PRISONERS OF OUR OWN CONSCIOUSNESS?

The Autonomy of the Subject

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Abstract

This thesis explores questions which have vexed both philosophers and sociologists. These are questions which, to varying degrees remain unanswered, but which, nonetheless, are basic questions pertaining to our existence. Just what is the nature of the 'subject'? Can we even say that the 'subject' exists? What is consciousness? What role does language play in defining the subject? What is 'truth'? Is there a 'truth'? How much autonomy does the subject have? The main question, though, posed in this thesis relates to whether we are: Prisoners of our own Consciousness?

It is from a reading of the writings of certain late twentieth century French thinkers that the above questions are considered. The four writers: Jean Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu, offer their views. Whilst Jean Paul Sartre advocates atheistic existentialism, the remaining three French theorists have been labelled post-structuralists, a term given, rather than claimed.

Whilst Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu have differing views on the above questions, there are points of congruence. The elusiveness of the subject is one such point of agreement. There is also agreement amongst the four (less overtly expressed by Derrida) that freedom of the subject is a possibility. For Sartre, freedom is the very essence of humankind. The thinkers differ on the matter of 'truth'. Sartre believes in an absolute truth, Foucault deals with 'regimes of truth'. Derrida remains somewhat silent, except that he contends there is a justice, which does not exist but which is an ideal and is infinitely irreducible. Bourdieu unashamedly believes all scientists are seeking the truth, and he proposes a method which he believes will assist in the pursuit of that goal. Each of the four theorists contends, to some degree, that language and discourse are constructed by the social world and influence our perception of reality.

Regarding the notion of being 'prisoners of our own consciousness?', the theorists under scrutiny, with the exception of Sartre, believe we are seriously constrained by language and discourse. Foucault and Bourdieu are of the opinion that knowledge may free us from this predicament.

I suggest that humankind is neither free, nor non-free. Rather, that the 'subject' merely Is. I suggest that we are not prisoners because to endorse such a view, would be to accept that we are being detained from a realm which would be our 'normal' realm. Given that there is no realm other than the present, and given that constraints are consistent with the nature of humankind, we cannot be said to be prisoners. Further, it is argued that not only our consciousness defines us but also our unconsciousness. And both consciousness and unconsciousness, in turn, are defined by the social world in which we live.

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Contents

Introduction

The question pertaining to whether we are 'prisoners of our own consciousness', is explored in this thesis. In order to examine the intricacies of this question, answers to several other questions need to be found: To what degree does the subject have autonomy? What is the subject? Can I ever define myself as subject? Or, is it that at the very moment that I become conscious of the 'I', it has changed its essence into the 'subjectum', a product of consciousness? What is consciousness? If I am a prisoner of my own consciousness, does that mean consciousness is an agent, an entity in itself? Or, at the moment when I am aware of consciousness, does not consciousness become the object, a matter which is reflected upon? Can reflected-upon consciousness, in turn, become reflecting consciousness? Is there nothing beyond consciousness? What about my unconsciousness? Are we incarcerated by language and language signs? Is there any possibility for the subject to choose or alter its state of affairs? What degree of freedom does the subject have? Does the subject yearn for something outside of itself? Is that something, absolute truth? What is truth?

The ramifications of participation in cyberspace throw new light on the subject as a 'shifting subject'. Some say the subject will no longer have a 'real life' identity but will be fluid and de-centred, perhaps reduced to a mere floating sign (Chia-yi Lee, 1996). The critics of cyberspace point to the inherent inequality in gender and class in the distribution of the social resources of cyberspace. The fans of cyberspace celebrate the liberating possibilities of the deconstruction of the subject and the construction of a new heterogeneous, 'playful' subject.

Whatever position one holds on what is termed 'cyber-subjectivity', the age-old questions are still asked: What is the subject? What is consciousness? Is there a 'truth'? What is the relationship between the subject and knowledge? What degree of freedom does the subject have? Is there anything beyond language?

The area I will draw on for this debate is late twentieth century French thought. The main theorists engaged in this particular debate are: Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980), Michel Foucault (1926-1984), Jacques Derrida (b.1930) and Pierre Bourdieu (b.1930). Amongst this group of thinkers there are similarities and important differences.

The mood and social circumstances in Germany and Central Europe between the two World Wars have been suggested as the fertile ground which offered the opportunity for serious questioning in regard to the search for a more secure basis to life. In those times of severe unrest and disruption there was an eagerness to question the authority of held beliefs and institutions, a willingness to seek a better 'truth' in the subjective and psychological spheres.

The works of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) became widely influential, especially in Germany, in the period between the two World Wars. His emphasis was on the importance of the 'existing individual' and on concepts such as 'faith', 'choice' and 'despair'. Kierkegaard had a major influence on many Protestant theologians and existentialists. His work was associated with post-Nietzschean thought. However, it was from the totally secular philosophy of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) that French existentialism took its source. In Germany Martin Heidegger, Rector at Freibourg University, was the intellectual who stood out for his insights into all the philosophies of the shell-shocked Europe of the time. He seemed to appreciate people's anxieties and their need to confer meaning on life. Although the fate of humankind is to perish, meaning can be bestowed on life through 'purposes' and 'projects'. While all the individual receives from this is knowledge of existence, that is precisely 'the transcendent need and desire' of the individual (Mairet, 1948:15).

The outbreak of the Second World War also meant that French sociologists with a philosophic leaning, had been cut off from adequate funding for empirical research and were unable to reconcile any empirical research with theory. After the War the intellectual field became dominated by philosophy and, more

particularly, by existentialism. This seemed to be the beginning of a break with traditional European sociology.

Twenty years later, in the 1960's, specific events occurred (*les evenements*) which further positioned young French revolutionaries and French thinkers. This period represents 'a watershed moment in the history of French thought' (Starr, 1995: 4). In 1960 Jean-Paul Sartre published, *Critique of Dialectic Reason*, which was essentially an attempt to develop Marxism through existentialism, defining the latter as 'a subordinate ideology' (Sartre, 1963:viii). In 1963 Sartre published, *The Problem of Method*, in which he criticizes Marxists of the day for trying to maintain a 'dialectic without men' (Sartre, 1963: xiii). Sartre is reacting against the notion of any external law being imposed on the subject. It is only through the subject's materiality that the subject relates to the world, but this relationship could not occur without 'free consciousness' which allows the subject to take a point of view. Is it coincidental that the following works were published in the same year: Althusser's *For Marx* in September 1965, Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* in December 1965, Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* in April 1966, Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits* in November 1966 and Julia Kristeva's *Word, Dialogue and Novel* in 1966?

Two years later, 1965, saw the bombing of North Vietnam. This catalyzed the Left into a revolutionary mood and into a common goal of looking towards liberation struggles in the Third World for new models of revolutionism. 1965 also saw the dissolution of the student organization of the French communist party. That group disbanded into two further groups: the *Trotskyist jeunesse communiste revolutionnaire* and the *Maoist Union des jeunes marxistes-leninistes de France*.

Evidence that the idea of revolution was alive and well could be seen on May 3 1968 from the gathering of militants in the courtyard of the Sorbonne. Their presence was as a protest against 'fascist terror and police repression' (Starr, 1995:2). There was a not too subtle implication of violence in the Gaullist order. Over the next two to three weeks there were several demonstrations, protests and sit-ins. On 10-11 May there were barricades in the *Quartier Latin.* On May 13

there was a General Strike. Events gathered momentum. Trade unionists joined with factory workers and lycees. There was a triumphant procession through the Left Bank and slowly daily life came to a halt. On May 29 General de Gaulle took refuge at Baden-Baden French military outpost, a refuge from which he saw current events as a communist inspired paralysis of the country. On the following day some sense of normality had returned and on the evening of May 30, after de Gaulle had promised a referendum on his presidency, half a million people marched up the Champs Elysees in his support. These were the 'May Events' of 1968.

The 'May Events' brought together Christian leftists, anarchists, Maoists, Trotskyists, situationists, Marxist-Leninists and any number of groups calling for the overthrow of bureaucratic structures, the overthrow of the capitalist order. Some groups were calling for sexual liberation, self-management and overcoming the disalienation of the subject. Environmental groups were calling for more effective use of urban space and protection from over-use of technology. '"*Difference*" was the password and the right to difference the fundamental stake in political struggles ... the celebration of difference stood athwart the political...' (Starr, 1995:7).

