a washing-machine work or (supposing that the engineer was a 'mad scientist') to admit more water into the watershed just when the danger level was reached, thereby provoking a flood. They can also be elicited by another (a) system: for example the destination can be instructed to evacuate the water only when, by means of a photoelectric cell, it detects an image of Fred Astaire kissing Ginger Rogers...
  - (d) A *rule* coupling some items from the (a) system with some from the (b) or the (c) system. This rule establishes that a given array of syntactic signals refers back to a given state of the water, or to a given 'pertinent' segmentation of the semantic system; that both the syntactic and semantic units, once coupled, may correspond to a given response even though no semantic unity is supposed to be signalled; and so on.' (1976: 36-7)

Eco offers some examples of these different codes: for (a) we have the 'phonological code'; for (b) we have the code of kinship (when considered as 'a system of pertinent parenthood'); for (c) we have the genetic code and for (d) the Morse code. As a result of the possible confusion that arises out of using the word 'code' for these different domains, Eco distinguishes between the s-codes or the code as system (codes as syntax, semantic and behaviour as (a), (b) and (c)) from (d) where a rule couples (a) with (b) or (c) as code.

## 2.0. Communication and Signification.



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A crucial distinction developed in *A Theory of Semiotics* is that between communication and signification and their relation to the code. Although there is an overlap between the domains of communication and signification, there is an important difference between them: communication is the process whereby a signal is transferred from a source to a destination. As such this process can take place either between machines, machines and humans or only humans. If the source and destination are machines, then what we have is the communication of information. But, if the destination is human then what we have is a process of signification. The difference between humans and machines is that when the human is the receiver of the message he/she knows that 0 means danger, unlike the machine that responds without knowing. As a result, other elements come into play, such as the fear that might affect the receiver upon reading the message. The introduction of the human element into the model involves a change from the communication of messages as signals to the communication of messages as signification. This is because there are different possibilities of response: interpretation, rather than conditioned reflex, is the characteristic of signification. Communication between humans presupposes the existence of a system of signification and it is this system that makes human communication possible.

The function of the code is to organise the process of signification: ‘A code is a system of signification, insofar as it couples present entities with absent units. When – on the basis of an underlying rule – something actually presented to the perception of the addressee *stands for* something else, there is *signification*.’ (1976: 8) Having clarified the concept of codes Eco starts to examine codes in relation to the process of signification. Crucial to

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his view of semiology as a method for understanding human culture is the strategy of breaking free of the tendency to equate the sign with the linguistic sign. Eco now adopts Hjelmslev's model of the sign that distinguishes between content and expression: '...a sign is always an element of an *expression plane* conventionally correlated to one (or several) elements of a *content plane*.' (1976: 48)

While the code establishes the relation between content and expression at the conventional level, Eco points out that 'conventional' is not necessarily 'arbitrary' since a sign might be an icon (and therefore motivated). But, how does the sign relate to the code? And what about its referent? Eco's proposed solution leads to the introduction of another of Hjelmslev's concepts, namely the sign as function or sign-production. A sign-function occurs when the expression and content are correlated and when these become correlated to something else, then a new sign-function is born. This sign-function allows for a shift in the understanding of codes: codes do not organise signs but are the rules that enable new signs to be produced. The interaction between codes and sign-function is described in the following way:

(a) a code establishes the correlation of an expression plane (in its purely format and systematic aspect) with a content plane (in its purely format and systematic aspect); (b) a sign-function establishes the correlation of an abstract element of the expression system with an abstract element of the content system; (c) in this way a code establishes general *types*, therefore producing the rule which generates concrete *tokens*, i.e., signs such as usually occur in communicative processes. (1976: 50)

However, having established that the sharing of codes between the sender and the receiver enables communication Eco adds that contextual cues or circumstances or even different codes can generate the reception of a different message despite the sharing of

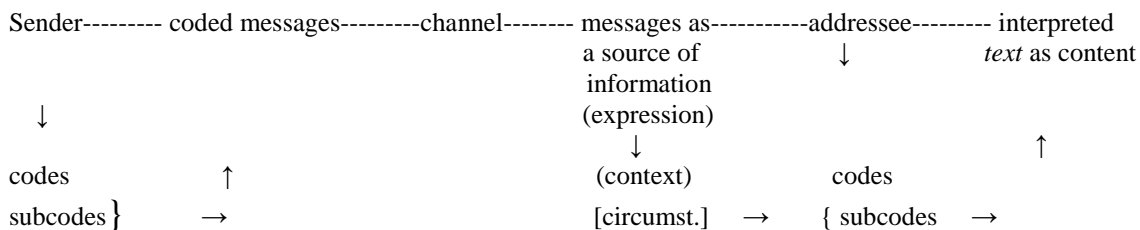
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fundamental code. Everybody knows that a skull on a bottle means poison but if the bottle is found in a drinking cabinet, a different message is being communicated. This is why Eco claims that ‘the criss-cross play of circumstances and abductive presuppositions, along with the interplay of various codes and subcodes, make the message (or the text) appear as an empty form to which can be attributed various possible senses.’ (1976: 139)

At its most extreme the denotation that is usually common to both the sender and the receiver can be different,

A paradoxical example is provided by the sentence */i vitelli dei romani sone belli/* which can be read either as a Latin one (<<Go Vitellus, to the sound of war of the Roman god>>) or as an Italian one (the calves of the Romans are beautiful>>). However paradoxical, this example should be taken as the allegory or emblem of the basic nature of every message. (1976: 140)

The multiplicity of codes, sub-codes and context show the limitations of the Watergate Model as a model for the explanation of the process of communication and signification. Eco offers a more sophisticated model (1976: 141):



On the question of the referent, Eco followed the practice of semiology to ignore from its considerations the domain of objects and things to which signs refer. In his discussion of the concept of meaning, Eco, is concerned to show that ‘meaning’ and ‘referent’ are not the same since it is possible to use a symbol or word that has no referent, such as (for example) ‘unicorn’. So too, we can have different symbols that express different thoughts

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(referents) but that refer to the same thing (referent). Semiology is therefore concerned with the cultural conventions used in acts of communication. To return to the example of the water-catchment, while the signifier AB denotes the level 0, to the person reading the sign, the signifier connotes danger. The connotation is the meaning added to the signifier; from within the parameters of a code a new signified is generated. His theory of codes is not concerned with meaning and truth but only with meaning (or signification). His reasoning is that whether the sender will be telling the truth or lying, a coded system of signification is always being used. It is on this ground that Eco excludes any consideration of the referent when explaining his theory of codes.

...there exist sign-vehicles which refer to non-existent entities such as 'unicorn' or 'mermaid'... Within the framework of a theory of codes it is unnecessary to resort to the notion of extension, nor to that of possible worlds; the codes, insofar as they are accepted by a society, set up a 'cultural' world which is neither actual nor possible in the ontological sense; its existence is linked to a cultural order, which is the way in which a society thinks, speaks and, while speaking, explains the 'purport' of its thought through other thoughts. (1976: 61)

Meaning is therefore a socio-cultural production that organises the world. A statement such as '/There are two natures in Christ, the human and the divine and one Person/' (1976: 68) has a meaningful content despite not having a referent and irrespective of the beliefs of the community. That the statement itself has generated a number of other messages to explain it points to the fruitfulness of accepting Peirce's notion of interpretant together with that of 'unlimited semiosis',

The very richness of this category [the interpretant] makes it fertile since it shows us how signification (as well as communication), by means of continual shifting which refer a sign back to another sign or string of signs, circumscribes cultural units in an asymptotic fashion, without ever allowing one to touch them directly, though making them accessible through other units...*Semiosis explains itself by itself*; this continual circularity is the normal condition of signification and even allows communication to use signs in order to mention things. (1976: 71)

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In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (1984), Eco clarifies a notion that is mistakenly attributed to signs: this clarification involves the distinction between the sign as equivalence and the sign as inferential. Frequently, the sign is understood in terms of equivalence so that for example, Aristotle's definition of man is that /man/ is equal to <rational animal>, 'but certainly not in the expression /mom, there is a man with a package to deliver/, where the content <<man>> can be analyzed according to many properties, (male, unknown, human being, person of low social extraction, even foreign presence or threat), but certainly not as a rational animal.' (1984: 34) Eco suggests that the inferential model better explains the dynamism of semiosis: knowing the meaning of a sign requires an act of interpretation, since we infer its meaning in order to understand it:

A sign is not only something which stands for something else; it is also something that can and must be interpreted. The criterion of interpretability should hold also for linguistics signs, even though they were based, by a long historical tradition, on the model of equivalence ( $p \equiv q$ ). This latter idea of a sign as identity was due to the persuasion that the meaning or the content of a given linguistic expression was either a synonymous expression or its definition. (1984: 46)

### **3.0. Abduction**

In *A Theory of Semiotics* Eco adopts the concept of abduction from Peirce distinguishing between 'abduction' 'overcoded abduction' and 'undercoded abduction'.

(a) abduction. Peirce had distinguished between logical deduction, logical induction and abduction. Logical deduction takes place when one passes from a general rule, to a specific case and one infers a result, '*All the beans from this bag are white – These beans*

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*are from this bag – these beans are white.*’ (1976: 131) Logical induction is the move from a result to a case so as to infer a rule, ‘*These beans are from this bag – These beans are white – All the beans from this bag are white (probably).*’ (1976: 131) Logical abduction differs in that from the rule and the result, it invents or guesses the case, ‘*All the beans from this bag are white – These beans are white – These beans are from this bag (probably).*’ (1976: 131)

Abductive inferences play an important part in our everyday lives and Peirce describes an experience of his to demonstrate its everyday use. Upon landing at a Turkish port he came across a man travelling on horseback surrounded by four other men holding a canopy over him. Peirce could only guess that this man was the governor of the province since he was being treated with such honour. Eco writes, ‘Peirce did not know that (or whether) a canopy was the ritual sign distinguishing a governor (in which case there would have been a simple decoding). He invented or *supposed a general rule.*’ (1976: 131) Abduction plays a crucial role in Eco’s semiological theory because it represents the possibility of new codes, possibilities that were not foreseen, but having been performed become ‘a customary social reflex.’ (1976: 132).

Eco points out that Peirce’s discussion of abduction involves two different aspects:.

(b) overcoding. Using Peirce’s example, Eco points out that Peirce inferred that the person was the governor because there already was a convention that established a canopy over a person’s head that functions as a sign of honour. What Peirce did was

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‘complicate’ the code by using other available evidence, such as being in a province, surrounded by four men, etc. ‘Therefore he has accomplished an operation of *overcoding*: on the basis of a pre-established rule, a new rule was proposed which governed a rarer application of the previous rule’ (1976: 133). Overcoding also takes place with the use of rhetorical and stylistic devices: when a person says /how are you/ or we see the sign /closed on Sundays/ what we have is the basic code of language that is being complicated by the certain circumstances coupled with certain stylistic devices (1976: 133).

(c) undercoding takes place when one lacks the rules but assumes them to be parts of a code. Eco uses as an example the familiar situation of a person going to live in a country in which he does not know the language. After some time the person infers from his experience in the country that a number of expressions /I love you/ or Hi, man!/ or /How are you?/ can be translated as <<friendship>>. Eco’s point is that the above expressions (and his list is longer) do not necessarily mean the same in English but this code should prove sufficient to interact in the new country. This is a case of undercoded abduction, where despite the lack of a precise code, one tentatively posits a code

At times both codes can be mixed together and Eco calls this process ‘extra-coding’:

Overcoding proceeds *from existing codes to more analytic subcodes* while undercoding proceeds *from non-existing codes to potential codes*. This double movement, so easily detectable in various cases (paralinguistics is a clear case of overcoding, aesthetic judgements – beautiful vs. ugly – are very deceptive cases of undercoding), is frequently intertwined in most common cases of sign production and interpretation, so that in many such threshold-cases (in which the programmed march toward codes is mixed with the free activity of semiotic production and innovation) it would be wiser to speak of *extra-coding* (such a category covering both movements at once. The movements of extra-coding are the subject matter of both a theory of codes and a theory of sign production. (1976: 136)

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In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco develops the concepts of overcoded and undercoded abduction but also introduces the concept of creative abduction.

(a) ‘overcoded abduction’ occurs when the rule is given to us such that we do not realize we are following the rule; the interpretation of a sign takes place ‘automatically or quasi-automatically’:

When someone utters /man/, I must first assume that this utterance is the token of a type of English word. It seems that usually we do this kind of interpretive labour automatically, but it is enough that we are living in an international milieu in which people are supposed to speak different languages, and we realise that our choice is not completely an automatic one. To recognise a given phenomenon as the token of a given type presupposes some hypothesis about the circumstances of utterance, the nature of the speaker, and the discursive co-text. (1984: 41)

(b) ‘undercoded abduction’ involves selecting the rule out of a number of equivalent alternatives from within a shared body of knowledge: the point is to choose the most plausible one:

...we have no guarantees that the meaning of /man/ is necessarily, and in every context, <<rational mortal animal>>. According to different contextual and circumstantial selections (see Eco 1976, 2.11), a man also can be a very virile person, a brave male, a two-footed creature, and so on. Therefore, when one utters /this is a man/, we have to decide whether one says that this is a rational animal, a mortal creature, or a good example of virility, and so on...The decision as to whether certain properties (belonging to the meaning of the term) must be blown up or narcotized (see Eco 1979 and Chapter 2 of this book) represents a good case of undercoded abduction (1984: 42)

(c) ‘creative abduction’ necessitates the invention of a rule to make the interpretation of a sign possible. The interpretation of detective novels and the work of scientists provide the best examples of this rule.

We implement creative abduction when dealing with poetic texts, as well as when solving criminal cases. Many interpretive decisions concerning symbols (see Chapter 4 of this book) involve creative abductions. Many cases in which language is used not to confirm but to challenge a given world view or a scientific paradigm, and to decide that certain properties cannot belong any longer to the meaning of a given term



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(see chapter 2 of this book) require an interpretive cooperation that displays many characteristics of a creative abduction (1984: 43)

## 4.0. The Production of Signs

The importance of Eco's theory of codes lies in its ability to explain the production of signs. He defines a sign as '*everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*.' (1976: 16) Eco attempts to reconcile pragmatics with semantics since his theory of codes explains the way signs and their meaning are generated through usage.

The starting point for Eco's theory of sign-production is that it involves labour, work: there is labour involved in the production of signals, in choosing from a number of signals, in co-ordinating signals into an acceptable sign-function and in interpreting these signals. This is the labour involved in the production of signs (1976: 153-156):

- i. There is a labour performed on the expression continuum in order to physically *produce* signals;
- ii. There is a labour performed in order to articulate *expression-units*...;
- iii. There is a labour performed in order to correlate for the first time a set of functives with another one, and thus making a code;
- iv. There is a labour performed when both the sender and the addressee emit or interpret messages *observing* the rules of a given code...
- v. There is a labour performed in order to *change* the codes shared by a given society;
- vi. There is a labour performed by many rhetorical discourses, above all the so-called 'ideological' ones, in which the entire semantic field is approached in apparent ignorance of the fact that its system of semantic interconnections is more vast and more contradictory that would appear to be the case.
- vii. There is a labour performed in order to interpret a text by means of a complex inferential process.
- viii. There is a labour performed by both sender and addressee to articulate and to interpret sentences whose content must be correctly established and detected.
- ix. There is a labour performed in order to check whether or not an expression *refers* to the actual properties of the things one is speaking of.
- x. There is a labour performed in order to interpret expressions on the basis of certain coded or uncoded circumstance.
- xi. The labour which the *sender* performs in order to focus the attention of the *addressee* on his attitudes and intentions, and in order to elicit behavioural responses in other people....it may be

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noted that among these various communicational acts figure not only the so-called locutionary ones, which may correspond to semiotic and factual judgements, but also all those types of expression that do not express any assertion but on the contrary perform an action or ask, command, establish a contact, arouse emotions and so on (illocutionary and perlocutionary acts)

By replacing the traditional typology of signs with a typology of sign-production, Eco reiterates his criticism of traditional semiology that over-emphasises the linguistic model. While language is one of the most sophisticated sign-systems available for study it is not the only one.

Interestingly, Eco applies his theory of sign-production to aesthetic messages i.e., to the use of language for aesthetics. His hope is that, by doing so, traditional problems in philosophical aesthetics might be resolved using semiotic analysis. The relation between semiology and aesthetics can be seen because aesthetic texts involve the manipulation of expressions which, as a result, create a new content that in turn initiates a change of codes producing a new understanding or knowledge of the world. In Eco's analysis of aesthetic texts both the sender and the reader focus on the material that has been produced and that has been transformed into 'interesting' material through the process of semiology. The material transformed into aesthetics is different from the material used for the communication of signals by information theorists.

A red flag on a highway or at a political meeting can be based on various differently manipulated matters in order to be grasped as an expression: but the quality of the cloth and the shade of red are in no way relevant. What is important is that the addressee detects /red flag/. Yet a red flag inserted in a pictorial work of art depends, among other things, upon its chromatic quality, in order to be appreciated (and to convey its signification). (1976: 266)

In aesthetic texts, both at the level of expression and at the level of content, the codes are 'transcended': at the level of expression, the material used is semiologized. It is the code

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that produces the new expressions rather than the individual. At the level of content, aesthetic texts communicate an abundance of meaning that might leave the impression that no communication is taking place at all. It is by answering the question of how new works of art are produced that one can see how communication still takes place. Because works of art stimulate an interrogation into their own status as works of art, this could lead to the production of a new code, a code that seem connected to a personal style or movement. Once the unique style becomes recognised it tends to become the norm. Despite standardization, the uniqueness of a work of art is still retained because imitations emphasize those aspects that they are imitating. Aesthetic texts have a communicative value in that they involve a process of changing a denotation into a connotation; aesthetic texts communicate a meaning that Eco points out is a form of knowledge. If aesthetics also concerns knowledge we can acquire of the world, then, he suggests, it can likewise contribute to semiology: 'If aesthetic texts can modify our concrete approach to states of the world then they are of great importance to that branch of a theory of sign production that is concerned with the labour of connecting signs with the states of the world.' (1976: 275).

The communication between the sender and the receiver in an aesthetic text involves an interplay between the intention of the author and the freedom of interpretation of the receiver. This explains why the meaning of the text is not always or completely predictable. An aesthetic text is 'a multiple source of *unpredictable "speech acts"* whose real author remains undetermined, sometimes being the sender of the message, at others the addressee who collaborates in its development' (1976: 276).

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Following *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco's research focussed on two overlapping areas: the use of semiology in more general social concerns where interpretation and inference are part of cognitive activity and the application of his general semiological insights to texts. However, in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, he elaborates upon the domain of semiotics as a discipline by distinguishing between three different types of semiotics:

(a) a 'specific semiotics' that is concerned with particular sign systems and the rules of signification that allow communication: these fields range from the grammars of sign language for the deaf, traffic signals, to poker. The crucial point for Eco is that the study of these systems leads to a 'scientific' kind of knowledge that entails prediction and the possibility of social engineering:

notwithstanding, a specific semiotics can aspire to a 'scientific' status. Specific semiotics study phenomena that are reasonably independent of their observations. Their objects are usually 'stable'---even though the duration of a code for traffic signals has a shorter range than the duration of a phonological system, whereas lexical systems are in a continuous process of transformation. Being scientific, a specific semiotics can have a predictive power: it can tell which expressions, produced according to the rules of a given system of signification, are acceptable or 'grammatical' and which ones a user of the system would presumably produce in a given situation. (1984: 5)

(b) an 'applied' semiotics that Eco describes as a 'twilight zone' whereby semiological concepts are applied to

literary criticism, the analysis of political discourses, perhaps a great part of the so-called linguistic philosophy...Frequently, the semiotic practices rely on the set of knowledge provided by specific semiotics sometimes they contribute to enriching them, and, in many other cases, they borrow their fundamental ideas from a general semiotics. (1984: 6).

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(c) a ‘general semiotics’ that differs from the other two types of semiotics in that it focuses on general categories: this is more of a philosophical enterprise than a scientific one. In this case, semiology posits the category of the ‘sign’ in much the same way as the philosopher posits the ‘good’ or the ‘true’:

To walk, to make love, to sleep, to refrain from doing something, to give food to someone else, to eat roast beef on Friday---each is either a physical event or the absence of a physical event, or a relation between two or more physical events. However, each becomes an instance of good, bad, or neutral behaviour *within a given philosophical framework*. Outside such a framework, to eat roast beef is radically different from making love, and making love is always the same sort of activity independently of the legal status of the partners. From a given philosophical point of view, both to eat roast beef on Friday and to make love to *x* can become instances of ‘sin’, whereas both to give food to someone and to make love to *y* can become instances of virtuous action. (1984: 10)

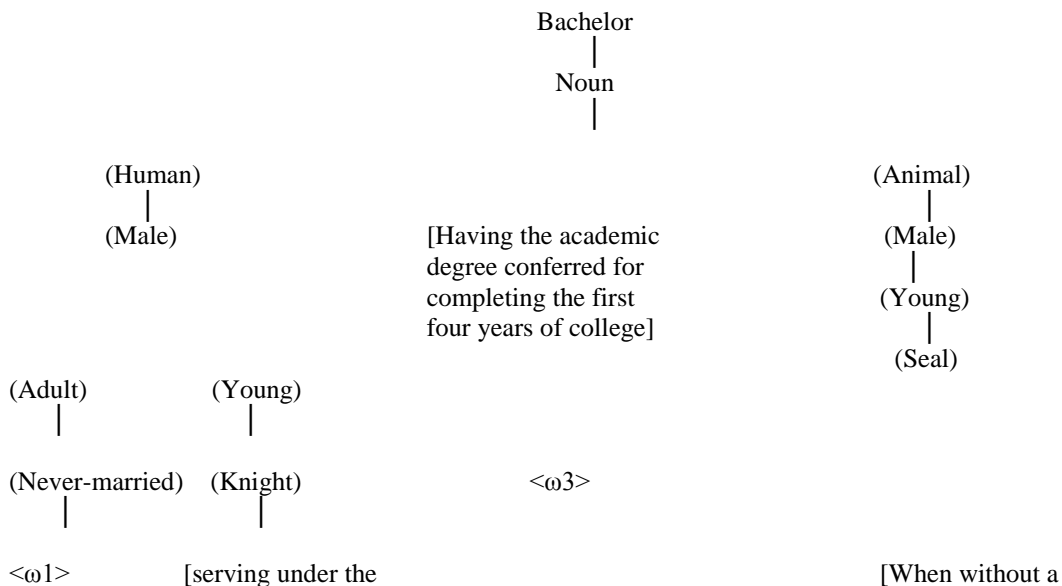
Since philosophical and ‘general’ semiotics attempt to make sense of the world by giving it a coherent form, ‘general semiotics’ has the benefit of explanatory power since it can put together data that seems disconnected and it is also a ‘practical power’ since it can change the world. For example, Marxism explained the relations between classes as one of conflict suggesting ways in which to transform society; however, while it has this practical potential, unlike science or ‘specific semiotics’, philosophical or ‘general semiotics’ does not have predictive power. In other words, it cannot say how things will turn out. The importance of general semiotics is that its objects are all the domain of human signifying practices. Language, in particular, is the fundamental semiotic activity of humans: the paradox is that we can only understand language by using language and as a result, ‘a general semiotics transforms, for the very fact of its theoretical claim, its own object.’ (1984: 12)

## **5.0. Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias.**

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Linguists have argued that meanings can only be analyzed linguistically and therefore ‘belong’ to the dictionary. From within this conceptual framework, they oppose the intensional constructs of the dictionary to the extensional material of the encyclopaedia. Eco collapses this distinction arguing that when defining a term the meaning of the term points to or depends upon an external context. It is not possible to have a ‘pure’ dictionary, uncontaminated by the external world. Consequently, he concludes that the encyclopaedia remains the most fruitful concept of human knowledge, both for that which is true and for that which has been imagined. It is potentially an open-ended field, given that it includes the knowledge of all cultures. Social competence relies upon the encyclopaedia.

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco discusses the model proposed by Fodor and Katz (1963) and dubbed by him the KF model (1976: 97)



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standard of another]

|  
<ω2>

mate during the  
breeding time]

|  
<ω4>

Eco point to a number of weaknesses with this model:

(a) Dictionary and encyclopaedia. This model, while supposed to explain the ideal competence of an ideal speaker, turns out to be very similar to a dictionary: it fails to explain the social competence of the speaker. (1976: 98) Eco points out that such a competence is a requirement for a semiotic theory of communication and signification. Fodor (1972) is very much concerned to leave the world out of his semantic model but Eco argues that as long as a term is coded and recognised by society then one need not worry about whether what the term refers to exists or not. The basis for recognition is the one 'that allows the KF Model to assume that a /bachelor/is an unmarried man and not a toothpaste; on the basis which allows not only an encyclopaedia but also a dictionary to record that a given entry means one thing in a certain context or for given uses, and in other case means another.' (1976: 99)

(b) Connotations. Another problem with the KF Model is that it fails to take into consideration the connotations that can be associated with a term: 'it offers the semantic theory of a strictly denotative language, and gives the rules for a basic dictionary that might be useful for tourists who wanted to order lunch, but would be of little help if they really wanted 'to speak' a given language'. (1976: 100)

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(c) Distinguishers. In the KF Model, the weakness of markers is supplemented by the use of distinguishers, but this in turn leads the Model out of a purely intensional domain (as originally intended) into an extensional one. Thus, for example, the intensional description of an Animal Male Young Seal leads to the external world of seals without a mate during the breeding season, and ‘the more dangerous result is that, without such an extensional description, there is nothing to distinguish a seal with a mate from a seal without one – except that the latter is called a /bachelor/.’ (1976: 102). There is a further problem in that while the Human Male Adult Never-Married is considered a marker, the Animal Male Adult when without a mate during breeding season is considered a distinguisher. It might seem that an unmarried man is always unmarried while the unmated seal is unmated only during the breeding season. However, this is mistaken since both are situational and can therefore change.

In *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco develops the concept of the encyclopaedia using the metaphor of the labyrinth. He describes three different kinds of labyrinths:

(a) the classical labyrinth: the labyrinth of Crete is the prototypical example of the classical labyrinth. It was linear and its only purpose was that of reaching the centre and return out of it. As such, one could not get lost in it, and it cannot be considered a model for the encyclopaedia.



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(b) the maze: this is a ‘true’ labyrinth for within it one can get lost. A number of alternatives are available and out of all the alternatives it is a question of finding the right one in order to be able to get out of it.

(c) the net: the labyrinth as a net is one where every point is connected to every other point leaving open the possibility of establishing new connections. ‘The territory of the United States does not oblige anyone to reach Dallas from New York by passing through St. Louis, Missouri; one can also pass through New Orleans’ (1984: 81)

Eco lists the fundamental characteristics of the encyclopaedia as a net (1984: 83-85): (a) it is ‘structured according to *a network of interpretants*’; (b) it is ‘virtually *infinite*’ since it takes into account all the interpretations generated by different cultures; (c) it includes what has been believed as true, false, imagined or legendary ‘provided that a given culture had elaborated some discourse about some subject matter’; (d) it is a ‘*regulative idea*’ since it allows for the isolation of a portion of the social encyclopaedia to enable the interpretation of texts and discourse; (e) it provides ‘structured knowledge,’ as long as it is realised that this knowledge is local and not global. The attempt to think of one’s local, encyclopaedic knowledge as the only worthwhile knowledge, i.e., as global, is in effect, an ideological gesture.

Eco’s developing ideas on the encyclopaedia as the embodiment of both linguistic and factual knowledge (since the encyclopaedia represents the cultural knowledge generated

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by the interpretant) is indicative of his thinking away from codes as rules to that of codes as making inferences possible.

## **6.0. Model Authors and Model Readers**

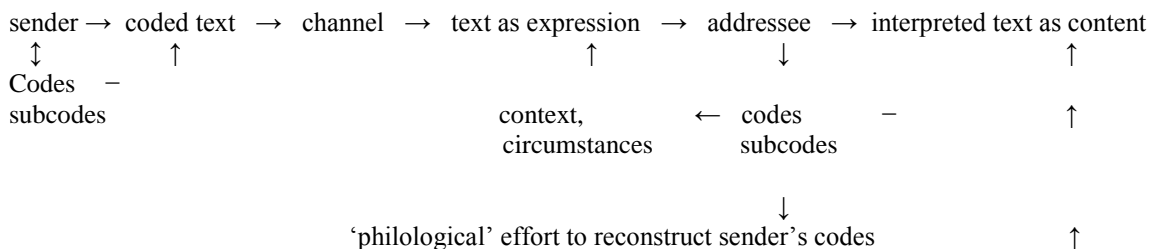
A considerable amount of Eco's work is oriented towards the specific application of semiology to the narrower domain of textual interpretation where the object of interpretation is the complete text rather than simple sentences. These two areas are not mutually exclusive since interpretation is central both to perception and to texts. The sign could be the text as a whole whereby the reader chooses from alternative interpretations. In *The Role of the Reader* (1979) Eco conducts an analysis of the status of the reader as an important pole in the actualizing of texts. The reader must be assumed both as a necessary condition for communication and for the attribution of meaning: it is the reader that makes both communication and signification possible.<sup>iv</sup>

Using concepts derived from his semiological theory, Eco's starting point is the words of the text that he had described as the level of expression. This level needs a reader to actualise them for without the reader the text (and any message) remains empty. The reader correlates a meaning with an expression in accordance with a code. At the very minimum, it is assumed that the reader has a certain grammatical competence so that he/she knows how to combine each word to generate a meaning. In the case of written texts the situation is even more complex since what the reader has to actualise is more than he/she finds on the page at the level of expression.

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But while the text assumes that there is a reader who will actualise it, it is not necessarily the case that the message the sender communicates will be the same as that which is interpreted. Eco had already discussed this in the theory of semiotics (1979: 139) where he criticised the sender-message-receiver model of communication because it assumed that the message arrived in ‘pure’ form from the sender to the receiver. A number of elements come into play in the interpretation of a message: it is subject to the different codes of the sender and the receiver; the code itself is complex, structured by a number of rules; and that to understand a linguistic message, it is not enough merely to know the linguistic code since other elements come into play that can hinder or help the reception of the linguistic message: these range from the circumstances, idiosyncrasies, and assumptions involved in the production and reception of the message. Eco elaborates (1979: 5)

...the standard communication model proposed by information theorists (Sender, Message, Addressee---in which the message is decoded on the basis of the a Code shared by both the virtual poles of the chain) does not describe the actual functioning of communicative intercourses. The existence of various codes and sub-codes, the variety of sociocultural circumstances in which a message is emitted (where the codes of the addressee can be different from those of the sender), and the rate of initiative displayed by the addressee in making presuppositions and abductions---all result in making a message (insofar as it is received and transformed into the *content* of an *expression*) an empty form to which various possible senses can be attributed. Moreover, what one calls ‘message’ is usually a *text*, that is, a network of different messages depending on different codes and working at different levels of signification. Therefore the usual communication model should be written...



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The difference between spoken and written communication is that while spoken communication has the possibility of limiting the range of interpretations due to the non-verbal background of signs, written communication allows for many different interpretations.

In his analysis of textual interpretation, Eco distinguishes between two sets of concepts: the empirical author and the empirical reader are opposed to the Model Author and the Model Reader. Perhaps the best way to start is by examining the role of the empirical author and many consider the empirical author as essential to the interpretation of a text. Is he/she the empirical, flesh and blood person? Or is the author the subject who intends to mean something by the text? In literary theory the empirical author is considered a problem insofar as the life of the author is unimportant to the meaning of the text.

However, although the empirical author is unimportant for the interpretation of a text, the author is important in another way:

To organize a text, its author has to rely upon a series of codes that assign given contents to the expressions he uses. To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible readers. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (1979: 7)

Through the text itself the Model Reader is constructed as one who is competent enough to co-operate with it: 'it seems that a well-organized text on the one hand presupposes a model of competence coming, so to speak, from outside the text, but on the other hand works to build up, by merely textual means, such a competence' (1979: 8). Eco lists the

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way texts posit every possible reader through a series of choices: the choice involved in the use of a shared linguistic code, the choice in the use of a specific literary style, and through the choice in the use of specific markers of specialized subjects. There are also instances where the text is directed at a particular reader (for example, children's stories); there are also texts that seek their Model Readers by activating their encyclopaedic knowledge so that this in turn creates the kind of Model Reader it is looking for. Using the historical novel *Waverley* (1815) written by Sir Walter Scott as an example, Eco writes that

whoever approaches *Waverley* (even one century later and even---if the book has been translated into another language---from the point of view of a different intertextual competence) is asked to *assume* that certain epithets are meaning <<chivalry>> and that there is a whole tradition of chivalric romances displaying certain deprecatory stylistic and narrative properties. (1979: 7)

The text generates its possible interpretations and its possible readers. The text postulates a series of competences that the Model Reader is capable of: it is the difference between the competence shared by author and reader and the actual knowledge of the addressee that opens the way for different interpretations. The textual clues that point to the Model Readers are 'signalled by a number of different means: language, the choice of a particular kind of encyclopaedia or ensemble of cultural references, particular vocabulary or style, or genre.' (Caesar, 1999: 122-3)

In turn, the Model Reader postulates the Model Author: a process of reciprocal co-operation takes place where the Model Reader activates the textual strategies of the Model Author. It is the Model Reader who postulates the Model Author through the text. The intention of the empirical author and reader are irrelevant. It does not matter what the

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empirical reader thinks the empirical author might have wanted to say; rather, what matters is the text out of which one infers or postulates the author. This is why the empirical author and the empirical reader are considered by Eco as ‘textual strategies’: the use of the grammatical markers such as ‘I’ or ‘you’ in a text do not refer to actual persons but function to actualise a text.

...the author is textually manifested only (i) as a recognizable *style*, or textual *idiolect*---this idiolect frequently distinguishing not an individual but a genre, a social group, a historical period (*Theory*, 3.7.6); (ii) as mere actantial roles (/I/ = <<the subject of the present sentence>>); (iii) as an illocutionary signal (/I swear that/ or as a perlocutionary operator (/suddenly something *horrible* happened.../). (1979: 10)

Another key element in the analysis of texts is that of ‘Inferences *by intertextual frames*’, where ‘[n]o text is read independently of the reader’s experience of other texts.’ (1979: 21) Eco argues that a text is understood when the appropriate frame is used (just as the use of the wrong frame leads to misinterpretation). Eco (for example) cites a line from *Undrame bein parisien* by Alphonse Allais where a quarrel takes place between Raoul and Marguerite. When a person reads, ‘Hands raised to strike, with a remorseless gaze, and a moustache bristling like that of a rabid cat, Raoul bore down on Marguerite, who quickly stopped showing off.’ (1979: 264), it is evident that the passage belongs to the frame ‘violent quarrel’; the reader knows that Raoul’s raising his hand was not a situation of him voting for some issues or person. While these ‘frames’ govern our reading expectations it must be added that each reader brings with him/her the reading of other texts. The notion of intertextuality refers to this: texts ‘carrying’ in their wake other texts and these different ‘frames’ belong to the mind-set of the reader.

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Eco distinguishes further between the ‘common’ frames that members of a culture share as part of their encyclopaedic competence and intertextual frames that are narrower in scope and recognised by a restricted audience, ‘Common frames come to the reader from his storage of encyclopaedic knowledge and are mainly rules for practical life (Charniak, 1975). Intertextual frames, on the contrary, are already literary ‘topoi’, narrative schemes (see Riffaterre, 1973; 1976).’ (1979: 21) These intertextual frames differentiate readers who are informed about what is taking place in the text, who recognise the ‘tricks’ or ‘twists’ in the text from those readers that ‘simply’ follow the text without a degree of competence.

## **7.0. Open and Closed Texts**

Related to the concepts of the Model Reader and Model Author are those of open and closed texts. The closed text aims for a particular type of Model Reader: he/she is the average person who, for example in the case of detective novels, is merely interested in the way the text ends.

Those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers (be they children, soap-opera addicts, doctors, law-abiding citizens, swingers, Presbyterians, farmers, middle-class women, scuba divers, effete snobs, or any other imaginable sociopsychological category) are in act open to any possible ‘aberrant’ decoding. A text so immoderately ‘open’ to every possible interpretation will be called a *closed* one. (1979: 8)

This is the paradoxical feature of closed texts: because they are supposed to produce a determinate response, it might – and frequently does – happen that readers produce ‘aberrant’ interpretations. The text as a closed ‘entity’ produces interpretations that were

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not intended by the text; they are interpretations produced from outside or externally to the text. In this situation, what one is doing is not interpreting the closed text but using it since the interpretation is taking place without any consideration of the textual strategies inherent within the text. As examples of closed texts Eco refers to Superman comics, Eugene Sue and Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. And in support of this claim, Eco argues that while the closed texts of the Bond novels are aimed at a specific reader, he himself has produced a semiological interpretation of them. The problem with closed texts is that they 'seem to be structured according to an inflexible project. Unfortunately, the only one not to have been 'inflexibly' planned is the reader.' (1979: 8)

While closed texts suggest the construction of a certain Model Reader, open texts suggest another kind of 'sophisticated' reader. The construction of this reader depends entirely on the text itself, 'You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however 'open' it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation.' (1979: 9). The text posits a reader with a certain competence, a reader who, given the appropriate competence, would be considered a 'good' reader of that text; if he/she fails in that competence then he/she has not satisfied the 'felicity' conditions of that text. The kind of good reader expected from *Ulysses* can be discerned from the text itself 'because the pragmatic process of interpretation is not an empirical accident independent of the text qua text, but is a structural element of its generative process.....the text is nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own Model Reader' (1979: 9-10). Eco argues that the good reader of *Finnegans Wake* cannot be a Greek from the second century B.C or an illiterate man of Aran because they would not have the required syntactical and



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lexical competence. Without the necessary competence to understand the text, Bondella describes the situation as ‘a missed opportunity for the actual empirical reader to transform himself or herself into the model reader envisioned by the model author.’ (1997: 167)

The underlying assumption of this distinction between readers is that some readers carry a larger encyclopaedia with them so that their reading of a text is better informed, and therefore allowing for an appreciation of insights that the naïve reader would fail to notice. In ‘The Limits of Interpretation’ (1990), Eco re-iterates this point:

Once again we must remember that every text presupposes and constructs always a double Model reader- a naïve and a ‘smart’ one, a semantic reader and semiotic or critical reader. The former uses the work as semantic machinery and is the victim of the strategies of the author who will lead him little by little along a series of previsions and expectations. The latter evaluates the work as an aesthetic product and enjoys the strategies implemented in order to produce a Model Reader of the first level. (1990: 92)

While the naïve reader co-operates with the author at the minimum level of generating a narrative from the text, the sophisticated reader goes through the same motions as the naïve one but takes a step back, whereby he/she appreciates the textual strategies inherent in the text. ‘In order to know how a story ends, it is usually enough to read it once. In contrast, to identify the model author the text has to be read many times, and certain stories endlessly.’ (1995: 27) So too, it is possible that some texts posit through their textual strategies both the ‘naïve’ and the ‘critical’ reader and Eco refers to Alphonse’s *Allais Un dram bien parisienne* pointing out that there is a big difference in the responses of these readers: ‘The naïve reader will be unable to enjoy the story (he will suffer a final

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uneasiness), but the critical reader will succeed only by enjoying the defeat of the former.' (1979:10)

A question that has always interested Eco concerns the limits of interpretation, and he has long argued against the idea that interpretation is infinitely open ended, 'you may infer from texts things they don't explicitly say---and the collaboration of the reader is based on this principle---but you can't make them say the contrary of what they have said.' (1995: 92) To counter the claim - popular with some American practitioners of deconstruction - that every interpretation is equally acceptable, Eco argues that there is something external to the text, something that acts as a boundary or limit to what constitutes an acceptable interpretation. The limits of possible interpretations are established by what he calls the 'consensus of the community' (1992: 144) of interpreters. This community establishes the rules of interpretation and produces a standard for judging its value and while acceptable interpretations will continue to generate other interpretations, unacceptable interpretations will be eventually forgotten since they are 'unable to produce new interpretations or cannot be confronted with the traditions of the previous interpretations.' (1992: 150) The limits that Eco proposes are flexible enough to permit different interpretations but also provide the framework for those that are unacceptable. Caesar elaborates, 'The reader, we are told, cannot make a text say anything that she or he wants it to say. *The Name of the Rose* contains abundant information on medieval herbalism as well as much useful advice on how to poison people, but it cannot be read as a treatise on botany, pharmacology or toxicology.' (1999: 149)

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An illuminating example of the limits of interpretation is offered by Eco himself who shows how the interpretations of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* by Gabriele Rossetti, Eugene Aroux and Luigi Valli in the nineteenth century were fundamentally flawed. These writers who Eco labels 'Followers of the Veil' were convinced that Dante's poetic work was really a 'veil' hiding secret messages, secret societies, and conspiracies. The point is their interpretations have no historical evidence to support their claims so it is the text itself that sets the limit to the way it is interpreted in its interaction with the community of interpreters. When a misinterpretation occurs it is the result of the commentaries about the text, rather than the text. This is not to say that commentaries have no contribution to make: on the contrary, a commentary, despite being open to potentially endless interpretation, folds upon the text to show its autonomy.

The community of interpreters are those who establish the boundaries of what counts as a good or bad interpretation. Authority and interpretation go hand in hand since judging a reading as bad or unacceptable is in practice an exercise of power. It might be claimed that the author of the text has the 'authority' or 'power' to decide on questions of interpretations. This is a claim Eco rejects: the empirical author has no authority over the text. Rather, authority lies in the hands of the Model Reader.

## **8.0. Reading the Bond Novels**

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Eco has always been a defender of the texts produced within the category of popular culture arguing that such texts should not be dismissed so easily as ‘escapist’, but are worthy of serious analysis. Popular culture has often been viewed as inferior by cultural theorists of both the left and the right who maintained the elitist position where only certain works of art deserved to be considered for study.

In ‘Narrative Structures in Fleming’ (1979) Eco reads the series of James Bond novels written by Ian Fleming. His goal is to explain the success of these novels to both the everyday man in the street and the sophisticated or cultured reader. What is it that makes these texts appealing? How do they function to attract such different kinds of readers? The answer to these questions is that these texts are based on two fundamental sets of relations: the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic.

Paradigmatic relations consist of the rules that are combined to generate the novels. These rules constitute a ‘narrative machine’ that tap into the values and desires of different kinds of audiences. While these basic rules are common to all of Fleming’s novels, it is the ways in which they are combined and re-combined that make each of the novels different. The paradigmatic rules involve both a series of oppositional terms and a relationship between the terms,

I have singled out fourteen couples, four of which are opposing characters, the other being opposing values, variously personified by the four basic characters:

- (1) Bond-M;
- (2) Bond-Villain;
- (3) Villain-Woman;
- (4) Woman-Bond;
- (5) Free World-Soviet Union;

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- (6) Great Britain-Non-Anglo-Saxon Countries;
  - (7) Duty-Sacrifice;
  - (8) Cupidity-Ideals;
  - (9) Love-death;
  - (10) Chance-Planning;
  - (11) Luxury-Discomfort;
  - (12) Excess-Moderation;
  - (13) Perversion-Innocence;
  - (14) Loyalty-Disloyalty.

These pairs do not represent 'vague' elements but 'simple' ones that are immediate and universal, and, if we consider the range of each pair, we see that the variants allowed in fact include all the narrative devices of Fleming.' (1979: 147)

A number of relationships are entailed by this list: relations between characters, between ideologies and between values. The novels constitute the way these different relationships are played out and Eco examines the different combinations that are used in the respective novels.

Syntagmatic relations explain the sequence of events that takes place in the novels. These sequences are likened to a game where, just as one move by one player is followed by another move by another player, in a similar manner a Bond novel follows a certain number of moves that are 'prearranged' and 'invariable',

- A. M moves and gives a task to Bond;
- B. Villain moves and appears to Bond (perhaps in vicarious forms);
- C. Bond moves and gives a first check to Villain or Villain gives first check to Bond;
- D. Woman moves and shows herself to Bond;
- E. Bond takes woman (possesses her or begins her seduction);
- F. Villain captures Bond (with or without Woman, or at different moments);
- G. Villain tortures Bond (with or without Woman)
- H. Bond beats Villain (kills him, or kills his representative or helps at their killing);
- I. Bond, convalescing, enjoys Woman, whom he then loses

The scheme is invariable in the sense that all the elements are always present in every novel (so that it might be affirmed that the fundamental rule of the game is "Bond moves and mates in eight moves"). That the moves always be in the same sequence is not imperative. (1979: 156)

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Eco's detailed analyses of Fleming's novels show that while the syntagmatic relations may change, the paradigmatic ones remain the same. It is this possibility of variation upon a structure coupled with a number of incidental features that make the novels a pleasure for the audience. In *From Russia with Love* (1957) the Soviet secret agency called SMERSH plans to assassinate James Bond but since Bond is no ordinary person his assassination must not be ordinary but rather an embarrassment both to him and to the British secret service. A trap is laid where Bond must go to Istanbul to get hold of a code-breaking machine and where his contact there is a 24 year old Russian woman. M, Bond's chief tells him that the girl is apparently in love with him after having read all about him. Bond is suspicious of the whole story but is persuaded by M that it is a plausible scenario. Bond agrees finally say 'There's no reason why a Russian girl shouldn't be just as silly as an English one'. ( in Radford, 2003: 37)

The narrative continues and readers know he will get captured but the suspense lies in how he will turn the tables on his captors. Captain Nash is the agent of SMERSH who has been entrusted with the task of killing Bond. His professionalism is shown by the accuracy with which he has shot Bond's wristwatch; evidently, there is no escape for Bond this time. His execution is timed to coincide with the train passing through a tunnel so as to mask any possible sounds that bond might utter as he dies. But as it turns out, Captain Nash's shooting ability is turned against him. Bond – recalling that Captain Nash mentioned wanting to shoot him through the heart – places a copy of *War and Peace* in front of his heart. 'It had all depended on the man's accuracy. Nash had said that Bond

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would get one bullet through the heart. Bond had taken a gamble that Nash's aim was good as he said it was. And it had been.' (in Radford, 2003:180)

As readers, we know that Bond will survive and yet we still enjoy reading Fleming's novels. However, Eco distinguishes between two kinds of readers or audience: the 'passive' and the 'cultured' types. With the passive audience pleasure is generated in 'the repetition of a habitual scheme in which the reader can recognise something he has already seen and of which he has grown fond....[he] finds himself immersed in a game of which he knows the pieces and the rules – and perhaps the outcome – and draws pleasure simply from following the minimal variations by which the victor realizes his objective.' (1979: 160). The passive reader is the one who enjoys going through the motions that structure the novel. Evidently, this type of reader contributes little to the reception of the text and Eco argues that Fleming's use of cold war ideology is drawn from the context that readers were familiar with at the time. By deploying the ideology of the cold war Fleming made sure that the reader could identify with the novel passively since no contribution was needed on their part.

So too the popularity of the novels among the general public was the result of a re-working of theme of good versus evil. This opposition is, on Eco's account, a 'universal' theme and Fleming's novels replay in modern form what was traditionally characteristic of the fairy tale. In the fairy tale a certain pattern is followed: the knight (Bond) is sent by the King (M) on a mission to destroy some evil being (the Villain) and rescue the Lady (the Woman). The universal opposition of good versus evil belongs to the collective

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consciousness of mankind that has viewed them as forces in eternal conflict. Without knowing it, the passive audience recognises this conflict since it constitutes the human condition.

There still remains to explain why the Bond novels also appeal to the ‘cultured’ or ‘sophisticated’ reader. The appeal is grounded in a number of features found in the novels that a person with a cultured background would appreciate. For example, the ‘evil characters’ in the Bond novels recall Marino’s Satan who through the poet Milton influenced the romantics; Satan is depicted as ‘fascinating and cruel, sensual and ruthless’(1979: 171), features that are found in the Villain and Bond; or the physical characteristics of James Bond, ‘the ruthless smile, the cruel, handsome face, the scar on his cheek, the lock of hair that falls rebelliously over his brow, the taste for display’ (1979: 171) would remind this reader of the Byronic hero.

In his analysis of the Bond texts, Eco notices the contrast in Fleming’s style between lengthy descriptions of the ‘obvious and the banal’ and short descriptions of key actions and events. This is because Fleming wants the reader to identify with what he/she is already familiar with: ‘he describes a game of canasta, an ordinary motor car, the control panel of an airplane, a railway carriage, the menu of a restaurant, the box of a brand of cigarettes available at any tobacconist’s. Fleming describes in a few words an assault on Fort Knox because he knows that none of his readers will ever have occasion to rob Fort Knox.’ (1979: 167) The point of these long descriptions and digressions is, according to Eco, that Fleming believes that the reader considers these to be the mark of high



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literature. But Eco's assessment of Fleming is that while the Bond novels succeed in pleasing the public, in the way they attract their reader they are 'only a more subtle, but not less mystifying, example of soap opera.' (1979: 172).

In a later work, Eco revises his criticism of Fleming arguing that his own critique was ideologically biased and that Fleming's technique of shifting from long passages of inessential descriptions to short descriptions of eventful ones was a technique also used by Alessandro Manzoni (1995: 68). In his revision of Fleming, Eco now considers him as a Model Author from whom other aspiring authors might learn something of value.

### **Critical remarks**

Eco is a prolific writer who has raised several interesting points, which in turn, have been commented upon and challenged. For a start, on the distinction between open and closed texts, Lévi-Strauss disagrees with Eco's claim that what defines a work of art is its being 'closed'. Lévi-Strauss argues that there are intrinsic properties within the work that justify its status as a work of art<sup>iv</sup>; in other words, he shifts the question of establishing the status of something as art onto the search for objective qualities.