'L*'apres-Mai'* is the expression often used to explain the works of French thinkers after *les evenements* of May 1968. What characterized this thought was, as already mentioned, the celebration of difference. Along with difference as a focal point there was also a commonality in play upon discontinuity and continuity, a recognition of the importance of fragments and fissures, and an elaboration of the *explication de texte*. Language is of central concern to 'post-structuralist' writers such as Foucault, Bourdieu and Derrida who show that discourse '...obscures and mystifies the constructed character of subjects and truths' (Allen and Young, 1989:5).

There are arguments about the role or influence of history on philosophy. Some movements pride themselves for being anti-historical. However, it is generally accepted that there are perhaps 'accidents' of history which may not be significant national events, but developments occurring in one field or other of human

endeavour which attract the minds and following of others. A particular line, or particular lines, of philosophic thought become the norm, often replacing known 'language'. Bernstein (1992:27) contends that: 'After a while, because of some other historical accidents – like the appearance of a new genius or just plain boredom or sterility – another cluster of metaphors, distinctions and problems usurps the place of what is now a dying tradition'. To accept that history has a critical function in philosophical thought is not to accept that historians are capable of autonomous thought, nor is it to deny that any thinking has its own set of conventions and metaphors. Accepting the critical function of history in philosophical thought is admitting to the sharing of an intent '...to expose prejudgments, prejudices, and illusions' (Bernstein, 1992:27).

'Existential phenomenology' and 'post-structuralism' are the two late twentieth century French philosophical currents of thought which are used in this thesis as the backdrop to the discussion of conceptions of the subject. Writings of Jean Paul Sartre on existential phenomenology are employed to expound the existentialists' position. The works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu are those used to put forward the 'post-structuralist' view.

Jean Paul Sartre was the main proponent of existential phenomenology in France from the mid to the late twentieth century. He was strongly influenced by the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Sartre himself described existentialism as a 'revolt against oversytematization' in philosophy (1948:5). Existentialism is often described as anti-historical. If, as described above, the purpose of a philosophy is to expose illusions and prejudgments and to find new ways of looking at the world, the reference to history (or past patterns of thought, for example, 'revolt against oversystematization') is, then, both essential and inevitable.

In addition to the anti-historical label, it has been suggested that there is an 'anti-philosophical tendency' in existential phenomenology. This understanding arises from the existentialist's emphasis on the subject's generation of meanings, as opposed to priority being given to 'reason'.

In response to the criticisms from the Marxists that the 'solidarity of mankind' is ignored in existentialism where the subject is seen in isolation, and the criticisms from Christian groups who maintain that ignoring eternal values ('since we ignore the commandments of God' (Sartre, 1948:23) is denying reality and failing to take cognizance of the seriousness of human affairs, Sartre responds:

> In any case we can begin by saying that existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and human subjectivity. (Sartre, 1948:24)

Perhaps the two main tenets of existential phenomenology which should be outlined here, however, are that: existence precedes essence, that is, the subject first of all exists and it is not until later that the subject defines itself and, secondly, that the human subject is free. No social or natural laws can determine the subject; the subject 'realizes' itself. Jean Paul Sartre's view of human freedom has been described as 'the most radical view of human freedom' since the Epicureans (Barnes, 1963:vii).

'Post-structuralism', as mentioned above, is the label most often used to describe the works of *'l'apres-Mai'* French thinkers (Foucault, Derrida, Bourdieu). The term, 'post-structuralism', refers to the current of philosophy which develops the importance placed on language by the structuralists but which sees the use of language as oversimplified by them (McLennan, 1989:170). For the post-structuralists, meaning not only resides in the utterance (which can no longer be seen as an entity) but the origin of meaning can no longer be pin-pointed. Language is of central concern to the post-structuralists but in the way that post-structuralists encourage de-construction of discourse to at least the point of recognition that language (especially Western metaphysics) 'obscures and mystifies the constructed character of subjects and truths' (Allen and Young, 1989:5). The post-structuralists' emphasis on deconstruction of texts is often termed 'literary criticism'.

Although Foucault did not accept any labelling in terms of belonging to one particular school of thought, he is generally categorized by commentators as

belonging to the French philosophical current, 'post-structuralism'. Like Sartre, Michel Foucault held a position of 'moral authority' in France. Like Sartre, he involved himself with many generous public causes, but while he was compared to Sartre, *'il nuovo Sartre'* by the Italian press *(L'Europeo,* 18 February 1977), I would suggest that the differences are far greater than J.G. Merquior suggests in his book, *Foucault* (1985). The differences are in the degree of autonomy afforded to the subject and, subsequently, the degree of freedom which the subject can exercize.

In regard to the concept of discourse, Foucault's emphasis on the context rather than the text includes a far broader context than those of his contemporaries (sometimes described as 'literary theorists'). For the structuralists, 'death of the subject' was a slogan, for the post-structuralists language, or more specifically the deconstruction of language, is a central concern. Derrida points to his continual reference to *l'autre'* in his discussions of language: 'It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the "other" of language' (quoted in Brannigan et al., 1996:154).

It is important here to take a brief look at the 'labelling' used in this thesis. I have already used terms that would be unacceptable to some of the theorists engaged in this debate. Foucault would not have accepted the label, 'post-structuralist', or any other label for that matter. Bourdieu suggests that 'sociology' rather than 'philosophy' offers a 'far truer vision of the world' (quoted in Murray, 1992:136). Bourdieu scorns 'philosophy' for engaging in 'prophetic and metaphysical posturing' (1992:136). On the other hand, he describes sociology as an 'esoteric science'.

Bernstein in *The New Constellation* is careful to use 'scare quotes' around such labels as 'modernity', 'post-modernism' and 'post-structuralism'. He warns that the labels are:

> ...slippery, vague and ambiguous. They have wildly different meanings with different cultural disciplines and even within the same discipline. There is no consensus or agreement about the multiple meanings of these treacherous terms. (1992:11)

For some the very labelling process assumes that the 'school' has a 'truth' compared to which all other bodies of belief are less 'true'. Vincent Descombes, in *Modern French Philosophy* (1979:1), states that contemporary philosophy cannot be aligned to a particular philosophical period or school: '...(French philosophy) is coincident with the sum of the discourses elaborated in France and considered by the public today to be philosophical'.

Finally, a comment from Jacques Derrida: '*Il y a peut-etre des pensee plus pensantes que cette pensee qu'on appelle philosophie.*' *There are perhaps thoughts more thoughtful than thinking that goes by the name of philosophy.* (quoted in Didier Cahen, *Diagraphe,* 1987:11-27).

Notwithstanding the above comments, I choose to employ 'a common language', providing extra explanations and definitions where required. Suffice to say, I heed the warnings of Bernstein, above, in regard to the lack of consensus in the use of terms.

The first four chapters in this thesis examine how each of the four selected late twentieth century French thinkers, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu, deals with the following specific questions: What is the subject? What is consciousness? The autonomy of the subject? The role of language? The matter of truth? Chapter One deals with selected readings of Jean Paul Sartre, Chapter Two focuses on the writings of Jacques Derrida, Chapter Three concentrates on selected works of Michel Foucault, and Chapter Four is concerned with the writings of Pierre Bourdieu. At the conclusion of each Chapter is a *Discussion* section. This section, firstly, discusses any apparent conflicts or unresolved issues found in the writings of the particular thinker and, then, concludes with a comment on how the author would answer the question relating to whether we are prisoners of our own consciousness.

In Chapter Five I outline the similarities and differences, along with the perceived ambiguities and conflicts, found in the writings of the four twentieth century French thinkers. Further, I elaborate on problems which remain unanswered and

which need future debate. Finally, I draw together the conclusions from the previous chapters, specifically in regard to each of the major thinkers on the question, 'prisoners of our own consciousness?'

After examining French thought of the late twentieth century do we agree with Sartre that the subject is 'condemned to be free', or with Bourdieu, who espouses that the subject has the possibility of freedom when it becomes conscious of the laws governing the situation? Derrida offers a range of 'futures for deconstruction'. Is that where the freedom of the subject lies, or is it in the work of *diakrisis* (discrimination) which Foucault tells us is 'a guarantee of freedom'? That is, in the discrimination of visible representations, not to look for hidden meanings but to 'accept in the relation to the self only that which can depend on the subject's free and rational choice' (Foucault, 1984:64).

1 Jean Paul Sartre

1.1 Introduction

Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) had a major influence on French intellectual life for a period of twenty years. He was also an immensely popular figure and it is reported that 50,000 people followed his funeral cortège. Although he was not the first existentialist, nor was his form of existentialism the only type of existentialism, he is credited with putting existentialism on the philosophical map.

'Being' comes before knowledge, 'existence comes before essence' (Sartre, 1948:26), this is the basic tenet of existentialism. Both Christian existentialism and atheistic existentialism share this position. Being is subjective and cannot be made a topic of objective inquiry. Sartre espoused atheistic existentialism declaring that '...if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence. That being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality' (1948:28). On atheistic existentialism Sartre comments:

> Existentialism is not atheist in the sense that it would exhaust itself in demonstrations of the non-existence of God. It declares, rather, that even if God existed that would make no difference from its point of view. Not that we believe God does exist, but we think that the real problem is not that of His existence; what man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself, not even a valid proof of the existence of God. (Sartre, 1948:56)

Sartre criticizes the social sciences for formulating categories of 'hidden realities' such as collective consciousness, social forces, human nature and the like. His position is that such categories 'betray the concrete experience of human life since such notions lend the illusion of objectivity to existence which is essentially a false objectivity' (Hayim,1996:136). These so-called hidden realities have the tendency to objectify the subject and view the subject from a God-like position. Rather, it is Sartre's contention that social struggles are best understood from the position of 'concrete' human behaviour in actual historical circumstances.

The above view will be developed throughout this Chapter. And a fundamental question asked will be: How do Sartre's preferred categories, 'a human universality of condition' and 'human kingdom', really differ from the concept of 'human nature' which he says betrays 'the concrete experience of human life'? (Hayim,1996:136).

The term, 'regression – progression', is often used to describe the method which Sartre is advocating. That is, what is perceived as objectivity should be reconceived by the subject. What results from this method is that so-called objective phenomena are seen to be objectifications of choices of the subject from which the subject is now removed and comes to view as objectivity.

Sartre is recognized as having a radical view on human freedom. However, just how closely is human freedom linked to human happiness? For Sartre, there is no universe except for the human universe and the individual subject is 'condemned to be free' within that universe. This is a total freedom since there is no legislator other than the individual subject. According to Sartre, is it therefore impossible to be a prisoner of our own consciousness?

1.2 What is the 'subject'?

Sartre describes the subject as 'no other than a series of undertakings ... the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings' (Sartre, 1948:42). While he believes that there is no apparent 'universal essence', he does confer on the subject a 'human universality of condition' (1948:46) in order to be able to describe the subject as having a human 'nature'.

For Sartre, the subject is a product of the reflexivity of consciousness. The subject cannot be described as the essential core of the individual, for it is fleeting, riven and has no foundation:

> The 'I' who was writing or busy ... has in fact disappeared by the time I try to examine it. The 'I' is now engaged in a new

> activity; the attempt to capture its essence (itself), and all it will be able to find therefore is its own (frustrated) attempt. I can never capture myself as subject, only as object. (Howells, 1997:29)

In Sartre's own words: 'The Ego only ever appears when one is not looking for it ... By *nature* the Ego is fleeting' (1957:70, emphasis added). The subject exists prior to essence and defines itself later:

> Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. And this is what people call its [existentialism's] 'subjectivity'. (Sartre, 1948:28)

While the subject cannot be described as the central foundation or core of the individual, we must begin from the subjective. The individual subject *is* free but cannot go beyond human subjectivity.

Sartre's radical understanding of human freedom will be explored later, but when first expounded it received criticism from several quarters for giving little heed to both heredity and the influences of the social environment on the subject. In *Being and Nothingness* which was published in 1943, subjects created their own world which was unencumbered by 'nothingness' (*neant* – non-thing). Subjects had the capacity to negate and rebel against anything they chose. Personal responsibility and creativity were the values of the individual and must be called upon for action, rather than relying on moral and political authority. In 1963, the publication of Sartre's *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* outlined a very careful critique of the subject as it relates to the physical universe, to the group, to history and to political/social existence. There is a shift in Sartre's thinking on the subject by the time he writes this *Critique*. He is now more aligned to Marxist determinism. He bemoans the condition whereby individuals are so influenced by social structures that 'serialization' results, that is, a loss of self-identity.

This is not to say that the *Critique* found favour amongst all of Sartre's peers. On the *Critique* Foucault commented: 'The *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* is a nineteenth century man's magnificent and pathetic attempt to think the twentieth

century. In that sense, Sartre is the last Hegelian, and I would even say the last Marxist' (quoted in Macey, 1993:171). Be that as it may, at the time, Sartre firmly believed that existentialism was a subordinate ideology to Marxism, attempting to develop the future of Marxism. He termed existentialism a 'parasitical system living on the margin of knowledge, which at first it opposed but into which today it seeks to be integrated' (Sartre,1963: viii). Later Sartre was to again change his view criticizing Marxism for maintaining a 'dialectic without men' (Sartre,1963:xiii).

At this stage some questions pertaining to Sartre's conceptions of the subject are already marked for further discussion. Sartre holds that notions of collective structures such as those found in the social sciences 'betray the concrete experience of human life', leading to an illusion of objectivity. Could not the criticism of giving phenomena the illusion of objectivity which he lays at the door of the social sciences not also be laid at the door of existentialism? That is, is there any essential difference between the objectification of social science concepts such as class, collective consciousness, capitalism, social structure and the inevitable, inescapable objectification of phenomena such as human condition, consciousness and human freedom?

Sartre despairs of the alleged 'hidden realities' in the social sciences. These are the collective structures referred to above. What Sartre proposes is that the subject be understood from the position of concrete human behaviour in actual historical circumstances. What possibility is there of this occurring? Sartre does not see a 'universal essence' in the subject which would allow him to be able to define the subject as having a 'human nature'. However, he is comfortable with the notion that the subject has a 'human universality of condition'. Is there an essential difference in meaning between the two concepts?

1.3 Consciousness

Being And Nothingness (1956) is assessed by many as Sartre's most important philosophical work. It is in this work that Sartre outlines his theory relating to consciousness. Postwar Europe was a ripe climate to engage in an exposition of the important differences between objective things and human consciousness. Sartre described consciousness as a non-thing (*neant*) which has no causal involvements. This, Sartre proposed, is the very foundation of human freedom.

Detmer (1986:25) outlines Sartre's consciousness as:

> Consciousness is what it is not, because consciousness is characterised by its negative activities. It is only through such 'nihilating' behaviours as imagining, doubting, abstracting, questioning, denying, that non-being emerges in the world.

And Sartre himself asserts that since consciousness is:

> ...the being by which Nothingness comes to the world, it must be its own Nothingness ... It must arise in the world as a No. (Sartre, 1956:47)

He defines three types of consciousness: firstly, he defines 'being-for-itself' (conscious human experience). This is a consciousness 'which entertains itself as a possibility rather than as a terminal fact' (Palmer, 1995:147). Secondly, Sartre refers to 'unreflected consciousness'. This is a consciousness which has as its object something other than itself, for example, thoughts about a house or supermarket shopping. Unreflected consciousness is what Sartre terms our every day mode of practical consciousness. Thirdly, Sartre refers to 'reflected consciousness'. Reflected consciousness is thoughts about thoughts, thinking about thinking. All reflecting consciousness, then, is unreflected and a new act ('an act of the third degree') is required in order for it to be reflected upon. Consciousness (reflecting) which reflects upon reflected consciousness mistakenly, according to Sartre, comes to see itself as 'the reified ego (object or reflected consciousness)', but by the very act of reflection it has ceased to be that. It has now become by the same act a reflecting subject (1987:30).

Sartre has defined consciousness as 'a transcendental field without a subject' (1956:291). Consciousness is always somewhere else; it is '*diasporique*', always escaping identity. In self-reflection the reflecting consciousness and the reflected consciousness are one and the same.

Some clarification of Sartre's positioning of the ego, the subject and consciousness may be of benefit here. For Sartre, the ego is a product of consciousness; it is not in consciousness. Similarly, the ego is a product of the subject. It is the self I make, not the self which makes me who I am. Although grammar indicates that the 'me' is an object, and when I talk about 'me' it is as if I have the viewpoint of another, the ego is both the 'I' and the 'me'.