Caesar's (1999: 155-157) detailed study of Eco questions the distinction between the naive and the sophisticated reader arguing that it does not seem to be a tenable distinction to maintain. He gives the following reasons: (a) in both cases the reader is passive, but with the sophisticated reader, the sophistication lies in his/her admiration towards the author's 'cleverness'; (b) the relation between the Model Reader and the Model Author is

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restricted to an appreciation of the skills and techniques in the text; this goes against the reading experience of many to whom texts contribute and highlight their own experiences; in addition, the pleasure of reading consists of immersing oneself in the character and the situation, rather than in admiring the author's skills; (c) the strict disjunction between naïve and sophisticated/critical reader is weak since reading can be both: it is not impossible to conceptualise a reader who is naïve but develops a critical attitude or vice versa. The distinction between the 'sophisticated' and the 'naïve' reader has led Caesar to comment the concept of the Model Reader is being 'tainted' with empirical (psychological, sociological) considerations.

In the analysis of popular culture, Strinati's (1995:106-107) discussion of Eco's semiological reading of the Bond novels points to a tension in his theoretical position. On the one hand, Eco claims that it is impossible to know what readers will make of Fleming's texts with the implication that the reception of these texts depends upon the readers; but on the other hand, Eco's own analysis is directed at the universal structures that produce the text, independently of readers. In addition, Strinati (107-8) refers to the work of Bennett and Woolcott who argue that there are no universal codes that lie outside history, but rather, contexts with specific codes. Readers approach these texts with certain cultural knowledge and their reading codes are in-formed through this cultural knowledge. Many readers would have had knowledge of British spy thrillers as they read the Bond novels.

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In this chapter, I have started by offering a detailed account of Eco's semiological theory. This account has covered (a) the study of signs, followed by (b) the distinction between signification and communication, (c) the concept of abduction and (d) the production of signs, and (e) dictionaries and encyclopaedias. I then focus on the narrower domain of textual semiotics, (f) starting with the distinction between Model Authors and Model (g) Readers and (h) Open and Closed Texts; this is followed (i) Eco's semiological analysis of the James Bond novels.

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Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the current sense of this opposition), in a small or large unit, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre or absolute anchoring [*ancrage*]. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called “normal”. What would a mark be that could not be cited? Or one whose origins would not get lost along the way? (1988: 12)

## **Derrida and the Deconstruction of Communication**

Jacques Derrida (1930-2002) and the practice of deconstruction that has become synonymous with his name became widely known in the late 1960s for a new approach to the analysis of texts irrespective of the discipline to which they traditionally belonged. While such an approach has been judged by its adherents as a radical liberation from the outdated categories of thought that permeate western culture, its detractors accuse Derrida of wilful obscurantism. Derrida’s rise to intellectual fame initiated with his publication of three books in 1967: these are *Of Grammatology*, *Speech and Phenomena* and *Writing and Difference*.

Derrida’s notoriety and rejection is closely related to what he conceives of as the practice of deconstruction. This practice entails closely reading other philosophers with a special focus or attentiveness to their written language; this practice reveals a concern with the literary-ness of philosophy, with the fact that much of philosophy is communicated through texts with the result the language used - ambiguity, metaphor and imagery - disrupts the content that is being expressed. This is not the traditional view of

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philosophical practice where philosophers assume that a ‘proper’ piece of philosophical writing communicates an argument or thesis clearly and logically. Derrida argues that certain words will always escape the control that the author attempts to exert on the text, that the intentions expressed and the language used to express those intentions are not necessarily synchronised.

In this chapter, I am going to (a) elaborate on what are considered traditional theories of language and use this elaboration to introduce some of the terminology associated with the practice of deconstruction. This followed by (b) an examination of Derrida’s account of the spoken-written hierarchy which will serve to highlight (c) the role of *differance* in Derrida’s philosophy and finally (d) discuss Derrida’s relation to speech act theory and his engagement with John Searle.

## **1.0. Language**

While reading Derrida might initially seem a rather daunting task, once one is comfortable with a number of terms used in his writings, then these become (relatively) more accessible. A good place to start is with the concept of ‘presence’ as it features throughout Derrida’s texts. When an object (a tree) or a thought (a holiday) is present to us, it would not be mistaken to say that the ‘tree’ is next to us or that we are thinking about our holiday at the moment: both the tree and the holiday are present ‘here and now’ to us externally (in the world) or internally (as a thought or idea in our mind). This model

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assumes that there is a truth beyond and independent of our language, about which we can only communicate by using our words and language.

Derrida<sup>iv</sup> challenges this view arguing that there is no truth outside language for language is the ‘filter’ that prevents any direct access to the world or to our minds. Derrida is critical of traditional theories of language that explain the way meaning is produced in terms of either (a) language’s relation to the world, such that the meaning of a sentence is located in its ability to represent the external world; or (b) language’s relation to the self where meaning is produced by the mind or consciousness. The underlying assumption operating in these theories is that of ‘presence’: in the case of the former the presence of the world acts as a guarantor of meaning, while in the case of the latter, the mind or consciousness acts as a guarantor of meaning. Both the world and the mind are the foundations that offer stability to language.

The notion that there is a truth outside language that is present to the person is one that has ‘haunted’ western thinking about reality, and Derrida has labelled this the ‘metaphysics of presence’. He argues that western metaphysics can be read as

determinates of being as *presence* in all the senses of the word....all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have designated an invariable presence – eidos, arche, telos, energieia, ousia, (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentalis, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth. (1978: 279-280)

The metaphysics of presence is closely connected to what Derrida calls ‘logocentrism’ and ‘phonocentrism’. Logocentrism refers to the classical use of the Greek word *logos* to mean, ‘word’, ‘speech’, ‘law’, and over time has been associated with ‘reason’. With

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logocentrism Derrida identifies a close connection in western thought between the self as a conscious, rational mind and language: according to this view, the self is both prior to and the source of meaning which then expresses itself through the medium of language. This is not an uncommon view of the self for it is widely believed that each of us is a unique self that communicates its uniqueness through language. The problem with this account, according to Derrida, is that when we look into our self and listen to the voice 'within us', this voice 'within us' is already an effect of language. The critique of logocentrism is that there is no self that exists prior to and apart from language.

Furthermore, logocentric thinking with its emphasis on reason promotes a specific way of thinking by subscribing to the values of logic as the tool for the communication of thought. Logical thinking excludes all meaning that cannot be controlled by the principles of identity and non-contradiction: as a result, a concept has a single, identical meaning and this meaning is opposed to another, such that to assert it and its opposite at the same time would be a contradiction (for e.g. to say a bachelor is a married man). There are three consequences of this way of thinking that Gutting (2001: 293-4) labels as

(a) the principle of opposition where the world is structured into binary opposites (the true versus the false, the soul versus the body, good versus evil, etc).

(b) the principle of exclusion where the meaning of a concept excludes, by definition, that which does not fall within it. Given the way (for example) good is defined then certain acts would by definition be considered evil.

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(c) the principle of priority where thinking is structured not only in terms of oppositions and exclusions, but where the terms in the opposition are value loaded. There is, according to Derrida, an inherent bias that favours one of the terms in the opposition so that (for example) truth is privileged over error, the good over the bad, the soul over the body and the masculine over the feminine.

Phonocentrism is intimately tied to logocentrism in the sense that it is a symptom of the logocentric bias of western thought. Since by communicating our thoughts with language there is the danger that the language used might influence our thoughts, a superior form of communication would be one without language, a kind of ‘telepathy’ between minds in direct communication with each other. But since this ideal form of communication is unattainable the spoken word is the next best option. Phonocentrism favours the spoken word since the voice is closest to the mind and is therefore best suited to communicate our thoughts. Derrida notices, in his reading of the history of western thought, that different writers from different disciplines have always privileged speech while considering writing as a secondary and inferior medium. The problem with writing is that it involves the use of stylistic devices that can prevent the ideal of clarity in communication from being attained.

For Derrida, logocentrism and phonocentrism are the attempt to explain away differences of meaning by reducing them to a single meaning; logocentric thinking is oppressive in that it attempts to control the multiple potential meanings with language. Derrida’s goal is



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to liberate language so that its inherent potential, its many possibilities of meaning are released.

It might be useful at this stage to answer the question ‘what is deconstruction?’ The answer, however, is not so simple for it is the characteristic feature of deconstruction to resist any attempt to be simply defined in terms of an ‘is’ because the ‘is’ presumes an ontology that deconstruction works against and from within. In “Letter to a Japanese Friend”, (1983) Derrida suggests to Japanese translator ways in which the term deconstruction can be translated into Japanese and in the process outlines a number of ways in which deconstruction should not be conceived. For a start, (a) deconstruction is not some nihilistic destruction of everything and (b) neither is it a type of analysis for analysis is a process of reducing elements to their basic units, but it is these basic units that deconstruction is engaged with; (c) it does not involve critique of any sort, for the concepts involved in critique - choice, judgement, the Kantian transcendental – are those things that deconstruction operates upon; (d) it is not a method which is in competition against or methods or which can be taught as a kind of procedure in educational institutions; (e) it is not something that a person or an institution does to a text from the outside. Derrida closes the Letter by writing, ‘What deconstruction is not? Everything of course! What is deconstruction? But nothing of course!’ (1983: 5)

## **2.0. Speech and Writing**

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Most people would be taken aback if they were told that to understand the nature of language, to understand what is essential and unique about it, then they should look to writing rather than speaking to achieve this goal. It is generally assumed that oral communication is the primary function of language, with writing considered an additional and secondary feature. And it is not hard to imagine the basis for this assumption for when we speak we feel as though we are both producing and in control of the meaning as we speak.

Derrida controversially argues for the priority of writing, but this should be immediately qualified: in arguing for the priority of writing, he is not discussing the chronological evolution of language i.e., whether, historically, writing came before speaking, but rather the logical preconditions that make a language possible. The deconstruction of the speech-writing opposition is an important feature of Derrida's overall project of undermining the metaphysics of presence since the spoken word is widely associated with the presence of the speaker. In this section I am taking two of Derrida's texts that demonstrate his deconstruction of the spoken-written opposition: these are his reading Plato in *Dissemination* (1981) and his reading of Saussure in *Of Grammatology* (1976).

In the essay 'Plato's Pharmacy' in *Dissemination*, Derrida offers a sophisticated reading of Plato's *Phaedrus* where towards the end of this text, we find Socrates engaged in defending the priority and superiority of speaking as opposed to the inferiority and secondary aspect of writing. Derrida's deconstructive strategy renders this opposition

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untenable by questioning those values that the privileged term in this contrast - speech - assumes.

A cursory reading of the *Phaedrus* immediately challenges our understanding of Plato's philosophy. Plato was a firm believer in the power of the dialectical process that uses reason and logical deduction to arrive at the truth. But Plato's attempt to justify the superiority of speech over writing is framed within a mythical context. This is highly unusual because Plato had always insisted on the superiority of rational explanations over mythological ones. Derrida will demonstrate that though this is unusual, Plato is obliged - perhaps without knowing - to start in this way given that mythology and writing share the common feature of repeating without being able to provide reasons for what they are repeating. In 'Plato's Pharmacy' Derrida's strategy is not merely that of reversing oppositions, but of going further by displacing the entire spoken/rational and written/mythical opposition.

The myth in question concerns the presentation of a number of gifts invented by the god Thoth to the Egyptian King Thamus. These gifts would benefit humanity and they include numbers, geometry, mathematics, astronomy, and writing. The benefit of writing is that it will make 'the Egyptians wiser and [it] will improve their memories: both memory and instruction have found their remedy.' (1981: 96-7) However, King Thamus is not convinced. He approves of all the inventions except for writing, offering a number of interrelated reasons for rejecting it.

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The fact is that this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it because they will not need to exercise their memories, being able to rely on what is written, using the stimulus of external marks that are alien to themselves rather than, from within, their own aided powers to call things to mind. So it's not a remedy for memory, but for reminding, that you have discovered. And as for wisdom, you're equipping our pupils with only a semblance of it, not with truth. Thanks to you and your invention, your pupils will be widely read without benefit of a teacher's instruction; in consequence, they'll entertain the delusion that they have wide knowledge, while they are, in fact, for the most part incapable of real judgment. They will also be difficult to get on with since they will be men filled with the conceit of wisdom, not men of wisdom. ( in Derrida, 1981: 102)

The negative assessment of writing can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Writing replaces the living voice and presence of the speaker with inanimate signs.

Instead of the presence of the teacher who can guide and instruct the student, who can activate the knowledge within the student, writing offers a system of signs that does not challenge the student in the search for truth, but merely repeats the same thing. When someone reads and re-reads a text, he/she will find exactly the same words. If the person has difficulty in understanding the text, they will remain with their difficulty because there is no author to explain the meaning of the text. Writings 'seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever.' (in Derrida, 1981: 135-6)

- (b) Writing makes people lazy. The memory of those who rely on writing will decline because they will no longer find the need to exercise their memory since they can consult the written text whenever they feel like. But the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom is not merely the result of blind repetition but the active exercise of memory framed within the student-teacher model.

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(c) The teacher-student relationship will no longer have any importance since the student can dispense with the teacher and just read the text. But true knowledge and wisdom is accumulated over time as a result of the maturity of the teacher who can transmit this knowledge and wisdom orally to the student. The authority of the teacher is in effect challenged and the natural social order is disrupted.

(d) The written text acquires a life of its own. Since a written text can communicate a meaning without requiring the speaker to explain that meaning, the written text, in effect, makes the speaker redundant: texts can be read and understood even when the author is dead. The problem and danger with writing is its autonomy since the written word is meaningful independently of the author and as a result it is possible to offer interpretations that differ from what the author originally intended:

And once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its aid being unable to defend itself or attend to its own needs. (in derrida, 1981: 143)

There is an evident paradox in the relation between Plato, Socrates and the *Phaedrus* itself. Socrates argues for the priority of the spoken word as the medium for the practice of philosophy while denouncing writing in the process; consistent with this belief Socrates does not write his own philosophy. But, unless the philosophy of Socrates is written down, it would soon be forgotten after his death. And even if he does not explicitly say so, Socrates wants his philosophy to be remembered. Writing down his

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philosophy is therefore a necessary evil and this ‘duty’ is performed by his diligent student, Plato, who thereby ensures that what was taught by Socrates is communicated to posterity.

Despite this inconsistency between what Socrates says and what Plato does, Derrida’s deconstructive reading goes further: he focuses on certain features of the text that other readings tend to skim over or ignore as unimportant details. With extreme meticulousness he unravels the different senses of certain terms used by Plato to articulate his point of view. What these different senses show is that there is no single, clear-cut rationality that can communicate the truth of the *Phaedrus*: the values of reason, logic and speech – values that are central to Plato’s philosophy – are disrupted by a number of metaphors that are found in the text. Plato (for example) uses the Greek word ‘pharmakon’ to discuss the nature of writing as both a ‘poison’ and a ‘cure’. What Derrida points out is that although these two senses of ‘pharmakon’ are opposed to each other, they are found together when Plato describes writing. Writing is a ‘poison’ since it threatens the purity of living speech: with the spoken word the speaker knows what he/she means, but with writing the connection between the speaker and the meaning is dislocated since a written text has no need of the speaker to explain its meaning. On the other hand, writing is a ‘cure’ for old age, a ‘cure’ that aids the failure of memory with the passage of time. And as a ‘cure’ it enables a person to remember what was spoken about in the past since through writing the original intention of the speaker is preserved forever.

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The *pharmakon* reveals the inability of the text to transmit a single meaning. The difficulty is that of deciding which of the two senses Plato intends. Derrida answers that it is not possible to decide and the term ‘*pharmakon*’ is one that Derrida describes as an ‘undecidable’. Writing as *pharmakon* is the sign of irreconcilable opposites, a disruption of the logic of identity:

If the *pharmakon* is “ambivalent,” it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing.). It is on the basis of this play or movement that the opposites or differences are stopped by Plato. The *pharmakon* is the movement, this locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. (1981: 127)

Memory plays an important role in Plato’s account of truth and it is from within this memory-truth axis that writing is considered a disruptive influence on the grounds that writing impoverishes memory. However, while Plato sees writing as a threat to memory, he then goes on to distinguish between a ‘good’ type of memory and a ‘bad’ one. The ‘good’ type of memory (*anamnesis*) occurs when those truths that the soul has forgotten are recalled through proper teaching. The ‘good’ use of memory involves the living presence of the speaker/teacher, who in dialogue with the student, activates his/her memory so as to repeat what was already known but forgotten. The ‘bad’ type of memory is the one that replaces the genuine live interaction of the intellect with ‘shorthand’ signs; it is not genuine knowledge since it is not the product of reflection. The ‘bad’ type of memory is repeats blindly without any understanding of the material under consideration. Derrida’s argument is that this contrast is untenable since both the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ type of memory rely equally on the possibility of repetition, on the ability to repeat what happened in the past.

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On both sides of that line, it is a question of *repetition*. Live memory repeats the presence of the *eidos*, and truth is also the possibility of repetition through recall. Truth unveils the *eidos* or the *ontōs on*, in other words, that which can be imitated, reproduced, repeated in its identity. But in the anamnestic movement of truth, what is repeated must present itself as such, as what it is, in the repetition. The true is repeated; it is what is repeated in the repetition, what is represented and present in the representation. It is not the repeater in the repetition, not the signifier in the signification. The true is the presence of the *eidos* signified. (1981: 111)

It is on the question of repeatability that Derrida's argument hinges: on the one hand, for truth to present itself as truth it must be repeated in the presence of the teacher, through the use of the spoken word and the exercise of memory; on the other hand, repetition is also the characteristic of non-truth, writing and bad memory: 'The true and the untrue are both species of repetition.' (1981:168)

However, while writing is pejoratively described, it would seem that – at some level – Plato is unable to relinquish writing completely. One of the clearest examples of the conflict between what Plato intends to say and what he actually writes can be seen in his attempt to define speech by using metaphors of writing. When Phaedrus asks Socrates to specify which form of discourse is superior to writing, he replies, 'the sort that goes together with learning and is written in the soul of the learner.' (in Derrida, 1981:148). As Derrida points out, isn't it remarkable that after Socrates put so much effort into condemning writing, he then goes on to define speech as 'writing' on the soul? Writing, in some sense, must be necessary after all and this is why a distinction is made between good and bad writing:

According to a pattern that will dominate all of western philosophy, good writing (natural, living, knowledgeable, intelligible, internal, speaking) is opposed to bad writing (a moribund, ignorant, external, mute artifice for the senses). And the good one can be designated only through the metaphor of the bad one. Metaphoricity is the logic of contamination and the contamination of logic (1981:149).



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Derrida also argues that the ‘instability’ of writing, its effect and disruption of speech was also played out in ancient Greek society which defined itself in opposition to those persons who did not fit in. But, while Greek society excluded its others, it also maintained within its walls a number of individuals who could be used as scapegoats in times of crisis, ‘the representative of the outside is nonetheless *constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community, chosen, kept, fed, etc., in the very heart of the inside.’ (1981: 133) Interestingly, the Greek word for these scapegoats is *pharmakos* (defined as wizard, magician, prisoner and scapegoat), a word not found in the *Phaedrus* but whose etymology reveals an overlap with the *pharmakon*. Derrida argues that there is continuum of sense between the words found within Plato’s text and those found outside it. And just as the purity of Greek society was contaminated by maintaining within itself those it wanted to exclude, likewise the purity of speech is ‘contaminated’ by writing.

Among the other values that constitute the framework of the discussion on the spoken and written are also questions concerning the role of authority and the legitimation of tradition as a way of ensuring the continued existence of the community. This existence is ensured by the tradition which acknowledges the father as the natural authority transmitting orally to his legitimate son the values and knowledge of that community. Within this father-legitimate son framework, writing is an ‘orphan’ permitted only because it is non-threatening,

the specificity of writing would thus be intimately bound to the absence of the father....the status of this orphan, whose welfare cannot be assured by any attendance or assistance, coincides with that of a *graphein* which, being nobody’s son at the instant it reaches inscription, scarcely remains a son at all and no longer

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*recognizes* its origins, whether legally or morally. In contrast to writing, living *logos* is alive in that it has a living father (whereas the orphan is already half dead), a father that is *present*, *standing* near it, behind it, within it, sustaining it with his rectitude, attending it in person in his own name.(1981: 77)

Underlying Plato's text is another logic that operates by exclusion with the goal of protecting truth from the corrupting influence of writing. The model of speech as the medium that leads to truth through dialogical interaction can only and necessarily condemn writing as a secondary and impoverished derivative. The *Phaedrus* is situated at a relatively early stage in western philosophy and is indicative of a certain way of thinking about language, truth and reality. It might lead one to argue that Plato is the 'founder' of this way of thinking. However, despite this prominent historical position, Derrida carefully rejects talk of both 'origins' and 'ends' as these belong to the 'luggage' of logocentric metaphysics whose assumptions he seeks to undermine. To claim that Plato is the originator of this way of thinking about speech is to return to the framework of binary oppositions that belong to the discourse of the metaphysics of presence. In his close reading of 'Plato's Pharmacy', Derrida has shown the play of differences work within the text. The term *pharmakon* has the structure of the double that is undecidable since it is used simultaneously as both a poison and a cure.

In *Of Grammatology* (1976) Derrida uses a similar strategy to question Saussure's claim of the superiority of the spoken word over the written word. While Derrida remains indebted to Saussure for the radical innovations he brought to linguistics, Derrida's reading develops these innovations to their logical conclusions. The importance of Saussure's linguistics is that it offers a tentative critique of logocentrism: by arguing that a sign is composed of a signifier and a signified, Saussure is, in effect, dismissing the

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view that a sign is used to communicate ideas lie outside the sign system. And yet, despite this promising start, Saussure did not realise the implications of this own linguistic model and remained ‘trapped’ within the metaphysics of presence that has characterised western culture (1976: 53). And while Saussure considered his linguistics to be a scientific study of language, Derrida argues that his ‘scientific’ model is tainted with logocentric and phonocentric assumptions.

The starting point for Saussure’s linguistics immediately reveals his prejudice in favour of speech: in the study of language, it is the sound or phonology that should be the focus of attention. ‘For each language uses a fixed number of distinct speech sounds and this is the only sound system which has any reality as far as the linguist is concerned.’ (1983: 34) This is prejudiced because if one is studying language as a whole then this should include both the spoken and the written word; by stressing sounds or phonology it is evident that Saussurean linguistics – allegedly scientific and objective - values the spoken word from the outset. As a result, writing is positioned as the external other to speech and ‘outside’ language in general.

The phonocentric bias is even more evident in Saussure’s account of the relation between speech and writing: ‘[t]he object of study in linguistics is not a combination of the written word and the spoken word. The spoken word alone constitutes that object.’ (1983: 24-25) And yet, despite this exclusion of writing, he goes on to say that although ‘writing is in itself not part of the internal system of language, it is impossible to ignore this way in which the language is constantly represented. We must be aware of its utility, its defects

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and its dangers.’ (1983: 24) There is a tension in Saussure’s thinking on the relation and value of the spoken and the written word for while the spoken word is exclusively privileged as the object of study for linguistics, it seems that the written word shouldn’t be dismissed out of hand. On the contrary, Saussure warns us to be vigilant since many people continually and mistakenly think of writing as part of language.

But Saussure is not only issuing a warning: in his analysis of writing, his rhetoric describes writing as having many ‘dangers’, as something with the power to ‘usurp’ the spoken word, as exercising a ‘tyranny’ over language as a whole. It is odd to hear writing condemned with such an outburst of indignation. Derrida asks why Saussure felt the need to resort to such forceful rhetoric: what is it about writing that is so threatening?

One of the threats lies in writing’s ability to disrupt the natural condition of language. According to Saussure, there is a natural connection between meaning and sound, ‘the natural and only authentic connection which links word and sound.’ (1983: 26) Humans, by nature, have the faculty of expressing themselves through sounds and this explains why he considered phonology (the study of sound) as the model for the science of linguistics. Implicit in Saussure’s view is the assumption that the natural order of the world is one where humans in their natural state use language in the first instance to speak.

But this claim on the way things are by nature is challenged by Derrida who asks: how can Saussure claim that there is a natural connection between the sounds humans produce

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and the meanings in their minds, when he considers one of the achievements of his linguistics to be the non-natural connection between sounds and meanings? The thesis of the arbitrary nature of the sign gives an account of the relation between the signifier (the sound) and the signified (meaning) as a non-natural relation. These two claims – the natural and the arbitrary – are precisely the opposite of each other so it is strange to find them next to each other in Saussure's explanation of language. The thesis of the arbitrary nature of the sign has an important consequence for the alleged superiority of the spoken to the written: (a) if the spoken is superior to writing because it is natural and (b) if writing is inferior because it is unnatural, and (c) if all signs (spoken and written) are arbitrary, then (d) this disrupts the contrast between the natural and the unnatural, a contrast that Saussure wanted to retain.

In addition, Saussure had also introduced the principle of difference to explain the identity of signs. What gives sounds an identity is not something inherent within the sound itself but its relationship to other signs within the linguistic system, a system constructed according to certain conventions of use. The basis of this claim is Saussure's view that the sign is fundamentally a psychic phenomenon as opposed to a material one: sounds are not defined by their physical manifestation but by the way they relate to other sounds.

...it is impossible that sound, as a material element, should in itself be part of the language. Sound is merely something ancillary, a material the language uses....linguistic signals are not in essence phonetic. They are not physical in any way. They are constituted solely by differences which distinguish one such sound pattern from another. (1983: 116-117)

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The evidence for the differential nature of sound could be seen in the way different people could pronounce sounds differently and yet still be understood. This showed that understanding could take place because it was not a question of the sound being related to the meaning, but a question of understanding sounds as different from others within the sound system. As Derrida one again points out, the differential nature of sounds contradicts Saussure's claim that there is a natural connection between sounds and meaning.

Given that Saussure considered there to be a natural connection between sound and meaning, what is the danger posed by writing? The danger represented by writing is that it threatens the natural order of things. Writing has the potential to disrupt the way words are pronounced since different people can read the same words but pronounce them differently. These variations of pronunciation would eventually lead to modifications within the language itself and, as a result, the natural connection between the sound and meaning would be weakened. Derrida writes,

This natural bond of the signified (concept or sense) to the phonic signifier would condition the natural relationship subordinating writing (visible image) to speech. It is this natural relationship that would have been inverted by the original sin of writing... (1976: 35)

As Derrida points out, Saussure way of thinking conceptualises writing as a phenomena lying outside of language: since by nature language is a spoken medium, then writing is the non-natural, external other of language, posing a permanent threat to the natural order of things.

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There is a further interesting twist to Derrida's reading of Saussure. The internal contradiction in Saussure's writing is apparent when, after having condemned writing so vigorously, he uses writing as a useful model to understand the functioning of language as a whole. 'An identical state of affairs is to be found in that other system of signs, writing. Writing offers a useful comparison, which throws light upon the whole question.' (1983: 117) One would think that, having expressed so many reservations about writing, Saussure would have adopted some other model. Perhaps, as Derrida points out, he could not do otherwise.

The problem for Saussure's account is that it had privileged speech at the expense of writing by prioritising sound, but the difference that enables a person to identify a sound is not a itself a sound. Difference or the 'space' between sounds is what makes the identification of different sounds possible and it is also this 'space' that makes meaning possible. As a result, the spoken word loses its privileged status since both the spoken and the written are generated by the same process of difference.

By definition, difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude. Therefore, its necessity contradicts the allegation of a naturally phonic essence of language. It contests by the same token the professed natural dependence of the graphic signifier. (1976: 53)

Saussure had placed writing in a secondary and derivative position on the grounds that it was a 'signifier of a signifier,' but the principle of difference shows that all signs were signs of other signs. As it turns out, the feature that was identified so closely with writing is the same feature that can best explain the functioning of the linguistic system as a

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whole. Perhaps, this is why Saussure increasingly turns to models and examples of writing as support for his linguistic theory.

The implication of Saussure's use of writing as a model to explain all of language reveals that writing is not the external other of language, situated in a secondary and derivative position, but rather always already within language. As it turns out, language is a form of writing. Derrida writes, 'the alleged derivativeness of writing, however real and massive, was possible only on one condition: that the "original," "natural," etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing.' (1976: 56) Derrida calls this generalised concept of writing 'arche-writing' or 'originary writing' and his argument is that the characteristic that was attributed to writing – difference and absence – is the characteristic of language as a whole. 'Writing is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true.' (1976: 43) And by broadening the concept of writing to arche-writing, other systems of meaning production (ideograms, hieroglyphics, and cybernetic systems) rather than just the written marks on a page can be explained.

The re-definition of writing as a generalised writing, as arche-writing that includes both the spoken and the written word as signs of signs leads to a reversal of the speech-writing hierarchy and a re-construction of the concept of writing. Although arche-writing is the condition for the possibility of both speech and writing, it should be noted that Derrida's notion of arche-writing does not function as a 'master' concept positioned outside of a discourse. Although it is not a transcendental signified that provides a stable foundation



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for discourse, it can be described, according to Gasche (1988), as ‘quasi-transcendental’ in that it functions like a transcendental signified but operates within specific texts and discourses.

Derrida’s close textual reading undermines the strategies employed within the discourse of metaphysics to erase difference as it seeks to establish the presence of self-identity. Grammatology is the name Derrida uses for the new writing that reveals and revels in its resistance to metaphysics. It would seem that the easiest way of resisting the metaphysics of presence would be to reverse the speech-writing opposition by placing writing in the superior position. This would be a mistake for to do so would be to succumb once again to the logocentrism of western metaphysics. Resistance to the metaphysics of presence is not merely a simple reversal of opposites but rather a re-configuration of the terms to include both terms of the opposition. The terms Derrida introduces throughout his texts – *différance*, arche-writing, pharmakon, supplement and hymen among others – perform this function and in this sense they can be considered undecidables insofar as they resist the attempt to be straitjacketed into a single, determinate meaning. The two or more meanings of these terms undermine the binary oppositions that inform the discourse of metaphysics.

### **3.0. Différance, traces.**

As I have already mentioned, Derrida agrees with the Saussurean model of language but develops it to its logical and radical conclusions. One consequence of his reading of

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Saussure is that of the interrelated notions of ‘trace’ and ‘*differance*’. Derrida argues that the relation between signs is not merely one of proximity, where each sign is different from or opposed to the sign that is immediately next to it, but rather each sign is related to every other sign within the linguistic system. The presence and identity of a sign is also connected to other absent signs within the linguistic system and this means that the use of a sign entails other signs following in its ‘wake’: each sign leaves a trace of itself on other signs. In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida writes,

*The (pure) trace is differance.* It does not depend on any sensible plenitude, audible or visible, phonic or graphic. It is, on the contrary, the condition of such a plenitude. Although it *does not exist*, although it is never a *being-present* outside of all plenitude, its possibility is by rights anterior to all that one calls sign (signified/signifier, content/expression, etc), concept or operation, motor or sensory. (1976: 62)

An indication of what Derrida means by trace and *differance* can be found in *Positions* (1972) where he discusses the key Saussurean conceptual opposition between langue (system) and parole (event). Derrida highlights the paradoxical nature of this opposition for on the one hand, the presence of a sign is established by its difference from other signs within the system, but the system itself can only come about as a result of signs themselves having a meaning in the first place. The speech act (or event) depends upon the system (or langue), but the system itself is the product of speech acts<sup>iv</sup>. (1972: 28) To know the meaning of the sign ‘house’ depends on its contrast with other forms of accommodation, but to be able to articulate the different types of accommodation you must have the sign (such as house) that enable the system to come into being. Derrida describes this process as a circular in that the speech event and the system depend or refer back to each other. What is needed is a way of explaining both, and the term *differance* is

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used to explain the conditions that must be in place so as to account for the generation of meaning.

The term *differance* is a neologism coined by Derrida to capture two characteristics of signs: difference and deferral. It is a combination of ‘to differ’ (as when we say ‘a’ is different from ‘b’) and ‘to defer’ (as in to postpone, put off). The connotations associated with difference and deferral are spatial and temporal respectively: signs are spatial because they are connected next to other signs within the linguistic network, and they are temporal because they are connected to other signs that are before or after them within the linguistic system.

It is because of *differance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called “present” element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. (1982: 13)

When Derrida coined the term ‘*differance*’ he pointed out that in French ‘different’ and ‘differant’ sound the same and this might easily lead to some confusion. This confusion is dispelled when they are written, since their difference is apparent in the spelling. What this highlights is the important Derridean point that certain meanings can only be communicated through the written word.

It should be emphasised that Derrida’s *differance* is not merely the combination of two sets of meanings, but is ‘immediately and irreducibly polysemic’ (1982: 8). The use of a sign has within it the potential to generate infinite meanings as a sign differs from another

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sign that in turn differs from another in a chain of signification so that, given a different context, a different signification might (though not necessarily) be generated. Meaning is not fixed once and for all but is an on-going process, ‘the indefinite referral of signifier to signifier...which gives the signified meaning no respite...so that it always signifies again and differs...’ (1978: 25) One way of showing Derrida’s point is that if we look up the meaning of a signifier in a dictionary, we do not find any signifieds but more signifiers. Storey gives an example of this process of endless postponement or deferral of meaning:

if we look at the signifier ‘letter’ in the Collins Pocket Dictionary of the English Language, we discover it has five possible signifieds: a written or printed message, a character of the alphabet, the strict meaning of an agreement, precisely (as in ‘to the letter’) and to write or mark letters on a sign. If we then look up one of the senses, the signified ‘[written or printed] message’, we find that it too is a signifier producing four more signifieds: a communication from one person or group to another, an implicit meaning, as in a work of art, a religious or political belief that someone attempts to communicate to others, and to understand (as in ‘to get the message’). (1993: 86)

In *Margins*, Derrida describes differance as ‘the movement according to which language or any code, any system of reference in general is constituted “historically” as a weave of differences.’ (1982: 12). But by saying that *differance* is at the core of meaning and history (as their origin) it would seem that Derrida has returned to the language of metaphysics with its emphasis on foundations or first principles. This would re-enact a gesture typical of the tradition of western philosophy that locates a transcendental first principle to explain differences away. But for Derrida, the ‘originary trace’ shows that there can never be a pure, first moment, an origin towards which meaning can return to. Unlike, Saussure who remained trapped within logocentrism by privileging the signified as that towards which signifiers (phonic or graphic) referred to, Derrida considers the signified as just another signifier.

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Thus, although *differance* functions like a metaphysical principle it has no privileged foundational status: it is transcendental in the sense of the underlying presupposition or conditions that make something possible. In this sense, *differance* is the condition for the possibility of language and meaning without being situated in an anterior position to language and meaning. For Derrida, *differance* is inherent within or part of language and meaning and yet it makes language and meaning possible. '*Differance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus the name 'origin' no longer suits it. (1982: 11) There can never be a pure origin or meaning that is independent of all signifiers since signifiers circulate within the linguistic system.

As opposed to the idea of meaning as grounded in an origin or a goal, Derrida argues that signification is a process of dissemination where each sign substitutes the other in an infinite play of meaning. Consequently, there is no centre that can function as a presence to stabilise signs: on the contrary, the presence that logocentrism took as an unquestioned value is an effect of signification, an effect of the linguistic system. *Differance* undermines the metaphysics of presence. This Derridean position opens up the space for a radical theory of interpretation that no longer claims to have access to things or meanings but that produces new interpretations that are in turn interpreted, giving rise to new interpretations, *ad infinitum*.

In his elaboration of meaning as *differance*, Derrida replaces Saussure's static account of language with a dynamic and temporal one that takes into consideration the context/s within which language is used. Whereas Saussure's account considered signs as

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expressing a meaning that was already present within the linguistic system, Derrida's account considers meaning as always incomplete since understanding the meaning of a sign requires taking into account other signs within the linguistic system.

#### **4.0. Communication and Speech Act Theory.**

Traditional theories of communication assume a sender-message-receiver model of communication. On this account, the sender intends a meaning that is encoded (phonically or graphically) into a message, is transmitted to a receiver who decodes the message to understand what the speaker intends to mean. This model operates on the assumption that: (a) communication is the communication of intentions<sup>iv</sup> with the presence of the speaker in oral communication and the absence of the speaker (as a deferred presence) in the case of written communication; (b) there is a strict dichotomy between the signified and the signifier with the signifier as the optional (but necessary) supplement - that enables the signified to be communicated. Interestingly the signified is favoured over the signifier (the meaning over the medium) and furthermore, is assumed to remain the same in each instance of communication.

In 'Signature Event Context' (1988) Derrida's critique of the traditional model of communication aims to demonstrate that the signified/signifier opposition is untenable. This opposition fails to take into account the logically necessary features of all signs – the possibility of their repetition or iteration. His critique opens (a) by identifying this necessary feature in writing, as it is in writing that it is most evident; and continues (b) by

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showing that this feature belongs not only to written signs but to all signs; this is followed by (c) an application of this insight to the speech act theory of J.L. Austin.

Derrida's starting point is a problematization of the concept of communication:

Is it certain that to the word *communication* corresponds a concept that is unique, univocal, rigorously controllable, and transmittable: in a word, communicable? Thus, in accordance with a strange figure of discourse, one must first of all ask oneself whether or not the word or signifier "communication" communicates a determinate content, an identifiable meaning, or a describable value. However, even to articulate and to propose this question I have had to anticipate the meaning of the word *communication*: I have been constrained to predeterminable communication as a vehicle, a means of transport or transitional medium of a *meaning*, and moreover a *unified* meaning. (1988: 1)

Derrida's point is that the concept of communication is typically defined as the transfer of meaning such that the other senses or meanings of communication - such as the imparting of a non-linguistic force or the delivery of a paper at a conference - are considered as secondary. In offering to define 'to communicate' most dictionaries would start by offering the literal sense and then add the figurative ones. But this method offers an inherent difficulty since as we are try to define communication the performative act of defining assumes we already accept that communication is the transfer of meaning. What dictionaries show that understanding or defining the meaning of a concept entails using other words so to start any discussion one must tentatively agree to use words in a certain way within a context. This is precisely the case with the concept of communication.

Derrida starts his analysis of communication by focussing on written communication and his analysis focuses on Etienne Condillac's *An Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge, Being a supplement to Mr. Locke's Essay on the Human Understanding* (1756), an essay explicitly written with the purpose of 'filling' in certain features of

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language that Locke had neglected in his work. Condillac's essay attempts to account for the origins of writing as an addition or supplement to speech: it serves the important function of enabling the communication of messages to take place over greater distances, distances that are out of range of the spoken word but that can be bridged by writing. On Derrida's reading, Condillac justifies writing on the grounds that (a) men have to communicate; (b) they have to communicate the ideas or thoughts in their minds and (c) given that men are already able to communicate to themselves and to others, they invent a new means of communication, writing. (1988: 4)

For Condillac the invention of writing is a progressive 'evolution' of linguistic communication since, given that societies are no longer organised as communities using face-to-face communication, then the distancing of members from each other could be reduced through writing: '[m]en in a state of communicating their thoughts by means of sounds felt the necessity of imagining new signs capable of perpetuating those thoughts and of making them *known* to persons who are *absent*.' (in Derrida, 1988: 4) This, however, is not an accurate way of representing absence and Derrida points out that the absence of the receiver in Condillac's model is not really an absence but a 'modification of presence'. On Condillac's account, to write is to communicate with someone who is present but beyond the range of the spoken word, who, so to speak, is distantly present. Clearly, this view of writing is still dominated by the framework that thinks of the spoken word as present and immediate with the written word as a projection across space of the spoken word. On this account writing does not have any characteristics of its own and it



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owes its relatively favourable status as a result of its ability to transport the presence of the spoken word.

Derrida adds that a more complete understanding of writing as absence is one whereby the receiver is not merely distantly absent, but absolutely absent i.e., dead. The meaning of a piece of writing can still be understood if the receiver is dead, for to understand a written text there is no need to assume that there is a reader who will activate the text. It is possible to write a letter to someone who, unknown to you, has died before the letter arrived: it will still be possible to understand the letter despite the absence of the receiver. This view on the absence of the receiver applies equally to the sender or producer of the text: the author is not a necessary condition for understanding a text since we can understand a text even if the author is dead. Furthermore, it is also possible to understand a written text without needing to know what the author intended to mean. Given the removal of the sender and the receiver as the source or origin of the meaning, where does this meaning 'reside'? The short answer, for Derrida, is that meaning is found within the structure of language itself.

If it is possible to understand a written text without the sender or receiver, then how is it possible for a written sign to function? For a written sign to function, it must have the possibility of being repeated: repetition or 'iterability', as Derrida calls it, is a structural feature of writing and it enables the recognition of a unit of writing as the same despite being different. In other words, the power of iteration makes it possible to both identify a

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string of words as the same and to generate a different meaning since it is being generated within a different context.

For the structure of iteration---and this is another of its decisive traits---implies *both* identity *and* difference. Iteration in its “purest” form---and it is always impure---contains *in itself* the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration. The iterability of an element divides its own identity a priori, even without taking into account the fact that this identity can only *determine* or delimit itself through differential relations to other elements and that it hence bears the mark of this difference. It is because this iterability is differential, within each individual “element” as well as between the “elements,” because it splits each element while constituting it, because it marks it with an articulatory break, that the remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence: it is a differential structure escaping the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence ... (1988: 53)

At this stage it is useful to distinguish between Derrida’s notion of a ‘generalised writing’ with what I am calling ‘specific writing’ (the written sign, writing in a narrow sense). Derrida points out that the traditional account of writing has certain features that pre-figure his ‘generalised writing’: these features are (a) that the written sign does not need to be associated with the present moment; (b) that it can be taken out of a context and inserted into another, a process of ‘grafting’; and (c) it is situated at a distance from that which it refers to so that it can be used again to refer to another thing. (1988: 9-10). The absence that is central to ‘specific writing’ overlaps with the absence that ‘generalised writing’ is concerned with and this is why Derrida applies this insight to all signs: spoken, written, human and non-human. The use of any sign does not entail as a necessary pre-condition the presence of the sender or the receiver: the nature of the sign is that it can be used and reused, i.e., repeated. This notion of ‘generalised writing’ as repetition is the condition that makes all communication possible: absence is an inherent feature of communication and the relatively permanent marks of ‘specific writing’ become possible only as a result of this repetition.

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This structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context) seems to me to make every mark, including those which are oral, a grapheme in general; which is to say, as we have seen, the nonpresent *remainder [restance]* of a differential mark cut off from its putative “production” or origin. And I shall even extend this law to all “experience” in general if it is conceded that there is no experience consisting of *pure* presence but only of chains of differential marks. (1988: 10)

The second part of Derrida’s essay, ‘Parasites. Iter, of Writing: That It Perhaps Does Not Exist’ is an engagement with the speech act theory of J.L. Austin. In *How to do Things with Words* (1975), Austin had argued that the use of language to describe or represent the world is only one way of understanding language, one that could be subsumed within a broader category of speech acts. A speech act is an utterance that performs an action: it is what we do when we talk so that when a couple say ‘I do’, they are not describing a wedding but actually getting married. Since all utterances perform an action we can use language to promise, pray, declare, warn, threaten, joke, and describe etc.

In order to explain these speech acts, Austin does not rely on the presence of the speaker who intends the utterance since one can think of many instances where the intention is not enough to guarantee the meaning of the speech act: a promise remains a promise even if the speaker doesn’t intend to keep his promise. Promises can be explained in terms of the conventions governing their use, the ‘formula’ used in uttering them, rather than the speaker’s intentions. And this is why Austin proposes to explain speech acts by focussing on the conventional context of their production: if certain conditions are fulfilled or satisfied, then the speech act is judged as successful (if not, unsuccessful). These ‘felicity conditions’ are: (a) the appropriate words must be uttered (one can only say ‘I do’ when getting married); (b) they must be uttered in the right context (one can only say them in a

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church for them to be effective as a Christian wedding); and (c) that the speaker is sincere in his/her in uttering them (saying them as a joke renders them null and void). These are the necessary conditions that guarantee the success of a speech act.

A number of features attract Derrida to Austin's theory, namely (a) his explanation of communication in terms of speech acts; (b) his defining communication in terms of 'force'; (c) his elaboration of the notion of force as transformative, as producing an effect; (d) his rejection of the true and the false as the values that are central to language.

For these four reasons, at least, it might seem that Austin has shattered the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic, or symbolic concept. The performative is a "communication" which is not limited strictly to the transference of a semantic content that is already constituted and dominated by an orientation toward truth (be it the *unveiling* of what is in its being or the *adequation-congruence* between a judicative utterance and the thing itself). (1988: 13-14)

But while the feature that attracts Derrida to Austin is the latter's attempt to account for meaning in terms of the context and the associated conventions of production, Austin himself retreats from this explanation when he re-introduces the speaker's intention. In order to account for the transformative power of a speech act, i.e. how an utterance does something to transform a situation, Austin realises that the grammatical structure is not enough to generate the illocutionary force: something else is needed and it is here that the speaker's intentions are re-introduced. Austin therefore distinguishes between the locutionary and the illocutionary aspect of an utterance: the locutionary aspect is explained in terms of the grammatical rules of a linguistic system, while the illocutionary aspect is explained with reference to the way the speaker uses the utterance, to the intentions. The utterance, 'The bus is arriving' can be explained according to the

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grammatical rules of the English language, i.e., its locutionary aspect, but also according to the way the utterance is used by the speaker: as a fact, as a warning to get back onto the pavement, as a remark on its punctuality.

Speech act theory is Austin's attempt to explain the illocutionary force of utterances by identifying the presence of the speaker intending the speech act as a necessary feature of the illocutionary act. It is only (for example) because the speaker intends to keep the promise he/she is making that it counts as 'genuine' speech act of promising. The speaker must be committed to the promises he/she is making and Austin calls the making of a promise that one has no intention of keeping an 'insincerity' or an 'abuse'. It is evident is that speech act theory relies upon the presence of the speaker as a guarantor for the authenticity of his/her utterances.

The critical point Derrida makes at this stage is that the intentionality and presence that Austin associates with speech acts is not necessary for the speech act to mean. It is perfectly possible that an utterance can be repeated in a different context from that within which it was originally uttered by the speaker. For a speech act to function it must derive its meaning independently of the speaker, it must, in other words, belong to a system of conventions that are already in place prior to the speaker and that make it possible for the speech act to be repeated in a different context.

This leads Derrida to make a further claim about Austin's theory of speech acts that has been strongly resisted by commentators sympathetic to speech act theory. If, according to

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speech act theory, utterances require the presence of the speaker to guarantee their authenticity, what happens when someone makes a joke of something serious, when a promise or threat is uttered on stage or when the words of someone else are quoted? These speech acts pose a threat to the claims made by speech act theory since the speaker's intention to mean is being used in a way that undermines the value of intentionality. Austin considers it in the interest of speech act theory to separate performatives into two groups:

a performative utterance will, for example be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void, if said by an actor on the stage, or introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance---a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways---intelligibly---used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use---ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances. (1975: 22)

These utterances are 'etiolated' or 'parasitic' since these 'thrive' upon everyday uses of language, they represent exceptions or aberrations from the norm. As a result, when Austin describes the 'felicity' conditions that ensure the success of a speech act, he excludes those speech acts that are 'non-serious' since these cannot even claim to function as genuine speech acts.

It is this opposition between the 'serious' and the 'non-serious' that Derrida challenges, for by removing the 'non-serious' from the equation, Austin commits an unjustified limitation upon the object of inquiry. If Austin wants to give an account of the way performatives function he must also be able to explain those that cannot function, and not just remove them as irrelevant to the study of speech acts. To account for the possibility of both serious and non-serious speech acts, Derrida introduces the notion of iteration:

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‘what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, “non-serious”, *citation* (on a stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a “successful” performative? (1988: 17)

The condition that makes it possible for a speech act to be taken seriously is the same condition that makes it possible for it to be taken non-seriously. Miscommunication is inherent within the system of communication. Derrida’s concept of iteration describes the fact that speech acts can be taken out of one context and used in another without the need to explain the meaning by referring to the speaker’s presence in the act of intending-to-mean. The metaphysics of presence that Derrida has detected in such diverse writers as Plato and Saussure, has also slipped into Austin’s speech act theory since intentionality is not a necessary, ‘felicity’ condition for the production of meaning; on the contrary, a better explanation for the production of meaning is Derrida’s notion of arche-writing as *differance* since it is the condition that makes the ‘iterability’ of language possible without the need to posit the speaker and his/her intentions.

Derrida is insistent that a speech act is performed and has a meaning in a context. Its importance is such that it is usually taken for granted that to understand the meaning of a sign or signs, one should look at the context of their production. And in this sense, it is frequently accepted that the context is a kind of fixed or enclosed entity within which any ambiguity of meaning can be removed. However, various questions arise: does a text lead to the context or is it the context that allows us to understand the text? What are the

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boundaries of a context? Who decides what is included and excluded from a context?

Derrida is explicit: 'I shall try to demonstrate why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated.'

(1988: 3) While meaning is always context-dependent, the context itself not a fixed and self-enclosed entity. Derrida claims that a context is 'boundless' and this for two reasons:

(a) the attempt to limit what can be included within a context serves to create another context: to say what should or shouldn't be included within a context has the paradoxical effect of creating another context:

any attempt to codify context can always be grafted onto the context it sought to describe, yielding a new context which escapes the previous formulation. Attempts to describe limits always make possible a displacement of whose limits, so that Wittgenstein's suggestion that one cannot say 'bububu' and mean 'if it does not rain I shall go out for a walk,' has paradoxically, made it possible to do just that.' (Culler, 1988: 124)

(b) the addition of new information to the object under investigation in effect creates a new a new context for the object under investigation<sup>iv</sup>. Using Derrida in a book on the philosophy of communication has created a new context for studies in deconstruction.

any given context is open to further description. There is no limit in principle to what might be included in a given context, to what might be shown to be relevant to the performance of a particular speech act. This structural openness of context is essential to all disciplines: the scientist discovers that factors previously disregarded are relevant to the behaviour of certain objects; the historian brings new or reinterpreted data to bear on a particular event; the critic relates a passage or a text to a context that makes it appear in a new light.....meaning is determined by context and for that very reason is open to alteration when further possibilities are mobilized.... (Culler, 1982: 124)

Despite Derrida's questioning of the limits and possibilities of the context<sup>iv</sup>, it still retains an important role insofar as it imposes a limit on interpretation. Contrary to what many think, deconstruction does not advocate an 'anything goes' with regard to interpretation



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and the often quoted 'there is nothing outside the text' is nothing more than a confirmation of the context as a limitation upon the text. The extent of these limits upon the text can be seen by Derrida's endorsement of what he calls 'interpretive police' where a community establishes the criteria for what counts as good or bad, true or false interpretations: 'within interpretive contexts...it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigor, criticism, and pedagogy.' (1988: 146) What Derrida shows is that the rules that govern an interpretation are not somehow natural, but rather the product of a community that achieves a minimum of consensus as to what counts as a good or bad interpretation. It is the community that has the possibility of halting the re-contextualisation of speech acts, and that functions as an 'interpretive police'. When asked about whether the notion of 'interpretive police' implied a certain amount of repression, Derrida responds by pointing out that while there are restrictions on what counts as an interpretation, restriction should not be equated with repression just as a red traffic light is restrictive but not repressive (1988: 132).