The 'I' is a transcendent 'I'. That is, the 'I' is 'usually transcended towards an external activity or focus: I am running, writing, talking' (Howells, 1997:29). It is the subject of the conversation, the 'talking' or the 'writing' which is the focus, not the 'I' who is the subject. The subject cannot be identified with consciousness, for the subject, too, is a product of the reflexivity of consciousness.

We may be conscious of something but not explicitly so. For instance, we may not be conscious of a clock until it stops ticking. There must have been prior consciousness of the ticking without necessarily having been 'reflectively or thetically conscious' of it (Sartre, 1987:xvi). Unconsciousness, then, as with consciousness, is not a reified entity. It merely has the capacity to recall past experiences of which we have not been explicitly aware. Every 'unreflected consciousness, being non-thetic conscious of itself bears a non-thetic memory that one can consult' (1987:xvi).

While Sartre, at least at one stage preferred to see existentialism as a contributing ideology to Marxism, there would appear to be some important differences in the attributes the two positions give to consciousness. In the same way that products of their own activities could become alienating forces for the very people who produced them, it was Marx's and Engels' contention in *The German Ideology* (1846) that consciousness could also have the same fate; consciousness being, after all, but a product of individuals' activity which could come to exert an alien

force and be mistakenly perceived as a material thing. For Marx and Engels, consciousness is integrally bound up with social practice and expectations: '...life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life' (Marx and Engels, 1965:47).

The difference here seems to have come about as a result of different conceptions of consciousness. Marx and Engels appear to define consciousness as an object or product. They do not afford consciousness the *diasporique* state which Sartre gives it, that is, a consciousness which cannot be situated, for when it reflects it ceases to be reflected consciousness and fails to recognize itself as a reflecting subject which it becomes in such an action.

Marx and Engels do not see consciousness as *neant* (non-thing or nothingness). For these two thinkers, consciousness is a product of individuals' activity closely bound up with social practice and expectations. It is somewhat difficult to gain Sartre's meaning on unreflected consciousness but this appears to be the area of consciousness which most clearly highlights the differences in thought between Marxism and existentialism. Remembering Sartre's overall definition of consciousness as having no causal involvement, his definition of unreflected consciousness as everyday consciousness of the subject thinking about things other than itself, points to an area where he has overlooked (or at the least appears to have very much understated) the influences of socialization in defining our world.

The question remains as to the *nature* of the causal involvements in the act of defining, but for Sartre to say that consciousness has no causal involvement, on the face of it, seems somewhat naïve. We recall unreflected consciousness has as its object, according to Sartre, something other than itself, for example, thoughts about a bird or a car. The question is: am I not employing a consciousness with causal involvement when I am thinking of these objects? Am I not, in the process of thinking about a bird or a car, somehow at the same time designating those objects with socially influenced definitions? Am I not, in the process of defining those objects, categorizing them into fields influenced by social expectations? While the relationship between the thinking and the production of the bird or the

car may not be a direct relationship, that is, the thinking may not cause the bird or the car to materialize, surely the thinking about the bird or the car, nonetheless, has some kind of causal involvement in terms of definition and expectation?

Notwithstanding the criticism, or at the best the obscurity of Sartre's definition of consciousness as having no causal involvement, his clarity on the requirement for an 'act of the third degree' being necessary to reflect upon unreflected consciousness, stresses the potential for continuity of reflection. In Sartre's words:

> It must be remembered that all writers who have described the Cognito have dealt with it as a reflective operation, that is to say, as an operation of the second degree. Such a Cognito is performed by the consciousness directed upon consciousness, a consciousness which takes consciousness on as an object ... We are in the presence of two consciousnesses (a reflecting and a reflected consciousness) one of which is conscious of the other ... Now my reflecting consciousness does not take itself for an object when I effect the Cognito. What it affirms concerns the reflected consciousness ... All reflecting consciousness is, indeed, in itself unreflected, and *a new act of the third degree* is necessary in order to posit it. (Sartre, 1957:44-45; emphasis added)

The potential for continuity of reflection, and thus the potential for ever new insights into consciousness, is perhaps the most liberating aspect of Sartre's exposition on consciousness. That is not to say, the notion of the subject having total freedom as a result of this consciousness which he describes as *neant* or nothingness, is without difficulty. However, that is the topic of the next section of this Chapter.

1.4 The autonomy of the subject

It is in the area of freedom of the subject that Sartre is recognized as having a radical view. When *Being and Nothingness* was published in 1943 Sartre was

regarded as having the most radical notion of human freedom since the Epicureans.

Sartre was not interested in, and rejected any attempts to answer the question: Why is there something, rather than nothing? Anderson claims:

> A primary reason for this rejection was that he [Sartre] saw that absolute human freedom and autonomy were incompatible with a fundamental ontological dependency on a Creator. The later Sartre, however, since he insists that the human being's essential dependency on other persons and on their love is not inimical to its freedom but, in fact, absolutely necessary for its flourishing, has, therefore less reason to be suspicious of attempts to account for reality of radically contingent beings by means of a loving Creator-person. (Anderson, 1993:166)

Sartre's contention was that because existence precedes essence, the subject has responsibility for what it does and becomes: 'Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his shoulders' (Sartre, 1948:29). So, while Sartre is saying there is total freedom on the part of the subject, he is also making it quite clear that the subject cannot go beyond human subjectivity. In addition to this, Sartre is stating that the free commitments which the subject makes, also, in some way have an influence on the commitments that humans make as a whole. The example Sartre gives is the choice of monogamy: 'If I decide to marry and have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice of monogamy ... In fashioning myself I fashion man' (1948:30).

For Sartre, the subject is free; the subject *is* freedom:

> We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does'. (1948:34)

In Chapter Six we will look more closely at Sartre's description of freedom given here. For the moment, though, Sartre has alerted us to some puzzling activities regarding 'condemnation' and being 'thrown into this world'. Does this not appear to denote a being outside of humanity who is taking these actions? Sartre denies anything outside of human subjectivity. There is no universe beyond the human universe. Also, Sartre is saying the subject is condemned to be free 'because [the subject] did not create itself'. This raises an important question: If the subject did not create itself, who created the subject?

Sartre himself asserts that at the heart and centre of existentialism is the 'absolute character of the free commitment' (1948:47). The subject, first of all, exists, encounters itself and, later through free choices, defines and fashions itself. There is no presence of determinism. The subject, according to Sartre, through pursuing transcendent means is always projecting itself outside of itself and it is only in its self-surpassing that it can 'grasp objects', thus, the subject 'is the heart and centre of its transcendence' (1948:55). Sartre criticized Marxism in regard to its rendition of human freedom being largely determined by social factors or external law. For Sartre, the subject is the only legislator. He believed that the problem with modern Marxism was that the latter tried to maintain a 'dialectic without man' and this is what hindered Marxism from further development (Sartre, 1963:xiii).

The Sartrean subject's way of 'being' is by relating to the world. The only way that that relationship is possible is through:

> ...free consciousness which allows man to assume a point of view of the world. But man would equally be unable to have any connection with matter if he did not himself possess materiality. (Barnes, 1963:xiv)

This connection with matter is what Sartre terms 'historical materialism'. The individual is not determined by social laws. There is always the possibility for altered states and change. The future remains open for fashioning.

Anderson (1993:73) draws our attention to what he perceives to be inconsistencies in Sartre's exposition on the autonomy of the subject. In *Existentialism and*

Humanism (1948), Sartre asserts that the subject cannot find any truth about itself save through the 'mediation of another'. Anderson contends that Sartre also believed the subject to be 'always lucidly aware, pre-reflectively, of myself and my freedom, and it is bad faith to pretend otherwise' (Anderson, 1993:73). On the other hand, Detmer (1986:39) contends that 'Sartre has always recognized the existence of constraints upon, and limitations to freedom'. There are obvious questions raised here, especially in regard to *the degree* of autonomy which the subject has.

For Sartre, while every human life is unique and the individual determines the quality of its life, every action of the individual has some kind of influence on humanity as a whole. In other words, for the existentialist, freedom is always situated. The subject is always in a relationship with others, social groups and historical events.

The two areas of human freedom where Sartre is seen as being a proponent of a 'most radical view of human freedom since the Epicureans' (Barnes, 1963:xiv) concern perhaps, firstly, the aspect of a break with the traditional rendering of the duality of will and the emotions and, secondly, the belief that every action is an intentional action. Sartre rejects the traditional rendering of human freedom as a battle of the will over the emotions since such a view assumes a division between the reflecting consciousness and the reflected consciousness. It is a view which is inadmissable for Sartre, given that what has occurred for those who hold this idea, is the mistaken belief that reflecting consciousness is a reified ego or reflected consciousness. The fact that in the act of reflection it becomes a reflecting subject has been lost. The point that Sartre is making here is that there is no division between the will and the emotions. Reflecting consciousness is not a pure entity. It does not have a separate will upon which to act upon its emotions.

The second radical aspect of Sartre's conception of human freedom bears on every action being intentional. This idea is linked to the above in that passions and emotions are described as actions and, according to Sartre, are intentional. An example which Sartre gives is a soldier at war. The soldier fears battle. The reason he fears battle is because he wants (intends) to live. The emotion of fear is

a fear of *something* and thus the emotion only has meaning in the wider context of the soldier's life, that is, what the soldier wills (Catalano, 1974:197).

Human freedom is being exercised even when the resulting actions are being motivated by passions such as fear or anger. If a subject motivated by fear, a sense of rejection or protection of self withdraws into itself, it is still exercising a choice of human freedom. All human action is intentional and human freedom is present in every action:

> Thus since freedom is identical with my existence, it is the foundation of ends which I shall attempt to attain either by the will or by passionate efforts. Therefore it cannot be limited to voluntary acts ... In relation to freedom there is no privileged psychic phenomenon. All my 'modes of being' manifest freedom equally since they are all ways of being my own nothingness ... The will is not a privileged manifestation of freedom. (Sartre, 1943: 444-452)

Sartre's belief that the subject is 'condemned to be free' has been variously interpreted. Some commentators believe Sartre saw human freedom as a 'burden', 'onerous' and anxiety provoking (Fay,1987:201). Others contend that Sartre's concept of freedom is a 'depreciated concept'. For even though Sartre gives great importance to the topic, if we *are* freedom, how can we discuss it as an attribute? (Smith, 1964:41).

It is clear that Sartre did not present freedom as a panacea for happiness. He recognizes that the majority of individuals do not authenticate their existence. What he means is that very little thought is given to death and individuals are prone to reassure themselves through the worship of idols, be it science, humanity or some 'objective divinity'. He describes individuals who try to escape freedom as having 'bad faith', as seeking a comfortable illusion by deeming others to be responsible for their lot.

My own discontent with Sartre's notion of human freedom has not so much to do with whether human freedom is associated with happiness or whether it is a burden, but with Sartre's description of the subject being 'thrown into this world',

being 'condemned to be free', due to not creating itself. If there is no existence outside human subjectivity, how can the subject be 'condemned'? Is there a similarity in concept here between 'condemned to be free' and 'prisoners of our own consciousness'? Surely, both notions imply that there is an outside agent who is involved in taking an action of condemnation and imprisoning. If there is no outside agent beyond human subjectivity, why are the pejorative terms used? If the action is an action of self-condemnation, does this not indicate that the subject yearns for a 'truth' beyond itself? Is there such a truth?

1.5 The role of language

Sartre speaks of a dependency relationship between intellectual productions such as knowledge and language, and the social conditions of the particular time in which they were produced (McBride, 1991:103). He makes explicit his belief that language is formulated to promote and further the ideas of society (Sartre, 1963). In this regard, Sartre's concepts are very similar to Marxism which he claimed was the dominant philosophy of our epoch.

In addition to viewing language as an intellectual product, Sartre asserts that language, along with traditions and mores, in fact, camouflage our view on reality. The being-in-itself rarely confronts itself directly, but only through the medium of institutions such as language which have the effect of obscuring reality (McBride, 1991:48). This is to say that, 'Materialism which leads us to believe that material conditions determine belief, causes us to forget that belief – the belief in the primacy of materialism – is also the basis of materialism' (Montefiore, 1983:2). In Sartre's words:

> In the reciprocity of conditionings, it can be seen that the surrounding produces the material content and that the surrounding organism gives *unity* to the forces conditioning it... (Sartre,1991:364; emphasis in original)

Language, on Sartre's reading, signals generations of labour carried out on it (Sartre, 1991:364).

Put another way, Sartre describes the 'word' as 'perpetually serializing and institutional' (1991:426). It is 'the others in the series' which give the word its meaning which in the process 'escapes from me'. The word is 'institutional' as a result of it tending to create reciprocity. Sartre describes the word as acting in the manner of a third party. That is, communication is not effected through the word, but as reference to the word.

Sartre's concept of 'series' is that they have an historical life. For example, he contends that linguistics:

> ...acts serially upon the totality in interiority. But it is itself, in its life, provoked to its serial action by the action of groups or series. So the ensemble of the system, manifesting itself as an action on the series, results in a serial response which deforms it (even if it is *confirming*: there is always a deviation). (Sartre, 1991:432; emphasis in original)

Concepts, for Sartre, necessarily expressed by language, always introduce '...the time of their object into the thought of that object' (Hendley, 1991:116). Sartre made a distinction between the terms, 'concept' and 'notion':

> A concept is a way of defining things from the outside, and it is atemporal. A notion, as I see it, is a way of defining things from the inside, and it includes not only the time of the object about which we have a notion, but also its own time of knowledge. In other words, it is a thought which carries time within itself. (Sartre, 1977:113)

I find Sartre's differentiation of 'notion' from 'concept' unconvincing. Whilst I accept that 'notion' consists of an historical reference in addition to a present time reference, I contend that the same exists for any 'concept' we may have. That is, a concept obviously has referral to past ideas, times and traditions, but cannot escape present time 'contamination' as well. And I want to suggest that a concept cannot be defined solely 'from the outside'.

In *Search for a Method*, Sartre insisted that 'Our historical task ... is to bring closer the moment when History will have only one meaning...' (1963:52). For Sartre, this task was possible and should also be the motivation for others. Unfortunately, he did not outline how it would be possible for history to have a single meaning, nor why it is so important.

1.6 The matter of 'truth'

In response to criticisms that existentialism is a philosophy of quietism, Sartre replies that this cannot be so because existentialism defines the subject by the *action* of the subject. He also suggests that this is the very point of difference between the Christian and atheist versions of existentialism. That is, the emphasis which atheistic existentialism gives to the subjectivity of the individual:

> ...we seek to base our findings on the truth, and not upon a collection of fine theories, full of hope but lacking real foundations. And at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself ... Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple ... It consists of one's immediate *sense* of one's self. (Sartre, 1948:44)

For the subject, to know that it exists, is to know the truth. Sartre, together with Heidegger and Kierkegaard before him, believed that the subject's central and most basic anxiety is to feel and know that it exists. The subject has a 'transcendent need and desire' to know this. Hope for the subject lies in the realization of this truth.

However, Hendley (1991:21) reminds us that for Sartre:

> There can be ... no knowledge of a situation independent of the historical praxis that is productively engaged to it. With such an

> intimate link to praxis, how could knowledge ever hope to aspire to a truth that would transcend its historical specificity?

Hendley seems to be saying that Sartre is suggesting the possibility of transcendence over 'historical specificity'. This is not the case. Sartre makes it quite clear in *Search for a Method* (1963) that the 'experimenter' and the 'experimental system' are inextricably linked:

> The only theory of knowledge which can be valid today is the one which is founded on that truth of microphysics: the experimenter is part of the experimental system ... the *revelation* of a situation is effected in and through the praxis which changes it. (Sartre, 1963:33; emphasis in original)

It is Sartre's contention that atheistic existentialism finds it 'extremely embarrassing' that there is no God. Atheistic existentialism recognizes that it is attractive to believe in a 'perfect consciousness', an infinite and a priori 'good'. But because God does not exist, no longer can the subject yearn for an 'intelligible heaven'.

This theory of existentialism, according to Sartre, is the only theory which affords dignity to the individual, for it is the only theory which does not treat the subject as an object. Sartre accuses all kinds of materialism of doing just that, relegating the status of subject to that of object. In place of the 'material world' Sartre claims the aim of existentialism is to establish the 'human kingdom' (1948:45).