It should be recalled that Derrida is not denying that meaning is determined by context as it is this very context that enables communication to take place. His argument that a context is open ended or under-determined does not imply that there is no meaning, that meaning is indeterminate. On the contrary, Derrida insists that 'one cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining (in a manner that is not only theoretical, but practical and performative) a context.' (1988: 136)

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What Derrida has argued for in '*Signature, Event, Context*' is that an adequate account of any speech act theory must be able to explain both its successes and its failures. A case in point is that of 'signatures'. The function of a signature is that of acting as a guarantee of the identity of the person to whatever is being signed: it represents the speaker in his /her absence. And signatures function because they have the possibility of being repeated – as when I sign different cheques – and therefore, as with other signs, a signature can be 'misused' or fail (as when someone counterfeits my signature on a cheque). The possibility of 'misuse' or failure is the result of signatures belonging to the same system of iteration that makes 'serious' or 'successful' signatures possible. The example of the signature is an instance of the same structure that applies to all speech acts: (a) meaning is dependent upon both convention and context, but (b) these do not limit the range of use for speech acts. Speech act theory, in the hands of Austin, attempted to control meaning first by tying meaning down to contextual conventions and – when these seemed inadequate – by tying meaning to the speaker's intentions.

It should be pointed out that Derrida rejects the view that authorial intention should be eliminated and replaced by iterability in the search for meaning. Rather the concept of iterability and the possibility of decontextualisation – both of which are inherent within the structure of language – are the conditions that make possible the author's intentions as one of several possible meanings for any speech act. So too, the author's intention to mean is not there 'in our face' simply waiting to be read off the text. Rather, what counts as the author's intended meaning(s) is also the result of what the community of interpreters operating within a context determine this meaning (s) to be.

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One can surmise the benefits of deconstruction as twofold: (a) it demonstrates how meaning is not dependent upon the sender or the receiver of the message so that any question of intentionality is not exhausted by reducing meaning to subjects and (b) that neither is meaning so tied to the context that it becomes intelligible only in relation to a context; rather contexts are multiple and the nature of the sign is such that it can function in other contexts different from what which it 'originated'. This is why it is always possible to mean something differently from that which we intended to mean.

In 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida' (1977), Searle takes issue with Derrida accusing him of maliciously misreading Austin's work and of undermining the most obvious and common sense view of language as an instrument for communication. Not to be outdone, Derrida responds to Searle's arguments in 'Limited Inc a b c...' (1977) by pitting the 'playfulness' commonly associated with the Yale school of deconstruction against the 'seriousness' associated with Searle and analytic philosophy. Perhaps the most blatant example of this 'playfulness' is his quoting parts of Searle's text (and these quoted parts eventually make up all of Searle's text) within his own and using them out of context to undermine the idea that writing communicates what the author intended to mean despite his/her absence. *Limited Inc* (1988) reproduces both Searle's criticism and Derrida's response:

- (a) Searle argues that Derrida is mistaken in claiming that writing can *only* function in the absence of the receiver.

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Writing makes it *possible* to communicate with an absent receiver, *but* it is not *necessary* for the receiver to be absent. Written communication can exist *in the presence* of the receiver, as for example, when I compose a shopping list for myself or pass notes to my companion during a concert or lecture. (in Derrida, 1988: 47)

Derrida responds by claiming that he never said that the absence of the receiver is necessary for written communication to take place. As Dooley and Kavanagh (2007) point out, this would mean that when Derrida wrote a text, for the text to acquire a meaning he would have had to leave the room. And while the absence of the receiver is not a necessary condition for the text to have a meaning, it is still possible for it to have a meaning if the receiver is not there. A text will always function irrespective of whether the intended receiver is there or not. Iteration or the possibility of repetition is the condition of possibility for there being a text at all,

The ‘shopping list for myself’ would be neither producible nor utilizable, it would not be what it is nor could it even exist, were it not possible for it to function, from the very beginning, in the absence of sender and of receiver: that is, of *determinate, actually present* senders and receivers. And *in fact* the list cannot function unless these conditions are met. (1988: 49)

(b) Searle thinks that Derrida has missed the whole point of Austin’s argument by focussing on secondary aspects of language use:

Austin’s idea is simply this: if we want to know what it is to make a promise or to make statement we had better not *start* our investigation with promises made by actors on a stage in the course of a play or statements made in a novel by novelists about characters in the novel, because in a fairly obvious way such utterances are not standard case of promises and statements. (in Derrida, 1988: 204-5)

Derrida comments on the strangeness of Austin’s claim since in his other writings he considered his theory as a ‘project of classifying and clarifying all possible ways and varieties of *not exactly doing things*...[it] has to be carried through if we are to

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understand properly what doing things is...' (1979: 271) In addition, the whole point of *How to Do Things with Words* was to challenge the (then) dominant traditional view of language as the study of constative utterances (true or false statements). So while traditional philosophy of language offered an inadequate theory of language by excluding performatives, Austin himself initiated a series of exclusions from his own theory, a theory that was supposed to explain all languages-uses, all speech acts. This is why Derrida challenges Searle's claim that Austin is merely suggesting a method for proceeding with the analysis of language since this claim is too restrictive in that it fails to explain the conditions that generate all utterances.

On the question of the non-serious utterances Searle reads Derrida differently: the latter's concern with the value of 'non-serious' utterances, is a sign, that Derrida is not interested in doing 'serious' philosophy and it therefore explains why Derrida questions both the communicative function of language and the value of the context for understanding the meaning of an utterance. In fact, it would seem that Derrida, in Searle's eyes, is determined to challenge the everyday, commonplace assumptions of language use. In effect, Searle argues that the possibility of non-serious utterances, of pretending to make a promise or to get married, depends upon or is secondary to the possibility of making a promise or getting married in real life. Searle writes,

The existence of the pretended form of the speech act is logically dependent on the possibility of the nonpretended speech acts in the same way that any pretended form of behaviour is dependent on nonpretended forms of behaviour, and in that sense the pretended forms are *parasitical* on the nonpretended forms ( in Derrida, 1988 : 205)

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Derrida's reply is to challenge the notion of the dependency of the non-serious upon the serious by arguing that both of these classes require the repetition of conventionally agreed upon 'formulas'. According to Austin, the condition that makes promising possible is the following of a conventional procedure, a 'code' or 'formula' that is uttered. Derrida highlights the iteration of speech acts, when he writes,

Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or in other words if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, to launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* with an iterable model, if it were not thus identifiable in some way as 'citation'? (1988: 18)

And since the iterability of 'formulas' is especially evident in non-serious contexts such as the stage, then Derrida argues that the serious uses are a branch of the more general non-serious uses. Culler is exemplary in bringing out this point,

This is a principle of considerable breadth. Something can be a signifying sequence only if it is iterable, only if it can be repeated in various serious and non-serious contexts, cited and parodied. Imitation is not an accident that befalls an original but its condition of possibility. There is such a thing as an original Hemmingway style only if it can be cited, imitated and parodied. For there to be such a style there must be recognisable features that characterise it and produce its distinctive effects; for features to be recognisable one must be able to isolate them as elements that could be repeated, and thus the iterability manifested in the inauthentic, the derivative, the imitative, the parodic, is what makes possible the original and the authentic. Or to take a more pertinent example, deconstruction exists only by virtue of iteration. One is tempted to speak of an original practice of deconstruction in Derrida writings and to set aside as derivative the imitations of his admirers, but in fact these repetitions, parodies, 'etiolations' or distortions are what brings a method into being and articulate, within Derrida's work itself, a practice of deconstruction. (Culler, 1982: 120)

In addition, there is also the question of the 'parasitical' status of fictional discourse since Derrida denies that fiction is 'parasitic' upon non-fiction. For Searle the relation of non-fiction to fiction is one of logical dependency, with the latter dependent upon the former and which he describes, following Austin, as 'parasitic'.

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Derrida responds by turning the tables onto Searle: if Searle's analysis is supposed to be objective by showing the logical dependence of one to the other, why is his analysis value-loaded relying as it does on pejorative value judgments?

How is it possible to ignore that this axiology, in all of its systematic and dogmatic insistence, determines an object, the analysis of which is in essence not "logical," objective or impartial? The axiology involved in this analysis is not intrinsically determined by considerations that are merely logical. What logician, what theoretician in general, would have dared to say: B depends logically on A, therefore B is parasitic, nonserious, abnormal, etc? One can assert of anything whatsoever that it is "logically dependent" without immediately qualifying it (as though the judgment were analytical, or even tautological) with all those attributes, the lowest common denominator of which is evidently a pejorative value judgment (1988: 92)

Derrida's argument is that Searle's thinking or logic is governed by certain 'pre-logical possibilities' that reveal a hierarchical axiology at work so that certain concepts are privileged over others. This axiology operates in an exclusive 'all or nothing' way so that speech and the serious are opposed to writing and the non-serious. But Derrida argues that the opposition of a concept to another does not entail that one excludes the other from the analysis for to outline or demarcate a concept is, in effect, to mark what it is from what it is not. (1988:123)

To add insult to injury Searle concludes that Derrida does not believe in 'rigorous and precise' distinctions for concepts. Derrida finds this criticism impossible to believe,

What philosopher ever since there were philosophers, what logician ever since there were logicians, what theoretician ever renounced this axiom: in the order of concepts (for we are speaking here of concepts and not of the colors of clouds or the taste of certain chewing gums), when a distinction cannot be rigorous or precise, it is not a distinction at all. (1988: 123)

(c) Searle argues that Derrida's distinction between the spoken and the written word is grounded in a confusion between the permanence of a text and the iterability of a text.

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The relative permanence of a text distinguishes it from speech, but in both the spoken and the written word, it is the intention that grounds the meaning within a context.

The fact that a written text is a permanent object is not the result of the possibility of its iterability or repetition since permanence and repetition are very different concepts

[F]or the purpose of this discussion the most important distinguishing feature is the (relative) permanence of the written text over the spoken word...Now the first confusion that Derrida makes, and it is important for the argument that follows, is that he confuses iterability with the permanence of the text. He thinks the reason that I can read dead authors is because their works are repeatable or iterable. Well, no doubt the fact that different copies are made of their books makes it a lot easier, but the phenomenon of the survival of the text is not the same as the phenomenon of repeatability...this confusion of permanence with iterability lies at the heart of his argument...( in Derrida, 1998: 50-51)

Derrida agrees that the survival of the text cannot be equated with repetition and this is because it is repetition or iterability that makes the survival of the text possible. When Searle talks of permanence, what he has in mind is the book as being the same book, as being a reproduction of the same. This is precisely what Derrida does *not* mean by iterability: iterability is repetition with the possibility of difference. It can be called a structural principle in the sense that it is the condition that makes both difference and sameness (or permanence) possible.

(d) Searle's criticizes Derrida for denying that a written text can communicate an intention. The important point for Searle is that by understanding the intentions of the writer, by using the intentions as a kind of bench mark, one can resist the temptation to misinterpret the writer.

The situation as regards intentionality is exactly the same for the written word as it is for the spoken: understanding the utterance consists in recognizing the illocutionary intentions of the author and these intentions may be more or less perfectly realized by the words uttered, whether written or spoken. (in Derrida, 1988: 26)



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But this is not what Derrida claims: there is no question of denying the intentions of the speaker or the author but of whether these intentions can be completely accounted for in every context, since it is always possible for an intention to be interpreted otherwise. ‘What the text questions is not intention or intentionality but their *telos*, which orients and organizes the movement and the possibility of a fulfillment, realization and *actualization* in a plenitude that would be *present* to and identical with itself’ (1988: 56) Iterability is not opposed to intentionality but is rather the condition or the system that makes the communication of intentionality possible. For Derrida the fact that language can function in different and unpredictable situations shows that an utterance can be understood without reference to the intentions of the person. There is a big difference, Derrida argues, between the assumption that readers need to posit some kind of hypothesis of intentionality to understand a text and a speech act theory that claims understanding necessitates the interpretation of an intended meaning. It is towards the latter that Derrida objects to.

From Searle’s point of view if one subscribes to the notion that communication is possible because humans have an innate competence to understand language then a written text can also draw upon the communicative competence of the reader to understand the intentions of the author as expressed in the text.

Hearers are able to understand this infinite number of new things that can be communicated by speech acts because “the speaker and hearers are masters of the sets of rules we call the rules of language, and these rules are recursive. They allow for the repeated application of the same rule” . (in Derrida, 1988: 27)

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For Searle, it is these conventional rules of language that make it possible to retain the meaning intended despite the change of context. In other words, the repetitive power of language is what enables the illocutionary force (the intentions) to be ‘saved’ even if the context of that utterance is different; this is why a text can be read for its intended conclusion even if the author is no longer alive.

For Searle, ordinary language is the ideal medium for communicating the intentions of speakers or writers, with any possible obstacles to this communication as incidental. For Derrida it is not a question of eliminating intentionality in the communication of meaning but rather a realisation that language itself as a medium has the potential to disrupt the speaker or writer’s intentions. It becomes increasingly apparent from this exchange of ideas that the distance between the starting points of Searle as representative of the analytic practice of philosophy and Derrida as representative of the practice of deconstruction is further than imagined.

## **Critical Remarks**

Derrida’s challenge to western philosophy has not gone unnoticed. On the one hand, there are those (Rorty, Butler) who consider his undermining of the assumptions of western philosophy as a breath of fresh air, while, on the other hand, there are those (Searle, Quine, Chomsky) who consider him as nothing more than a charlatan. However, since the early reactions to Derrida there have been a number of re-evaluations of his work and though not all philosophers are persuaded by its value, an increasing number

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are more sympathetic. A case in point is the publication by S.C. Wheeler called *Deconstruction as Analytic Philosophy* (2000) and B. Stoker's *Derrida on Deconstruction* (2006)

Since I have already described in detail Derrida's engagement with Searle on the questions of intentionality and communication, I will now present the views of Habermas and Gadamer. Habermas objects to Derrida's views insofar as they tend to dissolve the distinction between reason and rhetoric. Since, according to Derrida, there is no foundation (in the world or in the mind) to meaning then what makes a view or interpretation acceptable is its rhetorical force. Habermas counters this view by arguing that Derrida does not realise that there are different ways of using language: what Habermas has called, 'the rationalisation of the lifeworld' (1987) entails the ability to recognise and use the different dimensions of language. Rather, Derrida confuses the descriptive or factual use with the poetic or disclosive use of language, in effect confusing philosophy with literature. In addition, Habermas (1988) also describes Derrida (and others) as a 'young conservative' since by abandoning reason in favour of rhetoric, young conservatives renounce the possibility of improving things through rational argument and indirectly opening themselves up to manipulation.

Gadamer's engagement with Derrida is not so much a confrontation but a rapprochement of hermeneutics with deconstruction. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics with its emphasis on dialogue and open-ness to the other requires a certain amount of good will, i.e., a willingness to reach out to understand others. Derrida is suspicious of the notion of

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good will arguing that what is considered as good will is a disguised form of a good will to power, a will to appropriate others that is symptomatic of the western tradition. In line with his way of thinking about dialogue as the search for mutual ground, Gadamer modifies his claim that the understanding that philosophical hermeneutics seeks, is in fact, an understanding of that which is different and where the other can be right (Michelfelder and Palmer, 1989).

Deconstruction has proved to be highly versatile offering insights into a number of subjects. In *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, (2000) Storey offers a deconstructive account of the film *Dances with Wolves* (1990). His starting point is that of highlighting the structures inherent within the film: East/West, civilization/savagery, and white/native Americans. The privileged term in all these oppositions is the one on the first and the film questions our assumptions of what it means to be civilised, for although the central figure in the film is a Lieutenant sent from the 'civilised' East to the 'savage' West, it turns out through the course of the film that the representatives of the civilised East (the U.S. cavalry) are more barbaric than the presumed 'savage', Native Americans. However, what deconstruction does is not to merely reverse the priorities and suggest we start living in a natural Native American way; rather, it challenges or undermines the assumptions that we take on board when we describe our culture as 'civilised'. Deconstruction is a strategy of intervention for in the process of interpretation it does not leave the text and the concepts underpinning the text as they were; the process of reading a text in effect produces another one.

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So too, Derrida's focus on writing has had the added benefit of inducing more scholars to re-thinking the value of writing, not merely as an 'imitation' of speech, but as a form of communication that has greatly contributed to the development of western civilisation. Thompson (2003: 65-66), while acknowledging the work of Derrida, highlights the centrality of writing – in the narrow sense - in everyday life. When information is stored, its 'permanence' acts as a 'witness' to the possibility of (a) 'inappropriate actions' taking place which acknowledges (b) a 'failure to act' when, on the basis of that information, certain actions should have taken place and also to the possibility of (c) 'complaints or litigation' where information that is incorrect can lead to legal action.

In this chapter I have started (a) by examining Derrida theory of language and (b) proceeded to his discussion of the relation between the spoken and the written word as it is played out in a number of key texts. The next section (c) develops Derrida's views of language with the concept of *differance* and the final section (d) outlines Derrida's engagement with speech act theory and his discussion with John Searle.

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What characterizes a dialogue, in contrast with the rigid form of statements that demand to be set down in writing, is precisely this: that in dialogue spoken language---in the process of question and answer, giving and taking, talking at cross purposes and seeing each other's point---performs the communication of meaning that, with respect to the written tradition, is the task of hermeneutics. (1989: 368)

### **Gadamer on Communication as Hermeneutics**

After a lengthy academic career Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) published *Truth and Method* (1989). It was the culmination of a lifetime's investigation into questions concerning interpretation. Theories of interpretation have been considered a peripheral area of study usually restricted to theology, law or literature departments. Since it is not always clear what certain texts or passages within these disciplines mean then the question of how to interpret them becomes a crucial one. Gadamer examines questions of textual interpretation in depth but this concern is ultimately connected to the view that

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these questions help understand better the nature of human existence. His concern is ontological rather than epistemological.

Questions concerning interpretation usually belong to the area known as hermeneutics<sup>iv</sup>: the word ‘hermeneutics’ has an old history and its etymology is derived from the Greek word ‘hermeneium’, meaning ‘to interpret’. In classical mythology, Hermes was the messenger of the gods, and his function was that of bridging the world of the gods and the world of humanity since the language of the divine and the language of humanity differed radically. Irrespective of whether the gods told the truth or lied, Hermes would interpret and communicate their messages to humanity. His role was indispensable since it was the only way communication between the two separate worlds could be maintained.

Gadamer’s literary output is prolific, ranging from theoretical questions of interpretation to specific studies on philosophers such as Plato and Hegel, poets such as Celan. In this chapter I am focussing on the text that crowns Gadamer’s academic career, *Truth and Method* (1989). Despite its title Gadamer has pointed out that the title is misleading for it suggests that the acquisition of truth is to be equated with the use of a particular method; it would have been better, he later suggests, to call it ‘truth against method’ so as to show that there are other kinds of truth, truths that go beyond the narrow conception of truth as proposed by the methods of science<sup>iv</sup>. This explains why the first two sections of *Truth and Method* address questions of art and history respectively as central to his project in hermeneutics is the idea that truth also belongs to the domains of art and history.

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I open the chapter by (a) providing a lengthy overview of Gadamer's interpretation of the history of hermeneutics. This is followed by (b) his critique of science and (c) his retrieval of the concepts of prejudice and authority. The next sections examine (d) the centrality of understanding in hermeneutics and (e) the role of history in the constitution of the understanding together with the fusion of horizons. The last sections focus on Gadamer's concept of (f) dialogue and (g) language.

## **1.0.The History of Hermeneutics.**

Gadamer's contribution to hermeneutics is not that of offering another theory of interpretation that is in competition with other rival theories of interpretation<sup>iv</sup>. Gadamer's hermeneutics is not just a technique for interpreting texts, but involves a much broader and therefore more philosophical account of human understanding. Hermeneutics is concerned with all human activities, from the sciences to the arts; these disciplines are concerned with the human attempt to understand the both world and humanity itself. And since all human understanding can only take place in language, the universality of language transforms hermeneutics into a philosophical discipline.

For man's relation to the world is absolutely and fundamentally verbal in nature, and hence intelligible. Thus, hermeneutics is, as we have seen a *universal aspect of philosophy*, and not just the methodological basis of the so-called human sciences. (1989: 475-6)



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Given the importance of understanding to hermeneutics, Gadamer's point of departure is an interpretation of the history of hermeneutics so as to see the way understanding has been conceptualised.

Before the nineteenth century, hermeneutics as a practice for the interpretation of texts was associated with Protestant theologians and their approach to the Sacred Scriptures. They were concerned with two problems: (a) for most of the time it was possible to understand the Scriptures without the need for hermeneutics, but there were times when hermeneutic procedures were necessary to prevent misunderstanding from taking place. Laying down guidelines for the correct interpretation of the Scriptures was considered important since it was believed that certain allegorical or vague passages in the Bible prevented the word of God from being correctly understood; (b) the true meaning of the Scriptures had been corrupted by the dogmas and the traditions of the Catholic Church. Protestant theologians argued that the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures could be understood on its own terms. This raised the further question that if the Scriptures could be read on their own, should they be read as a unified text, or as a number of texts written at different times with different goals in mind.

Despite the differences in the methods of interpretation Protestant and Catholic theologians shared common ground in that the whole point of interpretation is to focus attention on the truth claims made by the text. Protestant and Catholic interpreters were interested in the subject matter of the texts i.e., content, and not what they might tell us about their authors or about the historical context of their construction. Gadamer concurs

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with this view as he is interested in what texts have to say to us, to teach us and the act of interpretation entails a conversation with the text itself, rather than the author.

The first major shift in the history of hermeneutics occurs with Schleiermacher (1756-1834) who broadened the concept of understanding from the interpretation of specific texts to interpretation in general. It was not a question of devising a specific hermeneutics for each of the disciplines, for biblical, legal or literary texts, but of creating a general hermeneutics, i.e., a theory of interpretation. '*Hermeneutics as the art of understanding does not yet exist in a general manner, there are only several forms of specific hermeneutics*' (in Lawn, 1998: 5). Hermeneutics as a discipline with its own identity and concerns was born.

The starting point for Schleiermacher's general hermeneutics is that of centralizing misunderstanding in interpretation; misunderstanding is so frequent that it can even occur in those passages that do not seem to require interpretation. In this respect, he distinguished between two kinds of hermeneutical practice: the lax and the strict. The lax practice of hermeneutics is one where the basic assumption is that understanding is the norm so that hermeneutics is only necessary when misunderstanding takes place. The strict practice of hermeneutics assumes that misunderstanding is the norm: misunderstanding occurs because our prejudices or perspectives influence our interpretation. In this sense we misread the author by adding or excluding something that the author might have not intended. 'For from now on we no longer consider the difficulties and failures of understanding as occasional but as integral elements that have

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to be prevented in advance. Thus Schleiermacher even defines hermeneutics as “the art of avoiding misunderstandings.” (1989: 185)

Although a theologian and translator of Plato, Schleiermacher was inspired by the Romanticist view that humanity needed to return to the emotional and religious sources of life; from a theological perspective, he wanted to return to the ‘special’ feelings experienced by the early Christians as they received the gospel orally within their particular Hebraic context. To achieve this goal he meticulously studied the Greek texts of the New Testament to remove the layers of interpretations that had encrusted the original intentions of the author of the New Testament. What he discovered was that many rituals that were celebrated in the Roman cults of Christianity were not related to Jesus or to the Hebraic context, but to the Roman Empire.

In order to reconstruct the original meaning of the text, Schleiermacher distinguished between the grammatical and psychological levels of the text. This distinction is necessary because there is a difference between the grammatical meaning (language) and the meaning the author intended (psychology) in the production of the text. Since the author uses a language to communicate his/her thoughts, for the interpreter to understand him/her it is obvious that both must share the same language. In addition, since words in a language are interconnected and since one understands words and sentences in relation to other words and sentences, i.e. to the totality of language, the interpreter must not only understand the words used by the author, but also understand the way language as a whole was used at the time. Language pre-exists the thinker and conditions to a degree

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his/her thoughts. The grammatical meaning can be understood through the rules of language, rules that are shared by a linguistic community. Understanding the grammatical meaning entails studying the language used at the time to uncover the historical sedimentation that has accumulated on the text.

On the other hand, a different approach is required to understand the psychology of the author. Through his/her texts the author wants to communicate something different, a new thought that can be understood when placed in relation to the rest of his/her life. This level entails being able to understand the motivations and intentions of the author. This can be achieved through a process of empathy where one enters the mind of the author to be able to share the original experience that led him/her to produce their text. Understanding the psychology of the author means that one must also look at the life and times of the author, the historical context.

Psychological interpretation involves a further distinction between discovering the thoughts of the author and examining the way these thoughts were expressed. The former is psychological while the latter is technical. To understand the subject-matter that the author is communicating it is necessary to see what it is about the subject that induced the author to think and write about it. Likewise, it is also necessary to see why the author selects a particular genre to communicate his/her thoughts together with the logical rules that connect the different thoughts of the author. Although the genres and logical rules are conventional they also contribute in helping to understand the thoughts of the author. The point in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics is that of entering the mind of the author; by

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reconstructing the original context to discover the background elements of the author's life, Schleiermacher believed it was possible to understand the unique individuality of the author.

The art of interpretation involves therefore the twin features of the grammatical and the psychological. Which of the two is given priority actually depends upon the interpreter: if the interpreter is interested in the way the language at the time influences the thoughts of the interpreter, then the emphasis will be upon the grammatical; if the interpreter is interested in the way the author uses language to communicate his/her thoughts, then the emphasis will be on the psychological. However, despite having more of an interest in one than in the other, the grammatical and the psychological cannot exclude each other completely.

The hermeneutic circle or the part-whole relation of understanding is evident in Schleiermacher's account of the grammatical and the psychological.

As the single word belongs in the total context of the sentence, so the single text belongs in the total context of a writer's work, and the latter within the whole of the particular literary genre or of literature. At the same time, however, the same text, as the manifestation of a creative moment, belongs to the whole of its author's inner life. (1989: 291)

Understanding an utterance depends upon understanding both the utterance in relation to the language as a whole and in relation to the author and his/her life as a whole (the social and historical context). But to know the whole it is necessary to know the parts (the utterances) that make up this whole: there is a to-and-fro movement between the parts and the whole. To know (for example) the meaning of a text it is necessary to know the

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culture within which the author lived; but to know the culture within which the author lived it is necessary to study the texts (including the author's) of that culture.

Given the circular nature of understanding, the problem seems to be one of finding a way entering into this circle. Schleiermacher suggests that it is possible to enter the hermeneutic circle by first reading the text so as to get a rough idea of what it is about and with this rough idea subsequent readings serve to confirm and consolidate the main ideas. In short, the strategy is that of first going through the text to acquire familiarity with the ideas and then proceeding to the grammatical and psychological interpretations. The influence of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics was widespread but subsequent interpreters tended to emphasize the value of recreating the original creative moment of the author through the process of divination. The quest to enter the author's mind as the goal of interpretation led to the negation of the interpreter in the process of interpretation.

Although Gadamer acknowledges the important role Schleiermacher played in the history of hermeneutics he takes issue with him on a number of points: (a) the emphasis on the author had the negative effect of ignoring the contribution of the interpreter to the extent that this contribution was considered problematic. In effect, the subjectivity of the interpreter was eliminated so that the subjectivity of the author could be highlighted; (b) Schleiermacher neglects the contribution of the text itself in the production of meaning: the language used in the text presents a vision of life and the world. The interpretation of a text is the result of the world view presented by the text in its interaction with the reader; (c) Schleiermacher's attempt to eliminate the gap between the past and the present

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is solved by negating the present so as to return to the past; it is the distance between the past and the present that constitutes the problem for interpretation. Gadamer argues that this conception of hermeneutics is fundamentally flawed since it is this temporal distance that generates the interpretation. It is a mistake to think of a past 'in itself', a past as it actually happened, a past that can be understood without the filter of the present. The idea that there is a past that can be faithfully reproduced and that can be returned to through the hermeneutic process is a relic of Romanticism that longed for a return to a golden past; (d) Gadamer is also critical of Schleiermacher's negative assessment of misunderstanding. He had argued that the task of hermeneutics was that of avoiding misunderstanding in order to let the original meaning and intention appear. Gadamer does not consider misunderstanding entirely in negative terms arguing instead that misunderstanding can also be productive in the sense that the misunderstanding of texts has also generated other interpretations.

Gadamer sums up the problem with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as one that replaces the communication of truth with the communication of subjectivity:

Schleiermacher's formula, as he understands it, no longer pertains to the subject matter under discussion; rather, he views the statement a text makes as a free production, and disregards its content as knowledge. Accordingly he organizes hermeneutics, which for him is concerned with understanding everything cast in language, according to the normative example of language itself. The discourse of the individual is in fact a free creative activity, however much its possibilities are limited by the fixed forms that language has taken. Language is an expressive field, and its primacy in the field of hermeneutics means, for Schleiermacher, that as an interpreter he regards the texts independently of their claim to truth, as purely expressive phenomena. (1989: 196)

After Schleiermacher, the next major development in the history of hermeneutics came with the Historical School characterised by Ranke and Mommsen. These applied the

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insights of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics to the study of history but this study was broadened to include not only texts but also artefacts and monuments. The Historical School was a reaction to the Hegelian interpretation of history as the unfolding of the Absolute Spirit; such metaphysical speculations were rejected outright and replaced by the view that historical texts should be read on their own terms. Objectivity was the desired goal and this entailed, according to Ranke, ignoring the present moment – with the beliefs, values and ideas of the time – to capture the spirit of the past.

Following the Historical School, Gadamer turns to another leading figure in the history of hermeneutics, Dilthey (1833-1911). Dilthey was explicitly concerned with establishing the scientific and objective credentials of hermeneutics. He read the history of hermeneutics as the history of the progressive development of hermeneutics towards scientific objectivity and, with his hermeneutics he hoped to provide a method equivalent to the methods used in the natural sciences. The question he set himself mirrored the question asked by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Just as Kant asked about the conditions that make objective scientific knowledge possible, likewise Dilthey wanted to know what the conditions that made objective knowledge of the human sciences possible.

Dilthey distinguished between the knowledge derived from the natural sciences (chemistry, physics, biology, etc) and the knowledge derived from the human sciences i.e., the human spirit (philosophy, theology, sociology, politics, psychology, history and economics). The difference between these two sciences is grounded in terms of their goals: the natural sciences seek to explain, while the human sciences seek to understand.



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The basis for the explanations of the natural sciences is that of causality. To say one knows something in the natural sciences means that one can establish a causal relation between the phenomena one is studying. This means that the study of science involves bringing these phenomena under laws. On the other hand, to know something in the human sciences requires understanding and this entails eliminating the interpreter from the process of the interpretation; objectivity in the human sciences requires that the historical situation of the interpreter be removed and that the object that is being studied is studied according to the spirit of its own age. Human life cannot be explained with the categories used in the natural sciences, since understanding human life requires an interpretation of the intentions, motivations and behaviour of humans: it is in this respect that Dilthey argues that hermeneutics was the method of the human sciences. However, despite the different methods used, Dilthey believed that the ultimate goal for both the natural and the social sciences was the same: objectivity.

Gadamer considers Dilthey's hermeneutics as an advance upon Schleiermacher's hermeneutics since Dilthey replaces the psychology of the author with the category of life or lived experience. To understand life or lived experience in the present moment, Dilthey argued that it was necessary to understand the past as there was a continuity between both moments. The idea of life as a dynamic and ongoing force that lies at the basis of human culture was popular in the nineteenth century. Dilthey was explicit that his account of life should not be construed in strict biological terms but rather one that demonstrates the interconnection between the part and the whole, so that just as the part

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is an expression of the whole of life, in a reciprocal manner, the whole determines the significance of the part. Gadamer writes,

Like the coherence of a text, the structural coherence of life is defined as a relation between the whole and the parts. Every part expresses something of the whole of life ---i.e., has significance for the whole---just as its own significance is determined by the whole. It is the old hermeneutical principle of textual interpretation, and it applies to the coherence of life insofar as life presupposes a unity of meaning that is expressed in all its parts. (1989: 223-4)

The present is the result of what happened before and the connection between the present and the past is mediated by the texts we have inherited. We can go back in time through the various interpretations of texts since interpretations of the present are the result of the interpretations that have preceded them i.e., through earlier interpretations. It should be pointed out that hermeneutics was not only concerned with literary texts but with all expressions of life – monuments, works of art, customs - as they are manifested.

Gadamer objects to Dilthey's hermeneutics on the grounds that (a) if hermeneutics is the 'special' method that enables understanding in the human sciences, then this creates a gap between the understanding used in hermeneutics, and the understanding used in everyday life, as though understanding was not also a component of day to day living; (b) although the natural and the human sciences were both, according to Dilthey, concerned with attaining objectivity, the goals of the two disciplines are not the same since the human sciences are concerned with the motivation behind particular events whereas the natural sciences are concerned with universal or general laws. As a result, when Dilthey contrasted cultural understanding with scientific explanation, since the latter was privileged as the model for knowledge, cultural understanding was relegated to a

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secondary and inferior position. What Dilthey failed to realise is that understanding is central to human existence and therefore takes place within a historical context. As a result, understanding at a particular moment entails the assumptions of the tradition to which a person belongs.

Despite his criticism, Gadamer considers the principle of lived historical experience that underlies Dilthey's thought as a vitally important component for hermeneutics; from this principle he derived two notions, namely that human understanding is limited and finite, and that understanding can never be absolute in the same way as that of the natural sciences.

The writings of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and especially, *Being and Time* (1962) play a central role in the development of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. Heidegger transformed hermeneutics by shifting its emphasis from that of theorizing about interpretation to interpretation itself as the central feature of human life. Understanding and interpretation are not incidental features of human life but constitute the very nature of human existence. Heidegger is concerned with the way humans strive to understand the world through their interpretative activities. Instead of human existence, Heidegger introduces the term *Dasein*, translated as 'being-there' and it captures the sense of human life as inextricably situated within the world: '[t]he phenomenology of *Dasein* is a *hermeneutic* in the primordial signification of this word, here it designates the business of interpreting.' (1962: 62)

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Since the existence of Dasein unfolds within the world, it is therefore temporal and by this Heidegger includes both the past and the future: human existence is a 'thrown projection' because Dasein is born into a world that is already there with its structures of significance and because it looks to the future with certain expectations. The understanding that Dasein can achieve is grounded in what Heidegger calls the 'fore-structures' of understanding i.e. a context of value and expectations. The fore-structures of understanding are what we inherit from the past and are born into, and given the world that Dasein is born into, certain possibilities for their future are available. Ultimately the understanding that Dasein seeks to find in life is also an understanding of itself because it concerns its own future possibilities.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops the notion of the hermeneutic circle (1962: 194-5), and the circularity of understanding involved in everyday life. Since understanding is defined in terms of the projections of possibilities what Heidegger is offering is an existential account of understanding rather than a cognitive one. Heidegger brings out three characteristics of the fore-structures of understanding: (a) as fore-having which means that we born into a world where objects already have significance. A hammer, to use Heidegger's example, shows that it has a significance within the world of the workshop prior to our existence; (b) as fore-sight where we understand something from a certain point of view, such as the need to fix the chair; and (c) as fore-conceptions where the hammer is interpreted as a tool that is used for the sake of something. In being used, the hammer stands out from its context of equipment even though it has significance within that context: when I see an object 'as' a hammer, '[t]he 'as' makes up the structure

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of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation.’ (1962: 189) The concept of fore-structures is crucial as it demonstrates first that there is no such thing as ‘pure’ perception since perception is always already an interpretation, and second that there is a close connection between understanding and interpretation.

The relationship between understanding and interpretation can be more clearly explicated in terms of Dasein’s possibilities and actualizations. The mode of existence of Dasein is that of understanding its environment or world as a number of significant possibilities: in its everyday life Dasein encounters a number of possibilities so that (for example) a student has the possibility of going to class, to the library, to the bar, or just sitting idly only campus. This is why Heidegger writes that Dasein understands itself in terms of its projected possibilities: by project he does not mean having a plan in one’s head but the world as a number of possibilities that are projected into the future. The concept of interpretation presupposes the concept of the understanding for while understanding relates to the environment as a whole, interpretation is specific. Thus, I interpret that building as a library because I already understand what the world of the university as an institution entails: lecture halls, the canteen, exams, friends, lecturers, computer labs and the library etc.

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. (1962: 190-191)

In Section 33 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger goes on to examine the movement from interpretation to assertion. Insofar as Dasein is involved in its everyday life, its relation to

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objects is practical so that the student uses the library in order to research his assignments. In a situation where a student answers that he/she goes to the library to borrow books the student is now sharing his /her view of the library as a place with certain characteristics: it is an assertion. A transformation has taken place for instead of the library actually being used, it has now become an object of thought and is present to the person as having certain characteristics. Heidegger comments that the mode of being captured by the assertion has superseded the practical mode of being that participates in the world.

Dasein is involved with and participates in the world that it interprets; it is no passive observer of the world. It is only because Dasein is a temporal being that has a past - is thrown - and has a future - projects possibilities – that Dasein can have the kind of existence it does. The point is that there is no such thing as pre-supposition less data of perception: I don't see a building as stones and concrete but as the library. The idea that perception is neutral is a chimera of modern science that hoped to acquire knowledge that was free of pre-judgments. This is an important point because it is here that Heidegger shows the mistake in thinking that knowledge and understanding is free of all contexts, or objective. But, although there is no such thing as purely objective knowledge in the modern scientific sense of non-prejudiced, this does not mean that Heidegger excludes all forms of objectivity. Rather interpretation is a process that follows the hermeneutic circle where ones presuppositions are challenged in the light of new information so that understanding is more thorough. It is 'objective' in this sense.

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Gadamer acknowledges the Heideggerian centrality of interpretation and expectation for human existence. The philosophical project of hermeneutics involves ‘working out appropriate projections anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed “by the things themselves” (1989: 267). The search for meaning that Gadamer understood to be central to the hermeneutic project was always necessarily incomplete for two reasons: (a) the fact of human finitude or the limitations of human existence, and (b) the linguistic aspect of human existence.

So too Gadamer agrees with Heidegger’s opposition to Dilthey’s notion of hermeneutics as the search for a method appropriate to the human sciences. Underlying this view is the assumption that the appropriate method will lead to objective interpretations. Heidegger and Gadamer both consider Dilthey’s project a vestige of the Cartesian view of knowledge as objective. However, despite the rejection of objectivity, both argue that the interpretation of history, art, or of texts led to a form of understanding that was no less valid than that of the sciences.

## **2.0. Science and Method.**

Gadamer’s critique of science is directed at the idea that the truths of science do not represent the whole truth of the world and neither are they the only truths that one should look for. His analysis of the historical conditions that gave rise to the scientific method shows that there was another tradition that did not emphasize the methodology of science

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but instead focussed on the tradition of history and culture. The domination of the scientific method resulted in the human sciences denying their own historical nature.

Gadamer – following Heidegger and Husserl – rejects the modern Cartesian view that knowledge can only be obtained by eliminating all traces of subjective and cultural influences in order to find a ‘pure’ starting point for knowledge. The Cartesian strategy is transcendental in the sense that it seeks to establish an ahistorical standpoint from which to operate. In a twist that shows the inherent contradiction of historicism, Gadamer argues that the desire to find an absolute standpoint for knowledge is itself the product of a particular historical situation. While the historicists of the nineteenth century recognised the historical foundations of all human life and knowledge, they still attempted to ground the human sciences in an epistemological method that would yield absolute knowledge. Gadamer points out that this is an impossible quest: we can only understand and acquire knowledge from where we are positioned at the moment.

The general thrust of Gadamer’s thinking is to encourage a return to humanistic concepts in education. The concepts of rhetoric, justice, common sense and taste are no longer considered part of a person’s education because these are deemed to be subjective and therefore unable to provide any valid contribution to knowledge. There does not seem to be any place for these subjects in the contemporary world and are excluded from a person’s education. In his attempt to reverse this way of thinking about education, Gadamer re-thinks the goal of education as bringing about cultural understanding.



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### 3.0. Prejudice and Tradition

The starting point for Gadamer's hermeneutics is the revival of the concept of prejudice which he defends against attempts to discredit it by the Enlightenment. For the Enlightenment, the only acceptable form of knowledge, of a belief, or of a practice was that which passed the standard of reason. Enlightenment thinking valorised rationality and opposed reason to the authority of the tradition and of the person.

Gadamer's concept of prejudice is used in the sense of Heidegger's 'fore-structures' or pre-judgements that are already 'in place' before a judgment can be passed. Whenever understanding takes place there are prejudices in the background as part of the tradition within which we belong. It might seem that his use of the word prejudice to replace Heidegger's 'fore-structure of understanding' is not such a good one as the word in English has several negative connotations so that a racist or sexist is a prejudiced person in that they judge others on the basis of their race or gender.

But Gadamer is not using the concept of prejudice in this sense and to argue his case for the rehabilitation of the term, he reveals how the negative connotations have been historically derived. These negative connotations started with the Enlightenment when (Enlightenment) reason was opposed to (traditional) authority on the grounds that the latter passed judgements and maintained certain claims to knowledge and truth that could not be justified on rational grounds. In addition, Enlightenment thinkers favoured the superiority of present in the search for knowledge over the inherited wisdom of the past

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that they considered unreliable. The authority of tradition had no rational justification and consequently, it was prejudiced to accept the wisdom of traditional authority. Paradoxically, this negatively evaluation was continued by the Romantics who - in reaction to the Enlightenment - were prejudiced in favour of the past over the present. But by simply reversing the polarities, they still remained within the same framework of thinking of that attributed negative connotations to prejudice.

Gadamer's rehabilitates of prejudice and tradition consists of re-establishing their role in the understanding. In defence of the authority of tradition against the Enlightenment, Gadamer argues that the contents of a tradition, having survived over time, prove themselves to be of value, and therefore provide a source of legitimate prejudices. This does not mean that what is of value in a tradition will remain so forever since it is always possible that the truths embodied in the tradition change. But these changes will in turn further the growth of the tradition. What this shows is that tradition preserves what is best and this explains why Gadamer thinks that the past still has something to teach us. So too, it shows that understanding is not something subjective occurring only in the mind of a person, but something that is shared: *'[u]nderstanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated.'* (1989: 290)

In response to the Enlightenment mistrust of authority Gadamer argues that this is also mistaken for it assumes that authority is always oppressive. The Enlightenment conception of authority was one of blind obedience to a command, and in this sense it is

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opposed to reason and freedom. But this is a corrupt version of authority. According to Gadamer, authority is not the expression of an irrationality, but rather the recognition of a person's capabilities. When (for example) we are unwell we go to the authority in medicine, the doctor, to ask for help. In this situation, we recognise the doctor as the person who is superior to me in judgment and therefore overrides my judgement. There is therefore no contrast between reason and authority because seeking the authority is, in fact, the rational thing to do.

Since we all belong to a particular context, we all inevitably carry with us a certain amount of cultural 'baggage' or prejudices (our values, systems of belief and language) that make it possible for us to understand anything at all. These prejudices can be both conscious and unconscious, the latter operating without us being aware of their influence. We can, however become aware of their influence and transfer our unconscious prejudices into the domain of reflective consciousness. Since these prejudices are the product of our social and cultural education as part of our belonging to a society, it is evident that they are an inherent part of us, constituting our being. Gadamer writes, '*That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*' (1989: 276-7) The prejudices that are the result of our historical situation are not an obstacle to understanding but prepare the way for it.

In everyday life, Gadamer accepts Husserl's claim that perception is never neutral but always involves the projection of a meaning, a meaning that is strictly speaking not found in the perception, 'Pure seeing and pure hearing are dogmatic abstractions that artificially

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reduce phenomena. Perception always includes meaning.’(1989: 92) The same occurs in textual interpretation: to be able to understand a text involves projecting its meaning on the basis of the evidence that one has, so that, for example, the title and the author indicate (as a starting point) what the text is about. The expectations of meaning a reader has of the text are the necessary preconditions or prejudices that enable him/her to read the text; obviously, the reader’s understanding of the text can change as the reader proceeds through the text. The encounter with the text therefore entails the projection or expectation of meaning, which (upon detailed examination) either confirms or highlights the need to revise one’s prejudices.

Gadamer’s concept of prejudice can be seen in the process of interpreting texts where the hermeneutic circle operates since when we read, we project a meaning onto the parts that are in turn related to the whole. The assumption behind this way of thinking is that the text forms an internal unity that Gadamer calls the “fore-conception of completeness”. This functions as a regulative ideal that guides our reading by setting a standard by which we can accept or reject an interpretation. The standard implicit in the interpretation of a text is the standard of truth and coherence. It is only because we assume that a text is true that the prejudices we carry with us can be challenged. ‘It is impossible to make ourselves aware of a prejudice while it is constantly operating unnoticed, but only when it is, so to speak, provoked.’ (1989: 299)

Dropping this standard exposes the interpreter to the impossible situation of not knowing whether it is the text itself that is inconsistent or whether it is the interpreter who is

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unable to understand the text. Gadamer's position is that since the text has something to teach us it should be given precedence over the interpreter: the text is the 'authority' of a subject, offering something different to say to its readers. If the text did not have this priority, then interpretation would merely consist in confirming the reader's view, a view that is could possibly be mistaken.

There can be no question of eliminating one's prejudices, but rather a recognition of their presence. This recognition necessitates realising that the starting point of interpretation is self-interpretation. By recognising that we are prejudiced, it becomes possible to understand the subject matter in relation to oneself. This is an important step in that it serves as a limit to the always present possibility that our prejudices are mistaken. The consequences of realising the prejudicial nature of our understanding is that: (a) our prejudices are subjected to a critical analysis that will allow the text to disclose its truth; and (b) there can never be a total elimination of prejudices that would enable the 'pure' meaning to shine out. Just as the understanding of a word takes place because it is located within the larger sentence, likewise, the understanding of a text takes place because the text can be located within the context of a tradition. Since the tradition includes all the interpretations that have been generated and transmitted over time, then a crucial feature of the interpretation of a text also includes all the previous interpretations of the text. In the relation between the interpreter and the text, Gadamer argues that the tradition offers a standard of truth. In the interaction between the interpreter and the tradition it might be happen that some feature of the tradition is changed or re-valued and what was

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considered important loses its stature: the tradition - while providing a standard - is dynamic and ongoing.

It is often the case that we take our prejudices for granted considering them to be the right ones. This is a mistaken assumption that Gadamer seeks to highlight: the goal of his philosophical hermeneutics is to find a way of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. The one possible help in assessing the prejudices of our predecessors is what Gadamer calls 'temporal distance'. With the passage of time we can look back at the past and identify those prejudices that were legitimate from those that were illegitimate. 'Often temporal distance that can solve the question of critique in hermeneutics namely, how to distinguish the true prejudices, by which we *understand*, from the *false* ones, by which we *misunderstand*.' (1989: 298-299) In the distance between the text and the present other interpreters have been at work and through their work understand why a work has value. By way of example, Schmidt writes that 'changes in our understanding of the world may allow Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* to be read with greater insight today than in the Middle Ages.' (2006:104)

#### **4.0. Understanding**

One could say that the starting point for Gadamer's concept of understanding is a retrieval of the Pre-Romantic views of hermeneutic theorists such as Spinoza and Chaldenius who considered the content of certain texts – the Sacred Scriptures – to be communicating the truth. To understand these texts is to understand the truth of their

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content just as (for example) understanding Euclidean geometry involves understanding the truths of geometry<sup>iv</sup>. This view is very different from that of the Romantic theorists who argued that understanding a text was a question of understanding the creative genius of the author which led to a search for the authors' intentions: 'understanding means, primarily, to understand the content of what is said, and only secondarily to isolate and understand another's meaning as such.' (1989: 294) Understanding and truth are interconnected in that to understand a text is to agree on the content and this agreement is what Gadamer considers the truth.

By focussing upon the truth claims of the text, Gadamer is able to displace the emphasis of hermeneutics away from understanding meaning in terms of what the author intended. This latter view is the source of much controversy since understanding the meaning of a text entails that one must 'exit' the text to discover the author's intentions or the reasons as to why he/she wrote what he/she did. This procedure usually involves examining the biographical, psychological or historical conditions that constitute the background of the author. This view assumes that because the reader cannot see the point of what the author is saying, then the only way to understand this text is by referring to the circumstances surrounding the author's life. Gadamer rejects what he calls the 'genetic' explanation of meaning, arguing that this explanation only comes about when the attempt to understand the content fails: '[i]t is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to "understand" the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion.' (1989:294)

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Understanding the meaning of a text is not the possession of either the writer or the reader but a mutual process in which both participate in since they both share the same language of the text. To highlight this point, Gadamer compares the process of understanding with that of playing games. When a person plays a game, he/she enters the world of the game: his/her private goals and purposes are set aside so as to follow the rules that enable the game to be played. The game takes over the person's life so that it, so to speak, allows itself to be played: 'The real subject of the game (this is shown in precisely those experiences in which there is only a single player) is not the player but the game itself.' (1989: 106). The importance of this point is that the game imposes its rules on the players and this means that it imposes its authority on the players. And just as a game follows rules, language is governed by rules that are socially formulated so there can be no communication and understanding that does not abide by these rules. The process of understanding texts is similar in that the texts belong to a tradition that imposes its authority upon the interpreter by making certain claims. In arguing for the predominance of the tradition over the person, Gadamer is reiterating his critique of subjectivism in interpretation since understanding and interpretation are not something solitary that take place in the subject but constitute the participation within the tradition.