Sartre is not claiming that subjectivity is solely an individual subjectivity: 'The subjectivity which we postulate as the standard of truth is no narrowly individual subjectivism ... It is not only one's own self that one discovers in the cognito, but those of others too' (1948:45). Every 'truth' (the subject sensing itself) and every action imply both subjectivity and the environment.

Even though Sartre speaks of an 'absolute truth' which he defines as one's sense of oneself, he does claim that that truth is a truth which emerges, which 'becomes' (Sartre, 1963:x). Secondly, Sartre contends that truth must become totalization: 'I have taken it for granted that such a totalization is perpetually in progress as

History and as historical Truth' (1963:x). For Sartre, then, history changes through a continuous, repeating process of a dialectical relationship between contradictions and synthesis. A synthesis is the temporary resolution of contradictions until new contradictions arise and are temporarily resolved by a new synthesis.

So the relationship between 'historical totalization and totalizing Truth' is a relationship in perpetual motion. It is the relationship between being (*etre*) and knowing (*savoir*), and is called reason (*raison*). It is important to acknowledge, therefore, that reason, or perceived reality, is about the connection between apparent objectivity *and* the method of knowing to which we have referred above in this Chapter.

Sartre's understanding of 'truth' is most clear in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1991, Volume 2): '...historians cannot look at things *from the standpoint of the inhuman* in order to know and comprehend historical reality' (1991:302, emphasis in original). Sartre proposes that there are two means by which we attempt to 'de-situate' ourselves with respect to the object. One way is to turn ourselves into 'Nature' and see ourselves as producing history and, the second way, is to 'reject the situation of reciprocity'. This means to view the research and the research topic as being separate from any historical influences. Sartre asserts that both of these methods of de-situation result in 'positing objectivity'. By this he means that in both cases it is the 'absolute object disclosing itself as an *absolute reality*' (Sartre, 1991:302; emphasis in original). If the researcher is de-situated from the object, the object loses '...part of its qualification, its *human* meaning, but wins (illusorily, of course) the absolute autonomy of its being' (1991:302, emphasis in original):

> The dialectic [can] not be the object of a critical investigation outside the practical milieu of which it is simultaneously the action (inasmuch as it gives itself its own laws), the knowledge (as dialectical control of action by itself) and the cognitive law (inasmuch as knowledge of the dialectic requires a dialectical temporalization of knowledge). (Sartre, 1991:203)

Arlette Elkaim-Sartre in the Preface to *Critique of Dialectical Reason* posits that it was Sartre's intention, by the end of the second volume of the above, to find an answer to the question: Does history have a meaning? The second volume was drafted in 1958, but was never finished (Elkaim-Sartre, 1991:ix).

1.7 Discussion

In this section we will look at the apparent contradictions and unanswered questions in the work of Jean Paul Sartre, and we will also ask how Sartre would respond to the question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness?

Obviously, this Chapter does not pretend to faithfully portray the complete works of Jean Paul Sartre. In some instances where I have identified apparent anomalies in his work, it may well be that particular concepts under investigation have been more fully explained elsewhere. Further, some of the apparent contradictions in Sartre's thought may merely be the development of ideas from one period to another. Such a change in Sartre's thought is surely both expected and a healthy indication of further development. However, what are set out below for further discussion are specific claims which appear to be contradictory or which lack clarification, and which are particularly pertinent to the question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness?

In his argument regarding existentialism versus the social sciences it does seem as though Sartre has fallen into a fallacy similar to the one to which he says the social sciences have succumbed. That is, Sartre holds that notions of collective structures such as found in the social sciences (collective consciousness, social forces, class structure) 'betray the concrete experience of human life', leading to an illusion of objectivity (Hayim, 1996:136). Could not the criticism of giving phenomena the illusion of objectivity which he lays at the door of social sciences not also be laid at the door of existentialism? The notion that the phenomena may 'belong' to different sciences is, I would suggest, irrelevant. In other words, the first grouping may belong to the social sciences, but does not the second grouping

(human condition, consciousness, human freedom) 'belong' to psychology or existentialism? It is 'objectification' which is Sartre's main concern here. But is not objectification inescapable, even when using the regression–progression model which Sartre promulgates? Indeed, had not Sartre already alerted us to the inescapable illusion of objectivity when the reflecting consciousness reflects upon reflected consciousness? Sartre took pains to explain how in the very act of reflection, consciousness becomes a reflecting subject (1987:xi).

Sartre despairs of the alleged 'hidden realities' in the social sciences. These are the collective structures referred to above. What Sartre proposes is that the subject be understood from the position of concrete human behaviour in actual historical circumstances. What possibility is there of this occurring? In my view, the possibility seems remote. Firstly, in practical terms it appears impossible, but even if it were possible, there would be an inability to generalize as each event must be examined in its own context. While that might be ideal, in order to converse about human subjects' needs we must generalize and categorize, but not necessarily universalize. Sartre would criticize this action as objectification, but I see no escape.

On the question of the definition of the subject, Sartre does not see a 'universal essence' in the subject which would allow him to define the subject as having a 'human nature'. However, he is comfortable with the notion that the subject has a 'human universality of condition' (1948:46). Is there an essential difference in meaning between the two concepts? It is difficult to distinguish the difference in meaning here, at least when using common sense language. Further, does not Sartre contradict himself by saying: 'By *nature* the Ego is fleeting'? (1957:70, emphasis added).

It is in Sartre's definition of consciousness that I find most problematic. On the one hand, in saying that the subject's free choice not only commits the subject but makes a commitment for the whole of humanity, Sartre does seem to be giving recognition to the dialectical relationship between the subject and social function. But he does not elaborate on this relationship, on how the relationship works, and just what is the influence of one on the other. In fact, in earlier writings, Sartre

(1956, 1957 and 1973) is somewhat silent regarding any reciprocal relationship at all. That is, the individual commits the whole of humanity by its action, but what influence does the 'whole of humanity' have on the subject?

To be fair, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1991), Sartre does refer to the dialectical relationship between 'objective realities' and the method of knowing. However, he does not ever appear to abandon his claim that consciousness has no causal involvement, that it is nothingness (*neant*). If he argues that there is a dialectical relationship between the perceived object and the method of knowing, surely there is some sort of causal relationship here? This lack of clarity overflows into Sartre's discussion on the autonomy of the subject and his claims about truth.

Concerning Sartre's notion of free commitments fashioning not only the subject but also humanity as a whole, two points arise: one pertaining to the nature of autonomy, and the other, again, pertaining to Sartre's notion of consciousness having no causal influence. Taking Sartre's contention that the subject is free within human subjectivity, is he not underestimating the influences on that subject (for I am not sure that he claims that the sum total of all that exists is human subjectivity)? In underestimating the influences on the subject, is Sartre not overestimating the degree of autonomy that the subject has? Again, we need to return to our difficulty with Sartre's notion that consciousness has no causal involvements. In believing that in making a commitment of choice, that choice not only fashions the subject but also fashions humanity, is that not also saying that there is some relationship which looks very much like 'causal involvement' in the consciousness of the individual and, in turn, in humanity as a whole? As we have seen, Sartre was adamant that no causal involvement existed.

On the autonomy of the subject, Sartre's notions of the subject being 'condemned to be free', of not creating itself, of being 'thrown into the world', are somewhat puzzling. There is a strong suggestion that someone else must be doing the condemning, the creating and the throwing. And yet, this is not the message Sartre is intending to give, that there is someone or anything outside human subjectivity. The subject, he has told us, is merely a sum of relations of

undertakings. Why has Sartre used terminology which gives the impression of an 'outsider' taking action on the subject? Why is the terminology used in a pejorative sense – 'condemned', 'thrown'? These terms give rise to a suspicion that Sartre is referring to an absolute 'truth' from which the subject is being detained. However, while Sartre does argue that there is an absolute truth, as we have seen, he defines that truth as continuously emerging and being nothing other than 'one's immediate *sense* of oneself' (1948:44; emphasis in original).