A crucial aspect of Gadamer's account of the concept of understanding is that all understanding is situated. This means that the position of the interpreter must be taken into consideration. Understanding something depends upon the interests and focus of the interpreter, an interest that might not have been the concern of either the author or of his contemporary reading public. Warnke points out,



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My understanding of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may be connected to my understanding of psychological issues and existential themes. These may not be issues or themes that motivated Shakespeare himself; neither are they ones of which his public was necessarily aware or of ones that will necessarily always orient the understanding of the play. Nevertheless these issues and themes help determine both the meaning the play can have for me and, indeed, the way in which I understand Shakespeare's intentions. (1987: 74)

There is a further broadening of Gadamer's account of understanding. When the nineteenth century emphasized the value of method, it had created a distinction between understanding and application. The goal of nineteenth century hermeneutics was that of understanding a meaning 'in itself', with this understanding has subsequently applied to particular situations. In the field of jurisprudence an attempt was made to first understand the law, and then to apply it to the case at hand; or in the field of theology when an attempt was first made to understand the meaning of a passage from the Scriptures, and later this was applied to the situation at hand.

Gadamer argues that the distinction between understanding and application is untenable: understanding always involves application since the attempt to understand something entails applying a meaning to our context. When we try to understand something, we are part of the equation, carrying ourselves along in the flow of meaning. The concept of application is important since it is what enables the interpreter to project the meaning of the text; it is because one applies the text to one's situation that one is able to project a meaning to the text in the first place. Application is an inherent part of the process of understanding not an optional and additional extra, 'Application does not mean first understanding a given universal in itself and then afterward applying it to a concrete case. It is the very understanding of the universal – the text – itself' (1989: 341).

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Understanding involves the application of a universal to a particular situation, to the horizon of the interpreter. But it is not a question of having a pre-given universal and then applying it to a text: it is in the application itself that the universal is realised so that the meaning of the text is realised in the fusion between the interpreter and the text.

The model that Gadamer uses (1989: 317-324) to describe the process of application is the one proposed by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* who shows how universal ethical norms require deliberation so that they can be applied to concrete and particular situations. The Aristotelian model shows that it is not enough to have abstract guiding principles in ethics without a consideration of how these principles connect with practical life. When it comes to the concepts of courage or of right, it is not enough to understand what these concepts mean but rather a question of seeing how they can be relevant or are applicable to the particular situation. This highlights the fundamental difference between Plato and Aristotle: Plato sought a theoretical understanding of the Form of the Good, whereas Aristotle asked what the good was for man within a context. Understanding norms without knowing how to use them is useless; it is not enough to know that in principle one should be good to others; it is more important to know when to be good to specific people in specific situations<sup>iv</sup>.

To summarize, if we relate Aristotle's description of the ethical phenomenon and especially the virtue of moral knowledge to our own investigation, we find that his analysis in fact offers a kind of *model of the problems of hermeneutics*. We too determined that application is neither a subsequent nor merely an occasional part of the phenomenon of understanding, but codetermines it as a whole from the beginning. Here too application did not consist in relating some pre-given universal to the particular situation. The interpreter dealing with a traditional text tries to apply it to himself. (1989: 324)

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There are three points that Gadamer's textual practice derives from Aristotle: (a) the application of the text to the particular situation is part of, and brings out, the potential meaning of the text; in interpreting a text from the past the new circumstances could not have been imagined by the author and yet the interpreter projects the meaning of the legal text to the new circumstances; (b) the application of the text to the contemporary situation is not one that can be predicted in the manner of a law-like deduction; the interpreter must apply what the original author said to the present situation even though the original author did not know the future possible applications of the text; (c) the application of the text to the new circumstances should be guided by a principle of charity whereby the best of what the text has to say is brought out.

Gadamer demonstrates his arguments on the importance of application by offering as examples (1989: 324-341) the process involved in the interpretation of legal or theological texts. From legal hermeneutics he describes the position of the judge and the legal historian: in the case of the judge, when he passes a judgement, he must apply the 'old' law to the present situation even if the lawgiver had not considered the current situation in formulating the law. In the case of the legal historian, in the process of understanding the 'old' law, it is not enough to understand the original situation when the law was created because an essential part of understanding the law involves understanding how the law has been applied and how it has developed over time. These developments are part of the potential meaning of the law. It is the same with the interpretation of the scriptures: the priest who reads the Sacred Scriptures to prepare his homily must take into account his contemporary audience. The homily must be relevant

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to the lives of the listening audience so that the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures includes its application to the current situation.

The importance of Gadamer's identification of understanding with application is apparent in that it explains the relationship between truth and the interpreter. The truth that the tradition communicates is not a timeless truth that one blindly accepts but is, rather, a truth applied to the situation of the interpreter. The tradition is the framework or a standard with which to approach the text, a framework or standard that enables the interpreter to distinguish interpretations from misinterpretations. Warnke describes this process:

...whether we are familiar with the literature on Shakespeare's work or not we approach his work in a way influenced by a tradition of Shakespeare interpretation so that we assume its excellence, importance and so on. But, just as we cannot apply ethical norms categorically we cannot adhere to a tradition of interpretation dogmatically. Rather, in approaching Shakespeare from the perspective of changed historical circumstances, we necessarily modify and extend the traditional way in which the excellence and importance of his work has been understood. (1987: 96)

## **5.0. Effective History and the Fusion of horizons**

In order to explain the importance of tradition upon the interpreter Gadamer introduces the concept of effective history. Effective history has a dual structure: on the one hand it involves the effects of history upon the interpreter i.e., the prejudices that influence him/her consciously or unconsciously, while on the other hand, it also includes the awareness of the interpreter that there are historical forces influencing him/her, 'Understanding proves to be a kind of effect and knows itself as such. (1989: 341)

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The concept of effective history also shows why there can never be an understanding of the past 'in itself'. Any understanding of the past - whether as an event or a text - entails understanding the effects upon the interpreter. For Gadamer, these effects are not something external to the phenomena being studied but an essential aspect of it, so much so, that it is these effects that reveal or disclose its true significance. Whereas events in the natural world are causally connected, understanding an event or a text requires interpretation. But understanding an event or text involves understanding the history of their interpretations. This highlights the embedded situation of the interpreter since he/she is not neutral or detached from the context but a part of it. The tradition of a text is the history of its interpretations; our interpretation of a text is therefore conditioned by the prejudices that we have inherited from the tradition.

The 'power' of effective history is such that although we are aware of its influence on our understanding, we can never grasp or master it completely. When the historicist school in nineteenth century attempted to eliminate all traces of the interpreter's historical context so as to produce objectivity in history, they failed to realise that this same attempt was a product of their own historical situation.

Even in those masterworks of historical scholarship that seem to be the very consummation of the extinguishing of the individual demanded by Ranke, it is still an unquestioned principle of our scientific experience that we can classify these works with unfailing accuracy in terms of the political tendencies of the time in which they were written. When we read Mommsen's *History of Rome*, we know who alone could have written it, that is, we can identify the political situation in which this historian organized the voices of the past in a meaningful way. (Gadamer, 1976: 6)

The effect of history upon the reality of human existence is always greater than our consciousness; and even if we recognise the power of effective history, this power is in

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no way diminished and this explains why it is always possible to subject an interpretation to revision.

The centrality of the concept of effective history in Gadamer's writings is such that it would be mistaken to think of it as relevant only to the philosophy of history or to the study of the past; this would only suggest that we are conscious of our historical situation as we read the past. Gadamer's account is deeper in that all understanding is affected by history because history takes place within the broader context of the tradition within which we are situated<sup>iv</sup>. This is why he emphatically writes, '*u*nderstanding is, essentially, a historically effected event.' (1989: 300).

Central to Gadamer's concept of understanding is the concept of horizon, a concept derived from the Husserlian account of perception but transformed into an account of understanding that is re-located to the broader context of horizons of significance. The horizon (or lifeworld) is the world within which we live and it encompasses the values, systems of belief, customs, social practices, and rituals of a culture. A horizon offers a perspective of the world viewed from a particular point. The concept of horizon is a fruitful way of describing the complete set of prejudices that constitute the world of the individual. A language is such a horizon and different cultures with their different languages offer different horizons. And just as a physical perspective excludes certain features of the terrain from its range, likewise a language or a horizon allows certain things to be revealed while other things remain hidden. Revelation and limitation are the characteristics of both a language and a horizon.

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Interpretation involves the twin horizons of the interpreter and of the text. The mistake of the nineteenth century historicists was that of ignoring the horizon of the interpreter which was judged as having no contribution to make toward the production of meaning. The idea was that to understand the past it was necessary to leave behind one's horizon (with the issues and prejudices that constitute it) and enter the horizon of the past. But eliminating the interpreter would only result in adopting what the author has said rather than agreeing with the truth content of the text. And even if we wished to eliminate the interpreter from the process of understanding this would be an impossible task because the horizon of the interpreter is not something that just happens to be there, something incidental that can be removed. Horizons are an essential part of the interpreter's identity because it is the prejudices of the interpreter that make any understanding possible. Finally, the horizon of the interpreter is important because the text communicates or has something to say to the interpreter now, in the present world.

In the interpretative process, an encounter occurs between the horizon of a text and the horizon of the interpreter. 'Understanding is always inevitable *for* a subject as much as it is *of* some object...' (West, 1996: 108) Gadamer's expression 'fusion of horizons' is intended to capture this ongoing process in the production of meaning: he calls the interaction between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the interpreter an event of understanding that enables communication to take place. Although the interpreter anticipates the meaning of the text on the basis of his/her prejudices, the encounter with

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the prejudices of the text generates a new interpretation, '*understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*' (1989: 306)

The fusion of horizons is also one way of reacting to the claim made by relativists that each horizon is a self-enclosed world with no possibility of contact and communication. Gadamer argues that just because understanding takes place within a horizon, this does not exclude the possibility - as Rorty does - of understanding between horizons taking place. The 'borderline' between horizons is not rigid but allows for movement between them: while we realise that there are differences between horizons, mutual understanding involves merging these differences rather than abandoning them.

Given that the fusion of horizons involves the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text Gadamer argues that there is no standard that enables one to judge an interpretation as better or worse. Rather, understanding can only be considered as different: understanding a text involves understanding what the text has to say, and what it has to say to me in my particular situation. However, the emphasis on the application to the particular situation should not be interpreted as implying a subjectivist or private concept of the understanding since Gadamer considers understanding to be something public, an event that belongs to the happening of the tradition. The truths that texts communicate are not truths in-themselves, truths that eternally represent an unchanging object, but rather they are true to a community of interpreters, true from the point of view of the community of interpreters rather than the individual.



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The concepts of effective history and the fusion of horizons go hand in hand. In the encounter between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text, the consciousness of the effects of history by the interpreter helps in the formation of critical judgements and in maintaining or eliminating prejudices. Clearly, the interpreter is not a passive recipient locked in his/her horizon of prejudices. The text - with its horizon - has the potential to disrupt the prejudices of the interpreter. What is taken for granted can be challenged and subsequently modified or rejected. But whether prejudices are modified or not, the new interpretation is the product of the fusion of horizons and with it the tradition continues to reproduce itself.

## **6.0. Dialogue.**

The model for the understanding that takes place in the fusion of horizons is that of a dialogue or conversation where the goal is to understand the truth of the subject-matter or the content that the text is communicating. It is not a conversation that is intended to find something about the psychology of the other person or the context of the other, but to agree on the subject-matter. This agreement on the subject-matter is an agreement that is concerned with truth.

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transpose himself in the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. (1989: 385)

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In the understanding or dialogue that takes place between the interpreter and the text, it is not the case of an interpreter projecting a meaning onto a (now) meaningless past, but on the contrary, of the past speaking to the present through the text. The fusion of horizons describes the process whereby the horizon of the text speaks to the horizon of the interpreter. While the horizon of the past imposes itself and communicates its truth to the interpreter, since the horizon of the interpreter changes with different historical periods, there can never be a final objective meaning. The emphasis is on 'different': for Gadamer, the successive interpretations cannot be called 'better' because different historical situations can only produce varied interpretations. There is no point outside history from which to judge whether one interpretation is better than another. Those interpretations that are false have not withstood the test of time. Tradition as the preservation and transmission of what is true eliminates those prejudices that are false or illegitimate. Although there is no in-itself of meaning of a text, the opposite conclusion – that each meaning is subjective or that each interpretation is a misinterpretation – is likewise mistaken. For Gadamer, each interpretation belongs to the potential interpretations of a text, 'the verbal explicitness that understanding achieves through interpretation does not create a second sense apart from that which is understood and interpreted.' (1989: 398)

The otherness of the text puts into sharp relief our assumptions and prejudices by challenging them. It is the difference in time between the production of a text and the world of the interpreter that enables a new interpretation to be generated. The point of the interpretation is not that of travelling to the past world when the text was produced, but to learn from the text, to discover the truths that the tradition has to communicate. And as

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the tradition unfolds new insights are discovered; the text reveals or discloses new meanings that would not have been previously noticed. The distance in time between the production of the text and its reception by the interpreter is one of the means that enables one to judge between legitimate and illegitimate prejudices. Warnke writes,

...our understanding of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* may differ from Twain's understanding of it or the understanding of it by his immediate public. Because of our heightened awareness of racial stereotyping we may find the portrait of Jim more problematic than people did at the time that the book appeared and this may affect our understanding of the content of the book as a whole. ...Understanding is primarily an understanding of the claim a work of art imposes on us and this means that we understand a work in its relevance to our own situation. That situation does not affect simply the significance of a work but rather enters into the interpretation of meaning itself, into what is shocking, what is unclear and into what the work "really" says. (1987: 68)

Gadamer describes the process of understanding and application by using the model of dialogue defined in terms of question and answer. The meaning we are trying to understand is the answer to our question and the process of interpretation and understanding is formulated in terms of a dialogical situation, '[F]or the dialectic of question and answer that we demonstrated makes understanding appear to be a reciprocal relationship of the same kind as conversation.' (1989: 377) Some might argue that in dialogue we exert out 'power' over the other, seeking to dominate or criticize them. This is not Gadamer's view for rather than confrontation Gadamer seeks mutual understanding. This is why he distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. Authentic dialogue is concerned with listening to what the other has to say while inauthentic dialogue is concerned with being right, with 'winning'.

In everyday life, a conversation has a life of its own with no pre-established objective that the conversation must arrive at. The interesting feature of the nature of dialogue is that a

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dialogue always has a temporary ending: it can be picked up and continued another day. So too, dialogues are not structured conversations in the sense that topics should follow a rigidly scripted sequence. Gadamer's description of a dialogue as something that happens to us is brought home when we recall conversations over the phone with our friends. Many times we are amazed at the range of topics that we have spontaneously spoken about changing from a serious point to a silly one with ease.

But the central issue for Gadamer is the conversation itself rather than the subjectivity of the participants. In our conversations with the other, the subject matter comes more fully into the forefront, and as a result, a better understanding of it takes place. 'What emerges in its truth is the logos, which is neither mine nor yours and hence so far transcends the interlocutors' subjective opinions that even the person leading the conversation knows that he does not know.' (1989: 368) In a conversation both participants belong to the bigger issue of the subject that is being spoken about, something that escapes their possession and which opens them up to each other.

There are parallels between the conversations we have in everyday life and the interpretations of texts. In the case of both, we are mistaken if we think that the participants are either in control of the conversation with each other or in control of the meaning of the text. The difference between them is that with texts it is through the interpreter that the voice of text is made brought out

Only through him [the interpreter] are the written marks changed back into meaning. Nevertheless, in being changed back by understanding, the subject matter of which the text speaks itself finds expression. It is like

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a real conversation in that the common subject matter is what binds the two partners, the text and the interpreter, to each other. (1989: 387-8)

To explain the dynamics involved in the interpretation of texts, Gadamer approves of the method suggested by R.G. Collingwood who is credited with introducing the expression 'the logic of question and answer'. He used this expression to argue that understanding a text is not the result of assessing its internal logic, but rather as an answer to a question. Collingwood argued that the 'context' surrounding the text should be acknowledged: the motivations, concerns and historical issues within which the author is situated contribute to the meaning of the text. While it is not possible to enter the author's mind, it is necessary to understand the background context within which he/she worked. By understanding the issues that were at stake it is possible to achieve a more complete understanding of the text. Interpretation involves retrieving the questions that made the text possible as an answer to certain questions.

However, while Gadamer considered Collingwood's position as an advance upon previous attempts that judged texts merely according to the binary logic of true and false values, Collingwood failed to realize that the other pole in interpretation is that of the interpreter, who is also a product of a historical situation. What this means is that the interpreter must also be taken into consideration since the questions asked of the text are relevant to the present day situation of the interpreter. As a result of the dynamic interaction between the interpreter and the text both the questions and answers change. The text is not a passive, 'dead' object with a meaning waiting to be discovered by the interpreter, and neither is the text merely the projected meaning of the interpreter. Rather,

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the process of question and answer is mutual: the text also confronts or questions the interpreter while the interpreter also directs questions towards the text in the search for answers

There are two questions<sup>iv</sup> that one might ask initially but these two questions merge into each other. In the first case, it is the interpreter who is asked a question: '[t]he voice that speaks to us from the past – whether text, work, trace – itself poses a question and places our meaning in openness.' (1989: 374). Something from the past speaks to the interpreter who turns to the text to see what it has to say about the subject. But to answer the question that the text poses to the interpreter, the interpreter needs to look for the question that the text itself is an answer to. In the process of reconstructing this question, the other interpretations of the text that belong to the tradition cannot be ignored; the interpreter is aware of these as he/she formulates the question from the context he/she is situated in. as we have already see, understanding a text involves its application to the interpreter: 'reconstructing the question to which the meaning of a text is understood as an answer merges with out own questioning. For the text must be understood as an answer to a real question.' (1989: 374) The two questions merge into one and the fusion of questions is a re-statement of the fusions of horizons. Understanding is 'the interplay of the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter.' (1989: 103). Schmidt describes this movement,

One example of the movement of tradition is the different ways that Plato's *Republic* has been found to have something illuminating to say in the course of its preservation within tradition. The movement of the interpreter includes not only the reading of the original text but also an examination of that reading in light of other interpretations of Plato and the goal of establishing a unity of meaning for the text. The tradition,

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as inherited language, provides for the anticipation of meaning, while the interpreter, through her critical judgement, continues to form tradition. (2006: 103)

This explains why different periods and different individuals find different answers to their questions. Again, the idea that there are ‘different’ interpretations might easily lead some to think that an interpretation is purely subjective. This is not Gadamer’s position: even when we think that an interpretation is completely our own i.e., that we decide what the text means because we are in control of its meaning, there is a historical process always already affecting us. Before we start to interpret, the tradition pre-exists us: others have already been engaged in a dialogue with it and our interpretations are continuations of that dialogue, which we modify, elaborate or reject. In turn, our interpretations become an ongoing part and continuation of the tradition itself. The dialogical process that takes place with the tradition within which we belong enables us to become aware of our prejudices i.e., our assumptions and value-judgements. Although these operate, so to speak, ‘behind our backs’ they can be made known to us and they therefore are a valuable and positive contribution to understanding and self-understanding

For Gadamer, it is the spoken word that must be re-vitalised. In the dialogue with the text the written word must speak again. However, although Gadamer favours the spoken word he is not (pace Derrida) trying to reinstate the ‘metaphysics of presence’ that Derrida claims is the founding error of western philosophy. The nature of writing is that it is ‘alienated’: writing is alienated from speech and the task of hermeneutics is to transform it back to a living dialogue. The way to do this is not to think of the text as having a ‘fixed’ and stable meaning but rather as the product of a dialogue between reader and

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text. Meaning is always tentative and successive generations will produce different interpretations of the same text. Or better still, the text will speak differently to different generations. This is why although understanding can be complete, it can never be final since there will always be the changing horizon of the interpreter in dialogue with the text. The difference between the spoken word and the written word is that the latter has broken free of the limitations of the space and time of its production and acquired a relative permanence within the tradition. The subject matter or what the text is about is the common element between the text and the interpreter so that the task of the interpreter is to make the text speak again.

The difference between an actual dialogue and a textual dialogue is that in the case of the latter the interpreter must bring the text to communicate what it has to say, its truth claims. When the interpreter interacts dialogically with the text, he/she listens to what the text has to say using the principle of charity to adopt and develop the claims made by the text to see if they challenge his/her prejudices. To understand what the text has to say involves the interpreter applying his/her own understanding through the medium of language to the language of the text. Just as language is the medium through which humans understand each other, understanding a text replicates the dialogical model of mutual understanding. It is with and through language that the text can speak to the interpreter so that an understanding about the subject matter can be agreed upon. An illuminating way of understanding Gadamer's hermeneutic enterprise is that of translation where a speaker must translate what the other has said into his/her own language: to understand what the other has said it is necessary to apply what the other has



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said to the speaker's own language. Translation involves understanding as application and the speaker has understood what the other has said when they agree on the content that they have been communicating.

The relationship between the interpreter and the text can be characterised in three possible ways (1989: 358-360): (a) as an object that can be subsumed under general laws and that therefore can be predicted: this is the method associated with the natural sciences where the interpreter can objectively describe what the text says; (b) as a person, but with the qualification that the interpreter can understand the author better than the author could understand him/herself; (c) as an Other that speaks to me: the text as part of a tradition has something to say to the interpreter who is open to what the text has to say. Being open does not mean passively agreeing with everything, but realising that there are some things we must accept even if we don't agree with them. This position describes the hermeneutic experience, for, in the act of interpretation, the interpreter experiences the truth of something new in the interaction with the tradition.

The importance of the dialogical model is that it reveals the attempt to understand both oneself and the world as the shared experience of humanity, rather than the experience of an isolated consciousness. Dialogue is described as a consensus because it goes beyond the original views of the participants and takes into consideration the possible objections and counter examples of the other. In a nutshell, consensus can be reached by agreeing to disagree, but what is crucial is that both have a greater understanding of the issues, have 'raised' the dialogue to a higher and more informed level.

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At the conclusion of a conversation, the initial positions of all participants can be seen to be inadequate positions on their own and are integrated within a richer, more comprehensive view. For hermeneutic understanding it follows that we are not limited to the premises of our tradition but rather continually revise them in the encounters with and discussion we have of them. In confronting other cultures, other prejudices and, indeed, the implications that others draw from our own traditions we learn to reflect of both our assumptions and our ideas of reason and to amend them in the direction of a *better* account. (Warnke, 1987: 170)

## 7.0. Language and Truth

Following Heidegger, Gadamer subscribes to the view that a human being's relation to the world is that of making sense of it, of attempting to understand a world that exists before them and that comes to them always already interpreted. The world humans are born into is constituted by tradition and the vehicle for the transmission and preservation of tradition is language: language precedes man and makes possible human experience and thought. It makes human experience possible both in terms of understanding others and in terms of understanding oneself.

Gadamer's valorisation of language is encapsulated in the following key sentences: '*the fusion of horizons that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language.*' (1989: 378) and '*Being that can be understood is language*'. (1989: 474) It is only through language that humans have a world at all. Clearly, language is not an optional or incidental feature of human existence, but an essential one for the world discloses itself through language and language comes into being by disclosing the world. The relationship between language and the world is one of complementarity rather than opposition with language on one side and the world on the other. Language 'is not just

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one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature.' (1989: 443).

The place of language in Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot be underestimated and it is one of those domains (together with history and art) that make the experience of truth possible. However, while Gadamer considers language as the source of truth, he distances himself from correspondence or representational theories of truth. According to these theories, language represents facts about the world and communicates their truth-value. Gadamer's criticism of this view lies in its assumption that one can treat language as an object of analysis, studying the way it corresponds to the world. This view of language suggests that one can step outside language to examine the relationship between propositions and the world. But it is evident that there is no position outside language with which to evaluate the relation between propositions and the world; the study of this relationship can only take place from within language itself. The criticism of propositional logic is part of Gadamer's ongoing criticism of the use of method in the human sciences. When we talk about method in the natural sciences, we are talking about the control of objects that are isolated, manipulated and repeated. In the case of the human sciences, understanding is not merely the ability to isolate a meaning, but that of belonging to, and participating in a tradition. It is this notion of understanding as participation that Gadamer contrasts with understanding as making things or meanings at our disposal.

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Gadamer's analysis takes as its starting point one of the first texts in western culture that examines language. In the *Cratylus* the question that Plato attempts to answer concerns the relationship between language and the world: is this relation a conventional one with the community agreeing upon the words used to name objects or is the relationship one where words naturally represent objects? The answer in the *Cratylus* favours the conventional argument with language described as a system of signs. However, Gadamer points out that both theories mistakenly assume that objects exist and can be known without any intervention of language. Gadamer rejects this arguing that language is disclosive, by which he means that it is language that brings the world into being; it is only after this disclosure that language can function so as to represent the world.

In his discussion of the historical development of language, the work of Humboldt plays an important role in the development of Gadamer's thinking on language. Humboldt had argued that each language expresses a vision of reality or a way of life. The differences between languages could be accounted for in relation to the different linguistic structures of a particular language. However, Gadamer does not merely appropriate Humboldt's claim, but argues that the vision of life that each language presents is not a question of its formal or structural features but a question of the content that that language expresses: '[i]f every language is a view of the world, it is so not primarily because it is a particular type of language (in the way that linguists view language) but because of what is said or handed down in this language.' (1989: 441) The language of a community communicates the 'form of life' of the community: without their language the world of a particular community - with their shared values, beliefs, and norms - would not exist.

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Gadamer's account retrieves the original sense of communication by identifying communication with the expressivist theory of language: originally the meaning of the concept of communication was closely tied to that of community but in the twentieth century the meaning was narrowed down to the transmission of information. On Gadamer's hermeneutic analysis of language, the concept of communication is re-defined as the expression of the values, beliefs, customs and social practices of the community, i.e., the world of the community and the community's experience of the world.

The centrality of language in Gadamer's philosophy is highlighted in the distinction between 'world' and 'environment'. All living things have an environment, but it is only humans that have a world, i.e., having an orientation towards the world. The difference is that while living things depend upon environment, human beings have attitudes, relate to and behave in certain ways toward the world. To have a world means that humans can stand back from the world whereas other living things are 'absorbed' into the environment. It is in this sense that they are free from their environment.

Animals can leave their environment and move over the whole earth without severing their environmental dependence. For man, however, rising above the environment means *rising to "world"* itself, to true environment. This does not mean that he leaves his habitat but that he has another posture toward it---a free, distanced orientation---that is always realized in language (1989: 444-445)

While all humans interact in a particular environment they are not passive in relation to it, but can think about it and attempt to understand it through their language. As a result they transform their world. Different cultures have coped with their environment in different

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ways and have therefore developed different concepts. The linguistic heritage of the community – its linguistic tradition – encapsulates the experiences of the community.

This raises the question of whether – given that each community has its own language and therefore its own linguistically constructed world – it is possible that there is a world in itself, an extra-linguistic world that can be contrasted to the linguistic world. Gadamer argues that although each language is a perspectival vision of the world, this does not mean that there is a position outside language from which one can compare language to the world in itself. Just as Husserl's account of perception had demonstrated that each perception is a partial perspective of the world and that the world in itself is nothing more than the totality of perspectives, Gadamer argues that each language is a perspective of the world and the world in itself is nothing more than the totality of linguistic perspectives. The important difference between Husserl's account of perception and Gadamer's account of language is that a language (unlike a perception) can assimilate the views of another language. And, while a language can assimilate the experiences of another language, no one language can ever attain the status of describing the world as it really is: 'the infinite perfectibility of the human experience of the world means that, whatever language we use, we never succeed in seeing anything but an ever more extended aspect, a 'view' of the world' (1989: 447). And just because we enter another linguistic world, this does not mean that we abandon ours: when we learn another language we do not forget the world where we come from.

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The sense of Gadamer's views on language is a strong one since language is said to construct the world. The concept of linguistic construction here does not just refer to the organising or structuring of nature, of giving form to an unformed environment. Rather, the disclosure of the world by language is a disclosure of something, of some subject-matter. And this is why Gadamer considers the primary mode of being of language to be dialogue which he defines as the coming to an understanding or an agreement about a subject. But this view of language should not be interpreted in terms of purposes with the sole purpose of language being that of achieving understanding. This would reduce language to the status of a medium or tool at the disposal and control of the participants rather than enabling the world to appear as a world.

But while language discloses the world, it is unable to dominate it. The world overflows the categories of language. This insight explains why unexpected experiences can overwhelm us to the extent that we fail to find the words to describe them. As a result of his analysis, Gadamer argues that language both discloses the world but also hides it. This double-edged quality of language can be seen in the distinction between the said and the unsaid. While a proposition is "the said" by virtue of communicating a content, the "unsaid" is the background of the proposition. The "unsaid" is the 'more' that frames the proposition or the text; it is the question to which the proposition is the answer, '[t]he hermeneutic task is to uncover and lay bare the unsaid by drawing it into an explicit dialogue with the said.' (Lawn, 2006: 84)

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The hermeneutic structure of language parallels the hermeneutic structure of human experience. Just as an experience is the result of the interaction between the background of the unfamiliar and the familiar, likewise, a sentence can be understood against a background of social and cultural conventions. The hermeneutic parallelism between the structure of experience and the structure of language is no coincidence since understanding an experience requires language for this understanding to be communicated. It is only through language that our understanding of a personal experience, a work of art, or social institution can be communicated. And language itself is a tradition since it transmits the experiences and knowledge that have been acquired over time.

Gadamer distinguishes between two senses of experience: empiricist accounts of experience tend to consider an experience as something that can be repeated, as something that can be verified through a process of experimentation. Rather than pointing to something new, the sense of experience is that which conforms or repeats what has already happened. On the other hand, Gadamer argues for a broader sense of experience that includes both its unexpectedness and novelty: experience, for Gadamer, means that one is open to future. And although one is always open to future experiences, what experience teaches us is that there are limits to what humans can achieve with their life. Even with the impressive advances in science and technology life can never be completely controlled or mastered. This is why experience is self-experience: ultimately what we learn is always about ourselves in our capacity as human beings. 'The experienced man knows that all foresight is limited and all plans uncertain. In him is



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realised the truth value of experience.’ (1989: 357) The emphasis here lies with the concept of experience as something primary, as something that happens to us, as something we have undergone.

The hermeneutic element in Gadamer’s account of experience is the interplay between the part and the whole or the new and the old. It is the background of the ‘old’ that makes what is ‘new’ an experience of truth: the true is produced in the dynamic that takes place between the part and the whole. And while the experience of something as ‘new’ lies in its ‘conflict’ with the ‘old’ background, it is the background that gives meaning to the experience. The experience of truth in Gadamer is an ‘eye-opener’: Lawn describes this from the perspective of literature,

no matter how many times a poem or novel are read they always manage to open up new lines of enquiry, new possibilities. The written text does not change but the interpretive possibilities that is, for Gadamer, the truth possibilities do, as they are endless. (Lawn, 2006: 62)

Gadamer’s model of dialogue helps us understand his concept of truth. In a dialogue something is revealed or disclosed about the participants: we are surprised by the truth that has been expressed. What we take for granted is disrupted and we see ourselves and the world differently. Likewise, in our dialogical exchanges the assumptions or prejudices we carry with us can be challenged such that we learn something about ourselves. Although language is never value-free since it always embodies the prejudices of a culture this does not mean that we are forever trapped within the tradition from which we speak.

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In textual interpretation, the relation between the interpreter and the tradition is bridged by the language that both share. It is through language that the content of the tradition is communicated: the question posed to the interpreter enables the potential meanings of the tradition to be actualised. The interpreter translates the question posed to him/her by the tradition into a new interpretation since something new is disclosed by language. And, this in turn perpetuates the tradition. Because we belong to a tradition that precedes us and since tradition is communicated linguistically, Gadamer argues that the tradition takes precedence over us:

The mode of being of tradition is, of course, not sensible immediacy. It is language, and in interpreting its texts, the hearer who understands it relates its truth to his own linguistic orientation to the world. This linguistic communication between present and tradition is, as we have shown, the event that takes place in all understanding. (1989: 463)

This is why the idea of interpretation as subjective with the subject enacting complete control over the text is mistaken; in fact, the subject is acted upon by language and tradition. When Gadamer writes that ‘the content of tradition itself is the sole criterion and it expresses itself in language’ (1989: 472-3) he is arguing that it is the tradition that provides the standard for interpretation. This is not to say that the tradition is always right or provides the correct interpretation but that it is the tradition that ‘decides’ if an interpretation continues to belong to that tradition or is dismissed and forgotten.

In his discussion of the realisations of the different interpretations that are inherent within the text, Gadamer introduces the notion of ‘speculation’. Each interpretation is a speculative event in the sense that each interpretation is different and yet it is part of the same subject; (for example) the different interpretations of a play all belong to the same

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subject. It is not that there is one subject and this manifests itself in different presentations but that the presentations are the different ways the subject presents itself.

Being is one but it manifests itself as many:

Every appropriation of tradition is historically different: each is the experience of an “aspect” of the thing itself... That paradox that is true of all traditional material, namely of being one and the same and yet of being different, proves that all interpretation is, in fact, speculative’ (1989: 473)

## **Critical Remarks**

When Gadamer died, he was considered one of the key contributors to hermeneutical theory, and while he is perhaps better known on the Continent, his work is steadily attracting the increasing attention of Anglo-American philosophers. However, the hermeneutic vision that Gadamer offers has not been without its detractors. Gerner (2000) points to a number of problems with Gadamer’s account: (a) the dialogue or conversation that takes place between individuals and which culminates in an understanding of the thing itself seems to take place ‘behind’ the back of individuals given that the individuals belong or participate in a tradition that both pre-exists them and ‘uses’ them to communicate its truths; (b) the dialogical structure of the question and answer that is central to Gadamer’s concept of the understanding is used mostly as a model for the interpretation of texts so that it is strained to see the way the relationship between the reader and a text is a model for the relationship between two persons. It seems that one can apply the dialogical structure of the understanding to the general field of hermeneutics only in a secondary sense; (c) one consequence of the concept of effective history is that we would not understand something that happened in the past if it

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had no effect i.e., no subsequent interpretation. This would entail the false view that we would not be able to understand Aztec culture since we have no effective historical connection with it.

In “A Review of Gadamer’s Truth and Method” (1986) Habermas has critically engaged the work of Gadamer on a number of counts but perhaps his most pertinent criticism is that Gadamerian hermeneutics miscalculates the force of ideology at work within society. It is not enough to equate the prejudices that hermeneutics uncovers with ideology for ideology is also at work in those situations that are ‘normal’ and that in fact are constituted by ideology with the consequence that it would be difficult to recognise them at work. It is in this respect that Habermas considers hermeneutics as lacking a “reference system” i.e., a theory of society that would enable it to go beyond the surface to the deeper level within which ideology operates.

Finally, given the centrality of language in hermeneutics several commentators thought that Gadamer had collapsed everything into language, that he was advocating a sort of linguistic idealism. But to understand Gadamer’s thesis it must be remembered that his philosophy is a phenomenological analysis of the act of understanding, an act that does not reduce understanding either to a subjectivist or an epistemological function. His view is that something can only be understood through language; language is the necessary condition for understanding to take place. Language transforms understanding into an event. Against his critics, it is possible to formulate two lines of defence: (a) they fail to understand the target of Gadamer’s assertion of the centrality of language. This assertion

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is directed against the entrenched view of propositional logic that dominates western philosophy. Dialogue replaces propositional logic in that the propositions of logic are themselves embedded within a context of dialogue; propositional logic does not exist on its own but falls within the ambit of speakers and their motivations; (b) within a genuine conversation, things crop up in the minds of participants; it is not a question of the speaker's intention to reveal things, but a question of common understanding that is achieved by speakers<sup>iv</sup>. Clearly, Gadamer's hermeneutics is not subjectivist, since understanding is not the exclusive 'private' domain of the subject but it incorporates the other with whom the conversation is taking place. Dialogue is a key term in Gadamer's vocabulary because it is the model with which understanding between persons and texts within a tradition takes place.

In this chapter I have (a) started by outlining Gadamer's reading of the history of hermeneutics, so as to prepare the way for (b) his critique of the claims of science, (c) a critique that retrieves the concepts of prejudice and tradition. This is followed by (d) an analysis of the kind of understanding that belongs to the social or human sciences, an analysis that (e) brings to life the notion of effective history as the foundation of understanding together with an elaboration upon the way understanding involves an interaction between a fusion of horizons that is (f) modelled upon a dialogue of question and answer. The chapter ends with (g) an overview of Gadamer's account of language.

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‘The total speech act in the total speech situation is the *only actual* phenomenon which, in the last resort we are engaged in elucidating’ (1975: 147)

### **J. L. Austin: on Speech Act Theory**

J.L. Austin (1911-1960) inaugurated a branch in the philosophy of language that subsequently came to be known as Ordinary Language Philosophy. Unlike those philosophers who focussed on the construction of formal or idealised languages, he studied the workings of everyday natural language as it is used in different situations of communication. As a result, the emphasis of his study shifted towards the role of the speaker, listener and context within which communication takes place. The emphasis upon the context reveals that the study of communicative processes entails not only an examination of the actual utterances, but crucially of the conventions that underlie such utterances.

Although Austin did not publish much during his lifetime his writings have been published posthumously and these include the *Philosophical Papers* (1961), *Sense and Sensibilia* (1975) and *How to Do Things with Words* (1975). In these writings Austin examines various philosophical problems and his innovative approach to the way they should be analysed has guaranteed his legacy.

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In this chapter I will first (a) outline Austin's suggestions on the methodology of ordinary language philosophy and (b) follow this with an examination of distinction between constative and performative utterances. The next section (c) focuses on Austin's analysis of performatives that leads to (d) the development of speech act theory. The last section (e) shows how Austin's insights have been put to use by Butler's in her analysis of hate-speech.

## **1.0. The Method of Linguistic Analysis**

In 'A Plea for Excuses' (1979: 175-204) Austin outlines his particular method of linguistic analysis as a way of proceeding from ordinary, everyday language 'by examining *what we should say when*, and so why and what we should mean by it.' (207: 181). He justifies this method on the following grounds:

(a) to avoid being misled: 'words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us.' (1979: 181-182)

(b) to learn more about the world:

words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can re-look at the world without blinkers. (1979: 182)

(c) to avoid specialisation or technical jargon:

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[O]ur common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking, in the lifetimes of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon – the most favoured alternative method. (1979: 182)

After having elaborated the reasons for his choice of method, Austin offers some more suggestions on the method with which he conducts his philosophical analysis of the concept of excuses in ‘A Plea For Excuses’ (1979: 175-204)

- (a) the use of the dictionary: using the dictionary to find the relevant definitions must be ‘*thorough*’ and there are two ways in which the dictionary can be used (i) by listing all the relevant words and looking them up and (b) selecting a large number of relevant words, looking up the definition and carefully noting other relevant words that are in turn also looked up. Eventually repetitions will occur. ‘This method has the advantage of grouping the terms into convenient clusters---but of course a good deal will depend upon the comprehensiveness of our initial selection.’ (1979: 187)
- (b) the use of textbooks: in the case of ‘excuses’ Austin considers the resources of the law and those of psychology as invaluable. ‘With these sources, and with the aid of the imagination, it will go hard if we cannot arrive at the meanings of large numbers of expressions and at the understanding and classification of large numbers of ‘actions’.’ (1979: 189)



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Elsewhere, in ‘Three Ways of Spilling Ink’ (1979: 272-287) Austin suggests starting his philosophical analysis by considering

(c) ‘imagined or actual cases’: by this, he means that one either selects an actual conversation for analysis to see what is appropriate to use in a particular situation, or to reconstruct imaginatively a possible conversation to see what should be said in a particular situation. Having collected the ‘data’, one must then proceed to explain it, and he suggests that the use of ‘such methods as ‘Agreement’ and ‘Difference’: [to show] what is in fact present in the cases where we do use, say, ‘deliberately’, and what is absent when we don’t’ (1979: 274) It is by using this method of comparison and contrast that what is specific to each expression can be highlighted.

(d) ‘the ‘grammar’, ‘etymology’, and so forth of the words’ (1979: 274). The point of examining both the grammar and the etymology is that over time, the grammar and morphology that has ‘survived’ will teach us a lot about the meaning of the expression. (1979:282)

An essential part of Austin philosophical’s practice required a conscientious involvement with minute details concerning idioms and expressions. There are a number of instances in the *Philosophical Papers* (1979) that demonstrate this concern: he looks for the difference between knowing that a bird is a gold finch from its red head and knowing that it is a gold finch because it has a red head (1979: 84); or, the difference between acting deliberately, acting intentionally and acting on purpose (1979: 275). And, in ‘How to do

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Things with words', (1975) Austin distinguishes between what I do in saying something and what I do by saying something (1975: 121-131).

This scrupulous attention to detail raises an important question: Are these details philosophically important or are they merely the historical variations of a language that offer interesting insights, but seem philosophically trivial? Austin's position is that if there is a difference then there is a rational explanation for this difference and this implies that it is not just an unimportant coincidence but something that should be looked into. The difference might not be evident, but the point of linguistic analysis is to find the difference that makes the difference.

Austin justifies his belief in the value of ordinary language on the grounds that it has evolved into its current usage, and that it therefore represents the best there is. Given that the language available - ordinary language - embodies all the necessary features for our understanding, why should this be replaced by a jargon that creates more confusion than clarity? The general thrust of Austin's philosophical method is to leave everything as it is, to describe what the 'plain man' says, without trying to improve upon it.

## **2.0. Constatives and Performatives.**

One of the movements that dominated the western philosophical tradition for a relatively brief period of time was that of Logical Positivism. The Logical Positivists devised what came to be known as the Verification Principle which stated that for a statement to

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meaningful it must be verified either as true or false; if there was no way of verifying it, then the statement was 'condemned' to meaningless-ness. This theory faced two fundamental difficulties: the first one was that the Verification Principle itself was impossible to verify and should therefore also be considered as meaningless; the second difficulty was that a large number of things we talk about – beauty, morality, religion – cannot be verified so that these utterances would be considered meaningless. However, although meaningless, the Logical Positivists did not advocate eliminating such utterances from our everyday discourse. They explained these utterances as expressions of subjectivity, so that (for example) the utterance 'the cake is good' is another way of saying 'I like the cake'.

It is against this background that Austin can be read. Throughout his writings, Austin resists the fairly common idea that the primary function of language is that of describing reality. To this end he coined the phrase 'descriptive fallacy'. In his posthumously published work, *How to Do Things with Words* (1975) Austin declares that his goal is to demonstrate that the truth-conditional theory of meaning is not central to the study of language. Austin introduces the terminology of 'constatives' to discuss the use of statements whose function it is to 'constate' something of the world, something that is true or false (1975: 3). According to this view, we have language on one side and the world on the other and when a statement represents the world we consider it to be true, and when it does not we consider it false. However it is evident that there are many other uses of language that have been largely neglected by formal semantic theorists. In particular, attention should be paid to the use of language from the point of view of the

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speakers and Austin coins the term ‘performative’ to describe the way speakers use language to perform actions. He offers the following examples:

(E.a) ‘I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)’ – as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.

(E.b.) ‘I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’ - as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem.

(E.c.) ‘I give and bequeath my watch to my brother’ – as occurring in a will.

(E.d.) ‘I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.’ (1975: .5).

These utterances cannot be assessed in terms of the true and the false, but by uttering them one is, in fact, performing an action. Utterances such as, ‘I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow’, or ‘I hereby christen this ship the Queen Elizabeth’ are not the sort of utterances that one says true or false to. It would just not make sense to answer, ‘I hereby christen this ship’ with ‘false’. The point of these utterances is not to describe facts, or states of affairs, but crucially, to do things. With the prime minister utters ‘I declare war on Zanzibar’ he/she is going to war, with the various issues that such an utterance involves, i.e., listening to the military, persuading the nation, etc. After war has been declared, the world is not the same place for something has happened: the words uttered have transformed the world. Likewise, when a person says ‘I do’ (within the context of a wedding ceremony) the person is not describing his/her wedding ceremony but getting married; the couple’s life is different from the life they enjoyed before they got married.

These are the characteristics of performatives,

A. they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constare anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and

B. they uttering of the sentences is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something. (1975: 5)

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But Austin is at pains to show that getting married is not a question of ‘just’ uttering a few words (1975: 8) since these words acquire their performativity through the established conventions of a particular society. He offers an analysis of the conventions that need to be fulfilled for the utterance to perform its function:

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A.2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

(B.2) completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently. (1975: 14-15)

In the case of A. (i) by saying ‘I do’ one is in effect, getting married, as long as (ii) there are witnesses, a priest or magistrate and none of the couple is already or still married. In the case of B. the whole procedure of getting married must be enacted (i) correctly so that the right words must be uttered: in response to the question of whether the bride wants to take the bridegroom, the performative would fail if she answers ‘maybe’. With (ii) what is meant by completion is that the utterance is acknowledged, so that, if (for example) one makes a bet, the other person must acknowledge that s/he is taking part in a bet, by shaking hands and saying , ‘you’re on’. Austin calls this acknowledgement, ‘uptake’. In the case of C. (i) we are in the domain of the sincerity with which the speaker expresses his intentions: to accuse someone of something that the speaker knows is not the case is a

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violation of C. (i), just as it is a violation of C. (ii) if one promises to do something that one has no intention of keeping.

The early Austin distinguished between performatives and constatives identifying the different characteristics of each. While constatives are descriptive utterances that can be either true or false, the values associated with performatives are those of success or failure. Austin introduces the terminology of ‘happy’ and ‘unhappy’ to describe the success or failure of performatives through the fulfilment of certain conditions, that he calls the ‘felicity conditions.’ While performatives might not be true or false, they might succeed or fail and it is always possible for them to go wrong. Austin calls failed performatives, ‘infelicitous’.

In the doctrine of Infelicities, Austin outlines the ways in which performatives can fail (1975: 14-44):

(a) they ‘misfire’ when there is no conventional procedure in a particular context. If I say, ‘I order you to chop wood’ in a context where there is no conventional system for ordering or accepting orders then the order has misfired; or when someone doesn’t follow the procedure completely as when I write a will saying ‘I leave everything to my son’ and inadvertently forget to sign it;

(b) they can be ‘abusive’: these are the more serious of the unhappy performatives for they are associated with the insincerity of the speaker. If I say ‘I promise to return the

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money tomorrow' when I have no intention of returning the money, this is not merely a case of the conventional procedures failing, but of an abuse of the conventional procedures; another abuse occurs when I apologise but do not mean it: in this case my apology is an insincere one.

Although both misfires and abuses are instances of performative failure, Austin differentiates between them on the grounds that abuses involve an act of deception and are therefore more serious than misfires.

Another way of differentiating between performatives and constatives is that of showing the different ways in which they relate to the world:

...in ordinary cases, for example running, it is the fact that he is running which makes the statement that he is running *true*; or again, that the truth of the constative utterance 'he is running' depends on his being running. Whereas in our case it is the happiness of the performative 'I apologize' which makes it the fact that I am apologizing: and my success in apologizing depends on the happiness of the performative utterance 'I apologize'. This is one way in which we might justify the 'performative-constative' distinction--as a distinction between doing and saying. (1975: 47)

The emphasis here is on the relation between the speaker and the world: in the case of the constative it is a question of whether the statement matches or fails to match the world. In the case of performatives, the world is changed by virtue of the performative being uttered: to say 'I do' successfully is to change the world since it is now a different place i.e., one in which I am married.

### **3.0. The Analysis of Performatives**

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Since Austin places so much emphasis on the performative-constative distinction his next step is to identify the specific characteristics of the performatives so as to find out why they constitute a class of their own. Austin asks, 'is the use of the first person singular and of the present indicative active, so called, essential to a performative utterance?' (1975: 57). Despite being couched as a question, it seems that these are the characteristics of a performative utterance, and they are justified on the grounds that since the speaker is doing the action through the act of uttering it, it would necessarily involve the first person.

Before conducting his analysis, Austin pre-empts two possible objections to his use of the grammatical form to identify performatives:

(a) the first objection is that they constitute an incidental feature of language and cannot really be the identifying sign of a performative. But Austin points out that if a performative is the doing of something, it must be something that is done by an agent, and this agent is the speaker. The use of the grammatical form of the first person shows precisely this.

(b) the second objection is that the grammatical form can also be used with constatives (for example, 'I want to have a drink'). Austin responds by pointing to a fundamental asymmetry between constatives and performatives: performatives are asymmetrical while constatives are symmetrical. Austin gives us the following example,



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...an anxious parent when his child has been asked to do something may say 'he promises, don't you Willy?' but little Willy must still himself say 'I promise' if he is really to have promised. Now this sort of asymmetry does not arise at all in general with verbs that are not used as explicit performatives. For example, there is no such asymmetry between 'I run' and 'He runs'. (1975: 63)

Despite this defence of the grammatical form, Austin still finds a number of faults with them.

(a) the use of the first person in the active voice is not necessary since a performative can be uttered in the passive voice, so that 'You are hereby authorised to pay...' and 'Passengers are warned to cross the track by the bridge only.' (1975: 57) are both performatives (1975: 57).

(b) there are even more serious challenges to the criterion (1) of the present tense: instead of using the present tense, 'I find you guilty' I might say 'you did it'; and (2) of the indicative mood: instead of the indicative mood, 'I order you to turn right' I might say 'Turn right'<sup>iv</sup> (1975: 58).

(c) there is also the problem that the first person can be also used to describe routine actions rather than the doing of things:

The first person singular present indicative active may be used to describe how I habitually behave: 'I bet him (every morning) sixpence that it will rain' or 'I promise only when I intend to keep my word.' (1975: 64)

(d) while the first person in the present tense differs from that of the continuous tense, the latter can be used at times in a performative manner

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...I can say 'Don't bother me at the moment; I will see you later; I am marrying' at any moment during the ceremony when I am not having to say other words such as 'I do'; here the utterance of the performative is not the whole of the performance, which is protracted and contains diverse elements. Or I can say 'I am protesting' when performing the act by, in this case, means other than saying 'I protest', for example by chaining myself to park railings.' (1975: 64)<sup>iv</sup>

The attempt to establish characteristics that identify performatives faces increasing difficulties. There are some utterances that have the requisite grammatical form but which we would not want to allow into the class of performatives as it would broaden the class of performatives excessively: 'I state that' seems to conform to our grammatical or quasi-grammatical requirements: but do we want *it* in? Our criterion, such as it is, seems in danger of letting in non-performatives.' (1975: 68). So too, Austin points out, the use of the grammatical form as a criterion for performativity can be too narrow: by telling someone 'I insult you', I am not doing anything, I am not insulting the person. The grammatical form does not indicate the presence of a performative and are misleading (1975: 68)

Another problem with the performative-constative distinction is the class of utterances that do not seem to fit within either of the two, where it is unclear whether the utterance is a performative or a constative. It is evident that when we say 'I feel repentant' we are describing our state and are therefore issuing a constative. Likewise, when we say 'I apologise' we are doing something i.e., apologizing and therefore issuing a performative. But some utterances are dubious: 'I am sorry' and 'I am grateful' can be considered both as performatives and constatives. (1975: 79).

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In his analysis of performatives, Austin introduces a further distinction between primary performatives and explicit performatives:

'I shall oppose it [explicit performative] to 'primary performative' (rather than to inexplicit or implicit performative). We gave as an example:

- (1) primary utterance: 'I shall be there',
- (2) explicit performative: 'I promise that I shall be there', and we said that the latter formula made explicit what action it is that is being performed in issuing the utterance: i.e., 'I shall be there'. If someone says 'I shall be there', we might ask: 'Is that a promise?' We may receive the answer 'Yes', or 'Yes, I promise it' (or 'that...' or 'to...'), whereas the answer might have been only 'No, but I do intend to be' (expressing or announcing an intention), or 'No, but I can foresee that, knowing my weaknesses, I (probably) shall be there'.' (1975: 69)

The point is that without the explicit formula the first utterance can be understood in different ways, for example, as the expression of an intention or as a hopeful desire. The function of the 'explicit' is parallel to certain non-linguistic actions: Austin describes the convention of bowing and saying 'Salaam' at the same time. If I say 'Salaam' as I bow before you, I am performing the action of greeting you and not examining your shoes. By bowing, and saying 'Salaam' I am making explicit my greetings to you. In a similar fashion, explicit performatives 'make plain how the action is to be taken or understood, what action it is.' (1975: 70)

Austin also realises that although performatives are explicit since they are unambiguous or specific ways of saying what one is doing, there are other indirect ways of saying that achieve the same results. These are (a) the mood so that instead of saying 'I order you to shut it', I say, 'Shut it'; (b) the intonation: where one uses a different tone of voice to express 'it's going to charge' either as a warning or a question; (c) the use of adverbs where instead of saying 'I promise I'll be there' one says 'I'll be there without fail; (d)

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connecting particles where instead of saying 'I conclude that X' one says 'therefore X'; (e) non-verbal accompaniments such as frowns, pointing and so on; (f) the context where for example, the health of the speaker influences the way the utterance 'I shall die some day' is understood (1975: 73-77). What this list shows is that primary performatives can perform the same function, or do the same things as explicit ones; in other words, to perform an action it is not necessary to have the grammatical form of the explicit performatives.

Austin's inability to identify performatives shifts his analysis toward a questioning of the strict dichotomy that separated performatives from constatives. He points out that:

(a) they are not mutually exclusive. The utterance 'I warn you the bull will charge' is performing an act of warning, but it can also be judged as true or false. In a similar vein, there is no reason why a constative could not be described as true or false and in addition, also perform an action.

'I warn you that the bull is about to charge' is the fact, if it is one, that the bull is about to charge: if the bull is *not*, then indeed the utterance 'I warn you that the bull is about to charge' is open to criticism---but not in any of the ways we have hitherto characterized as varieties of unhappiness. We should not in this case say the warning was void---i.e., that he did not warn but only went through a form of warning---nor that it was insincere: we should feel much more inclined to say the warning was false or (better) mistaken, as with a statement. So that considerations of the happiness or unhappiness type may infect statements (or some statements) and considerations of the type of truth and falsity may infect performatives (or some performatives). (1975: 55)

(b) there are features common to both performatives and constatives that Austin calls 'presupposition' so that both constatives and performative can fail if certain presuppositions are not in place. For instance, if a person says, 'when I die you will

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inherit my Caravaggio', without having any Caravaggio paintings then the utterance is a failure because it is stating things that should not be assumed in the first place. Similarly with performatives: if I advise you to join the French Foreign Legion without knowing anything about the military, I fail to give you good advice.

...what is to be said of the statement that 'John's children are all bald' if made when John has no children? It is usual now to say that it is not false because it is devoid of reference; reference is necessary for either truth or falsehood...People say 'the question does not arise'. Here I shall say 'the utterance is void'. Compare this with our infelicity when we say 'I name...' but some of the conditions (A.1) and (A.2) are not satisfied...we might have used the presuppose formula: we might say that the formula 'I do' presupposes lots of things: if these are not satisfied the formula is unhappy, void: if it does not succeed in being a contract when the reference fails (or even when it is ambiguous) any more than the other succeeds in being a statement.' (1975: 50-51)

(c) Furthermore, the distinction between the performative and the constative is undermined by observing the sincerity of the speaker. Sincerity is not only related to performatives but also to constatives so that a promise must be uttered sincerely for it to succeed just as a description requires the sincerity of the speaker to establish its truth claim (the earth revolves around the sun but I don't believe it).

The insincerity of an assertion is the same as the insincerity of a promise, since both promising and asserting are procedures intended for use by persons having certain thoughts. 'I promise but do not intend' is parallel to 'it is the case but I do not believe it'; to say 'I promise', without intending, is parallel to saying 'it is the case' without believing. (1975: 50)

It might be objected that the difference between constatives and performatives could lie in the area of their respective values: while performatives admit of degrees of success and failure, in the domain of constatives there are no degrees of truth and falsity. A performative can be more or less successful, while a constative is either true or false. Austin questions this claim arguing that there are many constative utterances that are not formulated with a strict demarcation of their truth. The utterance 'France is hexagonal' is

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not the description of the precise shape of France, but a rough estimate which is not meant to be answered as either true or false (1975: 143).

#### **4.0. Speech Act Theory**

By the second half of *How to do Things With Words*, Austin gives up on his goal of identifying the specific features of performatives, and broadens his inquiry into an analysis of how saying something is also doing something. It is the study of language as a whole that is being now considered. However, despite abandoning his early performative-constative distinction, Austin realises that although the insight that some utterances perform actions was correct, the way this insight was generalised was mistaken. As a result Austin proposes a new theory that subsumed within it the insights that were learnt from the performative-constative distinction. This new theory is called the Theory of Speech Acts and its central thesis was that all utterances – whether performative or constative – involved the doing of an action. In ‘Performative Utterances’, Austin writes,

besides the question that has been very much studied in the past as to what a certain utterance *means*, there is a further question distinct from this as to what was the *force*, as we call it, of the utterance. We may be quite clear what ‘Shut the door’ means, but not yet at all clear on the further point as to whether as uttered at a certain time, it was an order, an entreaty or whatnot. (1979: 251)

Before elaborating upon the details of Austin’s theory of speech acts, it might be fruitful to examine the sense in which speech can be said to constitute an action. There is the act of producing a sound, of producing sounds in a sequence to form a sentence, and of producing sentences that have a meaning. These three features are called the phonetic, the

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phatic and the rhetic respectively: the phonetic is the basic level of sound production through the use of the vocal chords; the phatic involves the use of sounds that have been transformed into words and that are strung together according to the rules of grammar to generate sentences; and the rhetic aspect is that involving the meaning of sentences i.e., sentences with a sense and reference.

The phonetic act is merely the act of uttering certain noise. The phatic act is the uttering of certain vocables or words, i.e., noises of certain types, belonging to and as belong to, a certain vocabulary, conforming to an as conforming to a certain grammar. The rhetic act is the performance of an act of using those vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference. Thus 'He said "The cat is on the mat"', reports a phatic act, whereas 'He said that the cat was on the mat' reports a rhetic act. (1975: 95)

Taken together these constitute what Austin calls the locutionary aspect and distinguishes it from the illocutionary and perlocutionary act. These are the differences between them:

(a) the locutionary act: this is the basic and fundamental level of a speech act because it literally involves doing something: when we speak we produce sounds that are words which are combined into sentences to generate a meaning.

(b) the illocutionary act: although it is evident that someone has said something it is not necessarily evident what the force of that utterance is. Austin uses the example of 'it's going to charge': should this be understood as a warning or a statement? (1975: 98)

The illocutionary force can take different forms, such as making promises, praying, joking, ordering, and crucially within speech act theory, making a statement; so too the illocutionary force involves taking into consideration the speaker and the intentions with which he/she communicates. The illocutionary act is a form of saying that qualifies as doing something and Austin cites a number of examples:

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‘asking or answering a question,  
giving some information or an assurance or a warning,  
announcing a verdict or an intention,  
pronouncing sentence,  
making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism,  
making an identification or giving a description’ (1975: 98-99)

- (c) the perlocutionary act: the saying of something can also effect another person. In this sense, our saying is also a doing: we did something to the other person i.e., convince them, make them laugh: ‘[s]aying something will often or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of them’ (1975: 101)

At the start of Lecture IX, Austin reviews the terms introduced in his speech act theory:

We first distinguished a group of things we do in saying something, which together we summed up by saying we perform a *locutionary act*, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense. Second, we said that we also perform *illocutionary acts* such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c., i.e., utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. Thirdly, we may also perform *perlocutionary acts*: what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading.’ (1975: 108)

However, Austin is chiefly interested in the illocutionary aspect of the speech act and his working method consists in comparing it with the locutionary and perlocutionary acts. In relation to this he examined

- (a) the difference between an illocutionary and a perlocutionary act? According to Austin, while perlocutionary utterances are the subject of empirical investigation since



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they can be verified, illocutionary utterances are the subject of an a priori philosophical analysis. Austin maintained that any utterance can produce a perlocutionary act, so what is required is an empirical analysis of which utterances produced a certain effect. In the case of illocutionary utterances, it is not an empirical examination that will tell us whether the utterance is illocutionary or not.

However, there is a further and, perhaps, more significant way of bringing out the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts revolving around the question of ‘effect’: ‘the performance of an illocutionary act involves securing of *uptake*’ (1975: 117). In the case of illocutionary acts all that is required is that the listeners understand the utterance, while with perlocutionary acts, the listener not only understands but changes his/her views or behaviour.

For an action to count as an illocution it is enough that the listener understand the speaker’s intention, for it to count as a perlocution the listener’s attitudes, his beliefs – what, for want of a better expression, we may call roughly his ‘mental state’ – must be affected in some way (Friggieri, 1991: 206)<sup>iv</sup>

Given this identification of illocutionary acts as not having consequences, then, Austin’s claim that they are the a priori material for philosophical investigation might be justified.

Austin also took great interest in the conflicts and misunderstanding that arise between the illocutionary force of the utterance and its perlocutionary effects. The locutionary act ‘shoot her’ has the illocutionary force of urging or advising or commanding, with the perlocutionary effect that of persuading me to shoot her. In this case, the intention as expressed by the speaker is understood by the hearer. But the relationship between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s response are not necessarily synchronized: the hearer

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could be frightened by the speaker's utterance and object to the speaker's utterance in the first place as dangerous or unwarranted. The perlocutionary effect is unpredictable and context-dependent (Levinson, 1983: 236-7)<sup>iv</sup>.

(b) The difference between the locutionary and the illocutionary acts. This is an important question because if we take the locutionary act to be the production of a meaningful utterance, then what is the scope of the illocutionary act? Austin insisted that this was an aspect of the philosophy of language that was of crucial importance (1975: 100), but his difficulty lay in how to formulate the nature of illocutionary acts. On the one hand, he had to prevent illocutionary acts from being 'reduced' to locutionary acts (meaning) while at the same time he had to show that they were different from perlocutionary acts as these are subject to empirically verification. Austin's difficulty lay in carving out the specific domain of illocutionary acts.

Austin starts by claiming, 'To perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also an *eo ipso* to perform an illocutionary act...' (1975: 98). Here he is bringing home the point that by virtue of uttering something I am producing a sentence with a meaning (locutionary act) and simultaneously doing something else such as asking, commanding, promising (illocutionary act). They are not two separate actions but one.

However, Austin clearly distinguishes between the meaning of the locutionary utterance and the force of the illocutionary utterance. The meaning of the locutionary utterance should be understood in the sense of Frege's distinction between the sense and reference

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of an utterance, while the force of the illocutionary should be understood in the sense of what we do, or how we use the locutionary (1975: 100). One can understand what is meant by ‘The bull is about to charge’ but not understand if it was meant as a warning, or a statement. (Friggieri, 1991: 189)

(c) The question of whether it is possible to identify an illocutionary act through its grammatical form. Austin offers these examples: ‘He said “get out”’, ‘He told me to get out’, [and] ‘He said “Is it in Oxford or Cambridge?”’; ‘He asked whether it was in Oxford or Cambridge’. (1975: 95) From these examples Austin concludes that ‘tell’ and ‘ask’ are the illocutionary acts of ordering and asking respectively. Given that there is no indication of the context of their production, it would seem that there is a grammatical form that enables us to identify illocutionary utterances: in these examples, they are the grammatical forms of the imperative and the interrogative. Perhaps, this is why Austin insisted that illocutionary acts are conventional, i.e., because they followed conventional grammatical forms.

Speaking of the ‘use of “language” for arguing or warning’ looks like speaking of ‘the use of “language” for persuading, rousing, alarming’; yet the former may, for rough contrast, be said to be *conventional*, in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula; but the latter could not.’ (1975: 103; also, 105, 118)

The problem with this view is that while there are certain grammatical forms for asking and telling, there are no grammatical forms for warning, toasting, or making an appeal. Clearly the grammatical form is not applicable to all illocutionary utterances and Austin goes on to suggest another possibility for identifying illocutionary utterances. When talking about illocutionary utterances it should also be possible to say, ‘he meant it as...’

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(1975: 100), highlighting the point that it is what the speaker intends to mean by his/her utterance that is important. And if the illocutionary force is not communicated then this is a failing of the speaker.

However, the emphasis on speaker intentionality is not entirely successful. For a start, it is difficult to maintain the view of illocutionary acts as conventional and intentional at the same time. Austin himself acknowledged this when he wrote that the illocutionary ‘act is constituted not by intention or by fact, essentially but by *convention*...’ (1975: 128). It would seem that Austin favours the conventional at the expense of the intentional, so if an utterance is understood as an order or a warning it is because of the conditions of ordering and warning, and not because of the way the speaker used the utterance (as an order or a warning). And it is also possible to perform an illocutionary act without intending to: to overlook and to neglect are cases of illocutionary acts that are performative without the relevant intention.

A third possibility suggested by Graham (1977) (the other two being the conventional grammatical form and the speaker intention) is that of highlighting the context of communication. This is something Austin advises us to always keep in mind: ‘the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be ‘explained’ by the ‘context’ in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in linguistic interchange’. (1975: 100). Austin’s point is that the contextual situation of the speaker and the listener, coupled with the grammatical conventions appropriate to that context, can explain illocutionary acts.

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But the emphasis on the context also has certain difficulties for while some explicit contexts explain illocutionary acts, it is possible to use an illocutionary act without a specific social context. Consider the difference between these two situations: within a military context the lieutenant might warn his troops to dispel any notion of surrendering. But when I warn you that the bull is about to charge the situation is different for there is no specific context for the utterance to count as a warning.

With Austin, a whole new dimension to the study of language has been introduced. The value of his studies on language has been picked up by others who have used his conceptual tools in their respective studies. One can mention J. Hillis Miller's *Speech Acts in Literature* (2001) and Judith Butler's *Excitable Speech* (1997) as cases in point. In the next section I will focus on Judith Butler and the way she uses Austin in her analysis of hate-speech.

## **5.0. Applied Austin: Butler's analysis of 'excitable speech'**

Butler opens *Excitable Speech* (1997) with a number of questions:

When we claim to have been injured by language, what kind of claim do we make? We ascribe an agency to language, a power to injure, and position ourselves as the objects of its injurious trajectory. We claim that language acts, and acts against us, and the claim we make is a further instance of language, on which seeks to arrest the force of the prior instance. Thus, we exercise the force of language even as we seek to counter its force, caught up in a bind that no act of censorship can undo. (1997: 1)

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In this citation, the issues that concern Butler - language, censorship, politics and agency - are thematized and, while focusing principally upon the writings of J.L. Austin and L. Althusser, her theoretical background is informed by both M. Foucault's account of power and J. Derrida's account of context and iteration. Interestingly, the word 'excitable' in the title of her book refers to the legal term 'excitable speech' a term that refers to speech considered beyond the control of the speaker because it is uttered under duress. Butler will argue that in a sense all speech is excitable (1997: 15).

Within democratic societies, the value of freedom of speech is unquestioned; the free exchange of ideas is considered an essential ingredient that characterizes western democratic cultures. But freedom of speech also raises the problem of whether it should include all speech? Should offensive speech – racist or sexist discourse – be also permitted? Do these situations justify censorship?

Several theorists have in fact argued in favor of state intervention by censoring racist or sexist discourses. In the 1980s, feminist anti-pornographers and critical race theorists argued (a) that pornography and racial speech should no longer be protected by the First Amendment of the American Constitution (the First Amendment protects freedom of speech) and furthermore, (b) the active intervention by the state to censor such discourses was justified in terms of the Fourteenth Amendment (the Fourteenth Amendment guarantees equality and respect for all citizens).

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Butler positions herself against those legal theorists and scholars who support the introduction of censorship. This is not to say that she condones offensive speech or that she is unaware of the possible injury that such speech can cause. But she views the question of censorship by situating it within the framework of democratic politics, with the possibility of the subject contesting such speech without recourse to state censorship.

The First Amendment of the US Constitution concerns the protection of free speech: all ideas have the right to be expressed and the freedom to express them should be protected. There are exceptions to the First Amendment (for example) speech that is defamatory, libelous, plagiaristic, threatening (to an officer of the law) and false advertising. But what is known as hate-speech - sexist or racist discourse - is also protected by the First Amendment since it belongs to the marketplace of ideas and while we might find these ideas reprehensible and disagree strongly with them, this does not justify their exclusion. Hate-speech is not harmful but merely represents the point of view of a person or groups of persons who are expressing their opinion and such opinions can be countered with other ideas.

This is where the issue of censorship has its origins. Those seeking to regulate hate speech argue that such speech is, in fact, harmful: it is not a question of 'just words', but rather of words that actually hurt the people they are addressed to. Matsuda writes about the "deadly violence that accompanies the persistent verbal degradation of those subordinated..." and later remarks that "Racist hate messages, threats, slurs, epithets, and disparagement all hit the gut of those in the target group." (in Butler, 1997: 166)

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Butler disagrees with the notion that the state should intervene to prevent such speech: it is not that Butler denies that hate speech can injure and hurt those towards whom it is directed but rather a question of strategy. Her view is that leaving hate-speech within the public domain provides a better way of dealing with it for the conditions that make hate speech possible are also those that make ‘defiant’ speech possible. It is defiant speech that can challenge and defuse the harm of hate speech.

Proponents of state censorship claim that hate-speech is harmful, that the person toward whom it is directed undergoes an injury. This raises a number of questions: how does language have this force to injure others? Where did this force come from? To answer this question Butler turns to Austin’s theory of speech acts where she sums up the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts as follows:

the former are speech acts that, in saying do what they say, and do it in the moment of that saying; the latter are speech acts that produce certain effects as their consequence; by saying something, a certain effect follows. (1997: 3)

Butler’s argument centers upon the temporal difference between them: while illocutionary acts are immediate and their happening instantaneous, perlocutionary acts occur later, their effect taking place at a different temporal moment.

But while the illocutionary act takes place at the moment of its utterance, its force is derived from elsewhere. Following Austin’s analysis, the power that gives illocutionary utterances their force is derived from the institutional framework that specifies the words



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or formula that is to be uttered, the persons who can utter them and the circumstances within which they can be uttered. If a speech act derives its force from previously established conventions, then it is much harder to identify what Austin calls the ‘total speech situation’ that he claimed was necessary for an understanding the speech acts.

Butler argues that if the difference between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary act is one of time – the former occurring immediately and the latter happening later – then, (given that illocutionary acts are the result of conventions or what she calls ‘historicity’), it is not the case that there is a direct and immediate effect between speech and conduct. The force that gives illocutionary acts their power is accumulated over time. The performative act ‘echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of prior and authoritative set of practices.*’ (1997: 51)

Whereas Austin thought that to understand a speech act one needs to examine the ‘total speech situation’, it turns out that there is more to the total speech situation than he had in mind. Butler’s introduction of the ‘historicity’ that gives the illocutionary act its force transforms the present moment of the speech act to include both the past and the future. The historical derivation of the force shows that there is a space between the (illocutionary) act and conduct. As a result, the distinction between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary cannot be maintained since both can be construed as ‘effects’, the former of its (vertical) historical development, the latter of its (horizontal) temporal recognition. And this constellation of past, present and future gives signs their potential

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for unexpected meanings; an utterance has the potential to transcend ‘the moment it occasions.’ (1997: 14)

In the case of hate-speech, it is the use and repetition of injurious names that constitutes their historicity. Injurious names carry their history with them, a history that

has become internal to a name, has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name, a sedimentation, a repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force. (1997: 36)

And it is because such hate speech has been used before in an offensive manner that we now know that it is offensive. It is by being used and re-used that it succeeds in acquiring its effects.

The next step in Butler’s strategy is to show that the censoring of hate-speech is mistaken because it is grounded in the belief that the illocutionary act always and necessarily succeeds in hurting the other. Hate-speech theorists assume that the illocutionary act is always successful, that it efficiently achieves its effect of hurting the other: ‘a speech act is said to act – as efficacious, unilateral, transitive, generative.’ (1997: 74). It is towards this assumption that Butler applies Austin’s doctrine of infelicities to show that an illocution does not necessarily achieve its goal: as Austin pointed out, one feature of performatives is that they are vulnerable to ‘misfires’ and ‘abuses’. If this is the case, if hate-speech always has the possibility of failing to achieve its goal, of failing to hurt, then perhaps censorship is not the best way to counter hate-speech.

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Paradoxically hate-speech theorists who attempt to censor certain terms fail to realize that in the process of taking these words out of their context they are creating new contexts through the process of repeating these words. And by repeating these words in different contexts, they are taking the 'sting' out of them: they are using these words not to hurt, but to exemplify, to educate, or to seek legal redress. In other words, they are deflating hate-speech and it is this, rather than censorship, that Butler thinks is a more productive approach to hate-speech. The way a sign can be defused through a process of re-signification can be seen (for example) in the way the word 'nigger' was appropriated by the black community and used as an expression of identity rather than humiliation.

Butler's critique of hate-speech theorists is further developed in her critique of the subject. It would seem that hate-speech posits a subject as the origin of hate-speech who in turn uses it to hurt the other. It should be recalled that while Butler is critical of the notion of the sovereign subject, this does not absolve users of hate-speech from their responsibility. Care should be taken not to equate responsibility with sovereignty: the speaker is responsible for the language he/she uses even if it is language that transforms the speaker in into a subject.

Her argument against the sovereignty of the subject relies on the work of Althusser and his concept of interpellation. According to Butler, the use of speech by a figure of authority inaugurates the subject, so it is language that constitutes the subject. Although this view contrasts with that of Austin who assumes that the subject is prior to the speech act that he/she uses, Butler argues that for hate-speech to have its injurious effects, it

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must be necessary to take on Althusser's account of interpellation of the subject, for if there is no subject then how can words hurt anyone? As a result, Althusser's account of the interpellation of the subject, 'appears to constitute the prior condition of those subject-centered speech acts that dominate Austin's domain of analysis' (1997: 24)

According to Althusser, a person becomes an ideological subject as a result of his/her response to the voice of authority hailing him/her. His example is that of a police officer who calls out to a person with 'Hey you there' and the person, recognizing that he/she is being address is transformed or constituted into a subject. This enables Althusser and Butler to argue that the subject is linguistically constituted, is an effect of, rather than being positioned outside of, or prior to language. But Butler's further point is that while it might seem that the police officer is a sovereign power, he is actually citing or repeating formulas that are already in existence. For the citational address to be effective the policeman must rely upon the context and convention of address: 'the police *cite* the convention of hailing' (1997: 33) using a language that pre-exists them and of which they are not in control.

Butler adds to the Althusserian analysis by arguing that (a) the subject can be interpellated without consciously knowing it; (b) the person is subjectivised even when he/she resists, refuses or counters the terms that are being addressed to him/her; (c) interpellation does not require an actual person, such as the policeman in Althusser's example, but can be the system itself that interpellates with its bureaucratic forms, adoption papers, etc. Here we can see the parallels between interpellation and

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illocutionary speech acts: both rely upon established conventions; for interpellative and illocutionary acts to work, they must belong to a conventional system that pre-exists the subject.

The Althusserian model of interpellation makes it possible to explain hate-speech. Through the act of calling the other with a hurtful name, the other is transformed into a social being. Butler generalizes this argument to include non-harmful interpellations: these are also injurious because the act of constituting persons as social subjects creates certain possibilities and denies others. When the doctor utters ‘it’s a girl’, the child is being interpellated or constituted as a female subject with all the possibilities (or lack of) that this entails.

Contrary to the popular view of the subject as the originator or author of his/her discourse, Butler argues that the subject is produced as an effect of discourse. As the subject uses offensive language, he/she is produced as a racist or sexist subject at the same time as he/she transforms others into ‘sexualised’ or ‘raced’ beings. The racist or sexist subject is produced because of the ‘long string of injurious interpellations’ that pre-exist him/her and that are already used in a sexist or racist manner: the subject is not at the origin of the discourse but rather an effect of it: the *‘subject who “cites” the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself’* (1997: 49)

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Although Butler does admit that there are times when hate-speech should be prosecuted she does not offer a detailed account of when this should occur. The reason for this lack is that her focus is directed mainly towards the institutionalization of hate-speech as opposed to the individual one-on-one interaction that underlies the claims of responsibility made by hate-speech theorists. Thus, while racists and sexists are responsible for their utterances, Butler's point is that the language they are using is not their responsibility but rather an inherited language, although this does not justify their using it.

Butler promotes counter-speech as a form of resistance to hate-speech:

the gap that separates the speech act from its future effects has its auspicious implications: it begins a theory of linguistic agency that provides an alternative to the relentless search for legal remedy. The interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjointed by their power to injure and recontextualized in more affirmative modes. (1997: 15).

While Butler's critical analysis is directed at the concept of the subject as a sovereign in control and able to calculate the effects of his/her utterances, this does not entail an elimination of agency. Rather, it is the elimination of the subject as traditionally conceptualized that makes possible her radical views of agency and resistance. Using the Derridean critique of the context and the related notion of iteration, Butler argues that agency is possible because hate-speech can be appropriated and made to re-signify: the agent can transform hate-speech into a tool of political subversion and used to challenge those that attempt to injure. Butler writes, 'Such reappropriations illustrate the vulnerability of these sullied terms to an unexpected innocence; such terms are not

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property; they assume a life and a purpose for which they were never intended.’ (1997: 161)

In her critique of the censoring of hate-speech by state, Butler elaborates what it is about the state and its exercise of power (through the courts) that she considers a hindrance to a more democratic politics. She claims that

(a) the state is arbitrary in the operation of power: Butler reaches this conclusion after examining the decisions taken by the American Supreme Court with particular reference to *R.A.V vs. St. Paul*. She contends that in their decision on racist hate-speech the Supreme Court made it harder to prosecute those who burnt a cross in front of an African American home, (racist hate-speech) while making it easier to prosecute obscene hate-speech, i.e., declaring oneself to be homosexual in the military was tantamount to being obscene and therefore liable to prosecution. Clearly, the courts were not neutral in their judgments.

(b) The state increases its power by being allowed to adjudicate on hate-speech. Allowing the state to decide (through the courts) which type of speech is permitted and which type is forbidden is another way of entrusting it with more power. It is, after all, the courts that decide what is to count as ‘hate-speech’ in the first place, and while there is a difference between the Courts’ judgments on racist and sexist discourse and the state’s decision on what constitutes the content of hate-speech,

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Butler's argues that attempts to challenge the state have tended to result in discrimination against the very groups it was supposed to protect (1997: 97-98).

(c) State regulation decreases the possibility for re-signification within the public domain. Butler argues that state censorship has the effect of diminishing the potential for re-signification by dictating what can and cannot be said. Her vision of an alternative democratic practice is one where there is no state involvement with the result that the threat of hate-speech can be challenged, undermined or used to empower in the process of re-signification within the public domain. (1997: 108)

Butler's disagreement with the notion that the state should intervene to prevent such speech is based on her radical vision of democratic politics. It should be pointed out that question of resignification has been challenged by Salih who argues that just because a person ignores or resignifies an abusive term, it still depends upon the abuser to recognize that he/she has been ignored or that the term is not being used in the same way. If the abuser fails to recognize this then nothing much seems to have happened, in the same way as the meaning of a word doesn't depend upon what one person decides to make it mean. It seems that some kind of 'semantic consensus' is needed for resignification to be effective (2002: 115).

## **Critical Remarks**



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Austin has been subjected to a number of critical comments both with regard to his philosophical method and in relation to his theory of speech acts. Hanfling (2003:26-37) points out that Austin did not help reject the charge that his contributions were ‘merely verbal’ which would imply that his method did not contribute to the resolution of philosophical problems. So too, Austin claims that his analysis is not the ‘last word’ but rather the ‘first word’ for the analysis of philosophical problems. However, Hanfling points out that the words that Austin examines are the ones that are currently in use, so as it turns out the ‘end’ and the ‘beginning of philosophical analysis revolve around the same words. A more serious criticism of Austin’s method of focussing upon words is the view that words and the world are two separate entities with words representing the world so that an examination of words should reveal a better understanding of the world<sup>iv</sup>. Hanfling asks: if this is the case then why not look at the world directly so that the ‘inadequacies and arbitrariness’ of words can be avoided? Take Austin’s examination of the difference between ‘succumb to temptation’ and ‘losing control of oneself’; here he was clarifying the different uses of these words to describe different forms of behaviour, but to bring out the differences between them it is not necessary to contrast them against a non-verbal world.

In relation to the details of Austin’s analysis of language, Friggieri (1991: 155-158, 161-2) raises two important points: (a) the distinction between primary or implicit performatives and explicit performatives misled Austin. The similarity of the grammatical form (the first person singular in the present perfect tense) led him to think that they both belonged to the same category, whereas they belong to different categories:

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(a.1) the reference of the primary performative is an object or name (the reference of ‘I name this ship...’ is the ship) while the reference of the explicit performative is the content of the sentence (in the utterance ‘I warn you that the bull is about to charge’ the reference of ‘I warn you’ is ‘the bull is about to charge’ i.e., it makes explicit the force of the primary utterance)<sup>iv</sup>; (a.2) Austin’s primary performatives had been conceptualised within the framework of non-linguistic or institutional conventions, whereas the explicit performatives were not bound by these non-linguistic or institutional conventions, so the ‘mishaps’ that were characteristic of the former were not surprisingly inapplicable to the latter; (b) so too, Austin is mistaken in thinking that the use of verbs to make an action explicit do not themselves describe that action: on this account, the emphasis of ‘I promise to come tomorrow’ is not on the act of promising, but on the content i.e. ‘that I will come tomorrow’. Friggieri (166-168) points out that in these utterances the speaker is also saying what he/she is doing (promising) but the emphasis is on what is said through the act of promising<sup>iv</sup>.

Graham (1977: 108-9) points out that the interesting question that Austin’s work raises for other disciplines concerns the degree to which one can achieve an accurate translation of their texts. Take (for example) intercultural communication, history or the social sciences: while it might seem that to understand the past, another culture or another people, the requisite is that one can get to the core meaning of their texts, i.e., in Austin’s terminology the locutionary content, what he demonstrates is that the illocutionary force of utterances in other cultures is not necessarily the same as ours. Problems with

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interpretation are common enough with utterances in one's own culture, so one can imagine how these problems increase with distances of space and time.

In this chapter I have first (a) outlined the method that Austin used in the analysis of philosophical problems. The second section (b) introduces the key distinction between constative and performative utterances, and the next section (c) describes Austin's criticism with the performative class, a criticism that leads (d) to his re-configuring this distinction into the new speech act theory. The last section (e) broadens the study of speech acts to the domain of social analysis.

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...in cases where there is doubt, say, about which of two or more things an utterer intends to convey, we tend to refer to the context (linguistic or otherwise) of the utterance and ask which of the alternatives would be relevant to other things he is saying or doing, or which intention in a particular situation would fit in with some purpose he obviously has (e.g. a man who calls for a “pump” at a fire would not want a bicycle pump). Nonlinguistic parallels are obvious: context is a criterion in settling the question of why a man who has just put a cigarette in his mouth has put his hand in his pocket; relevance to an obvious end is a criterion in settling why a man is running away from a bull. (1989: 222)

### **Grice: On The Theory of Conversation**

The primary contribution of H.P. Grice (1913-1988) to the philosophy of communication can be found in his theory of conversation which focuses on the analysis of language in everyday contexts of interaction and the implications that arise in its usage. He was the first who directed attention towards the value of inference in communication, a view that was adopted by later pragmatists. The kinds of inferences Grice was interested in were those that cannot be deduced from the actual content of an utterance but belong to the complete process that enables comprehension between participants to take place.

Grice can be situated within the debate in the philosophy of language on whether meaning should be understood in terms of formal linguistic rules or formal semantics

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(Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein, Chomsky) or in terms of context of use and participants (the later Wittgenstein, Austin). The debate between the two approaches to linguistic meaning can be understood in the difference between what people say and what they mean since it frequently happens that these two do not coincide. This disjunction between what is said and what is intended poses the problem of how to study language. The first group of philosophers think that since everyday language can lead to such difficulties, it would be best to study it at a formal level: it is therefore the logical meaning and not the everyday meaning that should be emphasised. Using deductive inferences, logic studies the transition from premises to conclusions that are automatically generated. This view of what constitutes the study of language is associated with Russell who dismisses ordinary, everyday language as such a ‘messy’ affair that it cannot be considered a proper field of study. On the other hand, philosophers such as the later Wittgenstein did not consider everyday language as flawed in any way, but rather, argued that the question of meaning should be grounded in the way language is used in the contexts of everyday life; to focus on the logical meaning of language is to abstract it from such contexts.

Grice’s position in the debate is singular in that while he rejects the idea of language as dependent upon truth-conditions, i.e., the formal semantic view, he was not wholly persuaded by the idea that the use of language in everyday life was the best way to understand meanings. Although a member of the ordinary language philosophy movement, Grice still thought that logic could help with explaining conversational meaning.

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Throughout his career Grice wrote a number of essays that have been collected into a volume entitled ‘Studies in the Way of Words’ (1989) and it is this volume that I shall be referring to when I examine his writings. In the first section (a) I focus on the relationship between intention and meaning and follow this (b) with an analysis of conversational interactions concerning perceptual statements that reveal the way these could be true, but misleading. The next section examines (c) Grice’s theory of conversation followed by (d) the relationship between the tools of logic and implicatures that can be raised within conversational settings. The final section (d) describes a number of areas within which Grice’s work has been fruitfully applied.

## **1.0. Meaning and Intention**

Although Grice was clearly influenced by the work of J.L. Austin there are a number of differences between them: (a) Grice agreed with Austin on the value of ordinary language, but he considered Austin’s approach, with its reliance on particular linguistic examples, as failing to differentiate between what is philosophically important from what is philosophically trivial. Grice himself attempted Austin’s method of going through the dictionary to analyse the language of emotions but gave up at the end of the letter B when he realised that the verb ‘to feel’ could also be used with ‘Byzantine’; (b) while Austin favoured remaining at the level of describing linguistic uses Grice wanted to put together these descriptions to formulate a general theoretical account; (c) Grice also retained the

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distinction between the meaning of words and the way words are used, while Austin emphasised use at the expense of sentence meaning.

In 'Meaning' (1989: 213-224), Grice's central thesis is that an account of meaning must be offered within the explanatory framework of the speaker's intention to mean something when he/she is communicating '...the meaning (in general) of a sign needs to be explained in terms of what users of the sign do (or should) mean by it on particular occasions...' (1989: 217) The analysis of meaning is seconded to the use of language for communicating intentions.

Grice applies the method of ordinary language philosophy to analyse the concept of meaning to see the different ways it is used. He concludes by grouping the different uses into two sets. The first set is that of natural meaning where we find sentences such as 'those spots mean measles' and 'the recent budget means that we shall have a hard year'. Natural meaning explains events that are symptomatic so that it is natural that the spots on a patient mean that he/she has measles and that the slashes in the budget mean that we will not have much money spend next year. The second set is that of non-natural meaning (or meaning<sub>NN</sub>) where we find sentences such as '[t]hose three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that 'the bus is full' and '[t]hat remark, 'Smith couldn't get on without his trouble and strife' meant that Smith found his wife indispensable'. (1989: 214) In this case non-natural meaning is linguistic meaning where something is meant by being uttered; the speaker means something with the utterance so that when he/she utters 'the patient has measles' there is no natural relation between the patient and the measles.

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When the expressions “means,” “means something,” “means that” are used in the kind of way in which they are used in the first set of sentences, I shall speak of the sense, or senses, in which they are used, as the *natural* sense, or senses, of the expression in question. When the expressions are used in the kind of way in which they are used in the second set of sentences, I shall speak of the sense, or senses, in which they are used, as the *nonnatural* sense, or senses, of the expressions in question. I shall use the abbreviation “means nn” to distinguish the *nonnatural* sense or senses. (1989: 214)

The differences between these two sets are specified as follows:

(a) in the first set, the sentence entails the truth of what is said. This, however, is not the case with the second set for while it does not make sense to say ‘[t]hose spots mean measles but he hasn’t got measles’, (the first set) it is perfectly possible to say ‘[t]hose three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the bus is full’.... ‘[b]ut the bus isn’t in fact full ---the conductor has made a mistake.’ (1989: 213-214)

(b) it would seem strange to say that the speaker who uttered ‘those spots mean measles’ intended to communicate something more by the spots. There is no question of trying to further understand the intentions of the speaker. On the other hand, with the second class of examples it would not be strange to say that the speakers intended to mean something more by their utterance: the ‘rings on the bell’ mean or communicate that there is no more place on the bus; likewise, the speaker – remarking about Smith – intended to communicate Smith’s dependence on his wife.

(c) finally, it is only with the second set of examples that we can add ‘mean’ followed by quotation marks: ‘those three rings on the bell ‘mean’ the bus is full’ but we cannot say ‘those spots ‘mean’ measles’.



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It should be pointed out that although the difference between these two classes is characterised by Grice as a difference between natural and non-natural meaning or meaningNN' the latter it is not restricted to linguistic meaning. Grice uses 'utterance' in a broad sense such that it includes non-linguist meaning: human behaviour which is used to communicate something to someone on a particular occasion is also an utterance<sup>iv</sup>. In the later 'Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning and Word-Meaning' (1989: 117-137) this view is specified: 'I use the term "utter" (together with "utterance") in an artificially wide sense, to cover any case of doing x or producing x by the performance of which U meant that so-and-so.' (1989: 118)

In his analysis of meaningNN, Grice considers causal explanations of meaning as similar to behaviourist accounts of meaning, an account that he firmly rejects. The causal explanation of meaning was suggested by C.L. Stevenson, and although Stevenson did not favour a strict behaviourist account of meaning on the ground that it was too simplistic, he did assume a causal model when explaining linguistic meaning. Stevenson had argued in *Ethics and Language* (1944) that a sentence such as, 'John is a remarkable athlete' causes in the listener the effect of associating 'athlete' with 'tallness'. This is obviously not a linguistic rule but an association that the sentence suggests: 'we should not ordinarily say that it 'meant' anything about tallness, even though it 'suggested it' (in Chapman 2005: 65). Grice's reply is that it is possible to talk about 'non-tall athletes' without contradicting oneself. The trouble with Strawson's account, as Grice shows, is that given the notion of suggestion, all forms of behaviour might be considered as

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communication, including those forms of behaviour that we would not normally consider as communication. For example, putting on a tailcoat might lead to the belief that one is about to go dancing because we conventionally associate tailcoats with dancing. But just because we conventionally associate wearing tailcoats with dancing, it does not meanNN that this is what is being communicated.

....the causal theory ignores the fact that the meaning (in general) of a sign needs to be explained in terms of what users of the sign do (or should) mean by it on particular occasions; and so the latter notion, which is unexplained by the causal theory, in fact the fundamental one. (1989: 217)

This explains why the concept of intention is crucial to the Gricean account of meaning. Intentionality provides the framework for understanding communication by shifting the emphasis away from conventional behaviour. It is the intention to mean rather than the convention that explains what is meant through the act of communication.

It seems that another major influence upon Grice's paper is that of Peirce (Chapman, 2005: 71-72). The starting point of Grice's analysis concerns Peirce's use of the term 'sign' that he equates with 'means': by using 'means' Grice is able to bring out the similarities as well as differences with Peirce's concepts of 'index' and 'symbol'. Using the following sentence, 'the position of the weathercock meant that the wind was North East' to analyse the category of index, Grice brings out two important points: (a) that it truly was a north east wind; and (b) that there was a causal connection between the wind and the weathercock.

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However, if instead of ‘means’ one says ‘the position of the weathercock was an indication that the wind was North East, but it was actually South East’, it is clear that ‘was an indication’ cannot be used interchangeably with ‘means’: ‘indication’ does not entail the truth of what is said. Likewise, the word ‘mean’ does not necessarily imply a causal relation: if one says ‘the position of the weathercock meant that the wind was North East’ then, in this case, there is a causal relation between the weathercock and the North East wind. But if during a conversation at a bus stop one says, ‘those three rings of the bell meant that the bus was full’, there is no causal connection since one might ask ‘was it full?’ By applying the method of ordinary language philosophy, Grice concludes that the way Peirce uses the term ‘sign’ is not consistent with everyday usage.

Grice introduces a distinction between the ‘timeless meaning of an utterance’ and what speakers mean to communicate with these utterances i.e., the ‘utterer’s occasion meaning’. Although Grice seems undecided on whether meaning is something stable (or ‘timeless’) or whether it depends upon the speaker, he eventually places greater emphasis on different levels of intentionality and communication.

This account of intentionality is further developed since it is realized that it is not only the speaker’s intention that is important, but equally important is the hearer’s recognition of that intention. When a speaker wants to produce a certain effect or a belief in a hearer the speaker both intends to communicate meaning<sup>NN</sup> and he/she intends that his/her intention be recognised by the hearer as the communication of certain information. It is

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the recognition of this intention that causes the speaker to accept or change his/her beliefs. His analysis here concerns descriptive sentences:

“A meantNN something by x” is (roughly) equivalent to “A intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of that intention”; and we may add that to ask what A meant is to ask for a specification of the intended effect...(1989: 220)

Grice's main contribution to understanding what is entailed by the concept of communication is the recognition of the speaker's intentions by the hearer. He introduces a number of examples that highlight the pivotal role of intentionality and its recognition in communication: the difference between ‘I show Mr X a photograph of Mr Y displaying undue familiarity to Mrs X’ and ‘I draw a picture of Mr Y behaving in this manner and show it to Mr X,’ is that in the former, the effect upon Mr Y (surprise, anger) would still take place irrespective of the intention to communicate the meaningNN: seeing the photo is enough. In the case of the latter, it is the intention to communicate that characterises the example: the art of drawing is my way of communicating my intentions to reveal or expose Mr Y's behaviour, and it is this that would normally be considered as communication.

Likewise, intentionality plays an important role in the types of communication that influence the actions of others. Take Grice's example of the policeman who stops the car by standing in front of it: the action of stopping the car will take place whether the motorist recognises the policeman's intention or not. On the other hand, when the policeman waves the car to stop, an act of communication has taken place because this depends upon the motorists' recognition of the wave as an act intended to communicate

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the message of stopping. Grice identifies two levels of meaningNN: first, and primarily, in the relation between the speaker, the listener and the context where intentions are communicated and recognised; second, and derived from the first, is the meaningNN of words and phrases.

However, despite conventional meaning being secondary to intentional meaning, Grice adds that the way some intentions are recognised cannot be included as part of the meaningNN: ‘if (say) I intend to get as man to do something by giving him some information, it cannot be regarded as relevant to the meaningNN of my utterance to describe what I intend him to do.’ (1989: 221) As Grice points out, the actual explicit formulation of the intention is ‘comparatively rare’ but, should there be any doubt about the intention, the context serves as a useful way of understanding it:

Again, in case where there is doubt, say, about which of two or more things an utterer intends to convey, we tend to refer to the context (linguistic or otherwise) of the utterance and ask which of the alternative would be relevant to other things he is saying or doing, or which intention in a particular situation would fit in with some purpose he obviously has (e.g. a man who calls for a “pump” at a fire would not want a bicycle pump). (1989: 222)

## **2.0 Conversational statements: ‘true but misleading.’**

A clue to the development of Grice’s theory of language can be seen in his paper ‘The Causal Theory of Perception’ (1989: 224-247) where he offers a defence of the causal nature of perception. Traditional empirical theory maintains that if our knowledge is derived from our senses, then it is this sense-data that we are immediately aware of. While it has been presumed that the material world is the cause of the sense data, there is

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no way of proving with certainty the existence of the material world since all we have access to is the sense-data and not the material world. Grice defends this scepticism of the material world arguing that it is a challenge that should not be dismissed out of hand, but listened to.

However, the value of the discussion on sense data is that of offering insights on language-use: when one utters the sentence ‘so and so’ looks Q [red] to me’ one is assuming that the notion of sense data is relevant otherwise there is no way of explaining the subjectivity of the experience. Grice calls such statements ‘*L*-statements’, and his general argument is that if I perceive a red object, then this objects causes me to ‘seem to see something red’: he claims that *L*-statements are ‘true whenever a perceptual statement is true’ (1989: 227) since the perceptual statement entails the *L*-statement.

When someone makes such a remark as “It looks red to me,” a certain implication is carried, an implication which is disjunctive in form. It is implied either that the object referred to is known *or* believed by the speaker not to *be* red, *or* that it has been denied by someone else to be red, *or* that the speaker is doubtful whether it is red, *or* that someone else has expressed doubt whether it is red, *or* that the situation is such that though no doubt has actually been expressed and no denial has actually been made, some person *or* other might feel inclined toward denial or doubt if he were to address himself to the question whether the object is actually red. (1989:227)

*L*-statements make sense only if one is doubting or denying the sense-data: when a speaker says ‘it looks red to me’ this utterance can only be construed as an answer to a query on the colour and Grice points out to the strangeness of the speaker ‘saying “that looks red to me” (not as a joke) when I am confronted by a British pillar box in normal daylight at a range of a few feet.’ (1989: 227) The speaker would only say ‘it looks red to me’ if someone else was doubting or denying the colour.

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But, the conditions of doubt and denial are not part of the meaning of *L*-statements and this is why the implication of *L*-statements is 'cancellable'. This point can be illustrated with another of Grice's examples from a non-perceptual angle<sup>iv</sup>: when a tutor is asked to write a report on the standard of philosophy of his student and his response only mentions the student's excellent use of English and regular attendance at tutorials, it is evident that he is implying that the standard of the student's philosophical ability is not worthy of note. However, if the tutor goes on to say, 'I do not of course mean to imply that he is not good at philosophy', then clearly the implication is cancelled with the qualification. In the case of *L*-statements, and the aforementioned example, Grice shows the way a statement might be true, even if misleading.

To explain this use of language, Grice offers both a weaker and a stronger account: in the weaker case, if there is no doubting or denial involved, then the sentence demonstrates a plain misuse of language. In the stronger case, if there is no doubt or denial and *Q* has the relevant property (red) this use is misleading even if true. Grice resolves the question in favour of the second case as it seems more applicable to language in general. He formulates a general principle of language-use as the 'preference to the making of a stronger rather than a weaker statement in the absence of a reason for not doing so.' (1989: 236) The difference between perceptual statements and *L*-statements is that perceptual statements are stronger since they entail *L*-statements while *L*-statements do not entail perceptual statements. To utter an *L*-statement when one could utter the stronger perceptual statement is misleading even though, as such, the *L*-statement is not untrue. On the causal theory of perception, *L*-statements are always true, even though

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using them in everyday contexts of communication is misleading. In his later writings on the maxims of conversation, Grice replaces the principle of the stronger and the weaker with the maxim of relevancy.

Chapman (2005: 96) describes the benefit of the principle of the ‘stronger’ as twofold (a) it is prescriptive in that it recommends the way language should be used and (b) it allows for reasonable exceptions since in terms of Grice’s overall project the principle would provide an explanatory account of language rather than merely provide a list of linguistic rules. Grice’s conclusion regarding the use of the language of sense data is that it is legitimate to use such statements because they are true irrespective of whether one is in a condition of doubt or denial, and, although true, people tend to avoid using them because they are misleading.

### **3.0. The Theory of Conversation**

In the 1960s Grice’s research focused on the difference between speaker and sentence meaning paying special attention to the context of speaker meaning:

Philosophers often say that context is very important. Let us take this remark seriously. Surely, if we do, we shall want to consider this remark not merely in its relation to this or that problem, i.e., in context, but also in itself, i.e., out of context. If we are to take this seriously, we must be systematic, that is thorough and orderly. If we are to be orderly we must start with what is relatively simple. Here, though not of course everywhere, to be simple is to be as abstract as possible; by this I mean merely that we want, to being with, to have as few cards on the table as we can. Orderliness will then consist in seeing first what we can do with the cards we have; and when we think that we have exhausted this investigation, we put another card on the table, and see what that enables us to do. (in Chapman, 2005: 96)



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From the aforementioned passage Grice emphasises the values of systematicity and order as a counterweight to the tendency of some ordinary language philosophers – Austin, being a case in point - to produce open-ended lists without some form of generalization.