So what is Sartre's response to our question: 'Prisoners of our own Consciousness?' It is clear that Sartre's intended message is: the subject is free, the subject has no legislator other than itself. There is no determinism. The subject is responsible for all actions it takes. It is clear that the intended message is also: consciousness escapes identity. The moment the reflecting consciousness (the subject) reflects on reflected consciousness (the object), it becomes unreflected consciousness and a new action. Taking our own question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness?, Sartre, on the one hand, would have to disagree with the prospect because his argument is that consciousness has no causal involvements. Therefore, it is impossible for our consciousness to imprison us in any way. All consciousness involves choice. But it is the contradictory nature of Sartre's comments which gets us into trouble here. We recall that Sartre claims the subject is 'condemned to be free' from the moment the subject is 'thrown into this world' (1948:34). The 'agent' doing the condemning remains a mystery.

We have also seen that while Sartre argued that the subject is free and is its own legislator, he also, at least by 1960 in *Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, commented on social structures having such an influence that the subject could suffer from loss of self-identity. What we may be facing here is a Sartrean argument for the ideal, that is, total freedom of the subject, but he does seem to recognize, albeit less vociferously and somewhat against his will, that social forces have a major influence.

I suggest there is a similarity between the two concepts – 'prisoners of our own consciousness' and 'condemned to be free'. Sartre's intended messages relating to the subjects' freedom are somewhat weakened by the haunting realization of

the strength and influence of social forces. Perhaps the agent responsible for the imprisoning and the condemning is none other than 'social forces'?

2 Michel Foucault

2.1 Introduction

Just like Sartre, Foucault was immensely popular and commanded a position of moral authority. Similarly, Foucault was involved in many popular issues of the day: mental health, imprisonment, crime and punishment, free speech and gay rights. Like Sartre, Foucault held many interviews and was a guest speaker in many forums. In 1969, together, Sartre and Foucault were speakers at a protest meeting at the Mutualite where 3000 people had gathered. The occasion was a reunion in memory of the 'May Events' of 1968. However, the similarities between these two influential French thinkers of the late twentieth century virtually end there.

It is reported that Foucault resented Sartre (Macey, 1994:429). This resentment apparently escalated when negative reviews were written about Foucault's *Les Mots et Les Choses* in *Les Temps Modernes*, a newspaper edited by Sartre. Initially, Foucault refused to go to Sartre's funeral, making the comment, 'Why should I? I don't own him anything' (quoted in Macey, 1994:429). He eventually attended in recognition of Sartre's standing as an internationally acclaimed 'prototypical' French intellectual of the post-war period. Foucault certainly put himself in opposition to Sartre. When asked by an interviewer to respond to Sartre's criticism of *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault replied: 'Sartre is a man who has too great a body of work of literary, philosophical and political work – to complete, to have had the time to read my book. He hasn't read it. What he says about it therefore cannot seem very pertinent to me' (quoted in Macey, 1994:193).

Foucault speaks of a division in post World War 11 French thought. He perceives this division to be between those who were interested in a 'philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject, and a philosophy of knowledge [*savoir*], of rationality and of the concept' (quoted in Gutting, 1989:9). Foucault places

Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and the existentialists in the first category. In the second category he places Cavailles, Bachelard and Canguilhem. A return to interest in the 'subject' was catalyzed by the existentialists. It is Foucault's contention that from 1945 to the end of the 1950's the philosophy of the subject dominated French thought. However, Foucault claims that by the end of the 1950's existential phenomenology was holding less sway due to what he saw as problems with language and unconsciousness. Nonetheless, through various linkages with Marxism and structuralism, the subject was still a dominant theme in French thought until the end of the 1960's.

Of the group which did not follow existentialism, which includes Canguilhem, Foucault describes their interest as being in the history of science: 'Many of his [Canguilhem's] students were neither Marxists, nor Freudians, nor structuralists. And here I am speaking of myself' (1983:198).

Michel Foucault died in Paris in 1984. *Le Monde* printed an obituary prepared by an eminent French historian, Paul Veyne, which described Foucault's work as 'the most important event in thought of our century' (*l'evenement de pensee le plus important de notre siecle*) (quoted in Merquior, 1991:10). Whether or not one is in agreement with this accolade, following on from Sartre, Foucault certainly held a central position in French thought.

Merquior describes Foucault as a '...man who tried hard to place post-structuralism on an ethico-political ground, at a far remove from the textual navel-gazing of "deconstruction'' ' (1991:14). Foucault's notions of power and discourse were far broader than those of writers to date. He emphasized the unseen, underlying both the conscious and unconscious interrelationships and intrarelationships of these concepts.

2.2 What is the 'subject'?

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Michel Foucault's main intent was to both define an 'archaeology of knowledge', and encourage its use in an approach to the history of thought. The main thrust of this particular approach was to change the position of the subject from a position of being a defining subject in the history of thought to a position of being defined:

> As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event ... were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (Foucault,1973:387)

It has been suggested that there is a close link between Foucault's writings and the beliefs of the structuralists (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:xii; Gutting, 1989:3). In fact, Foucault himself said: '...both archaeology and structuralism operate within a great transformation of the knowledge of the human science that has put into question ... the status of the subject, the privileged place of man' (quoted in Brouchier, 1969:25). However, Foucault was adamant that he was not a structuralist. He saw structuralists as continuing to give primacy to the subject in the making of history. While he agreed with their claim that the subject does not have an 'originative' position in the study of language and unconsciousness, he still accused the structuralists of allowing for an 'absolute subject' who makes history and has authorship of it, a subject with 'sovereignty' (Brouchier, 1969:24).

For Foucault, the idea of the subject is historically situated. And no matter how hard the subject tries to recover its origin, its origin lies elsewhere. What Foucault means is that the subject's true origin ('the point of application of the conditions that in fact produced [the subject]') will be where the subject is not present

(Gutting, 1989:205). So the origin cannot be said to be *the subject's* origin for that origin is but a series of conditions which make up history and which is forever retreating. History, for Foucault, is a non-subject centred history since the subject cannot make up its own 'archive'.

Some commentators have interpreted Foucault's claims that the subject does not have authorship of its history, and that the origin of the subject is where the subject does not exist, as claims for the 'death of man' (Gutting, 1989:207). However, I would argue that it is not the death of the subject which Foucault is concerned about, but rather the status of the subject and the authority and sovereignty with which it had been clothed. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault claimed that there are 'empty place[s] that may be filled by different individuals', in which one can be a subject (quoted in Wood, 1997:194). He is interested in the way in which the subject participates in all its dealings and relationships and how these relationships are defined:

> What is important to me is to show that there is not on the one hand inert discourses, which are already more than half dead, and on the other hand, an all-powerful subject which manipulates them, overturns them, renews them; but that discoursing subjects form a part of the discursive field – they have their place within it … Discourse is not a place into which the subjectivity irrupts; it is a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions. (Foucault, 1991:58)

Later in this Chapter we will look more closely at Foucault's interest in language as an object of knowledge, but for the time being it is important to note that Foucault does recognize a role for the subject in interaction.

Foucault is aware of critics asking how there can be a history of thought when there can be no history of thinkers (Gutting, 1989:229). He attempts to explain this by referring to 'subjective unities' and the various components which contribute to the intellectual activity of human subjects. These are similar to Marx's 'superstructure' concept which refers to ideology but which Foucault

refers to as the dominant discourse. Foucault points out that subjective unities are the very products which have traditionally been the objects of standard history. Furthermore, Foucault defines these subjective unities as having various hierarchical sub-layers such as periods and traditions (where the authors fit in relation to the subject in time and traditions), and disciplines (physical sciences, human sciences, mathematics and so forth) which have their own disciplinary hierarchy. It is for this reason that Foucault proposes a different view of the subject. Traditional history has taken documents as being a history of subjects, as demonstrating *intent* of subjects. Foucault takes those very statements and makes *them* objects of study. He is not interested in giving life to the subjects but in how and why those representations have been made of the subjects.

So, Foucault's interest lies with the constituted subject and the numerous relationships bound up in that constitution. His is a very broad perspective, seeing the constituting components as far wider than the system of language. In *Technologies of the Self* (1988), Foucault defined four technologies: production, sign systems, power and the self. His own interest lay especially with power and the self (Barrett, 1991:149). It was the interacting features which held Foucault's interest. His interest was always the broad context.

Commentators (for example, Merquior,1991) claim that Foucault's perspective on the subject changed over many years. The change is often described as 'a return to the subject'. When he wrote *The Care of the Self – The History of Sexuality, Volume 3,* (1984) and showed such interest in the self, commentators saw this as a repudiation of his earlier position. We will further examine this question at the conclusion of this Chapter.