Grice's operating strategy for the analysis of context consisted in narrowing it to linguistic contexts i.e., to conversational situations with two persons in the changing roles of speakers and hearers. The model of conversation adopted by Grice is one whereby meaning is communicated by one speaker to one listener with the aim of producing some effect on that listener. It seems that on Grice's account the goal of communication can be defined in terms of the values of success and effectiveness. (Cosenza, 2001: 20)

However, while Grice acknowledges the position of the hearer in the process of conversation, his account is structured in terms of the contributions of the speaker's intention to communicate a meaning to a hearer. In this respect, the hearer's contribution to the conversation is limited to the recognition of the speaker's intentions<sup>iv</sup>:

A general pattern for the working out of a conversational implicature might be given as follows: "He has said that *p*; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle; he could not be doing this unless he thought that *q*; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks that *q* is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that *q*; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that *q*; and so he has implicated that *q*". (1989: 31)

Although Grice restricts the concept of context to conversational exchanges, he does use some ideas from non-linguistic situations: in the situation of two persons passing through a gate it is expected of the first person to hold or leave it open for the second. Should the first person shut the door without any good reason then this would be considered rude. Just as helpfulness is a normal expectation in human behaviour, so too, helpfulness is part

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of our conversational behaviour, especially since conversations are joint, collaborative ventures between partners: both partners share a mutual goal and therefore help each other in achieving this goal.

Grice later changes the terminology of ‘helpful’ to that of ‘co-operative’: in trying to understand the nature of this co-operative activity, Grice uses the terms ‘object’ and ‘desiderata’ to describe the principles that regulate the behaviour within a conversation. There are two desiderata (a) of candour where speakers should, as a rule, make the strongest possible statements with the qualification that they do not attempt to mislead; (b) of clarity where speakers should contribute to the conversation by speaking clearly and by providing relevant information to the conversation. Other principles that formed part of the conversational setting are (i) the principle of Conversational Benevolence where contributions to a conversation are geared towards the agreed principle of conversation and (ii) the principle of self-love where the participants will not go to unnecessary trouble towards their contribution. These principles will later be renamed Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner where this loose assemblage of principles are united into a generalised schema.

Grice’s theory of conversation mapped out a new area of study in the philosophy of language. As such, he preferred using the term ‘conversation’ rather than that of ‘communication’ and it was only subsequent critics who labelled his work as an attempt at elaborating a theory of communication (Cosenza, 2001: 20). Although studies in the philosophy of language were divided into a concern with either the formal analysis of

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language or towards speaker meaning and intention, Grice argued that both could be subsumed under a broad principle that explained all human behaviour (linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour) as directed towards a goal. In 'Logic and Conversation' he develops this theme and introduces the Cooperative Principle: 'Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.' (1989: 26). When people communicate they expect to achieve certain purposes and in order to achieve them they follow a number of principles or maxims. For Grice, conversation implies co-operation between participants and he lists four maxims that they should follow in the pursuit of understanding:

The category of Quantity relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

.... Under the category of Quality falls a supermaxim---"try to make your contribution one that is true"---and two more specific maxims:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Under the category of Relation I place a single maxim, namely, "Be relevant." Though the maxim itself is terse, its formulation conceals a number of problems that exercise me a good deal: questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be, how these shift in the course of a talk exchange, how to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed, and so on.

...under the category of Manner, which I understand as relating not (like the previous categories) to what is said, but rather, to *how* what is said is to be said, I include the supermaxim---"Be perspicuous"---and various maxims such as:

1. Avoid ambiguity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

And one might need others. (1989: 26-27):

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Grice offers some examples of the aforementioned maxims:

1. *Quantity*. If you are assisting me to mend a car, I expect your contribution to be neither more nor less than is required. If, for example, at a particular state I need four screws, I expect you to hand me four, rather than two or six.
2. *Quality*. I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious. If I need sugar as an ingredient in the cake you are assisting me to make, I do not expect you to hand me salt; if I need a spoon, I do not expect a trick spoon made of rubber.
3. *Relation*. I expect a partner's contribution to be appropriate to the immediate needs at each stage of the transaction. If I am mixing ingredients for a cake, I do not expect to be handed a good book or even an oven cloth (though this might be an appropriate contribution at a later stage).
4. *Manner*. I expect a partner to make it clear what contribution he is making and to execute his performance with reasonable dispatch. (1989: 28)

The difference between what is said (the literal meaning) and what is meant (or as Grice says 'implicated') can both be explained and resolved by an appeal to the principle of co-operation: listeners can and do re-interpret literal sentences to achieve the goal of successful communication. It is by integrating these principles of language use that Grice hoped to create a broad philosophical theory of language.

While Grice favours the analysis of language in a particular context, he is critical of the notion that sentence or conventional meaning has one 'meaning'. The concept of sentence meaning is analysed as

- a) the 'what is said', where the speaker is committed to the truth of what is said.
- b) the conventional implicature where it is not the speaker intention but the words that generate the implicature. If we compare the following sets of examples: (i) Set A: 'she was poor but honest' and 'he is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave' with (ii)

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Set B: 'she is poor and honest', and 'he is an Englishman and brave'. The meaning of the Set A is not the same as the meaning of Set B since it is only in Set A that the idea of contrast and consequence are introduced. As a result we would not say the sentences in the Set A are false, though we would consider them to be misleading. With conventional implicatures Grice shows how it is the conventional meanings of words that can implicate.

- c) conversational implicatures are those implicatures that result from the fact that something is being said. With conversational implicatures participants in a conversation 'add' to the actual utterance so as to achieve understanding. One can say the participants go beyond the 'surface' of the utterance to fill in what has been implicated. For example, 'A says 'Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days' and B replies, 'He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately'. B's reply does not seem relevant to A's remark but the relevant connection can be made because B is conversationally implicating that A has a girlfriend in New York.

The opposition between 'conventional implicature' and 'conversational implicature' is fundamental. In the case of conventional implicature, it is the meaning of the words that determines the implicature, but in the case of the conversational implicature, the meaning is inferred from the context and the observation of the principle of co-operation. With conversational implicatures, it is not what is said that is the goal of the conversation but what is meant and conversational implicatures are generated when a maxim is not

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fulfilled. There is therefore a close connection between the principle of co-operation, maxims and conversational implicature.

Grice lists the different ways in which a maxim can fail to be fulfilled:

- a) a maxim can be 'violated' deliberately: this is the situation of people who don't say what they mean but pretend to be open and transparent. The list includes liars, con-artists, grifters, tricksters. Although they violate the maxims uncooperatively they still have reasons for their behaviour.
- b) a participant can 'opt out' by not following the relevant maxim, 'He may say, for example, *I cannot say more; my lips are sealed.*' (1983: 30). Again, the participant has reasons for not saying what he/she means and therefore opts out of cooperating in the conversation.
- c) a participant might be faced with a 'clash' of maxims so that to fulfil one maxim entails a clash with another one. So the maxim of quantity (be informative) is in conflict with the maxim of quality (have adequate evidence for what you say).
- d) a participant may 'flout' a maxim where he/she blatantly fails to fulfil it without however trying to deceive, opt out or resolve a clash of maxims. In this case, the participant does not say what he/she means but hints at it in such a way that the hearer understands what the speaker means. It is these 'floutings' of the maxim that are

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typical of conversational implicatures and it is these that Grice focuses on by offering a number of examples that demonstrate that ‘though some maxim is violated at the level of what is said, the hearer is entitled to assume that that maxim, or at least the overall Cooperative Principle, is observed at the level of what is implicated.’ (1989: 33) In these conversations the speaker is un-cooperative at the level of what is said. Again the example of the Professor’s reference for the student who has applied for a job in philosophy: ‘Dear Sir, Mr X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.’ (1989:33) This example shows that that co-operation is not taking place at the level of what is said, but at the level of what is implicated: the maxim of quantity is flouted by not giving enough information and therefore producing the implicature in which the professor is indirectly saying or implying that the student is not good at philosophy

For the hearer to figure out the conversational implicature a number of features must be taken into account. These include: the conventional meanings of the words; the principle of co-operation and its maxims; the linguistic and non-linguistic context; any background information; and that the participants are aware of the aforementioned features (a-d).

#### **4.0. Logic and Conversational Implicatures.**

In ‘Indicative Conditionals’ (1989: 58-85) Grice discusses the relationship between logic and natural language arguing that no ‘such divergence exists’ while focussing primarily on conditionals (although he does discuss other logical constants to a lesser degree).

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Chapman suggests (2005: 106-107) that the target of Grice's paper is P. Strawson who in *Introduction to Logical Theory* (1952) states that the logical implication 'p>q', is very different from the way it is used in ordinary everyday language. The use of 'if, then' in ordinary language suggests a causal connection between the antecedent and the consequent: when we say 'if it rains, then the party will be a failure' the suggestion seems to be that one is causally connected to the other. There is the further possibility, according to Strawson, that when the 'if, then' formula is used in everyday life the speaker is expressing some doubt about the 'if...' or he/she knows that it is false. As a result Strawson concludes that while the ordinary language use of 'if, then' entails its logical counterpart, the contrary is not the case: there is more to ordinary language usage than can be accounted for by the logical form.

Grice disagrees with Strawson and he introduces the 'Indirectness Condition' to describe the causal connection between p and q. For Grice, (Chapman, 2005: 107) the literal meaning of 'if p then q', of the 'what is said' on any particular occasion of utterance, is simply equivalent to the logical meaning of 'p>q'. He argues that the casual connection is a conversational implicature and can therefore be cancelled out by the context or by denial.

To say "If Smith is in the library, he is working" would normally carry the implication of the Indirectness Condition; but I might say (opting out) "I know just where Smith is and what he is doing, but all I will tell you is that if he is in the library he is working." No one would be surprised if it turned out that my basis for saying this was that I had just looked in the library and found him working. The implication is also contextually concealable, that is, I can find contexts which, if known to participants in a talk-exchange, would make an explicit cancellation unnecessary.' (1989: 59)



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The question Grice tackles concerns how implicatures produce the indirect condition. His first answer refers to the maxim of Quantity which enjoins us to use the stronger or more informative statement in our conversations. In this case, the more informative statement would be 'p and q' rather than 'if p then q'. In the weaker case, there is no definite information about the truth values of p and q the use of 'if p then q' leads (unless cancelled by the context) to conversational implicature. The same argument applies to other logical forms: (for example) 'p or q' has common features with the logical form ' $p \vee q$ ' but the ordinary language-use leads to conversational implicatures. The conversational implicature arises because it seems strange to use 'p or q' if both p and q are known to be true. While the truth conditional meaning of the logical form ' $p \vee q$ ' states that at least one of the propositions should be true, in the conversational use of 'p or q' it is implied that not both are true. If both were true it would, within a conversational setting, be better to offer 'p and q' since this would be providing more information.

Grice's second answer to the question of how conversational implicatures are produced is the way they contribute to everyday human interaction. The use of conditionals enables people to understand the choices available to them, though these uses depend upon the context: it does not make sense to say on a hot sunny day, 'if it is hot and sunny, I shall go to the beach'? Likewise, the use of disjunctions helps people in everyday life to think about alternatives: this or this other possibility. it would not ( for example)make sense to say at 4.30 pm, 'which show shall we go to? The 3.00 pm or the 6.00 pm show?'

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In 'Presupposition and Conversational Implicature' (1989: 269-282), Grice returns to the question of expressions that refer to non-existing things picking up the debate between Russell and Strawson. Here, Grice applies once again his theory of conversation to traditional philosophical problems retaining the overlap between logic and language-use rather than their opposition. Chapman (2005) points out that when this paper is read within the larger context of Grice's writings it can be seen as part of a study of the way language refers to the world with the question of reference as pivotal to the philosophy of language.

In the theory of descriptions Russell had argued that in

(a) 'the King of France is bald', the sentence entails that there is one unique person (the king of France) and this unique person is bald.

(b) 'the King of France is not bald', it is possible to deny that there is one unique person (i.e., there is no King of France) and that this unique person (who does not exist) is not bald. According to Russell, this sentence is ambiguous.

Strawson challenges the supposed 'ambiguity' that Russell claims, on the grounds that in everyday language-use, 'the King of France is not bald' means that there is a King of France who is not bald: speakers are committing themselves to the existence of the King of France while denying his baldness. The ambiguity of the kind Russell claims rarely crops up in everyday conversation,

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when one is asked such a question as whether the king of France is, or is not, bald, one does not feel inclined to give an answer; one does not feel very much inclined to say either that it is true that he is bald or that it is false that he is bald, but rather to say things like *The question does not arise* or *He neither is nor is not bald*, etc.’ (1989: 269)

Grice’s response and defence of Russell focuses on the different types of commitment by speakers to ‘the existence of the King of France’ and to his ‘baldness’. These, Grice argues, do not necessarily involve the same kind of commitment. Grice’s defence involves pointing out the distinction between (a) the use of negation when applied to the whole sentence (it is not the case that the King of France is bald): in this sentence there is no commitment to the King of France or to the baldness; and (b) the use of negation when applied to the latter part of the sentence (‘the king of France is not bald’): in this sentence, there is no commitment to the baldness. Russell’s theory of descriptions allows for two sentences that entail a commitment to the existence of the King of France: (a) the positive assertion (the king of France is bald) and (b) the sentence that denies only his baldness (the king of France is not bald).

But, Grice points out, ‘without waiting for disambiguation, people understand an utterance of “*The king of France is not bald*” as implying (in some fashion) the unique existence of the king of France (1989: 272)’. The denial of the commitment to the existence of the King of France only occurs in the denial of the whole sentence. Such a denial, Grice argues, is not the result of logical entailment, but rather the result of conversational interaction. The implicature arises on account of the form or way that the speaker formulates his/her utterance: it belongs therefore to the category of Manner. However, Grice adds a new element when he says, “‘Frame whatever you say in the form

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most suitable for any reply that would be regarded as appropriate'; or, "Facilitate in your form of expression the appropriate reply.'" (1989: 273) The point here is that participation in conversation should take into account the range of possible responses. This further reinforces Grice's defence of Russell against Strawson since it can be argued that the speaker did not frame the utterance in such a way that allows for a possible reply. Strawson had argued that upon hearing 'the King of France is bald,' the hearer would not say false but be nonplussed as to what you were talking about. But when the speaker utters 'the King of France is bald' one of the possible replies does not include denying the existence of the King of France because information or knowledge that is commonly shared is not usually denied.

This leads Grice to distinguish between common knowledge and controversial information:

[f]or instance, it is quite natural to say to somebody, when we are discussing some concert, *My aunt's cousin went to that concert*, when we know perfectly well that the person we are talking to is very likely not even to know that we have an aunt, let alone know that our aunt has a cousin. So the supposition must be not that it is common knowledge but rather that it is noncontroversial, in the sense that it is something that we would expect the hearer to take from us (if he does not already know). That is to say, I do not expect, when I tell someone that my aunt's cousin went to a concert, to be questioned whether I have an aunt and, if so, whether my aunt has a cousin. This is the sort of thing that I would expect him to take from me, that is, to take my word for. (1989:274)

In both the positive and negative sentences, it is not the existence of the King of France that is being challenged or considered controversial but the baldness.

## **5.0. Applied Grice**

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One area in which Grice's analysis seems especially amenable to is that of popular culture and what makes plays, TV shows, films interesting to watch occurs as a result of the violating, infringing and opting out of the maxims of conversation. While the ideal of clarity in the everyday use of language is important for mutual understanding, within popular culture the use of language with the ideal of clarity would lead to boredom. It is not difficult to recall situations in films where the protagonist needs to convince the addressee to reveal what they know so as to save (for example) someone else or the environment. The participant fails because the addressee refuses to cooperate by saying nothing i.e. by opting out; or the addressee misleads the protagonist by shifting attention to something else (rather than communicating the information he/she knows): this is a violation of the maxim of quantity.

In *Logic, Laughter and Laughter-Provocation* (2006) Cassar examines, among other issues, the way laughter is generated. She suggests that although one way of explaining laughter-provocation could be that of examining what Grice calls 'utterer-meaning', this might not be a fruitful approach, as the question of meaning itself is broader than the way Grice conceptualised it. As a result,

It follows that the first imperative task that has to be carried out in order to determine the meaning of laughter-provocation is to establish what laughter is, since only then can the investigation of the mechanisms, logical or otherwise, which connect provocation and response be undertaken, taking into account the diversities of both ends of the operation. (2006: 13)

In other words, it is not enough to examine Grice's codes or maxims and argue that laughter-provocation is the result of inverting these codes because these codes are framed as ways of achieving effective communication. Merely inverting them would only result

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in restricting our understanding of the way laughter can be provoked without any guarantee that this would be successful: (for example) by breaking Grice's maxim 'Be relevant' one does not necessarily produce laughter. Cassar concludes by pointing out that an account of laughter provocation is limited if it focuses on Gricean codes as such an account fails to take into consideration the temporal process underlying the generation of laughter.

### **Critical Remarks**

Although Grice is remembered mostly for his theory of conversation it should be added that his contributions to philosophy were wide ranging, offering solutions to problems in the fields of epistemology, perception, and ethics. However, while he applied his theory of conversation to these fields, he never used actual conversations in his analysis of language-use. Over time Grice realised that rationality plays an important part in his theory of conversation: by following the Co-operative Principle a person was behaving rationally by pursuing the goals of a conversation. It was this rational activity that constituted the very essence of human life that Grice tried to explain. And this is why the criticism that Grice's theory of conversation - as failing to take into account the conflictual nature of actual conversations - might be misplaced: as a rationalist, he was attempting to outline the conditions that allow for the production of meaning and effective communication, rather than an empirical description of actual conversations.

Hanfling (2000: 186-8) argues that although Grice champions the cause of ordinary language in the analysis of philosophical problems, as it turns out, the analysis

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undermines ordinary language. In his account of perception and L-statements, he supports his arguments with a number of ingenious examples but the result is that he employs a very non-ordinary use of everyday language. In this case, the meanings that are attributed to certain words such as 'seem' or 'see' deviate from their everyday ordinary use. So too, the principle that the stronger statement should be adopted over the weaker one is challenged: according to the theory, one should not say that 'Grice is in England' if I knew 'Grice is in Oxford' but if both contribute equally to the conversational exchange then – unless one had a point for doing so – there is no inherent reason for choosing the stronger statement and not the weaker one.

Grice also argues in favour of thesis that to understand the meaning of an utterance one must understand what the speaker intended by that utterance and in so doing eliminating the class of locutionary acts; in other words, he reduces the sense of the utterance to the force or the way that it is used. Again, Friggieri points out (1991: 199-204) that understanding the way the speaker intends to use the sentence, presupposes an understanding of what the sentence means so that to understand the utterance 'You're standing on my foot' as a request to get off my foot, you must first understand the meaning of the sentence.

Chapman (2005: 191) points to a number of criticisms with Grice's account of language: (i) his failure to define conversation, taking it to mean language used in a context i.e. a number of sentences following each other without any empirical data; (ii) the theory of conversation was supposed to explain a number of traditional philosophical problems but

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the casual conversations used seem to develop a life of their own with the point of their original introduction forgotten; (iii) on the one hand, Grice generalises from particular conversations, a generalization that is the result of describing what participants bring to the conversation, but on the other hand, he considers his maxims as rules that prescribe the way language should be used; (iv) Grice's conversations are between persons of equal social status and mutually interested in the exchange of information. However, not all conversations are of this kind and within different context (for example a university) participants resort to different maxims.

The influence of Grice's writings has been chiefly achieved through the papers on 'Meaning' and 'Logic and Conversation' and this success has been recognised by philosophers of language and linguistics. It is not uncommon to come across the term Gricean pragmatics even though he never used the term himself. It could be said that Grice's contribution to the debate between formal semanticists and pragmatists on the issue of literal meaning and speaker meaning is that of bridging the two through the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Maxims. In addition, the concept of conversational implicatures – a concept that includes the possibility of alluding, implying or insinuating something – highlights the difference between what speakers literally say and what they mean i.e., implicate. One way of evaluating Grice's place within the philosophy of language is by contrasting his views on language with those of Chomsky: Chomsky had argued that to understand linguistic meaning there was no need to take into consideration the use of language to communicate, arguing that it was not even necessary



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to consider communication as the primary function of language. For Grice the opposite is the case: the only way to explain language is from the point of view of communication.

In this chapter I have outlined (a) the concepts of intention and meaning in Grice's philosophy of communication, followed by (b) his analysis of statements that are true but misleading within conversational settings. The next sections discuss (c) his theory of conversation and (d) the relation between the procedures of logic and conversational implicatures and (e) ending with a brief look at the way his ideas have been applied.

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My claim that language is partly constitutive of institutional facts amounts to the claim that institutional facts essentially contain some symbolic elements in this sense of “symbolic”: there are words, symbols, or other *conventional* devices that *mean* something or express something or represent or symbolize something beyond themselves, in *a way that is publicly understandable*. (Searle 1995: 60-61)

## **Searle on The Intentionality of Speech Acts**

Throughout his career John Searle (1932- ) has focussed on a number of philosophical problems but he is chiefly known for his innovative contributions to three areas of philosophy: the philosophy of language, the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of society. In this chapter, I am focussing mostly upon Searle’s early studies of speech acts though I touch upon his philosophy of mind and of society when they overlap with language. Searle’s theory of speech acts is an attempt to develop further the insights made by Austin with his groundbreaking work on speech act theory. This development involves a description of the structure and processes that allow communication to take place.

The tradition Searle draws inspiration from is that of analytic philosophy where an emphasis on detail is part and parcel of the practice of these philosophers. Searle however, differs from the typical analytic philosopher in that while analytic philosophers tend to avoid putting together their detailed arguments into larger wholes, Searle has no qualms about synthesizing his arguments into a ‘big picture’. In the process of creating a synthetic philosophy Searle also incorporates the views of others and this has resulted in criticisms from many different quarters.

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In this chapter, I start (a) by looking at the foundations of Searle's analysis of speech acts (intentionality and rules), followed by (b) an analysis of the structure of the speech act (reference and predication). The next section (c) outlines the conditions for the generation of speech acts and (d) his elaborate taxonomy that highlights the differences between speech acts which (e) culminates in a re-vamping of Austin's classification of speech acts; other (f) speech acts such as double and indirect speech acts are also examined. The chapter ends with an examination (g) of the important concept of context and (h) an overview of the relation between language and society.

## **1.0. Speech Acts: Intentions and Rules**

The starting point for Searle's analysis of linguistic communication is the speech act rather than the word or the sentence; for a speech act to count as an act of linguistic communication, 'it must be produced with certain kinds of intentions.' (1969:16) Intentionality in communication marks the difference between linguistic communication and an emotional or non-verbal reaction. Saying 'ouch' after bumping one's head is not an act of communication since one didn't intend to say it. The importance of intention within linguistic communication can be re-stated as follows: even if a squiggle and a sound were identical to a spoken or written word, unless there is an intention motivating the squiggle or word, then they cannot be considered acts of linguistic communication. In addition, the intentionality that characterizes speech acts is of a particular sort. There is a difference between understanding a speech act and understanding the arrangement of

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furniture in a room: both entail understanding intentional behaviour, but of different sorts of intentions.

The analysis of the intentions that are expressed through speech acts is a bit complex because intentions are, so to speak, multi-layered. If, for example, I tell Peter 'the movie starts at 9.00pm', there are a number of intentions taking place for not only do I intend to inform Peter about the time the movie starts, but I also intend Peter to recognise my intention. The recognition of my second intention is important because if I only intend to inform Peter about the actual time the movie starts, then I cannot be blamed if he thinks I am hurrying him up (it is not my intention to hurry him up). The third intention is connected to the rules of language: meaning is communicated by the rules of language and for communication to take place, Peter must understand the intentions expressed through the rules of the English language. This is why understanding a foreign language also entails understanding the intentions expressed through the rules of that language. If the rules were not recognised as an intention to communicate, then the fact that a message was communicated and understood would only be a fluke.

Searle is aware of the distinction between what we say and what we mean. This is frequently labelled as the difference between speaker and sentence meaning. There are many situations where we know what the sentence means but, we still ask ourselves, what did the speaker intend by it? When Peter tells David 'it's beautiful today' does he intend to describe the weather? Or suggest that they spend the day outdoors? Or both? Or none? To resolve this issue Searle introduces the Principle of Expressibility whereby

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‘whatever can be meant can be said’<sup>iv</sup>. (1969: 19) The value of this principle is that the speaker, if need be, can help the hearer understand his intention by expressing it in a more direct way: the sentence can be re-stated so that speaker meaning and sentence meaning become one.

We might express this principle by saying that for any meaning *X* and any speaker *S* whenever *S* means (intends to convey wishes to communicate in an utterance, etc) *X* then it is possible that there is some expression *E* such that *E* is an exact expression of or formulation of *X*. (1969: 20)

In addition, the principle of Expressibility shows that even in those cases where I cannot say exactly what I mean, it is always possible for me to do so either by – if no term exists – introducing it, or by learning more about the language. The importance of the principle for Searle is that it aligns the rules for performing speech acts with the rules for using certain linguistic units. He points out (for example) that studying the speech act of promising involves studying those sentences that are the literal and correct performance of a promise. (1969: 21)

In his analysis of intentionality, Searle takes issue with Grice who considered the speaker’s meaning as the intention the speaker has in producing an effect upon the hearer by getting the hearer to recognize that intention, ‘when i say “hello”, I intend to produce in a hearer the knowledge that he is being greeted. If he recognizes it as my intention to produce in him that knowledge, then he thereby acquires that knowledge.’ (1969: 43) Searle disagrees with this analysis offering two counter arguments:

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The first counter-argument states that an account of speech acts must also take into account the rules and conventions of language. While Grice's account of intentionality and speaker meaning is useful as a starting point, it does not offer a complete picture of what is entailed as an act of communication. To illustrate his criticism, Searle offers the story of an American soldier captured by Italian troops in the Second World War. In order to persuade his Italian captors that he is in fact German, the American soldier repeats the only sentence he knows in German, '*Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?*' (1969: 44). His intention is to produce in his captors – as an effect of his utterance – the belief that he is German. But Searle asks, does uttering this sentence mean "I am a German soldier?" (1969:44). The German sentence does not mean I am a German soldier even if that is what the speaker intends by it; what the words mean is also dictated by the language and the sentence uttered by the soldier means ' "Knowest thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?" ' (1969:45). Searle elaborates,

Meaning is more than a matter of intention, it is also at least sometimes a matter of convention. One might say that on Grice's account it would seem that any sentence can be uttered with any meaning whatever, given that the circumstances make possible the appropriate intentions....In the performance of an illocutionary act in the literal utterance of a sentence, the speaker intends to produce a certain effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect; and furthermore, if he is using words literally, he intends this recognition to be achieved in virtue of the fact that the rules for using the expressions he utters associate the expression with the production of that effect. It is this *combination* of elements which we shall need to express in our analysis of the illocutionary act. (1969: 45)

The second counter argument states that the focus upon the effects of the intention confuses perlocutionary acts with illocutionary ones:

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--- many utterances have no perlocutionary effects. When one says 'hello' to someone else, no action is being expected from the hearer except that he understands that what is said to him counts as a greeting.

--- Grice's account is limited in that it applies to certain utterances, such as "Get out" where there is a perlocutionary effect expected of the hearer, but fails to explain the differences between 'I promise', 'I predict' and "I intend".

--- I might say something and produce an effect without intending to produce that effect. I might say and mean 'poverty is immoral' without the least interest in producing any effect upon the hearer.

--- Telling someone to believe what I say because it is my intention to make him/her believe it does not qualify as a reason for believing it.

Searle concludes: 'the 'effect' on the hearer is not a belief or response, it consists simply in the hearer understanding the utterance of the speaker. It is this effect that I have been calling the illocutionary effect.' (1969: 47) Strictly speaking, the perlocutionary effect should not be considered part of the speech act because the speech act has been completely executed.

Given that language plays a crucial role in generating the meaning that is part of the communicative act, Searle proceeds with his analysis of language by defining it a 'rule-

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governed form of behaviour.’ (1969: 41) To belong to a linguistic community is to share in the rules that make linguistic meaning and communication possible. By learning the same rules, speakers of a language can communicate a message and have it understood by hearers. In his analysis of the rule governed nature of language, Searle distinguishes between regulative and constitutive rules.

Regulative rules are those which regulate actions that already exist. The human action of eating exists independently of the rules, and yet there are rules that guide our eating habits; so too our interpersonal relations exist independently but there are rules of etiquette that guide our behaviour.

Regulative rules characteristically take the form or can be paraphrased as imperatives, e.g., “When cutting food, hold the knife in the right hand”, or “Officers must wear ties at dinner”....Regulative rules characteristically have the form or can be comfortably paraphrased in the form “Do *X*” or “If *Y* do *X*”. (1969:34)

Constitutive rules differ in that with these rules we are creating the actual forms of behaviour out of nothing. One of the prime examples of constitutive rules is the playing of games: without the rules of football there would be no game as it is the rules that bring the game into existence. Without the rules there would be twenty-two men running around a field chasing a ball. The ‘formula’ that captures constitutive rules is “*X* counts as *Y* in context *C*” (1969: 35). There are two points that need to be kept in mind when understanding constitutive rules. The first is that the rules usually are a system of rules: it might be the case that one rule does not have the “counts as’ formula but when this rule is seen as part of the whole system, then it is the whole system that constitutes the “counts as”. ‘Thus, though rule 1 of basketball---the game is played with five players to a side---



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does not lend itself to this form, acting in accordance with all or a sufficiently large subset of the rules does count as playing basketball.’ (1969: 36) The second point is that the Y term in the “counts as” formulation is not a neutral term in the sense that it usually describes consequences: ““offside”, “homerun”, ‘touchdown” “checkmate” are not mere labels for the state of affairs that is specified by the X term, but they introduce further consequences, by way of, e.g. penalties, points, and winning and losing.’ (1969: 36)

Having established the importance of constative rules in understanding both games and language, Searle still needs to tackle the question of why and how it is that speech acts generate illocutionary force. How is it possible that the speech act of promising – which is fundamentally an act composed of words following the rules of language - creates an obligation? To answer this question Searle forwards these claims:

(a) languages are conventional: to use a language is to use the conventions of that specific language, whether it is English or Swahili.

(b) illocutionary acts are rule-governed: while there are some illocutionary acts that can be performed ‘naturally’ by getting the viewer to recognise the intentions through the person’s behaviour, this does not eliminate the fact that many perlocutionary acts cannot be performed without language. Not only would it be impossible learn complex issues, (an account of the computer systems of the space shuttle) but so too, Searle adds, ‘I wish to argue, some system of rule governed elements is necessary for there to be certain *types* of speech acts, such as promising or asserting.’ (1969: 38-39). To highlight the difference

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between the rule-governed nature of illocutionary acts and ‘natural’ forms of behaviour, Searle points out that the rules for making a promise or asserting etc cannot produce a natural effect. To state, “I have a headache” is very different from actually having a headache as I can have a headache whether I state it or not.

(c) languages are rule-governed. While particular languages use their own conventions, each language follows the “same” underlying rules, ‘The fact that in French one can make a promise by say “je promets” and in English one can make it by saying “I promise” is a matter of convention. But the fact that an utterance of a promising device (under appropriate conditions) counts as the undertaking of an obligation is a matter of rules and not a matter of the conventions of French or English.’ (1969: 39-40)

## **2.0. Referring and Predicating**

A speech act has two components: reference and predication. In ‘Sam smokes habitually’ (1969: 22) the speech act refers to, or is about “Sam” and it predicates “smoking” of him. Together, referring and predicating constitute a Propositional Act i.e., what we are talking about. On its own the Propositional act fails to show its communicative value so that an account of communications must include an account of what the speaker intends to do with his speech act. This is why the Propositional Act is coupled with an Illocutionary Force Indicating Act: the latter tells us what type of speech act the sentence is, i.e., whether it is a question or an assertion, or a request. Together, the illocutionary force

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indicating act and the propositional act form the basis for the process of verbal communication.

In both his analysis of reference and predication, Searle's introduces a number of conditions that bring out their respective features. In the case of reference some preliminaries should be noted: referring requires that the normal input and output conditions are in place so that to refer requires that the speaker can vocalise the words and that the hearer can hear them; so too, referring belongs to a larger speech act since the act of referring takes place as we are communicating. The conditions outlined by Searle that enable reference are:

(a) the first condition is the axiom of existence and it states that proper referring entails that the object referred to exists. So when talking to my friends about my new plasma television set I am referring to a specific object that we are both admiring. If I do not own a plasma television set, then a condition for referring successfully has failed.

(b) the second condition is the principle of identification and it refers to the way an object can be re-described. Thus, to talk or refer to an object, we can use the demonstrative 'that' and point to it, 'that (pointing to the television set) is mine'. Or, we can also describe the object so that it stands out from other objects in the room saying, 'the flat screened, 30 inch thing hanging on the wall is mine'. Both conditions (a) and (b) enable us to pick out objects during the course of our communication.

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(c) the third condition for successful referring is that of intentionality. The speakers must (i) intend to use words and sentences that point to an object and (ii) want the hearer to recognise both the intention to refer to the object and the intention that the speaker has in referring to the object. This recognition is achieved through the rules of language that both speaker and hearer share in common. Searle, in explaining this point, asks us to imagine this situation, 'I may call my hearer's attention to an object by throwing it at him, or hitting him over the head with it. But such cases are not in general cases of referring, because the intended effect is not achieved by recognition on his part of my intentions.' (1969: 95)

A question that has drawn considerable attention in contemporary analytic philosophy of language is the problem of proper names. Some, Searle notes (1969: 162-164), have argued that a name functions as a label so that although it is attached to a person, it does not have any sense attached to it. If this is the case, then how does it refer or point to persons who no longer exist or who live far away? Searle responds to the problem posed by proper names by invoking the principle of identification. If we ask 'who is Richard Nixon?', we answer by offering a number of descriptions that are attributed to that person. '...was a president of the United States', '...resigned on account of the Watergate scandal', etc. The benefit of Searle's account is that it enables a person to be described in many ways and yet these different descriptions still refer to the same person.

Searle's analysis of predicating ties up with his account of referring. He adds three further conditions to those already mentioned:

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(a) the first condition states that it is necessary to satisfy the condition for referring before we can predicate. This is obvious enough for we cannot predicate if what one is predicating does not exist. I cannot predicate successfully of the tiger that 'it sure looks hungry' if there is no tiger.

(b) the second condition describes the application of predicates. When I predicate a quality of an object, that predicate must be relevant to the object. It makes no sense to say 'the rock has died': to be able to predicate reveals that we know a lot about the world.

(c) the third condition describes the application of the values true and false to all utterances. Searle's point is to show that not only assertions can be judged for their truth or falsity, but also requests, commands, promise etc. Whatever forms a predicate might have (as requests, promises, commands, etc) the values of truth and falsity still apply. When the general commands his troops, 'attack the bunker', it is true that they have not yet attacked and it will be true once they do. This is an important point for Searle who shows how truth values apply to all uses of language and not merely one type.

It should be noted that though predicates are important in that they bring content to the speech act, i.e., what the speech act is about, they still depend upon the way we talk about that content. In other words, it is the illocutionary force that conditions the way the predicate is used (as an assertion or as a question or as a command). This highlights the difference between predicates and reference for although referring is also about part of a

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speech act, what is referred to is independent of the speech act. To sum up, understanding predicates involves both understanding the content and the illocutionary force.

### **3.0. Conditions for Speech Acts**

Given that Searle accepts Austin's view that speech acts are used not only to describe facts but to do things, he considers it fundamental for the study of speech acts to outline the conditions that are necessary for the understanding of speech acts. Although Searle offers a number of conditions, these can be reduced to four main ones:

- (a) the propositional content condition: this condition focuses upon the content of the speech act, on what it is about. It is the content that must satisfy certain conditions for it to be successful: promises (for example) must be future oriented, while apologies look to the past since we apologise for the things we have done.
- (b) the preparatory condition: these conditions vary, ranging across the different social, mental and physical states of the speaker and the hearer, and they must be in place before the speech act can be issued correctly. If you congratulate someone, something positive must have happened (although we can be sarcastic in our congratulations); and for the general's command to take effect, it must be directed at his inferiors not his superiors.

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(c) the sincerity condition: this condition describes the speaker's relation to his or her utterance. A promise is sincere if I intend to keep it; a command is sincere if the general wants the soldier to do what he commands. The sincerity condition can be satisfied in different ways and the conditions of satisfaction depend upon the type of speech act: promises and commands differ in their respective conditions of satisfaction. However, we are all familiar with people saying 'I didn't mean it' as though that negates or justifies not keeping their promises. Searle disagrees arguing that a promise is a promise and the speaker who promises but fails to keep it is insincere.

(d) The essential condition: the essential condition of a speech act is that it is intended. A promise is intended as a promise, and it therefore places the speaker under an obligation to do something; a command places the hearer under an obligation to follow some action. With the essential condition the speech act is intended to fulfil something linguistically. Searle considers this condition as the most important one.

An analysis of speech acts must take into account what Searle describes as normal input and output conditions. Thus, (for example) for any speech act to take place both the speaker and the hearer must understand the same language, know what they are saying, do not suffer from any speaking or hearing impediment, etc. These do not actually contribute to the analysis of the various speech acts but are necessary for any speech act to take place.

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Searle (1969: 66) offers a schema of the different types of illocutionary acts using the rules or conditions described above. I am here reproducing part of his schema.

<i>Type of Rule</i>	<i>Request</i>	<i>Assert, state (that), affirm</i>
Propositional Content	Future act A of H	Any proposition of <i>p</i> .
Preparatory	1. <i>H</i> is able to do <i>A</i> . <i>S</i> believe is able to do <i>A</i> . 2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>H</i> that <i>H</i> will do <i>A</i> in the normal course of events of his own accord.	1. <i>S</i> has evidence (reasons, etc) for the truth of <i>p</i> . 2. It is not obvious to both <i>S</i> and <i>h</i> that <i>H</i> knows (does not need to be reminded of, etc.) <i>p</i> .
Sincerity	<i>S</i> wants <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i>	<i>S</i> believes <i>p</i> .
Essential	Counts as an attempt to get <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i> .	Counts as an undertaking to the effect that <i>p</i> represents an actual state of affairs.
Comment	Order and command have the addi- tional preparatory rule that <i>S</i> must be in a position of authority over <i>H</i> . <i>Command</i> probably does not have the ‘pragmatic’ condition requiring non-obviousness. Furthermore in both, the authority relationship infects the essential condition because the utterance counts as an attempt to get <i>H</i> to do <i>A</i> in virtue of the authority of <i>S</i> over <i>H</i> .	Unlike <i>argue</i> these do not seem to be essentially tied to attempting to convince. Thus “I am simply stating that <i>p</i> and am not attempting to convince you” is acceptable, but “I am arguing that <i>p</i> and not attempting to convince you” sounds inconsistent.

#### 4.0. Differences between Speech Acts

Searle continues to develop the ideas he introduced in *Speech Acts* in a number of essays that comprise the book *Expression and meaning* (1985). In ‘A taxonomy of illocutionary



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acts' (1985: 1-29) he provides a list of twelve ways in which these differences between speech acts can be generated, though some of these ways overlap with the conditions made in the earlier analysis of speech acts. The taxonomy accounts for the way speech acts can differ from each other.

1) the point or purpose of the speech act.

The point or purpose of an order can be specified by saying that it is an attempt to get the hearer to do something. The point or purpose of a description is that it is a representation (true or false, accurate or inaccurate) of how something is. The point or purpose of a promise is that it is an undertaking of an obligation by the speaker to do something. (1985: 2)

This aspect is similar to the earlier essential conditions and the idea is that the speech act has an illocutionary point or purpose: thus, (for example) in a promise, the speaker commits himself to what he has promised. Again Searle distinguishes between the illocutionary point and the illocutionary force. The latter is the broader term that includes within it the illocutionary point together with the other dimensions of speech acts. The illocutionary point concerns the effect of the speech act: both a command and a request want the hearer to do something, but the way this is done, the 'force' used to get the hearer to do what the speaker wants is different.

2) the 'direction of fit': the 'direction of fit' describes the relation between the word and the world.

Some illocutions have as part of their illocutionary point to get the words (more strictly, their propositional content) to match the world, others to get the world to match the words. Assertions are in the former category, promises and requests are in the latter. (1985: 3)

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When the speech act fits or corresponds to the way the world is, then it has succeeded in describing the world: when I say ‘the door is shut’ and the door is indeed shut, the direction of fit is word-to-world. There is also however, a ‘direction of fit’ that goes in the opposite direction, the world-to-word. In this case the world must be changed to fit the word: if the door is open when I say ‘shut the door’ then by shutting the door the world changes to match my utterance. Other possibilities include no direction of fit and a dual direct of fit.

3) the psychological dimension.

A man who states, explains, asserts or claims that *p* expresses the belief that *p*; a man who promises, vows, threatens or pledges to do *a* expresses an intention to do *a*; a man who orders, commands, requests *H* to do *A* expresses a desire (want, wish) that *H* do *A*; a man who apologizes for doing *A* expresses regret at having done *A*; etc (1985: 4)

This dimension repeats Searle’s earlier concern with the speaker’s sincerity in expressing his/her utterances. The person who utters a belief, a promise or request must be sincere in his belief, promise or request: to fail to do so is not only inappropriate but abusive.

4) the strength of the speech act. ‘Both, “I suggest we go to the movies” and “I insist that we go to the movies” have the same illocutionary point, but it is presented with different strengths.’ (1985: 5) The strength or force of a speech act may vary - I might speak loudly or softly - but the illocutionary point remains the same. It still remains a promise whether I shout or utter it quietly.

5) The status of speakers and hearers.

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If the general asks the private to clean up the room, that is in all likelihood a command or an order. If the private asks the general to clean up the room, that is likely to be a suggestion or proposal or request but not an order or command. (1985: 5-6)

Speech acts differ according to who is uttering them; this point concerns the social standings of the person so the utterances of the general differ from those of the private, etc.

6) the interests of the speaker and hearer. ‘Consider, for example, the differences between boasts and laments, between congratulations and condolences.’ (1985: 6) The speech act varies according to the situation of the speaker and hearer, so if a person gets a promotion then congratulations are in order, if a person is in mourning, condolences are appropriate.

7) the utterance within the discourse. ‘Consider, for e.g. “I reply”, “I deduce”, “I conclude”, and “I object”. These expressions serve to relate utterances to other utterances and to the surrounding context.’ (1985: 6) Certain speech acts are part of a larger set of speech acts or discourse. If I say, ‘I conclude’ it is fairly obvious that other things have already been said.

8) differences in propositional content. Speech acts are generated by devices that tell us the content of what is being uttered. ‘The differences, for example, between a report and a prediction involve the fact that a prediction must be about the future whereas a report can be about the past or present.’ (1985: 6) Certain devices, such as verbs, can indicate whether the content refers to the future or the past

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9) public and non-public issuing of speech acts.

For example, one may classify things by saying “I classify this as an *A* and this as a *B*”. But, one need not say anything at all in order to be classifying; one may simply throw all the *As* in the *A* box and all the *Bs* in the *B* box. (1985: 6)

Although some speech acts can start or end with ‘I classify this’ or ‘I conclude that’, this does not mean that what follows must be publicly stated. We can classify or conclude whatever we like without saying what is that we are classifying or concluding. On the other hand, it makes no sense to say ‘I promise’ without publicly saying what it is we are promising; or issuing a command without publicly saying what the command is.

10) institutional contexts: ‘[t]here are a large number of illocutionary acts that require an extra-linguistic institution, and generally, a special position by the speaker and the hearer within that institution in order for the act to be performed.’ (1985: 7) Some speech acts require non-linguistic institutions to acquire their force. Excommunication requires the institution of the church; marriage requires either the church or the state. It is useful to keep in mind that language is also an institution, albeit different from non-linguistic institutions: a promise functions as a speech act on account of the institution of language that regulates what counts as particular kinds of speech acts.

11) differences in illocutionary verbs having a performative use and not others. Most illocutionary verbs have a performative use (stating, concluding, and pleading) but ‘one

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cannot perform acts of, e.g., boasting or threatening, by saying “I hereby boast” or ‘I hereby threaten.’” Not all illocutionary verbs are performative verbs.’ (1985: 7)

12) differences of style in performance: the way the speech act is delivered can vary even though there might be no differences in the illocutionary point. ‘[t]hus, the difference between for example announcing and confiding need not involve any difference in illocutionary point or propositional content but one in the *style* of performance of the illocutionary act.’ (1985: 8) Other stylistic differences are those between speaking and writing, or an academic use of language and ordinary language.

## **5.0. The Classification of Speech Acts**

There is, however, more to the study of speech acts. It might seem that the study of speech acts is open-ended in the sense that there are an infinite number of speech acts without any order to them. Austin himself, towards the end of *How to do Things With Words* (1975) had suspected that despite the vast array of speech acts, it was possible to classify them into certain basic types. He proposed a tentative classification but died before this classificatory system could be established. In ‘A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts’ (1985) Searle takes up and refines Austin’s task.

Searle is critical of Austin’s attempt at classifying speech acts by concentrating on verbs in the first person, such as ‘I promise’ or ‘I state’ because in so doing, the difference between these speech acts is lost. By way of contrast, Searle’s proposed list of

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dimensions of speech acts brings out the differences between ‘I announce’ and ‘I promise’: ‘[a]nnouncing...is not the name of a type of illocutionary act, but of the way in which some illocutionary act is performed’ (Searle 1985: 9). When we say ‘I announce’ we are invoking the 12<sup>th</sup> dimension because of the way we perform the speech act, its means of presentation.

An examination of Austin’s classification shows that it has no order to it but bounces around from one dimension to another. Searle demonstrates this confusion with his classification:

(a) Commissives: Austin considers them a basic and fundamental category and he defines them as committing the speaker to a certain course of action. (1975: 157) It is as though by saying ‘I intend to go to the party’ we are promising or committing ourselves. But, Searle rejects this, arguing that ‘I intend’ is not a commissive but rather a description of what the speaker has in mind; it is a report of what he intends to do.

(b) Expositives: according to Austin, expositives ‘are used in acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments, and the clarifying of usages and of references.’ (1975: 161) But what Austin calls expositives belong to Searle’s 7<sup>th</sup> dimension where a speech act is part of a larger discourse.

(c) Executives: Austin defines executives as ‘the giving of a decision in favour or against a certain course of action, or advocacy of it.’ (1975: 155) Searle argues that these speech

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acts can be explained by looking at the social status of the speaker and hearer(5<sup>th</sup> dimension), and also by locating them within an extra-linguistic institution (10<sup>th</sup> dimension).

(d) Behabitives: according to Austin, ‘Behabitives include the notion of reaction to other people’s behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes or an expression of attitudes to somebody else’s past conduct or imminent conduct.’ (1975: 160) Searle finds the behabitives ill-defined, arguing that they can be better explained with reference to the interests of the speaker or the hearer (6<sup>th</sup> dimension), plus the expression of the psychological states of the participants (3<sup>rd</sup> dimension).

(e) Verdictives: ‘Verdictives consist in the delivering of a finding, official or unofficial, upon evidence or reasons as to value or fact, so far as these are distinguishable. A verdictive is a judicial act as distinct from legislative or executive acts, which are both exercitives.’ (1975: 153) Although Searle does not comment, Notion has commented that ‘it should be clear that verdictives involve appeals to the 7<sup>th</sup> dimension (*differences in relations to the rest of the discourse*), the 10<sup>th</sup> dimension (requiring extra-linguistic institutions) and perhaps the 5<sup>th</sup> dimension (status of speaker and hearer).’ (2000: 46)

Searle’s review of Austin’s taxonomy shows its failings and the need for a more systematic account of speech acts. ‘What I propose **to do is take illocutionary point**, and its corollaries, direction of fit and expressed sincerity conditions as the basis for constructing a classification.’ (1985: 12) He is critical of Austin’s attempt at classifying

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speech acts on the grounds that they are disorganised since there is no principle of explanation that tells us how to separate the different types of speech acts. Searle is not simply presenting a new taxonomy of speech act types but, and it is of fundamental importance, presenting a method that explains why one type is more fundamental than the other. Out of Austin's original list he only retains the commissives.

(a) Commissives are those illocutionary acts whose point is to commit the speaker (again in varying degrees) to some future course of action.' (Searle 1985: 14) Searle agrees with Austin that commissives are the basic type of speech act because they are oriented towards what he has already emphasized as the point or purpose. However, there is more to Searle's account of commissives and he introduces the notion of the 'direction of fit'. A commissive has a world-to-word direction of fit so that the world changes to fit the words. By uttering and fulfilling a promise the world has changed to match the words. This can be schematised as follows: (C) represents the commitment, the arrow upwards the world-to-word direction of fit, and (I) the sincerity condition (of Intent), while (S does A) refers to the propositional content (in the future).

$$C \uparrow I (S \text{ does } A)$$

Commissives are the basic category because a number of dimensions apply to them, such as the point of the speech act, the direction of fit and the sincerity condition. Other dimensions can also play a secondary role, so that within the rubric of commissives variations (vows, swearing) can take place.



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(b) Assertives: ‘The point or purpose of the members of the assertive class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something’s being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition. All of the members of the assertive class are assessable on the dimension of assessment which includes ‘*true* and *false*.’ (1985: 12). This can be schematized as:  $\vdash$  represents the assertion, the downward pointing arrow describes the word-to-world direction of fit, (B) represents the sincerity condition (of belief) and p represents the propositional content:

$$\vdash \downarrow B(p)$$

Like the commissives, the assertive category has a number of variations so that a number of other speech acts fit the assertive model. To say ‘I state’ or ‘I affirm’ is both to say that something corresponds to the world and also that the speaker believes in what he/she is saying. Variations take place if the speaker is unsure of what he/she says (the dimension of strength of point) or the speaker can complain about losing something (the dimension of interest to the speaker) or the speaker can be saying something that is part of a larger discourse (the dimension of the rest of the discourse).

(c) Directives: ‘The illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts (of varying degrees, and hence, more precisely, they are determinates of the determinable which includes attempting) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something.’ (1985: 13). Directives can be schematised as follows: the exclamation mark (!) represents the

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illocutionary point of getting the hearer to do something, the direction of fit is world-to-word ( $\uparrow$ ), the sincerity condition W (of wanting action A to get done) and the propositional content showing it is the hearer who should do it (H does A).

!  $\uparrow$  W (H does A)

Once again other secondary dimensions can come into play and these make variations possible. One, for example, can ask for something aggressively or politely (the fourth dimension) or one can ask something in virtue of one's institutionally defined status (the fifth dimension).

(d) Expressives: 'The illocutionary point of this class is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content' (1985:15). Other examples of expressives are, to thank, to congratulate, to apologise, to condole, to deplore, and to welcome. Searle's analysis of expressives is a subtle one in that it does not involve what we typically consider as responses to our emotions. Weeping with joy at having won the national lottery is not considered by Searle an expressive act of communication. Nor do expressives include saying what one did, as when I tell you how angry I was yesterday. This is a description or a report of an action. Expressive speech acts are those where linguistically one implies that one has had a certain emotion: to say 'Good Morning' implies that the speaker has a positive, cheerful emotion, just as saying 'I'm sorry' implies that I have the emotion of sorrow. These are legitimate speech acts that can be schematized according as follows: (E) represents the

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illocutionary point of expressives, ( $\emptyset$ ) represents the fact that there is no direction of fit for expressives, (P) represents the various psychological states and the propositional content is represented by (S/H + property)

$$E (\emptyset) \quad (P) (S/H + \text{property})$$

There are variations, as usual, in relation to the dimensions used: for example, winning the lottery and grieving at the loss of a close relative require different expressives: clearly the propositional content (the 8<sup>th</sup> dimension) and the interests of the speaker (the 6<sup>th</sup> dimension) come into play. Other variations can be produced with the 4<sup>th</sup> dimension describing the strength of the illocutionary point. The strength of an apology can vary: there is a difference between brushing with someone in a corridor and crashing into someone else's car through neglect.

(e) Declaratives:

It is the defining characteristic of this class that the successful performance of one of its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality, successful performance guarantees that the propositional content corresponds to the world: if I successfully perform the act of appointing you chairman, then you are chairman; if I successfully perform the act of nominating you as candidate, then you are candidate; if I successfully perform the act of declaring a state of war, then war is on; if I successfully perform the act of marrying you, then you are married. (1985: 16-17)

Declaratives are a unique type of utterance because once uttered they have the power to change things: when the couple are declared man and wife, in effect, they are married. Just by being uttered, the speech act changes the status or condition of the hearer. Declaratives are also unique in that they include both directions of fit: by uttering them,

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one is bringing about a change in the world and simultaneously the world is changing or ‘adapting’ to one’s utterance. The schema for declaratives is as follows: (D) represents the illocutionary point of declaratives, the double arrow ( $\updownarrow$ ) shows that the direction of fit is two-way (from world-to-word and vice versa at the same time); the symbol (P) represents the propositional content and the ( $\emptyset$ ) represents the lack of sincerity condition.

$$D \updownarrow (\emptyset) (P)$$

The variations of the declaratives depend upon specific dimensions but probably the most important dimension concerns non-linguistic institutions as described by the 10<sup>th</sup> dimension. To declare war or to excommunicate someone requires that the relevant speech acts be embedded within an institutional framework such as the state or the church. Other variations on declaratives emerge relative to the social position of the speaker (the 5<sup>th</sup> dimension) so that (for example) only the queen can knight certain personages.

Searle’s classification of speech acts accomplishes two goals: on the one hand it is broad enough to show the multiplicity of speech acts that can be found within natural language, and yet, on the other hand, it also creates an order or a system out of this multiplicity. The different speech acts – promising, requesting, baptizing, commanding, etc – can be grouped systematically with reasons offered as to why each speech act should be within its respective category.

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The most important conclusion to be drawn from this discussion is this. There are not, as Wittgenstein (on one possible interpretation) and many others have claimed, an infinite or indefinite number of language games or uses of language. Rather, the illusion of limitless uses of language is engendered by an enormous unclarity about what constitutes the criteria for delimiting one language game or use of language from another. If we adopt the illocutionary point as the basis notion on which to classify uses of language, then there are a rather limited number of basic things we do with language: we tell people how things are, we try to get them to do things, we commit ourselves to doing things, we express our feelings and attitudes and we bring about changes through our utterances. Often, we do more than one of these at once in the same utterance. (1985: 29)

## **6.0. Complex Speech Acts: Double Speech acts and Indirect speech acts**

In his analysis of speech acts, Searle stated that he will follow the strategy of starting by examining straightforward speech acts to establish a basis for his theory while leaving complex speech acts to be dealt with later. In ‘Taxonomy’ he began to examine non-standard speech acts such as assertive declaratives: these are single speech acts that function doubly. By way of example, Searle describes the failed attempt by the runner to reach another base when the umpire calls ‘You’re Out’ (1985: 19-20). This speech act is both an assertive since the umpire has passed the judgement that the ball reached the second base before the runner, but it is also a declaration since the status of the runner has changed from being in the game to out of the game. Assertive declarations can be schematised as follows:

$$D \downarrow \uparrow (B) p$$

While (D) represents the declaratives, (B) represents the sincerity condition (of belief that characterises assertions), the arrow downwards represents the assertive direction of fit and the double arrow the declarative direction of fit.

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In '*Indirect speech acts*' (1985: 30-57) Searle uses his theory of speech acts and his classification of speech acts to elaborate on the much used linguistic phenomenon of indirect speech acts. 'The problem posed by indirect speech acts is the problem of how it is possible for the speaker to say one thing and mean that but also to mean something else.' (1985: 31) When a person tells you, 'You're standing on my foot', then he/she is not merely providing information that can be judged as true or false, but indirectly telling you to take your foot off theirs. In other words, they are issuing a directive even though at face value, the utterance is an assertive<sup>iv</sup>.

What needs to be examined is the way indirect speech acts actually operate and how they can be explained within the framework of speech act theory. Searle offers the example of a dinner conversation between Dr. Phixum, an orthopaedic surgeon and his patient. When Dr Phixum asks 'can you pass the salt?', is he asking about his patient's ability to literally lift the salt off the table? If this were the case, then the patient would reply with something of the sort, 'Yes today I can, though 3 days ago it would not have been possible'. The patient's reply would consist of a series of assertives. However, if Dr Phixum actually wants to add salt to his food then maybe uttering an assertive ('here you are'), or just passing the salt silently would be sufficient. The conversational sequence in this example is that of a directive followed by an assertive should the patient respond verbally, with another directive involved if the salt is passed.

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The following is a detailed and complex analysis by Searle of the ‘Can you pass the salt?’ example.

Step 1: Y has asked me a question as to whether I have the ability to pass the salt (fact about the conversation).

Step 2: I assume that he is cooperating in the conversation and that therefore his utterance has some aim or point (principles of conversational cooperation).

Step 3: The conversational setting is not such as to indicate a theoretical interest in my salt passing ability (factual background information).

Step 4: Furthermore, he probably already knows that the answer to the question is yes (factual background information). (This step facilitates the move to Step 5, but is not essential).

Step 5: Therefore, his utterance is probably not just a question. It probably has some ulterior illocutionary point (inference from Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4). What can it be?

Step 6: A preparatory condition for any directive illocutionary act is the ability of H to perform the act predicated in the propositional content condition (theory of speech acts).

Step 7: Therefore, Y has asked me a question the affirmative answer to which would entail that the preparatory condition for requesting me to pass the salt is satisfied (inference from Steps 1 and 6).

Step 8: We are now at dinner and people normally use salt at dinner; they pass it back and forth, try to get others to pass it back and forth, etc. (background information).

Step 9: He has therefore alluded to the satisfaction of a preparatory condition for a request whose obedience conditions it is quite likely he wants me to bring about (inference from Steps 7 and 8).

Step 10: Therefore, in the absence of any other plausible illocutionary point, he is probably requesting me to pass the salt (inference from Steps 5 and 9). (1985: 46-7)

Although Searle’s rather elaborate breakdown of the speech act seems long it must be remembered that this takes place in an instant: just as behavioural acts can be broken down and re-described in terms of smaller acts that constitute one large act, the same applies to speech acts.

However, some important considerations are introduced by Searle as he develops his account of indirect speech acts.

- a. An indirect speech act is a literal utterance. It is not a question of ambiguity since if it were ambiguous the hearer would ask for clarification. Rather it is (directly) a question about whether the hearer can pass the salt (his arm might be broken, there

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might be no salt on the table, the salt container might be empty) and (indirectly) a directive to pass the salt. This explains why the hearer might respond to Phixum's question by saying 'I cannot as my arm is broken'; in this case he is responding to a question about his ability. Should he be able to physically lift the salt off the table, then (if he wants) he can also oblige Dr. Phixum and pass him the salt. What this shows is that indirect speech acts are indebted to speech act theory: for the indirect speech act to work what is directly uttered and indirectly implemented must be connected to certain preparatory conditions such as the speaker or hearer's abilities, wants, or social setting, or to the propositional content so that what is directly uttered can be connected to the indirect aspect of the speech act.

- b. In everyday life, indirect speech acts do not cause too much trouble since their frequency has given them an idiomatic status. Idioms are like formulas that listeners have no trouble identifying as conventional uses of language.
- c. Searle acknowledges the work of P. Grice who pointed out that the conversational setting required the co-operation of participants. In this case, the hearer co-operates with the speaker by understanding the indirect speech act; this is important because without the assumption of co-operation, it would be difficult to explain how speech acts worked.
- d. The broad picture Searle gives of indirect speech acts is that they are a polite way of talking rather, than the perhaps abrupt way a directive sounds. When (for example)



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you want the hearer to leave your apartment there is a difference between saying ‘it’s getting late now’ and the harsh sounding, ‘Get out’. The problem is that politeness makes it possible for the hearer to non-comply since he/she might reply ‘Yes it’s late, but the movie’s really good’. Politeness works because it offers a choice, even though, the speaker really doesn’t want the hearer to choose.

The benefit of Searle’s analysis of double speech acts shows that his classification can handle more sophisticated uses of language.

## **7.0. Contexts.**

Unlike indirect speech acts where speaker and sentence meaning can be distinguished separately, literal speech does the opposite by bringing them together. The sentence says what the speaker means it to say and this applies to any of the speech act types listed in Searle’s taxonomy: commissives, directives, etc. In literal sentences it is often claimed that the meaning of the sentence is independent of any contextual concerns, a view that has been called the “zero or null context view”. In ‘Literal Meaning’ (1985 117:136) Searle explicitly rejects this view:

I shall argue that for a large class of sentences there is no such thing as the zero or null context for the interpretation of sentences, and that as far as our semantic competence is concerned we understand the meaning of such sentences only against a set of background assumptions about the contexts in which the sentence could be appropriately uttered. (1985: 117)

In his early writings, Searle’s notion of preparatory conditions already indicated the importance of contextual considerations for the realisation of successful speech acts: thus,

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to excommunicate someone requires a social and institutional context where the speaker has the authority to excommunicate; to promise something assumes that the speaker can fulfil the promise, that it is future oriented; to make assertive claims the speaker must provide some evidence.

However, in 'Literal Meaning' Searle is, making a further and stronger claim, a claim that describes the context independently of the preparatory conditions and beyond the use of reference.

For a large class of unambiguous sentences such as "The cat is on the mat", the notion of literal meaning of the sentence only has application relative to a set of background assumptions. The truth conditions of the sentence will vary with variations in these background assumptions; and given the absence or presence of some background assumptions the sentence does not have determinate truth conditions. These variations have nothing to do with indexicality, change of meaning, ambiguity, conversational implication, vagueness or presupposition as these notions are standardly discussed in the philosophical and linguistic literature. (1985: 125)

When one says 'The cat is on the mat' this sentence might seem context-free since it can be understood without needing to know anything about the context of its utterance. Searle wants to say that even if we ignore the referential aspects (this cat and this mat) and if we ignore the preparatory conditions of the speaker, there is still an underlying context playing its part in the sentence. This can be seen by the 'on' in the sentence: by saying 'The cat is on the mat' we are assuming the existence of a gravity-conditioned world where cats can be on mats precisely because the laws of gravity are in operation. We also assume that the mat remains rigid on the floor even though it isn't rigid, and that the cat doesn't transform itself into another creature from minute to minute. Perhaps to avoid confusion or for the sake of clarity, it might be useful to add these taken for granted contextual features into the sentence itself. This, would be, however, an extremely

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daunting task as (a) it would transform simple sentences into long and complicated ones and (b) each new sentence we bring would itself have a context and this would entail elaborating these other contexts ad infinitum.

Searle re-enforces his argument concerning the implicit contextual assumptions operating and conditioning our speech acts with an example of a directive: the request for a hamburger with relish and mustard, etc carries with it a large amount of information related to ‘institutions of restaurants and money and exchanging prepared foods for money’ (1985: 127). But the presence of the context can be brought out even in contexts that are not explicitly institutional,

Suppose for example that hamburger is brought to me encased in a cubic yard of solid Lucite plastic so rigid that it takes a jackhammer to bust it open, or suppose the hamburger is a mile wide and is “delivered” to me by smashing down the wall of the restaurant and sliding the edge of it in. Has my order “give me a hamburger medium rare, with ketchup and mustard, but easy on the relish” been fulfilled or obeyed in these cases? My inclination is to say no, it has not been fulfilled or obeyed because that is not what I meant in my literal utterance of the sentence (1985: 127)

The point about Searle’s example is that we take it for granted that hamburgers are served in ways that allow them to be eaten. We never think of reminding the waiter that the hamburger should fit into the plate so that we can eat it.

In *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983), Searle introduces a further distinction between the context as Network and the context as Background. Speech acts and mental states are not isolated, individual entities but part of, or connected to, other speech acts and mental states. Searle uses the example of a person deciding to run for political office: to do so and for us to understand what he/she is doing, it is necessary that

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he/she does a number of things, such as announce his/her candidacy, is aware of the rules of eligibility, has the approval of a number of party members and so on. In other words, taking part in politics is part of a set of practices that have been elaborated upon by the political institutions of the land. The network, therefore involves an awareness of social and institutional conditions.

Although the line separating the Network from the Background is not rigid, a useful way of distinguishing between the two is to say that the utterances related to the Network possess Intentionality, while those of the Background are pre-Intentional. The question Searle's analysis raises concerns our knowledge of the background: if it is pre-Intentional, how do we know about it? To answer this question Searle introduces the distinction between knowing that and knowing how arguing that it is the latter know-how that points to the background:

The Background is a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place. Intentional states only have the conditions of satisfaction that they do, and thus only are the states that they are, against a Background of abilities that are not themselves Intentional states. In order that I can now have Intentional states that I do I must have certain kinds of know-how: I must know how things are and I must know how to do things, but the kinds of "know-how" in question are not, in these case forms of "knowing that". (1983:143)

We look at a table and know that it is a table just as we know that a table is a solid object. Accompanying this belief is the knowledge of how we can use tables – to read, eat, place laptops, books or television upon. We know how to deal with or use tables because we know that it is solid: the know how is the background knowledge that we carry about with us and we become aware of it through a secondary reaction, as when something that we usually take for granted is questioned.

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Searle illustrates the way the Network and the Background are the conditions that enable the following speech acts to succeed:

- (a) The chairman opened the meeting
- (b) The artillery opened fire.
- (c) Bill opened a restaurant.

With sentences (a) to (c) the meaning of ‘opened’ is the same and it is literal in each case: if it were not, then the meaning of ‘opened’ would be multiplied indefinitely. To understand the use of ‘opened’ in each sentence, it is necessary to refer to the Network and Background of each sentence, since different assumptions are brought to bear upon them. By examining the Network and Background we can answer the question of whether they are true or false. On the other hand, the following sentences are grammatically correct but leave us perplexed as how to interpret them

- (d) Bill opened the mountain
- (e) Sally opened the grass
- (f) Sam opened the sun.

Searle explains the difference between the two sets of sentences

Each of the sentences in the first group is understood within a Network of Intentional states and against a Background of capacities and social practices. We know how to open doors, books, eyes, wounds and walls; and the differences in the Network and in the Background of practices produce different

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understandings of the same verb. Furthermore, we simply have no common practices of opening mountains, grass or suns. It would be easy to invent a Background, i.e., to imagine a practice, that would give a clear sense to the idea of opening mountains, grass and suns, but we have no such common Background at present. (1983:147)

All this talk of Background and Network raises the question of where they are located. Are they metaphysical entities existing out there, independently of us or are they mental, psychological entities existing in our heads? Searle favours the latter mental view because the background and network ‘spring’ into being or ‘capture’ our awareness as a reaction to them. Although the assumptions that constitute the background concern things in the world, it is the way people are disposed towards them that counts: (for example) we assume that broken glass is sharp so we are disposed not to walk on it barefoot or we assume that sofas are heavy so we are not able to lift them on our own. It is because of our reactions towards these assumptions that Searle considers the Background as mental. But, this does not entail that the Backgrounds vary for each and every person such that communication becomes impossible with every person inhabiting a world on his/her own. This view – solipsism – is rejected on the grounds that the world we share is a common one and it includes gravity hard pavements, and global warming.

Searle also broadens his study of language from its internal workings to an account of the relationship between language and the mind. In *Intentionality*, he shifts his focus to language as being ‘directed’ towards something and as it turns out, the concept of Intention plays a crucial role in explaining both language and the mind: ‘Intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or

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of objects and states of affairs in the world.’ (1983: 1). There are two features that should be further explained:

(a) an intentional state has two components: a psychological aspect (the mental states of belief, desire, etc) and a content (what the beliefs, desires are about). Both the psychological aspect and the content are directed towards something or someone, so that when a speaker says ‘I believe that Gandhi was courageous’ the belief is not about the content but about Gandhi. As can be deduced from Searle’s earlier writings on language, Intentional states have a direction of fit: obviously, the direction of fit depends upon the psychological mode of the speaker: a belief about the world implies a mind-world direction so, for example, if I believe it is sunny, then my mental state matches the world. But if I wish that tomorrow will be sunny, then since I am wishing that the world (tomorrow) matches my wish, then the direction of fit is world-to-mind.

(b) intentional states are tied to conditions of satisfaction or success. When a belief is satisfactory, then this belief turns out to be true and when an intention is satisfactory then what is intended is performed. Searle argues that there is a striking similarity between his speech act theory and his theory of the Intentionality of the mind: illocutionary forces are similar to psychological states. Both speech acts and intentional states have a content, are about or directed towards objects, and have a direction of fit: both require conditions of satisfaction. However, Searle qualifies this distinction by arguing that the Intentionality of the mind is the foundation upon which the intentionality of language depends: in other words, language depends upon the mind but not vice-versa.

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Since sentences - the sounds that come out of one's mouth or the marks that one makes on paper - are, considered in one way, just objects in the world like any other objects, their capacity to represent is not intrinsic but is derived from the Intentionality of the mind. The Intentionality of mental states, on the other hand, is not derived from some more prior forms of Intentionality but is intrinsic to the states themselves. An agent uses a sentence to make a statement or ask a question, but he does not in that way *use* his beliefs and desires, he simply has them. A sentence is syntactical object on which representational capacities are imposed: beliefs and desires and other Intentional states are not, as such, syntactical objects (though they may be and usually are expressed in sentences), and their representational capacities are not imposed but are intrinsic. (1983: vii-viii).

By saying that Intentional states are foundational Searle is arguing that the mind's Intentionality is projected onto the world through language: both mental states and language are directed towards the world but while language has meaning, mental states do not: it is through language that mental states are expressed. The Intentionality of the mind uses language to express its psychological states with the conditions of success revealing whether that psychological state has been successfully expressed or not.

An overview of Searle's concept of intentionality reveals its importance in two senses:

(a) in the narrow sense that every speech act involves some kind of intentionality since it enables us to describe a particular state of mind. In describing the hot and humid weather I intend to express my belief that it is hot and humid; likewise, when the general issues a command his intention is to order his troops into battle.

(b) in the broad sense, language is configured or directed towards the world: our language is about the world so in talking about the weather my language is directed towards the world. This notion of Intention (written in capitals to distinguish it from the other sense) captures the way language and the mind hinge onto the world.



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## 8.0. Language and Social Life

The social dimension of language has already been alluded to since many speech acts would not be successful unless they had the appropriate social background. Thus, for a command to be successful, it must be uttered by the General to the Lieutenant within a military system that is organised hierarchically. Searle develops his account of social reality using ideas from his earlier accounts of language and mind but also introduces new ones.

In *The Construction of Social Reality* (1996) Searle uses the concept of constitutive rules to show the extent to which the institutions of society can be said to be constructed. It should be pointed out, however, that when he uses the concept of institutions what he has in mind is a much broader concept than that which we usually understand by an institution (such as the military or educational institutions) which we tend to associate with certain buildings. For Searle, it is only within an institution that his formula (X) counts as (Y) in (C) can only be meaningful. Take (for example) the game of chess: when the King is checked we are faced with an institutional fact because the constitutive rules of chess make it so. The game of chess is therefore also an institution and institutions are composed of a number of interrelated constitutive rules. Clearly, given the way Searle explains institutions in terms of constitutive rules, there are a very large number of institutions that cover most social practices, including perhaps, the most fundamental institution with society - language.

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To demonstrate the way social reality is created, Searle asks us to imagine what goes on when a person invents a game (he offers a detailed example of the invention of Chaos). The first and obvious step in this process involves establishing the rules of the game and to do so, this person uses Searle's formula: X (the first to cross the line) counts as Y (5 points) in C (when played on a certain field, watched by certain officials). The concept of collective intentionality plays an important part in the acceptance of rules and social reality. Since there is a tendency to associate intentions with a person, the concept of collective intentionality has an aura of mystery about it because it suggests that over and above our individual intentions, there is a kind of 'super' or 'mega' intentionality. Searle wants to dispel this 'aura' associated with collective intentionality but retains the concept to show how frequently it is used within our social lives. By accepting the rules of the game of Chaos, the players and coaches are together intending to play according to the rules. Collective intentions are we-intentions: just because we think of intentions as taking place in an individual mind, this does not mean that it is not possible to have group intentions. The importance of this concept in Searle's account of social reality is that it allows for the introduction of social facts: collective intentionality makes social facts possible.

In addition, while observing the game is subjective, understanding it is objective or independent of the person, since to understand it means knowing the rules of the game. Both the spectators and the players know the rules of the game and both teams – by playing against each other - agree to play by the rules. This agreement highlights a crucial

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feature of Searle's account of social reality: unlike natural reality, social reality is self-referential which means that humans are aware of, or can be made aware of what they are socially describing. Talking about social life includes necessarily accepting it for what it is since there is always a human component or attitude towards it.

Something can be a mountain even if no one believes it is a mountain; something can be a molecule even if no one thinks anything at all about it. But for social facts, the attitude that we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon. If, for example, we give a big cocktail party, and invite everyone in Paris, and if things get out of hand, and it turns out that the casualty rate is greater than the Battle of Austerlitz – all the same, it is not a war; it is just one amazing cocktail party. Part of being a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of being a war is being thought to be a war. This is a remarkable feature of social facts; it has no analogue among physical facts (1996: 33-34)

An interesting and pertinent question concerns the way constitutive rules create forms of behaviour from nowhere: how do constitutive rules create institutional facts? The answer involves the normative aspect of constitutive rules: if we see the constitutive rules of games it is evident that the goal or point of the game is to win. The constitutive rules of the game prescribe the purpose of the game and they therefore prescribe the norms that the players of both sides set out to follow. Do these normative features of constitutive rules also apply to other domains of social life? How do they translate into a marriage ceremony? Applying the formula of constitutive rules to a wedding, to say 'I do' (X) counts as getting married (Y) within a church with a priest, witnesses, etc (C).

The normative features of getting married entails knowing the rules of marriage and, because getting married is a serious event, these rules are repeated during the ceremony. Once the rules are clear then the normative feature is implied: if one gets married one should behave in a certain way i.e., one has, in effect, changed their life style. Furthermore, all those taking part in the ceremony – the officials, the couple, the

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witnesses, and the best man – show their approval of marriage as an institution and of the specific marriage taking place. All the individuals attending the wedding ceremony express their intentions (we-intentions) by participating in the ceremony, even though they might not know all the rules associated with getting married.

What Searle has shown, in effect, is the way the institutional fact of getting married has been generated: the two persons have changed their status and this is an objective fact since all the rules for getting married have been followed. The sophisticated nature of social life is highlighted by two further points: (a) an institutional fact is not a solitary fact, but usually interconnected with other institutional facts. Using money to go shopping (one institutional fact) is connected to the wider system of exchange (another institutional fact); (b) institutional facts involved a degree of repetition: the act of getting married involves the multiple repetitions of constitutive rules by the couple, the officials, and the witnesses within a specific context. Searle's argument applies not only to games and marriage but constitutes the very fabric of social life.

The issue that seems troubling concerns the appearance (or not) of the constitutive rules. It seems that most of the time the constitutive rules operate despite remaining hidden. When I go shopping the institutional fact of purchasing new items takes place on account of the constitutive rules that make up the institution of money and the institution of exchange. I go about the business of shopping without reminding myself of the relevant constitutive rules. Probably, the best example of the unconscious operations of constitutive rules is the institution of language which I use without knowing why I use it

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the way I do. Most people use language without knowing the grammatical rules that allow them to use it. How can, Searle wonders, I be said to follow the constitutive rules (knowing how), if I do not even know them (know that)? Searle's solution to this puzzle is formulated in the terminology of 'sensitivity':

[one] doesn't need to know the rules of the institution and to follow them in order to conform to the rules; rather, he is just disposed to behave in a certain way, but he has acquired those unconscious dispositions and capacities in a way that is sensitive to the rule structure of the institution. To tie this down to a concrete case, we should not say that the experienced baseball player runs to first base because he wants to follow the rules of baseball, but we should say that because the rules require that he run to first base, he acquires a set of background habits, skills, dispositions that are such that when he hits the ball, he runs to first base (1996:144)

In the case of games, therefore, one plays without consciously knowing the rules because they have become second nature to the player who performs the role habitually and routinely: it is an unconscious way of behaviour. This explanation makes sense for games where one first learns the rules and, having learnt how to play the game over a period of time, one no longer refers to the rules. But what about language where the rules are not specifically learnt by most speakers but only by a minority, such as philosophers of language and linguists? How does Searle explain the use of language without the knowledge of the rules that are necessary for its use?

I am saying that if you understand the complexity of the causation involved, you can see that often a person who behaves in a skilful way within an institution behaves as if he were following the rules, but not because he is following the rules unconsciously nor because his behaviour is caused by an undifferentiated mechanism that happens to look as if it were rule structure, but rather because *the mechanism has evolved precisely so that it will be sensitive to the rules*. The mechanism explains the behaviour and the mechanism is explained by the system of rules, but the mechanism need not itself be a system of rules. (1996: 146)

Searle claims that humans have evolved a neural system that permits a system of rules to operate; clearly, the neural system is the machinery that makes the rules possible but it is not identical to the rules. This answer explains how, given that both adults and children

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have a neural system, when adults speak (and therefore follow implicitly the rules of language), the neural mechanism of the children is activated into using the same rules.

Searle's analysis of social reality concerns the functional nature of both institutions and language. In the case of institutions it is their function that explains their actions: the institution of marriage has the function of protecting and raising children (among other things), the judiciary has the function of adjudicating between competing claims of innocence and guilt. Social life is dominated by different institutions with their own specific functions. These with functions can be divided into two groups: non-agentive functions are those without intentionality, such as the heart's pumping blood throughout the body. Agentive functions are those involving human inputting intentionality into an object or process or institution. Language belongs to the function of the agent insofar as humans impose meaning onto sounds: they do this intentionally with the goal of communicating with others who in turn communicate with them. The importance of language is however, not only restricted to this 'horizontal' function of mutual communication: rather, language and communication have enabled humans to create other functional objects. Through the transmission of information enough knowledge has been accumulated to transform society into an advanced society with cars, mobile phones and pacemakers.

## **Critical Remarks**

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Searle's elaboration of speech act theory has raised considerable interest that in turn has raised a number of questions. Fotion, for example, argues that Searle's account of politeness as an explanation of indirect speech acts is too narrow. Indirect speech acts are frequently performed for utilitarian purposes rather than out of politeness: when you say 'there is a large rattlesnake near your left elbow' you are providing information and indirectly telling the hearer to both move away and why they should do so. In addition, Fotion points out that we use indirect speech acts precisely because we want to be impolite. To the driver who is told 'Can't you see you are blocking the road?', the force of this indirect speech act is 'aggressive' and further insults can be added to it, such as 'you -----fool, can you see you are blocking the road?'<sup>iv</sup>.

Although Searle is clearly indebted to Austin's account of speech acts, he considers the distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary act to be redundant and retains only the latter. On Searle's account, the meaning of the utterance is established by examining the intentions of the speaker in the act of communicating. His argument is that every literal sentence has within it, as part of its meaning, force indicators so that there is no need to establish the locutionary act as a separate class. This view is challenged by Friggieri (1991: 195-198) who defends the distinction between the two as established by Austin. If there were force indicators within every speech act then it should be possible to identify them, but one can assert something without knowing what the illocutionary force is. Friggieri offers an example: the utterance 'I am waiting for Joseph' can be used in a number of ways - as a warning, a refusal to go to the cinema, as a hint, as a secret, etc - and there is nothing within the sentence that tells us what the speaker intended to achieve.

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We can always understand the utterance as an assertion without necessarily understanding the speaker's intentions in uttering it<sup>iv</sup>.

In this chapter I have (a) outlined the pivotal role that both intention and rules play in speech act theory; this is followed by (b) an analysis of the reference-predication distinction and (c) the conditions that enable an understanding of speech acts to take place. Having outlined these conditions, I then (d) highlight Searle's account of the differences between speech acts (e) his classification of the speech acts into types or classes. The next section (f) on complex speech acts is possible given that Searle has established a foundation for them and the sections deal with Searle's analysis of speech acts in relation to (g) the context and (h) society.



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If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established through communication—and in certain central spheres through communication aimed at reaching agreement---then the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action. (1987a: 397)

### **Habermas on Communication and Social Theory**

Jurgen Habermas (1929- ) is a leading exponent of the Frankfurt School and has been instrumental in reviving its influence. The Frankfurt School offer a new and up-dated version of Marxism that is intended to retain the critical and emancipatory dimension of Marxism within the context of the developments that have characterised the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Orthodox Marxist theory of the nineteenth century was situated in the Industrial Age and it articulated social phenomena in terms of a materialistic outlook. On the other hand, the technological innovations of the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries have radically transformed society into what is described as an ‘information society’. Habermas has ‘upgraded’ Marxist theory to account for these social changes.

Habermas’ intellectual background draws upon a wide number of influences from the Continental tradition, but quite unusually, he is one of the first to exploit the resources of the analytic or Anglo-American tradition of philosophy. Within the tradition of twentieth century western philosophy, analytic philosophers have shifted their focus upon the study

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of language and in so doing replacing the focus upon consciousness that had characterised modern philosophy since Descartes. This shift toward language had the advantage that, unlike consciousness, it was more conducive for analysis and study. However, the interest in language and communication should be situated within his concern with social questions, questions concerning social order and co-operation. This qualification is necessary as his critics have pointed out that his writings on linguistic communication might at times seem to be overstretched. But given the question of how social order is indeed possible in a society composed of a large number of individuals, Habermas's writings on language and communication provide an answer to this question.

In this chapter, I will start (a) by developing in detail Habermas' theory of communication and continue in the next section (b) with an examination of his concept of validity claims. Following this, I shall (c) place Habermas' theory of communicative action within the broader picture of society and (d) outline his analysis of contemporary society from the perspective of the lifeworld and the system. The chapter ends with an overview of (e) Habermas' contribution to ethics within the framework of this theory of communication.

## **1.0. Communication**

The cornerstone of Habermas's project for the revival of critical theory involves an analysis of the way language is used in communication. Habermas has written widely on linguistic communication with a number of his well known essays brought together in *On*

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*the Pragmatics of Communication* (2002). In addition, his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987) demonstrates the way his pragmatic account of language ties in with his theory of society: by reconstructing the competences of speakers in their everyday life within society Habermas' theorisations can be considered a reconstructive science that explains the way society operates.

A central question to the study of communication is the question of what it is a person understands when something is being communicated. The answer to this question necessarily entails an examination of the concept of meaning since communication is the communication of meaning (as opposed to noise). In the case of linguistic communication we might ask: what it is that we know or understand when we know or understand the meaning of a sentence? Is the meaning in the sentence itself or in the way the speaker uses that sentence?

According to the account of those theorists interested in what is known as 'formal semantics' (Frege, the early Wittgenstein and Dummett) a person knows the meaning of a sentence when he/she knows the conditions that would make it true or false. Their claim is not that to understand the meaning of a sentence is to understand its truth, since it is possible to understand a sentence that is false ('the earth is the centre of the universe'). Rather, they claim that to know the meaning a sentence one would have to understand what sort of evidence would be required for it to be true or false. Given that there is a clear correlation or correspondence between the meaning of a sentence and the way that sentence is verified, formal semantic theorists consider the primary use of language as

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that of stating facts about the world, events or people. Cooke summarises Habermas' critique of the formal semanticists approach to language

Traditional formal-semantic approaches to meaning have been guilty of three kinds of abstractive fallacies: a semanticist abstraction, a cognitivist abstraction, and an objectivist one. The semanticist abstraction is the view that the analysis of linguistic meaning can confine itself to the analysis of *sentences*, abstracting from the pragmatic contexts of the use of sentences in utterances. The cognitivist abstraction is the view that all meaning can be traced back to the propositional content of utterances, thus indirectly reducing meaning to the meaning of *assertoric* sentences. The objectivist abstraction is the view that meaning is to be defined in terms of objectively ascertainable truth conditions, as opposed to the *knowledge* the truth conditions that can be imputed to speakers or hearers. (2002: 6)

Habermas considers the pragmatic approach to meaning as offering a more fruitful approach to the study of communication: (a) it focuses on utterances i.e. on usage, rather than sentences, (b) it focuses on the many difference kinds of utterances that can be communicated though a language (promises, requests, and orders etc) rather than narrowing the domain of language to descriptive sentences; (c) it focuses on the relation between the utterance and the social conventions within which they are embedded. Utterances are used within a framework of human interaction so that, within a specific context, certain uses of language will be employed and considered meaningful, while other uses within the same context will be meaningless. If (for example) I am in a restaurant I can ask the waiter for a glass of water, but if I ask for permission to practice my knife throwing skills he will either laugh me off or ask me to leave.

Despite Habermas' preference for pragmatic theories of meaning there is, in his view, a defect with the way they have restricted truth to context. For pragmatic theorists who have adopted the meaning as use of the later Wittgenstein, meaning is relative to the local context or the way of life of the community. Habermas hopes to rectify this by

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explicating a theory of meaning that is context-independent such that the validity of an utterance is something that transcends the local context.

In his early writings, he uses the label of ‘Universal Pragmatics’ to describe his project, while in his later writings he changes the title to ‘formal pragmatics’. There are two major differences between the pragmatics of Habermas and the pragmatics that interests linguists and philosophers of language. While the study of pragmatics has tended to focus on language-use within specific contexts, and therefore fragmented into a series of smaller contexts of use, the pragmatics of Habermas is broader in the sense that it is concerned with the use of language by all speakers. Unlike, for example, sociolinguists who collect empirical data to examine particular situations of language-use, universal pragmatics is a generalised study of the presuppositions involved in speech. It is a concern with the conditions that are necessary for any speaker to be able to communicate and this is why Habermas describes his pragmatics as universal. In addition, Habermas is not interested in pragmatics per se but in relating pragmatics to his larger concern with social and political theory. His project of reviving critical theory entails an investigation into what it is that constitutes the fabric of society and since language-use enables social integration, the study of pragmatics is a necessary first step.

In his pragmatics, Habermas carefully observes the work of Noam Chomsky who, as a linguist, was interested in uncovering the rules that every speaker of a language – irrespective of the particular language – must have to be able to generate a sentence. In other words, Chomsky studies the ‘deep rules’ of language that a speaker must have so as

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to be competent in his/her language, such as the ability to form grammatically correct and meaningful sentences, and to recognise when others do not form them correctly. The interesting thing is that the speaker uses these rules even if they are not able to articulate them; they use them ‘unconsciously’ in the sense that being competent in a language is a question of ‘know how’, as opposed to knowing the rules of the language, which would consist in ‘knowing that’. The fundamental difference between Chomsky and Habermas is that while Chomsky is interested in the rules that generate sentences, i.e., assertions, Habermas is interested in the rules that generate utterances, i.e., speech acts. This difference brings out the point that Habermas develops: language is an intersubjective affair, connecting people together. The social dimension of language establishes relations between people since a speech act is uttered by someone (the speaker), to someone else (the listener), to do something, within a particular context.

The influence of the later Wittgenstein is also evident in Habermas’ account of language and society where he develops Wittgenstein’s analogy between language and games. According to Wittgenstein, although there are many varied games all of them are characterised by the following of certain rules: it is the rules that define the particular game and a competent player is one who follows the rules of the game. Again, like the rules of language, the player need not consciously know the rules of the game in their detail to be able to play it; playing is a question of ability rather than being able to list the rules. And the ability to play entails using the rules even in situations that one has not encountered before; different situations arise during a game of football or chess that the capable player reacts to. There is a parallel with language in that a competent speaker can

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both understand sentences that he/she had never heard before and can also construct a sentence that he/she never uttered before.

Given language is a rule-governed activity Wittgenstein concludes that (a) language cannot be explained in terms of the solitary speaker, in terms of a private language who alone understands the meaning of what he/she is saying: the use of rules necessitates a community of speakers who can confirm whether those rules have been used correctly or not; without the community to provide a standard of communication, we could never know if the words we used today were the same as those we used yesterday; (b) the nature of the rules inherent within language shift the question of meaning away from the relationship between language and the world towards the way speakers follow rules within specific social contexts. Given that there are different contexts, the way a speech act is used will vary according to its context: the rules governing the way a speaker asks a question within the context of religion is different from the rules governing the discourse of science. Different contexts or language games generate different sets of rules to the extent that there might be no compatibility between the language games.

Habermas objects to the relativistic implications of Wittgenstein's reduction of language to contexts and ways of life. On this account the many different uses of language have nothing in common so that language is merely a series of disconnected games the study of which would be to clarify the confusion that results when 'language goes on holiday'. The problem with Wittgenstein's approach is that (a) it fails to realise the degree with

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which competent speakers relate to each other and (b) it underrates the importance of the cognitive use of language. (1971: 56-65)

As opposed to the potential slide toward relativism implied by Wittgenstein's language games, Habermas proposes the project of universal pragmatics as the rational reconstruction of the competencies that every speaker must have in order to be able to communicate at all. The analysis of communication presupposes that both speaker and hearer always already have this competence. The early programme of universal pragmatics had the goal of establishing the dynamics of communication as an essential component for the maintenance and reproduction of society.

Speech act theory is the starting point for Habermas' analysis of society because it clearly demonstrates the intimacy between language and social life. The writings of J.L. Austin provide Habermas with the theoretical framework for his analysis of interpersonal linguistic communication. It was from Austin that Habermas derives both the concept of the utterance (as opposed to the sentence) and the notion of the illocutionary force of the utterance where by uttering something, a speaker is doing something. The weakness of Austin's account is that he separates the force of the utterance from its meaning so that the force is found in the illocutionary act, while the meaning belongs to the sentence uttered. Habermas rejects this distinction because (a) the meaning of an utterance is different from the meaning of a sentence used in that utterance; (b) the separation proposed by Austin is connected to his concern with establishing criteria for differentiating between constatives and performatives with the result being that only



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constatives can be subjected to validity claims; (c) Austin's concept of illocutionary force lacks a rational foundation<sup>iv</sup> (Cooke, 2002: 7).

Habermas' analysis of the utterance reveals that it is composed of two components, or a 'dual structure': these are the performative aspect (or illocutionary aspect) and the propositional content.

I would distinguish (i) the *level of intersubjectivity* on which speaker and hearer, through illocutionary acts, establish the relations that permit them to come up to an understanding with one another, and (ii) the *level of propositional content* about which they wish to reach understanding in the communicative function specified in (i). Corresponding to the relational and the content aspects, from the point of view of which every utterance can be analyzed, there are (in the standard form) the illocutionary and the propositional components of the speech act. The illocutionary act fixes the sense in which the propositional content is employed, and the act-complement determines the content that is understood "as something..." in the communicative function specified. (2002: 64)

The propositional content of an utterance is what the sentence is about i.e., what it refers to. The performative aspect concerns the use or what can be done with the propositional content and it is this pragmatic use of utterances that interests Habermas. The sentence 'the sun is shining' does not float around independent of people who use it; it is embedded within a context of usage with the meaning of this sentence conditioned by the way it is being used. The question here concerns the illocutionary force with which utterances are used. According to the context, one can ask: Is it an invitation to go to the beach? Is it a warning to use a suntan lotion? Is it a confirmation of the weather report? Habermas is explicit: 'One simply would not know what it is to understand the meaning of a linguistic expression if one did not know how one could make use of it in order to reach understanding with someone about something.' (2002: 228)

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The dual structure of linguistic communication shows that an utterance is a combination of both the illocutionary force and the propositional content, a combination that involves both the doing of something with words and the saying something about the world. The communicative act takes place when the intention of the speaker is understood in the process of communicating some content. The content can be cognitive or non-cognitive so that with cognitive utterances the emphasis is upon the world and further disagreement will concern the truth or falsity of the content, with the social dimension taking secondary place. If (for example) I say, ‘the sun is shining’ the emphasis of my utterance is on the cognitive side, informing you about the world, with the social aspect (although present) as secondary since I might be casually talking to a friend. If (for example) I say, ‘let’s go swimming’ the emphasis is on the social angle since what is primary is my suggestion, while the cognitive side is secondary (‘the sea is lovely today’). There is therefore always a social dimension to language use: communication entails an intersubjective element of understanding of both the content and the intention of the speaker since the content must be understood as something specific, i.e., as a fact, an invitation, promise, commands, etc. Whatever type of utterance I use, a social relation is always involved:

Both the illocutionary aspect and the propositional aspect can be re-used in several ways. The propositional content ‘the sun is shining’ can be added to several different illocutions that bring out the social angle: I can warn you that the sun is shining, I can inform you that the sun is shining, I can pretend to you that the sun is shining. Likewise, the same illocution can be used with different propositional content: I promise that the sun is shining, I promise to take you out to dinner, and I promise to start eating more fruit.

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Habermas formulates his universal pragmatics by delineating the conditions that must be met for linguistic communication to take place. This use of language entails (a) grammatical competence (b) a relation to an external reality (the objective world); (c) an inner reality (the speaker's relationship with his/her own utterances, i.e., his/her intentions) and (d) a normative reality (the values, norms and rules of society).

(a) Speakers and listeners must share the same rules that allow them to generate sentences. Participants in communication must be competent in the language such that they understand the sense of what is being communicated. The communicative class involves the uttering something that is understandable or intelligible:

The first class of speech acts, which I want to call *communicative*, serves to express different aspects of the very purpose of speech. It explicates the meaning of engagements via engagements. Each instance of speech presupposes an actual preconception of what it means to communicate in a language, to understand and misunderstand the engagements, to bring about a consensus, to dissent: in general, to know how to deal with language.

examples: say, express, speak, talk, ask, answer, respond, reply, agree, contradict, object, admit, mention, repeat, quote, etc. (in Horster, 1992: 28)

(b) Speakers can communicate their representations of the external world. It is the cognitive use of language insofar as it informs us about the external world. The constative class involves the imparting of something about the world that needs to be understood:

the second class of speech acts, which I want to call *constative*, serves to express the purpose of the cognitive use of sentences. It explicates the meaning of engagements through engagements. In the prototypical word for the assertoric modes, in "assert" two instances are united that appear separately in the two subclasses of these speech acts. On the one hand, "assert" belongs to the following group of examples: describe, report inform, tell, elucidate remark, set forth explain, predict, etc. These examples stand for the

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assertoric use of engagements. On the other hand, “assert” belongs to the following group of examples: assure, protest, affirm, deny, dispute, doubt. These examples elucidate the pragmatic purpose, especially of the truth claim of engagements. (in Horster, 1992: 28-29)

(c) Speakers can communicate their intentions and it is important that these intentions are understood. It could happen that when the speaker is communicating he/she is lying or being sarcastic so that failing to recognise these intentions can result in the collapse of the communicative interaction. Questions of sincerity arise since the utterance is used to express the speaker’s intentions and whether the speaker was sincere when he/she expressed his/her intentions. The representative class involves making oneself understood; it involves the expression of the subjectivity of the speaker:

The third class of speech acts, which I want to call *representative* (expressive) serves to express the pragmatic purpose of the self-portrayal of a speaker before an audience. It explicates the purpose of the speaker’s engagement of intentions, views and experiences. The dependent clause of propositional content and intentional clauses with verbs like know, think, mean, hope, hear, love, hate, like, wish, want decide, etc. Examples are: expose, reveal, divulge, admit, express, conceal, veil, pretend, obscure hide, keep secret, deny. (These speech acts appear in negated form: ‘I am not hiding from you that...’) (cited in Horster, 1992: 29)

(d) Speakers communicate according to the norms of behaviour within society. It is a question of the appropriateness or the right of the speaker to communicate. Within the context of a lecture, it is usually assumed that a student has the right to ask the lecturer clarification on some point made during the lecture, but not about the lecturer’s hobbies. At issue are the respective roles of the speaker and the hearer, roles that are normatively conditioned. Clearly, what and where something is said - the context and the conventions – are an important feature of the communicative act:

The fourth class of speech acts, which I want to call *regulative*, serves to express the normative purpose of the established interpersonal relation. It explicates the meaning of the relation that the speaker/listener has with respect to behavioural norms. Examples are: command, ask, request, demand, warn, forbid, allow, suggest, refuse, oppose, obligate oneself, promise, agree, accept responsibility, confirm, support, vouch for,

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terminate, excuse, pardon, suggest, reject, recommend, assume, advise, warn, encourage, etc. (cited in Horster, 1992: 29)

The four classes are frequently referred to as the domains of (a) meaning or comprehension, (b) truth, (c) truthfulness and (d) rightness. In his later writings, Habermas leaves out (a) as the other three depend upon it. The possibility of saying the truth, being truthful and having the right to say something are all predicated on the possibility of language-use.

Although Habermas is clearly indebted to the speech act theory of J.L. Austin, he finds that the latter's analysis of speech acts is directed chiefly upon those speech acts that are institutionally framed, i.e., in terms of the institutions that set the rules or conditions for their successful performance (of a marriage, or baptism). Habermas' theory is less reliant on the institutional context of speech acts and in this respect, his work is much closer to that of John Searle who elaborated the conditions that must be met for the success of any speech act. For Habermas, the non-institutional success of communicative actions is grounded upon the ability of the listener to challenge the speech act: it is here that the notion of validity claims comes into force, *'In the final analysis, the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer, and vice-versa, because speech-act-typical obligations are connected with cognitively testable validity claims---*that is, because the reciprocal binding and bonding relationship has a rational basis.'  
(2002: 85)

## **2.0. Discourse and Validity Claims**

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Although communication is defined as achieving an understanding between the speaker and the hearer this definition is not restricted to understanding the meaning of an utterance, but also includes reaching an agreement on the utterance: ‘reaching understanding aims at consensus formation (2002: 294). From the way Habermas articulates the concept of understanding it is evident that it is employed to carry a fairly large load ranging from the everyday use of understanding the linguistic aspects of an utterance, to the more specialised use of understanding in the broad sense<sup>iv</sup> of including the reasons that enable a consensus to be reached. The possibility of arriving at consensus is an inbuilt feature of language. On Habermas’ account, communication always entails a relation between understanding and agreement and in the early universal pragmatics this is expressed as:

The aim of reaching understanding (*Verständigung*) is to bring about an agreement (*Einverständnis*) that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal comprehension, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of the corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness.’ (2002: 23)

And this is stressed again in *The Theory of Communicative Action*: ‘We understand a speech act, when we know what makes it acceptable.’ (1987a: 297). The point that Habermas wants to establish is that to understand the meaning of an utterance is to understand and accept the reasons for that utterance. This is why he considers his account to be consensual or pragmatic since the ‘internal connection’ between meaning and understanding is based upon speakers and hearers communicating and offering reasons for their utterances.

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In everyday life communicative interaction continues undisturbed and in this interaction a number of things are taken for granted: by uttering something the speaker makes a number of claims with regard to (a) the meaningfulness of the utterance (it follows the syntax of the language), (b) its truth (it says something about the world), (c) its appropriateness (the speaker has the right to say what he/she is saying) and (d) its being truthful (the speaker is consistent in what he /she says and does). But all these features of the utterance can be challenged: the hearer might question each of the implicit or explicit claims made and the onus lies on the speaker to provide reasons for what he/she is claiming.

Habermas calls the providing of reasons that are acceptable ‘validity claims’ and these claims describe the conditions that enable successful communication to take place: when (for example) the speaker tells the person who has just turned up at his/her office, ‘I am going for a coffee’ the speech act follows the rules of English, assumes that the coffee shop is open, assumes you understand that I have the right to go on break (its ten o’clock) and that I am sincere (that I am not inventing excuses to avoid you). These four dimensions of communication are taken for granted in everyday interaction and are therefore never questioned. But should they be questioned or challenged, Habermas - as a rationalist - argues that genuine communication entails the possibility of providing reasons for one’s utterances; the speaker should be able to defend him/herself and it belongs to the very nature of communication that participants can offer reasons for their ‘validity claims’.

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Given that every act of communication involves all the validity claims, it is not necessary to challenge each validity claim. While one validity claim might be explicitly challenged, the other validity claims are implicitly maintained and could in turn also be challenged.

Habermas writes that

We have seen that communication in language can take place only when the participants, in communicating with one another about something, simultaneously enter two levels of communication---the level of intersubjectivity on which they take up interpersonal relations and the level of propositional contents. However, in speaking, we can make either the interpersonal relation of the propositional content more centrally thematic; in so doing, we make a more interactive or a more cognitive use of our language. In the *interactive use of language*, we thematize the relations into which a speaker and hearer enter---as a warning, promise, request---while we merely mention the propositional content of the utterances. In the *cognitive use of language*, by contrast we, thematize the content of the utterance as a statement about something that is happening in the world, (or that could be the case). While we express the interpersonal relation only indirectly' (2002: 75-76)

In listening to the meteorologist, the explicit claim he/she is making concerns the truth of the content (that a tornado is approaching our town), while implicitly it is assumed that the meteorologist is the appropriate person to tell us this information (we should take the advice of moving to a safer area), and that he/she is being sincere (and therefore someone we should trust).

Discourse is that process that occurs when communication is suspended and utterances are challenged; it is the process that asks for the reasons that justify the utterance. Of the four validity claims informing a communicative act, each has a different mode of what Habermas calls 'redemption'. The validity claims can be grouped into two different sets as there is a fundamental difference between them: one set includes the validity claims of comprehension and sincerity and the other set includes the validity claims of truth and correctness. The difference between the two sets is that it is only the second set that can



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be redeemed in discourse. In the case of comprehension, when an utterance is challenged with regards to its meaning, the speaker can always use other words to convey the meaning and in the case of sincerity, the validity claim is redeemed if the actions of the speaker conform to his/her intentions (such as keeping a promise). On the other hand, the validity claims of truth and correctness involve discursive argumentation: whether it is a question of establishing the truth of a statement or the correctness of a norm, the speaker must defend his claims by offering reasons or justifications.

Habermas has narrowed down his account of validity claims to three such that speech acts (a) relate to the external world; (b) relate to the subjective world of the speaker; and (c) relate to others, to the domain of interpersonal relations. (1987a: 308) These speech acts can be challenged respectively on the question of (a) their factual status: they are judged according to whether they are true or false; (b) their value system: they are judged according to whether the speaker is sincere or not; (c) their normative rightness: they are judged according to whether they are right or not right. Habermas offers as an example of the professor who asks a student to get him a glass of water. The student can challenge the professor (a) on factual grounds since there is no water nearby; (b) with regards to his sincerity since the professor might be testing the student to see his reaction in front of the other students; and (c) on normative grounds since the student might object that it is not right or appropriate to ask this of a student.

What we have shown in connection with this example [of the professor] is true for *all* speech acts oriented to reaching understanding. In contexts of communicative action, speech acts can always be rejected under each of the three aspects: the aspect of the rightness that the speaker claims for his action in relation to a normative context (or, indirectly, for these norms themselves); the truthfulness that the speaker claims for the expression of subjective experiences which he has privileged access; finally, the truth that the speaker,

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with his utterance, claims for a statement (or for the existential presuppositions of a nominalised proposition). (1987a: 307)

The benefit of showing the internal connection between rational justification and communication is that the domain of reason is now expanded to areas that have for some time been considered outside its legitimate domain. Rational justification can be offered not only for the domain of facts and objectivity, but also for the domains of morality/norms and subjective experiences. In the case of morality, one's actions can be rationally examined in the light of legitimate moral principles, or if those principles are challenged they can be defended or rejected through reasoned argumentation. With the world of subjective experience, Habermas includes the expression of evaluations and desires: contrary to what many think, this is not so personal that it lies beyond rational justification. When one passes an aesthetic judgement calling it 'good' (or beautiful) one is not just expressing one's taste but can offer reasons for their judgment; and reasons are subject to agreement or disagreement. Habermas gives an example of friends discussing a film with the person who claims that the film is good being expected to offer reasons for his/her assessment: 'In this context [of art] reasons have the peculiar function of *bringing us to see* a work or performance in such a way that it can be perceived as an authentic expression of an exemplary experience, in general as the embodiment of a claim to authenticity.' (1987a: 20)

With the concept of discourse, Habermas offers an account of the processes that take place when validity claims are challenged: discourse is a meta-communicative process since it involves a suspension of everyday communication that in turn requires more

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communication to resume the communication. Communication breakdowns can only be resolved through further communication. This is where the notion of ‘illocutionary force’ is particularly relevant for Habermas’ account since the communicative act is more than the minimalist notion of involving two persons, but a relationship grounded in reasons and their acceptance. The hearer wants to know the reasons for what the speaker is saying and therefore challenges him/her. However, it is not enough to just offer reasons since the reasons must be acceptable to the hearers: there is a big difference between being asked to close the window because there is a cold draught and being asked to close it because ghosts might enter the room and possess everyone<sup>iv</sup>. Once the hearer is satisfied with the speaker’s reasons then the process of everyday communication resumes. James Gordon Finlayson offers a narrative that describes this process,

Suppose you ask me not to smoke in my office when you are present, and I demur at your request because I know that you too are a smoker. I ask you for the reasons behind your request. You may reply that you have recently given up smoking and do not wish to be tempted back into the habit. At this point, I might accept your reason and put my cigarettes away. On Habermas’s view, we have entered into discourse (however briefly), and reached a rationally motivated consensus (this phrase is the accepted English translation of *rationales Einverständnis*), and returned smoothly to the context of action. (2005: 41)

Habermas discusses the logic of discursive argumentation because he is concerned with the logic of speech acts that are used in rational argumentation (rather than deductive logic which is concerned with the relation between sentences) since the purpose of these arguments is with the strengthening or weakening of a validity claim. The logic of discursive argumentation applies to the domains of truth and of norms and these are respectively called ‘theoretical-empirical’ discourses and ‘practical’ discourses. The difference between the two is that while ‘theoretical-empirical’ discourse demand an

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explanation, practical discourse demands a justification. The arguments for the respective discourses are listed by Habermas (in Held, 1980: 342).

	Theoretic-empirical Discourse	Practical Discourse
Conclusions	Statements	percepts/evaluations
Controversial Validity Claim	Truth	correctness/propriety
Demanded from opponent	Explanations	Justifications
Data	causes (of Events) Motives (of actions)	Grounds
Warrant	Empirical Uniformity Hypothetical Laws	behavioural/Evaluative norms or principles
Backing	observations, results of surveys, factual accounts etc	Interpretation of needs (values), inferences secondary implications, etc

It is clear from the schema that both the statements of the ‘theoretical-empirical discourses’ and the evaluations of ‘practical discourse’ belong to an interconnected set of concepts that form a hierarchical arrangement within arguments<sup>iv</sup>:

the conclusion that is to be grounded (particular statements in theoretical discourse, commands or evaluations in practical discourse); the data that is submitted as pertinent (causes, grounds); the warrant which establishes the link between data and conclusions (general laws, moral principles), and the backing which makes this link plausible (observation reports, considerations of secondary implications of following a particular norm). (Held, 1980: 342)

The standard by which one judges where an argument is acceptable or not is called by Habermas in his later writings, ‘the persuasive force of the better argument’ (1990: 158-9) and it is reason that adjudicates as to whether to accept or reject a validity claim. This

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is understandable because Habermas equates the use of arguments and the offering of more reasons as an increase in the freedom of reflection.<sup>iv</sup>

When a discursive argument ends the presumably satisfied participants return to everyday communication, and, on Habermas' account, their agreement has arrived at the truth of the matter. However, a discourse cannot challenge all validity claims simultaneously: a discourse is grounded in an actual way of life so that rational argumentation takes place within a background context of values and beliefs. When a truth or a value is challenged, other truths and norms remain in the background and taken for granted. It is impossible to challenge the whole background of truths and values at once. So too, what is accepted at any moment might – given the availability of new evidence – need to be revised. As a result the truths or values that a discourse establishes are temporary and open-ended: it is always possible that in the future they would be subject to investigation.

It should be pointed out that the concept of discourse describes the practice that takes place in the course of everyday life by ordinary people in the attempt at arriving at rational agreements about their disagreements. This should immediately show that it is not the exclusive domain of philosophers or linguists but occupies a central position in modern societies as the mechanism that deals with conflict resolution. The importance of Habermas's analysis of discourse is that it ties his pragmatic account of meaning with his broader concern with social theory. It is important to his social theory because it shows the way social order can be maintained despite conflict. After the validity claim of a speech act is challenged in discourse, its acceptance or rejection leads to the re-

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establishment of communicative interaction between members of society. The function of validity claims in Habermas's theory of communicative action is fundamental to his restoration of reason. By showing that reason is inherent in the course of everyday language, Habermas is able to offer a form of social analysis that places reason at its centre.

### **3.0. Communicative, Strategic and Instrumental Action.**

As part of his social analysis, Habermas introduces a distinction between communicative action and strategic action. Both types of action are goal oriented but the way these goals are achieved differs greatly: communicative action relies on consent while strategic action relies on influence. Communicative action is that way of interacting whereby meaningful relations are established between members of society either through physical actions or through verbal actions (speech acts). One attempts to achieve one's goals by co-ordinating one's actions with others: at times, physical actions are accompanied by language or can be re-described with language and when communication fails or breaks down, then more language is used to re-establish communication. On the other hand, it is also possible to obtain one's goals through influencing others: rather than trying to achieve one's goals by agreeing with others, strategies are used to persuade others to do things that are (for example) in one's own interest. 'In strategic action, linguistic processes of reaching understanding are (generally) not used as a mechanism of action coordination' (2002: 203)

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The goal of communicative action is to reach agreement and consent between participants on what is being communicated and this is made possible by the ‘common knowledge’ of shared convictions that can be rationally challenged and redeemed. It is because humans live in a shared world – of facts, or norms – that agreement and disagreement are possible. ‘I call knowledge *common* if it constitutes *consent* whereas consent relies on the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims.’ (in Sutton, 2003: 53) In this sense, Habermas opposes ‘common knowledge’ to a shared body of similar opinions or to convictions that are resulting from sacred or secular authorities: in these cases, the question of validity does not arise.

To support his claim that an analysis of modern society necessitates prioritising the role of communicative action in the everyday world, Habermas utilises the distinction between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary aspects of a speech act. While the illocutionary aspect involves the speaker communicating his/her intentions so as to bring about a consensus with the listener in a rational and voluntary way, the perlocutionary effect of a speech act involves the attempt to influence others. The point of this distinction is that in the case of illocutionary acts the purpose of my uttering the speech act is clear so that the listener understands my intention when I utter it. With perlocutionary acts, however, this intention is not manifest since there is a gap between what I intend and what is understood: listeners ‘can understand what I am *saying* but have no idea what I am really *doing* with the utterance, since the perlocutionary aim of my utterances is not open to view.’ (Findalysen, 2005: 50). Habermas considers the illocutionary aspect to be fundamental and primary because it is transparent, with the

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speaker's intentions evident and open. The perlocutionary aspect, on the other hand, is secondary or 'parasitic' since the possibility of manipulating others depends upon them first understanding what one is saying. The success of strategic action involves hiding one's intentions:

I term those effects strategically motivated that come about only if they are not declared or if they are brought about by deceptive speech acts that merely pretend to be valid. Perlocutionary effects of this type indicate that the use of language oriented toward reaching understanding has been put at the service of strategic interactions. (2002: 202)

Communicative actions require understanding the reasons for one's actions while strategic actions require hiding the reasons for one's actions so as to get the other to do what one wants. By 'understanding' Habermas does not merely mean drawing up a list of reasons for accepting a proposition but a process of participation in where agents evaluate the reasons given for the claim. The participant judges whether the reasons offered are acceptable or not and similarly, the participant can defend his/her own reasons for the evaluation if challenged. On the other hand, strategic action operates differently: to achieve his/her goals, the agent uses a number of strategies ranging from bribery, threats of violence or blackmail. Words are transformed into tools used to influence others and no attempt is made to hide the fact that they are not being used for understanding and consent. There are also more subtle means of persuasion in the use of emotional language where the speaker plays on the emotional vulnerability of the other person to mask the defects of his/her arguments.



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The goal of strategic action is to control and manipulate others without their agreement or consent; it is success oriented and the only interest of the person is that of achieving their goals irrespective of the other. The other is reduced to the status of an object so that the relationship is a causal one with language used to bring about the desired effects. Strategic action is evidenced in game playing: players in the game of chess hide their intentions from each other so as to win. The players try to predict the way the other will react to their moves; they try to establish a causal relation between their moves and the effect it will have on the other player. And this is why one can play chess with a computer rather than another person. The relation between the players is therefore not one of communication since they are not trying to understand each other but rather a question of strategic action since success in chess is predicated upon the ability to hide one's intentions.

The emphasis on causality shows that there is a similarity between strategic action and instrumental action. However, Habermas differentiates between them since strategic action is a form of social action while instrumental action is concerned with the natural world and not with people. The difference between communicative action and instrumental action is that while communicative action entails reaching an agreement on the validity claims in the course of communication, instrumental action entails both (a) the choice of a goal that is independent of the means used to reach it and (b) a causal explanation of the relationship of the means to attain the goal. Unlike instrumental reasoning, communicative reasoning is not independent of its goal: if the goal is to achieve understanding and acceptance of the validity claims, this can only be achieved

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through the process of communication itself. There is therefore no separation of the means to attain the goals from the goals themselves. So too, the reaching of goals in communication is through participation and interaction, and not the result of a causal relationship: understanding persons is not the same as understanding the processes of nature.

In terms of his theory of society, the benefit of this analysis is that it enables Habermas to argue that the understanding of society entails accepting communicative action as the ‘gel’ that keeps society together; on the other hand, strategic action offers a vision of society as composed of solitary individuals, each working on their own and treating each other as means to their own ends.

#### **4.0. The Lifeworld and the System**

In his analysis of contemporary society, Habermas remarks on the widespread mistrust of reason for dealing with human problems. Though there are historical reasons for the decline of reason, a more pertinent explanation is the way it has been conceptualised in terms of efficiency: reason establishes the most efficient means for achieving a particular goal. This use of reason is known as ‘instrumental reason’ and its success is due to the assumption that there are causal relations between the means and the ends. Scientific thinking follows the model of instrumental reason and it has been credited with solving problems in the natural world. So too, instrumental reason is dominant in the way its applications have spread throughout contemporary society, as can be seen with the

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constant innovations of technology. However, Habermas argues that while instrumental reason has its place, it is not the only way that reason can be used.

Historically, it was Weber (1864-1920) who had offered an analysis of instrumental reason identifying it as the dominant - though not the only - mode of reasoning in the capitalist world. While the scientific application of instrumental reasoning had succeeded in resolving a number of problems in the natural world, Weber argued that it was being used in an ever-increasing manner in the human world, in the functioning of government and bureaucracies. The analysis of instrumental reason in terms of means and goals takes the following pattern: (a) the means for attaining the goals must be rationally chosen; (b) the goals that are chosen must conform to a person's value system (and therefore making these choices rational); (c) these values and their rational exercise are transformed into principles so that they apply completely to a person's life situation. For Weber, Calvinism offered a model of rationality in its choice of means, of goals and in the pursuit of actions according to principles. The ordering and prioritizing of a person's goals enables the person to give their lives a stable direction since it would be an absurd life if one changed goals every day.

It is the conclusion of Weber's analysis that leads to serious difficulties:

(a) Since instrumental reason is only concerned with the means of attaining certain goals efficiently, then the emphasis upon the application of reason ignores the status of the goals or values themselves. The value of tradition, as the basis within which to live our

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lives, is discounted in the modern world, a view eloquently captured by Weber's phrase 'the disenchantment of the world'. As a result, traditional meanings and values are replaced by whatever succeeds. There is a further consequence: if the only way of thinking permitted within a modern-capitalist society is that of instrumental reason, then the value system of a person as a whole could not be rationally justified. The ends are not anchored in something bigger than the individual (the tradition) but are chosen by the individual in a subjective manner. In other words, there are no criteria that justify the lifestyle one chooses: one chooses from the many different values and goals that are offered to them. There is no rational standard from which one can judge another person's choice of ends as mistaken.

(b) Weber had also argued that the rationalisation of modern society had led to the fragmentation of society into different value spheres or domains with each of these following their own inner logic:

one of the features of Western rationalism is the creation in Europe of expert cultures that deal with cultural traditions reflectively and in so doing isolate the cognitive, aesthetic-expressive, and moral-practical components from one another....into what Weber calls "spheres of value"(i.e., scientific production, art and art criticism, and law and morality). (Habermas, 1990: 107)

Since Weber conceptualized reason instrumentally there was no standard for assessing these competing value schemes. This generated a sense of fragmentation that left people feeling 'lost' or 'confused' with the typical reaction to these 'feelings' being the rejection of reason itself.

Habermas responds to these claims by arguing that:

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(a) successfully achieving an action is not a sufficient condition for claiming that the nature of reason is necessarily goal-oriented; one might successfully achieve something purely by chance, such as ‘choosing’ the right winning lottery ticket. This is why one of Habermas’ fundamental concerns throughout his writings is the transformation of reason into the broader category of communicative reason such that the rational reflection upon goals can be re-inserted as a legitimate domain.

(b) the instrumental model of rationality does not explain the rational choice of goals. The instrumental model assumes that the goal is arbitrary and is therefore opposed to a rational choice that can be challenged. To overcome the limitations of Weber’s analysis, Habermas argues that the externalisation of a person’s actions must be taken into account. A person who acts in the world so as to achieve his/her desired goals holds an implicit view of the world, a certain way of understanding of reality. In going about to attain these goals, the person might be questioned by someone else about the reasons for his/her actions and the response would involve an elaboration of the implied world-view. The elaboration and its subsequent justification could then be assessed by both participants in the discussion. It is clear that the strength of Habermas’ argument lies in the ability to offer reasons in the defence of one’s actions, just as reasons can also be offered to explain actions that fail.

(c) the fragmentation of society can be interpreted in another way: unlike Weber who interpreted the consequence of fragmentation within modern society as the cause of

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continuous struggles between the different domains, Habermas interprets modern society as the space where a number of ‘voices’ have the possibility of communicating with each other. This communication takes place both at the level of argumentation and at the level of everyday life. The problems that people encounter in contemporary society – the loss of freedom and meaning – are not problems about the value of reason but rather about the need to restructure reason to certain domains of society. ‘Communicative reason finds its criteria in the argumentative procedures for directly or indirectly redeeming claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness, and aesthetic harmony.’ (1987c:314) It is not reason that is problematic but its misapplication in contemporary society. As a defender of the Enlightenment, Habermas re-inserts reason in human life and rejects the ‘decisionism’ or subjectivism that dominates contemporary moral and cultural theory.

Given the centrality of communication in modern society, Habermas is able to claim that ‘[t]he theory of communicative action can make good the weaknesses we found in Weber’s action theory, to the extent that it does not remain fixated on purposive rationality as the only aspect under which action can be criticised and improved.’ (2002: 170) The dialogic or communicative dimension of reason dispenses with the solipsistic idea of the subject replacing it with an intersubjective account that Habermas calls communicative reason. The intersubjective dimension guarantees that the world is shared by people engaged in a conversation while providing reasons so that agreement can be established.

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In 'Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions and Lifeworld' (2002: 215-255), Habermas specifies the importance of the relation between communicative action and the lifeworld:

The concept of communicative action must prove its worth within the sociological theory of action. The latter is supposed to explain how social order is possible. In this respect, the analysis of the presuppositions of communicative action may be helpful. It opens us the dimension of the background of the lifeworld, which enmeshes and stabilizes interactions to form higher-level aggregates. (2002: 227)

As a social theorist Habermas re-formulates the question of the possibility of social order in terms of communicative action. The question of social order is central to social theory in that it seeks to establish how it is possible that a society composed of distinct persons - each with their goals, ambitions, etc, - are able to live together. In the early *Legitimation Crisis* (1988), he theorised modern society in terms of a distinction between the lifeworld and the system, a distinction that parallels the distinction between communicative action and instrumental or strategic action. Communicative action is the medium of the lifeworld while instrumental and strategic actions are typical of the system. So too, Habermas introduces the distinction between social integration and systems integration so as to explain the different ways in which social order is possible.

The concept of the lifeworld is originally derived from Husserl who had introduced it to explore 'the forgotten foundations of meaning underlying everyday life-practices and world experience.' (2002: 237) Husserl described the world of everyday life, a world that is shared by members of a community and opposed to the world of the scientist. The latter is, in effect, a spectator onto the world, objectifying and quantifying it, rather than living in it. For Husserl the world of the scientist was parasitic upon the world of

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everyday life since the scientist depends upon the meanings and interpretations found in the everyday world, before he could even start his own work. As a result, the traditional privilege accorded to science as the primary mode of access to the world was overstated.

The difference between Habermas and Husserl is that whereas Husserl focussed on the lifeworld in terms of the way a person structures his/her perceptual experiences of the world, Habermas focuses on the lifeworld as the world of meanings that are linguistically maintained and challenged. The lifeworld consists of the shared stock of knowledge, values, assumptions and beliefs that makes understanding and consensus possible: 'Communicative action takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions and naively mastered skills.' (2002: 172) Clearly it is a social concept since the world we share includes both the meanings and understandings that permit communication with others: the function of the lifeworld is that of making social integration possible since the use of general communicative competence is entwined with the cultural competence of members of the lifeworld.

Since communication is the lifeline of the lifeworld, it is evident that language plays a pivotal role in the transmission of communication and in repairing any disruption to the communicative process. The possibility of breakdown in communication takes place because the lifeworld operates, so to speak, 'behind our backs.' Most of the time communication takes place without any feature of the lifeworld being questioned but at times disagreement and dissent occur and this continues until consensus is once again



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achieved through discourse. It is therefore the lifeworld which provides both the conditions for social integration and for critical discussion. To illustrate his point, Habermas offers a story: at a construction site a new foreign worker is asked by one of the older workers to fetch some beer for the morning break. This request can be challenged by the younger worker on a number of grounds: the validity claim to intelligibility (perhaps the young worker is foreign and does not understand German well); the validity claim to appropriateness (the young worker does not think it is part of his duties to fetch beer and not right of the older worker to ask him); the validity claim to factual assumptions (there are no shops selling beer near the construction site); and the validity claim to sincerity (the young worker thinks that the older worker is trying to humiliate him in front of the other workers). What Habermas wants to illustrate is not only the possibility of challenging claims (the general communicative competence of participants) but the further point that communication also entails participants bringing their cultural competence and assumptions (their lifeworld) into the situation. In this story, the lifeworld of the foreign worker is different from that of the older worker and this explains why the young worker might think it odd that beer is drunk during the morning break; he might not recognise that there is an informal hierarchy at the construction site that allows the older worker to 'order' the younger one. When there is a problem it is not the lifeworld as a whole that is subjected to discussion, but rather a specific topic such as the timing of the morning break or whether all must drink beer: 'Single elements, specific taken-for-granted, are, however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet problematizable knowledge only when they become relevant to a situation.' (1987b: 124)

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But following a breakdown in communication a new consensus is achieved and this new consensus feeds into the lifeworld. Habermas's concept of the lifeworld is therefore a dynamic one in that the lifeworld enables communication between members of society to take place and in turn communication enhances the dynamics and growth of the lifeworld: '... the reproduction of the lifeworld is nourished through the contributions of communicative action, while the latter simultaneously is nourished through the resources of the lifeworld.' (2002: 191) This is why communication is not only a force for social integration, but contributes to the reproduction of society: through the medium of communication the identity of a society – its symbolic and cultural features - is revised, revitalised and transmitted to the younger members of society in so doing perpetuating that society. In his analysis of modern society, Habermas notes that as society has evolved,

traditionally customary contexts of action oriented to mutual understanding get shoved out into the environments of systems. Using this criterion, we can locate the boundaries between system and lifeworld in a rough and ready way, such that the subsystems of the economy and the bureaucratic state administration are on one side, while on the other side we find private spheres of life (connected with family, neighbourhood, voluntary associations) as well as public spheres (for both private persons and citizens). (1987b: 310)

Habermas describes the system in terms of the abstract structures that regulate life in modern societies. He calls them the 'non-symbolic steering media' and these include the sub-systems of money and power. These sub-systems enable modern societies to maintain themselves by generating the necessary material goods and services. Money is the force that 'steers' the capitalist economy, while power - as the mechanism that directs the country - is manifested in the administration of the state (the civil service, the

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judiciary, the military) and through the officially recognised political parties. Habermas points out that although both money and power operate to integrate society, they do so in different ways: money functions along a horizontal axis since it integrates society by bringing people together, while power is vertical in that it functions by ordering society into different hierarchies.

The lifeworld, which is grounded in communicative action, is opposed to the system which functions either instrumentally or strategically: just as instrumental and strategic actions are parasitical upon communicative action, likewise, the system is parasitic upon the lifeworld. While the lifeworld is self-sustaining since communication is beneficial for the lifeworld itself, the system, on the other hand, depends upon the resources of meaning that it finds in the lifeworld. So too in terms of social interaction, while communicative action in the lifeworld requires competent persons to co-ordinate their actions in accordance with each other, i.e., mutual understanding, the system requires the co-ordination of action in terms of the consequences without the need for the persons to know what these actions mean.

Through the use of money and power, the system does not require communication i.e., understanding the reasons for what one does, but the mere fulfilling of one's role. This is precisely the crucial feature of the non-symbolic steering media: for them to function they must rely on automated or predictable responses. When (for example) I pay the bill at a restaurant, the waiter is not interested in where I got my money from, or if perhaps I should have saved it to go on holiday instead. Likewise, with power, a soldier is part of a

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hierarchical military system that follows a chain of command: the soldier must follow the commands of his superior whether he agrees with them or not. For the system to function such that a number of people co-ordinate their actions, what it requires is a few simple rules that are consistent with each other so that there will be no conflicts between the persons following them. As a result, the system itself tends to gravitate towards a status quo; it is conservative in that it does not encourage change.

The advances of modernisation and industrialisation have made the twin tasks of managing the economy and the administration of power as functions that are too complex to remain at the level of the lifeworld: it has therefore fallen upon the system to co-ordinate these activities. In the past it was the lifeworld that provided the backdrop for meaningful interaction between members of a community: social interaction was maintained through the medium of language and the communicative competences of participants. This situation has changed with the growth of modern societies and the need to maintain social order over large populations. By co-ordinating the economy and the state the system makes complex tasks possible: 'system integration' is the name of the process that co-ordinates people within sophisticated networks. In the case of money, it is possible to purchase goods from all over the world (you can buy coffee from Brazil without going there) so your action of buying is tied to the network that eventually arrives at the coffee producer. Likewise, power co-ordinates a number of people from different spheres to pool their resources to build dams, organise armies etc. Performing these large scale tasks cannot be managed with the communication resources available in the lifeworld: system integration requires that each member of the system performs his

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role mechanically without the need for communication. It is the predictability of responses that enables the system to function as a means for organising society: (for example) I can go to the library and borrow a book without needing to know anything about the librarian just as he or she does not need to know anything about me (except see my library card). Strategic action can be used in a non-manipulative manner and Habermas develops this theme in relation to his study of social systems and the way people interact within them. In the course of our everyday life, a large amount of interaction does not take place at the level of the mutual understanding and agreement through communicative action: most of the time we live our lives in agreement with others without raising validity-claims. Social interaction in modern society involves being able to predict how others would react without the need to challenge them.

In an advanced, modern society there is no escape from the system as it is an integral part of the way these societies are organised and essential to their functioning. This is the positive aspect of system integration: by relieving the lifeworld of the twin burdens of managing the economy and the administration of power, the system has made it possible for the lifeworld to focus on the task of social integration. Social integration is grounded in communication where co-ordination between members of society is produced through meaningful communication with the possibility of asking questions and offering answers providing the context for social interaction. On the other hand, system integration does not rely upon communication but upon the predictability of actions so that persons interact with each other as though they were machines that function automatically.

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Despite the necessity of the system in modern societies, Habermas describes the tendency inherent in the system to both dislocate itself from the lifeworld and then attempt to take over it. He calls this process the 'colonisation of the lifeworld': 'the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside---like colonial masters coming into a tribal society---and force a process of assimilation upon it.' (1987b: 355) The systemic imperatives of economics and bureaucratic administration intrude upon the lifeworld so that communicative action is increasingly replaced with instrumental action. This can be seen in the way both economic factors and the intervention of the state dominate the way society is maintained. The evolution of society into complex forms of social organisation has developed systems that enable actions to be coordinated. But, problematically, these systems have developed a life of their own such that their functioning impose restrictions upon the freedom of persons: since it is the nature of the system to structure the pattern of action that a person is obliged to follow, then it 'limits' the possibilities of freedom. As a result, market forces dictate economics and the structures of power dictate one's behaviour. In the case of money (for example) freedom is restricted because (a) what we purchase is limited to the amount of money we have and (b) the economics of money operates independently of symbolic institutions: a company that produces pharmaceutical products for HIV is not interested in whether they should be making a profit over something that is needed by suffering people. It is beyond the purpose of the pharmaceutical company to ask such questions as they operate within market economies concerned with profits rather than people.

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The problem of colonisation is exacerbated when the system imposes its own values on the lifeworld. This can be seen when the system enters the domains of the family and culture; or when it takes over the domains of the public sphere such as the mass media. The markets or the specialists take over areas that previously belonged to agents in the lifeworld and who are now no longer in a position to assess or contribute to decisions that are taken for them. If the characteristic of the system is instrumental thinking and efficiency in the attainment of ends, when instrumental thinking is applied to human life, humans are transformed into objects, subject to calculation and quantification. When (for example) a hospital is interested in the numbers of patients, rather than the quality of the nursing provided, it is difficult for an individual nurse to provide the care required since the whole system is working against him/her. In effect, the system seems to develop a world of its own, a world that follows its own laws that are external to and beyond human agency, and imposes it upon the lifeworld. An inversion occurs since instead of the system serving the lifeworld the system becomes an end in itself with the lifeworld transformed into a subsystem operating along instrumental values.

The degree with the system has succeeded in colonising the lifeworld is such that challenging the system itself through the resources of communication becomes a difficult task: it is hard work - though not impossible – resisting the notion that efficiency and money are not necessarily the ones conducive to a person's happiness. Everyday language provides a sign of this increasingly dominant view where one hears people talking about 'retail therapy' as the quick fix to happiness. The encroachment of the

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system upon the lifeworld has produced a number of social pathologies such as ‘loss of meaning, anomie, and mental illness (psychopathology). (1987b: 142)

## **5.0. Discourse Ethics**

In his later writings on discourse, Habermas broadens the discussion away from the narrow conceptual concern with ‘objectivity’ and ‘facts’ to the broader domain of ethical issues. In a sense this was implied in his earlier writings since one of the validity claims of the theory of communicative action involved the rightness or appropriateness of what the speaker says. It covered, in other words, the ethical relation between participants in communication. When disagreements arise concerning questions of norms, ordinary communication is temporarily suspended and discussion or argumentation takes place enabling the speaker to defend himself against the challenges directed towards the rightness or appropriateness of his normative utterances.

In his account of discourse ethics Habermas develops the program outlined in his theory of communicative action but here he is interested in the kind of argumentation that leads to valid answers concerning moral questions that are generated out of the interaction between people in the lifeworld. The purpose of such argumentation is that of achieving consensus in norms: this might be difficult because new situations have arisen and the ‘old’ norms are no longer valid ways of coping with these new situations. New norms are required that need to be validated so that persons can adjust to the new situation that life has presented.



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In today's world there seems to be a widespread tendency to view moral issues as subjective ones: 'emotivism' is the idea that moral questions can only be at best expressions of subjective opinion. Habermas strongly disagrees with this view of morality as a private domain, positioning himself as a cognitivist: his argument is that the criterion for deciding the rightness of some normative issue is also that of rationality. His theory of discourse ethics is formulated along the same lines as his theory of communicative rationality since both are cognitively grounded. Moral actions and choices can be defended by an appeal to moral principles and, if these principles are challenged, then they can be defended. In his work on ethics, Habermas shows the parallelism between moral statements and factual statements since both presuppose the use of reason. When a person asks about the legitimacy of a norm, he/she is actually asking about its 'rightness' or 'correctness', and although many people think that this question can only be answered with reference to the psychological motivation of the speaker, such an answer is inadequate as it fails to take into consideration the rationality of the norm. When we communicate our values, we can offer reasons for why we hold them, reasons that others in a similar context would concur with. Habermas' account of communicative rationality shows that subjectivity in ethical issues is not the last word. A subjective evaluation can always be re-evaluated after the reasons for accepting another evaluation proves to be better.

And since normative utterances are evaluated rationally they can be also considered objective. This claim needs to be qualified as there is a major difference between

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normative and epistemological utterances: whereas a statement can be true or false of the world (it is not the world that is true or false), the validity of a norm is not dependent upon the way the world is. Rather, a norm is an expression of how a speaker or others should act in the world. It is evident that the objectivity we find in epistemological utterances is not the same as that of normative ones, but this does not mean that norms have no objectivity. On the contrary, Habermas defends the objectivity of norms by pointing to a 'weaker' version of what has been traditionally considered objective:

Owing to the fact that normative validity claims are built into the universe of norms, the latter reveals a peculiar kind of objectivity vis-a-vis regulative speech acts, an objectivity that the universe of facts does not possess vis-a-vis constative speech acts....norms are dependent upon the continual reestablishment of legitimately ordered interpersonal relationships....Normative claims to validity, then, *mediate a mutual dependence* of language and the social world that does not exist for the relation of language to the objective world. (1990:61)

There is therefore, an objectivity of the natural world and an objectivity of the social world; epistemological validity claims belong to the former, and normative validity claims to the latter.

But despite the objectivity of normative validity claims what is the 'force' generated by normative utterances such that one feels obliged to accept it? The use of 'ought' in normative discourse is such that it brings together participants who have agreed upon, and who co-operate in following such norms. A norm is followed when a consensus is achieved as a result of the co-operation of each participant: normative propositions depend upon the offering of reasons that justify not only one's behaviour, but also that of others. On this account, there is a big difference between accepting a norm on the grounds that it has been agreed upon, as opposed to following a norm out of obedience or

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conformity. Debates or discussions concerning norms stimulate questions on behavioural expectations, so that achieving a consensus on norms is a process that is informed by a willingness to undergo rational critique. What gives a discourse its power is that it expresses a common interest in its search for consensus; a discourse is universal in the sense that the interests it expresses are not particularised but generalizable involving shared participation.

Before any discussion of normative validity can begin, Habermas outlines certain presupposition or rules of discourse. These rules are connected to the competence of those participating in the discourse and all participants must accept these rules for validity of the discussion. The rules are:

1. Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse.
2. (a) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatever.  
(b) Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatever into the discourse.  
(c) Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires and needs.
3. No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising their rights as laid down in 1 and 2 (1990: 89)

The legitimacy of a discourse presupposes a situation where participants understand each other, where every participant has the possibility of using any speech act (raising questions, express doubts), where no one is excluded from the discussion, and where no one is forced to accept any opinion. It must be possible to challenge an opinion and if a participant cannot defend his opinion rationally then he/she is obliged to modify or reject it. It is only in this way that a justified consensus can be achieved since it would be the result of the 'force of the better argument' (1990: 158-9). The challenge to a claim can

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only be defended if the participants have the possibility of freely entering and moving between the different levels of discourse. Findalysen describes the ideal speech situation as follows,

...the rules of discourse are *idealizing* in that they direct participants towards the ideal of rationally motivated consensus. A discourse in which the voices of all concerned are listened to, in which no argument is arbitrarily excluded from consideration and in which only the force of the better argument prevails, will, if successful, result in a consensus on the basis of reasons acceptable to all. (2005: 44)

Habermas elaborates upon the two fundamental principles that are at stake in the program of discourse ethics:

(a) The principle of universalisation (U) is formulated in the following way: ‘*All affected can accept the consequences and the side-effects of its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone’s interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation).*’ (1990: 65)

(b) The principle of discourse (D) is formulated in the following way: ‘*Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse.*’ (1990: 66)

Taken together the two principles constitute a powerful basis for establishing the validity of moral norms. Those who participate in the process of argumentation are implicitly

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accepting the idea that a valid moral norm has universal applicability i.e., that it applies not just to oneself, but also to others. It would be a strange moral norm if it applied to you ('do not steal') but not to me. We expect moral norms to be binding on everybody and this is what the principle of universalisation caters for. But the principle of universalisation on its own is not enough since one could use other non-moral ways of bringing about universal consensus (threats, intimidation or through the prevention of certain topics). Habermas argues that establishing the validity of norms requires a certain type of reasoning: moral principles need to form a bridge between the logical techniques of argumentation and the data that arises from the social world. This is why both deduction and induction are tools in the formation of norms. The principle of discourse ensures that the solution to moral problems entails reasoning with others and that any agreement or consensus reached must have been subjected to a process of open and free rational debate. The two principles are in effect a combination of Kantian universality and public participation: a norm is valid only if it is recognised by all those affected by it and if it is validated by participants engaged in a rational debate.

...the categorical imperative needs to be reformulated as follows: "Rather than ascribing as valid to all others any maxim that I can will to be a universal law, I must submit my maxim to all others for the purposes of discursively testing its claim to universality. The emphasis shifts from what each can will without contradiction to be a general law, to what all can will in agreement to be a universal norm." (1990: 67)

The necessary involvement of others in moral discourse shows the extent of Habermas' differences with the views of John Rawls. In his attempt to formulate the grounds for a principle of justice, Rawls hypothesizes a fictional, 'original position' where each person imagines himself without the trappings of social class, wealth, or capabilities. Since

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nobody knows how his/her life would turn out, it is in the person's own interest to make sure that all material resources were equally and fairly distributed since the person him/herself might be the one who needs it most. While for Rawls, this imaginary return to an 'original position' ensures that justice is operating in society, for Habermas, this position neglects the very important point that morality takes place in the real world, in particular contexts. The solutions to moral problems are not discovered in the solitary world of the theorist speculating in his/her office, but in co-operation with others: persons argue to reach an agreement or consensus on the issues at hand.

Habermas's discourse ethics emphasizes the role of intersubjectivity in moral discourse. This role had been neglected in earlier moral theories (Kantianism or utilitarianism) as it was assumed that without some objective grounding or foundation there would be no basis for their moral principles. So as to achieve an objective moral position the views or perspectives of the speaker and of the participants were removed from the discourse. But Habermas points out that removing one's point of view or the point of view of others does not lead to objectivity: rather, it is by taking into account all points of view that a valid moral position can be reached. As Habermas puts it, moral questions are questions in the first person plural involving the use of 'we' or 'us' rather than 'I' or 'you'.

The possibility of formulating universal moral statements is one that pits Habermas against many contemporary philosophers who have questioned the traditional role of philosophy as the discipline concerned with the search for universal truths. And if this contemporary view is accepted, when applied to morality it would lead to a renunciation

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of universalism in morality. For many philosophers influenced by postmodernism, the attempt to universalise morality is a projection of western values onto the rest of the world, an attempt that is outdated and Eurocentric. Habermas needs to demonstrate that this charge is unfounded, for otherwise his whole project for the renewal of critical theory collapses. His strategy for countering the anti-universal bias of contemporary western thought relies upon the work of Karl Otto Apel who argues that the person who denies the possibility of moral discourse is in actual fact engaging in it. There is no position outside morality just as there is no position outside language: we can only talk about morality by expressing a moral point of view, just as we can only talk about language by using language. Denying any of these entails a performative self-contradiction and the fact that one cannot engage in moral discourse from a position outside morality is called the ‘transcendental presupposition of argumentation’: in other words, we have to accept that it is possible to argue about moral issues that concern everybody, for the conversation on morality to continue. Habermas uses this insight to claim that all moral argumentation presupposes a universal basis; since it is not possible to talk about morality from a position outside morality, then this is the universal precondition for the production of all discourse on morality.

Given that moral judgments are the result of rational argumentation between participants in every society, Habermas rejects the claim that morality is context-bound or specific, as in fact, moral relativists claim. It is the ‘force of the better argument’ rather than the values and beliefs that social agents bring to the discussion that validate a moral norm. One would think that if moral norms are universal then they always were universal: this

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is however not the case and Habermas argues that the process of testing moral norms for their rationality is a historical achievement: it is only found in what he calls ‘post-conventional’ societies. This implies, paradoxically, that the whole notion of a universal ethics is conditioned by a historical context. Habermas is aware of the paradox but considers the acceptance of a universal ethics as a sign of the progressive evolution of that society<sup>iv</sup>.

The practice of discourse ethics involves a negotiation between members of a community. A person belongs to a community – a lifeworld – within which he/she shares values and beliefs: these shared values and beliefs enable the person to understand others and him/herself. It is through this community that person acquires social and personal identity. But given that changes take place as communities evolve, the values and norms of the community are no longer acceptable: while the community can be a source of solidarity providing support and a sense of belonging to its members, it can also be oppressive: western societies have – at various moment in their history – oppressed persons on the basis of their race, gender or social status. This is where the utility of discourse ethics as a critical tool comes in: it enables persons to challenge those norms or values that they find unacceptable. Rather than blind acceptance and conformity, discourse ethics is the medium where the values and norms of a community are either revitalised or discarded. When this critical challenge occurs, it does not take place wholesale i.e., not the entire value system is challenged since this would lead to the collapse of the community. Instead, it is specific norms and values that are challenged.



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Given that universal ethics has evolved historically as part of a post-conventional society, there is also the possibility that it would evolve in the future in other ways, ways that might be repressive. Habermas attempts to solve this paradox by describing discourse ethics as a minimalist one (following from Adorno's *Minima Moralia*) in the sense that it does not offer the solutions to moral problems. It does not pretend to stand 'above' everybody and telling what to do but points out that it is up to the people themselves to find solutions to moral problems, since they are the ones who are going to live with whatever they agree upon. What Habermas does provide is a procedure that shows how a solution can be achieved; in other words, discourse ethics is formal not substantial in that it highlights the necessary conditions that enable a fair moral decision to be reached. It does not tell us what moral norms and values should be debated but that they can be debated: '[t]o that extent discourse ethics can properly be characterized as formal, for it provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure: practical discourse.' (1990: 103)

Habermas is consistent with the claim that moral discourse belongs to the intersubjective domain so that norms can only be validated in discussion with others. The only role left for the moral philosopher is that of offering his contributions to the public domain.

The advantage of Habermas' program of discourse ethics is that by offering a formal procedure rather than the actual content of values and norms it minimizes its relation to the cultural values and norms of a particular historical moment. With this procedure it is always possible to challenge the values and norms so that they are retained if they remain relevant and replaced if they are outdated. The critical dimension of discourse ethics is that by proposing a minimalist and formal approach it becomes possible to challenge

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what taken for granted. As Edgar puts it the role of discourse ethics is ‘to expose false consensus, rather than to affirm or anticipate any true consensus. It is suspicious of any existing consensus.’ (Edgar, 2005: 164)

The need for Habermas’ program of discourse ethics arises in connection with his analysis of western culture; as society has developed, it has moved away from a centred view of the world to a decentred one. As a result, there is a distinction between the way the world is and our experience of the world, an experience which might vary for different individuals. Ethical issues arise when the experience of the world differs between participants and it is through communication that these differences in norms, facts or life experiences are expressed. Any yet, despite these differences, it is still possible to communicate and understand each other. Morality, in Habermas’ view, provides the double function of protecting both the individual and the social, a function that in turn is a sign of the degree of rationality and progress within a society.

The shift from the early writings on communicative rationality to the writings on discourse ethics is a shift of emphasis. While the moral dimension was considered as one of the four validity claims, the early writings subsumed the moral dimension under the broader category of the political where the rightness of a political system is justified as in *Legitimation Crisis* (1988). In the writings on discourse ethics this political concern remains but it is no longer a neo-Marxist analysis of ideology but is situated within the debates on the nature of justice within a liberal context.

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## Critical Remarks

The writings of Habermas have generated considerable controversy from both those sympathetic to his project and from those critical of it. With regards to the narrow claims made of speech acts, it has been pointed out that Habermas's attempt to replace a truth conditional account of language with a pragmatic one fails to explain the complexity of speech acts. Finlayson (2005) argues that in everyday life, speech acts could easily include all three domains of meaning as one<sup>iv</sup>; and while Habermas does recognize that a speech act can simultaneously communicate different aspects (truth or norms or subjectivity) with the possibility of challenging each aspect, he stresses that it is only one that is usually thematized.

Sutton (2003: 52) raises the question of whether communication can ever be interest free. Strategic interests are part of discourse and therefore the neutrality described in the process of discussion and agreement seems to be highly optimistic. In response, Habermas has formulated the notion of 'idealisations'- a terms that replaces his earlier 'ideal speech situation' which described the assumptions inherent in language-use to achieve understanding. 'Idealisations' are those elements presupposed or assumed within language-use so that communication and understanding can take place. They are not over and above language even though they are objective. When talking about facts, we assume that an objective world exists. When initiating a discussion with others, one 'minimum' assumption underlying the discussion is that participants believe that the other is

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sincerely motivated in the search for truth or morality. It might be the case that one finds out that the other is insincere, in effect, seeking to influence others through strategic actions. Whatever the case, one starts by assuming the sincerity of the other person, otherwise, no discussion will ever take place.

It is clear that Habermas' theory of communicative action is a theory of argumentation. Participants in a dialogue rationally defend their views and criticise others. By argumentation, Habermas accepts the tools used within the discourse of philosophy (for example) the soundness of an argument, the logical or reasoning processes of deduction and induction. A number of critical points are raised by Calvin O. Schrag (in Ramsey and Miller, 2003: 15-16) who argues that by reducing the concept of communication to that of argumentation Habermas is neglecting other forms of communication. Argumentation is placed at the service of philosophy with arguments deployed to justify the validity of claims in the respective the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic domains. As a result, the validity claims serve an instrumental end. Ironically, as Schrag points out, the instrumental reason that communicative reason was supposed to counteract returns under the disguise of the validity claims. Communication, as it turns out, is instrumental.

The value of Habermas's theory of communicative action is that it locates the lifeworld as the context within which everyday communication takes place: it enables both the reproduction of a society and provides it with the resources for change. So too, the theory of communicative action highlights another crucial feature in that the communicative competence of speakers and hearers create the very contexts of communication. In their

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ability to respond to various speech acts participants are establishing relations between themselves. This is why successful communication involves both understanding and accepting reasons for what is claimed. Moreover, his analysis also reveals that the bigger threat to modern society comes from the impersonal forces of the system that operates without meaningful communication. The main goal of Habermas' critical theory is that of restoring rationality to its proper and central place in human life. Since it is language that defines us as humans, and since understanding and rationality are inherent to language, it follows that humans are rational beings. By combining rationality with communication – communicative rationality – he is able to show the dynamics of social life both in terms of social order and its disruption: social integration is achieved through the mechanics of communicative action while social conflict has its roots in strategic action.

In this chapter, I have first (a) outlined the foundation of Habermas' theory of communication and developed it with (b) the concepts of discourse and validity. These are then situated (c) within the analysis of action as communicative, strategic and instrumental. The next section (d) continues with the relationship between the lifeworld and communicative processes set in opposition to systemic ones. The final section (e) is narrower in the sense that it describes Habermas' turn towards discourse ethics.

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## Conclusion

The purpose of this text has been to demonstrate the theoretical background to communication studies. These studies are frequently associated with matters related to film, TV, web design, advertising, photography and journalism. But such practical activities are organised within a theoretical framework: theory and practice are not divorced but symbiotically interrelated to the extent that theory informs practice while practice reforms theory. It is therefore fruitful to provide an account of this theoretical framework and *Communication: a philosophical approach* offers an initial overview of the various aspects entailed by the concept of communication.

The three themes that organise the material for this text are those of ‘production’, ‘reception’ and ‘action’. In dealing with the production of communication the role of context as it features in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, C.S. Peirce and Michel Foucault. Saussure inaugurated the study of signs as an internally regulated system that can be explained without reference to the world. C.S. Peirce also studied sign-systems, but his account is broader, in that it is not limited to an examination of the conventional signs of a language but seeks to explain the way everything - perception, nature, the

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universe - can be understood as signs. Foucault, in his early writings, shows the way knowledge is produced and transmitted by employing a number of concepts - episteme and discourse - to describe this process. In his later writings he shifts emphasis to the relationship between discourse and power as they percolate from within institutional sites to society in general.

In the section regarding the reception and interpretation of messages I have examined the context within which messages are received and interpreted. This section opens with an overview of Umberto Eco's theory of codes that allow for messages to be interpreted (as well as produced), keeping in mind the 'encyclopaedia' that conditions the competence of the addressee. While through the theory of codes Eco studies the interpretation of signs in general, he is also interested in applying his insights to the narrower domain of textual interpretation. After Eco, I turned to Derrida whose view on the nature of language as a disseminating 'force' has influenced his account of the interpretation of texts. This account is considered radical in that it allows language to escape from the control of the author. Gadamer highlights the importance of language in the interpretation of messages, while articulating interpretation in terms of a dialogical relationship between the interpreter and the text.

In the last four chapters I examined the relationship between the communicative process and the actions this entails. The starting point is the work of J.L. Austin who was the first to develop the idea that through the process of communicating one is doing something, one is performing an action. Traditionally the study of language had focussed on descriptive statements, while Austin introduced the notion of performative utterances as

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playing an important role in the communicative exercise. This account segregates language into two groups, constatives and performatives, a segregation that Austin later goes on to re-configure in his theory of speech acts. P. Grice and J. Searle both develop Austin's ideas. Grice's analysis of conversational interactions led to the development of the idea of conversation implicature and to a discussion of the maxims that govern conversations and to the ways in which such rules or maxims may be flouted, leading (possibly) to the breakdown of the process of communication. Searle extends the analysis of speech acts to elaborate the necessary conditions for the generation of speech acts while also providing a classification that accounts for their various types. The work of Habermas combines the insights of speech act theory with social theory. His theory of communicative action attempts to explain the way a society can evolve rationally - despite conflicts - through the process of communication.

The philosophy of communication is a growing branch within both philosophy and communication studies, and although it has been traditionally studied as part of the philosophy of language, it is rapidly achieving an identity of its own. This text hopes to make a small contribution towards making progress in that direction.

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