2.3 Consciousness

Foucault rejects the Cartesian notion of consciousness which affords the 'sovereign' subject a pure consciousness. He claims that any modern view of

consciousness must see consciousness as inextricably tied with unconsciousness ('unthought') which cannot be 'entirely incorporated into the clarity of the cognito's thought' (1970:324). The unconscious is just as much the subject's reality as is the conscious. This duality of consciousness/unconsciousness, or cognito/unthought, is what allows the subject to be an experiencing subject and an apparent object of its experiences. Foucault claims that this latter aspect of consciousness, that is, the subject sometimes being the object of its experiences, is always misunderstood.

For Foucault, it will always be an unanswered question as to how thought can reside in unconsciousness or 'unthought'. Foucault sees problems in accepting the Cartesian inference which Sartre accepted: 'I think, therefore I am'. That is, the notion of the subject expressing a reflective consciousness in 'I think' and, then, linking that to a subject's reality of also being an object, '...therefore, I am'. For while I can think, or speak, or perform an activity and have a sense of life in myself, I can equally say I am, or I am not all this (Foucault, 1970:325).

So for Foucault, having a sense of myself, does not necessarily lead to an 'affirmation of being'; it should rather lead to the subject asking many questions about 'being': 'What must I be, I who think and who am my thought, in order to be what I do not think, in order for my thought to be what I am not?' (1970:325). While Foucault does not mention Sartre by name in dealing with the problem of consciousness, he does appear to be specifically referring to the position which Sartre holds on consciousness, that is, the position where the subject has a sense of its being, and therefore 'is'. According to Sartre, this sense of being is the 'absolute truth' and the absolute truth of consciousness. There is no basis for a pure consciousness, says Foucault. So-called transcendental consciousness cannot be separated from unconsciousness which is merely its 'reverse side' (1970:325).

Foucault contends that the world only becomes an 'historical reality' through consciousness, that, apart from the view of the subject, history is merely a succession of events. In fact, events only become 'historical' through the process

of the subject applying consciousness to them. And that consciousness is itself but a product of a far greater context of human thought. Further, when the subject interprets its history, it interprets using the product of human consciousness. Foucault is more interested in 'the law of *existence* of statements' than he is in events (emphasis added). His interest is with the correlation of the law of existence of the statements with other 'simultaneous events, discursive or otherwise' (Foucault, 1991:59). He states that he tries to answer the questions relating to the law of existence of statements without referring to the consciousness ('...obscure or explicit') of subjects. His mission is to formulate an archaeology of thought for, as we have already noted, he claims that it is impossible for the subject to define its own archive.

Later in this Chapter we will discuss the possibilities of focusing attention on the underlying laws of the existence of statements without referring to the subject's consciousness. Suffice to say, at this stage, that this notion seems problematic.

2.4 The autonomy of the subject

Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989), attempted to demonstrate two things: one was to show how the domains of knowledge result in constraints of power for the human subject and, secondly, to disclose how the human subject, by being provided with the specific intellectual resources, could overcome these constraints (Gutting, 1989:2).

On Foucault's reading, it is the human sciences such as psychiatry and psychology, rather than the natural sciences, which are the primary modern source of constraints on the subject. By this he means that the human sciences understand the subject as both a subject and an object. The subject is a 'knowing' subject in a world of objects, but is also an object of the world known through the subject. This, Foucault views, as the traditional construal of the subject's history,

but a construal which is passing. It appears that Foucault is also contending that if the subject understands the history of thought more clearly, this understanding will, then, enable the subject to break through the constraints on human freedom.

In addition to perceiving the human sciences as inflicting constraints on human freedom, Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1991), cites social and institutional influences as contributing to that diminution of freedom. Here the *social* sciences (for example, criminology, sociology) are regarded as an additional culprit, because Foucault regards the knowledge contained in the social sciences as being 'inextricably interwoven with techniques of social control' (Gutting, 1989:6). Foucault does not affirm that the knowledge contained in the social science arena is applied as power; to the contrary, he is asserting that the very constitution of social science interests as knowledge is a mechanism of power:

> ...power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault, 1983:93)

In Power/*Knowledge* (1980), Foucault explains why in his previous works he had hardly ever mentioned the term, 'power'. His explanation is that the sociopolitical climate of the time must have prevented him from doing so. Foucault is declaring that he was so affected by the subculture of post-war Paris up until 1968 that he had difficulty in conceptualizing exactly what power was: '...this was an incapacity linked undoubtedly with the political situation we found ourselves in' (Foucault, 1980:115).

Marxism had located power in agencies and states and, especially, in economic considerations. Foucault felt that this analysis excluded other conceptions of power. In the course of developing his own definitions, Foucault came to appreciate that power lay in micro-operations, in conscious and unconscious technologies and strategies within all relationships. So while Marxism saw power as class dominance motivated by economic interests, Foucault's notion of power is that it is *exercised*, not *possessed.* Therefore, the exercise of this power is not

necessarily situated in any class or group (Barrett, 1991:134). Moreover, Foucault does not see power as being a necessarily evil force:

> 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. (Foucault,1977:194)

Some commentators have criticized Foucault for 'seeing power everywhere' and for reducing everything to a power struggle (Eagleton, 1991:7). Foucault was adamant that this is not so. His interest lies in how power operates and what phenomena occur to change modes of delivery and objects of focus: '...the strategies, networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was' (quoted in Kritzman, 1988:103-104). Therefore, Foucault's focus is on power *relations*, not on an analysis of what power is, nor in treating power as an absolute entity:

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike ... In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *viv-a-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. (Foucault, quoted in Gordon, 1981:98)

And again, power:

> ...is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, because it is the ever-present environment in which we are subjects and agents. (Foucault, 1980:93)

So whilst it is incorrect to suggest that Foucault sees power as an absolute identity, it is fair to say that his emphasis is on the myriad of relationships which

give rise to particular discourses, actions and desires taking form. His interest lies in how this comes to be.

Foucault's intent was to provide alternative ways of viewing history by changing the focus from a history of events to a history of thought. There are some disturbing factors here which will be developed later. Suffice to say, that Foucault saw both the natural sciences, and it seems his own discipline, the archaeology of thought, as being in a privileged position and escaping the constraints of other domains of knowledge which arise from strategies and networks intertwined with the social world. How can there be such a privileged position which affords this particular knowledge independence and autonomy?

As stated, some commentators (Merquior, 1985; Barrett, 1991) view Foucault's later works as being a 'return to the subject' and the autonomy of the subject. In *The Care of the Self – The History of Sexuality,* Foucault speaks of 'conversion to self' (*'epistrophe eis heauton'*) (1984:64). This conversion is about 'returning to the self', escaping all the constraints of the social world, and finally rejoining oneself '...like a harbour sheltered from the tempests or a citadel protected by its ramparts' (1984:64). This does seem to be far removed from his 'single most notorious statement' at the conclusion of *The Order of Things* (1970) which referred to the 'death of man'. In the achievement of the return to the self, Foucault refers to Seneca for a description of the end result: 'The soul stands on unassailable grounds, if it has abandoned external things; it is independent in its own fortress; and every weapon that is hurled falls short of the mark' (Seneca, c.1988, 82:5). How is it that one achieves this position of autonomy and independence?

According to Foucault, the process whereby one arrives at the position of autonomy, or the conversion to the self, is by way of 'discrimination' (*'diakrisis'*). This is the process whereby:

> When a representation enters the mind, the work of discrimination will consist in applying to it the famous

> Stoic canon that marks the division between that which does not depend on us and that which does. (Foucault, 1984:64)

The key to conversion to the self, and therefore to human freedom, according to Foucault, is to 'keep constant watch over one's representations'. Foucault hastens to add that the task is not to look for hidden or underlying meanings, nor to decipher the origins of ideas, but to 'assess the relationship' of the thing or the idea to oneself. The purpose of this is to be in a position to 'accept in the relation to the self only that which can depend on the subject's free and rational choice'. The primary task 'one should set oneself is to be sought within oneself, in the relation of oneself to oneself' (Foucault, 1984:64). In the light of careful examination, it is perhaps less difficult to understand Foucault's meaning regarding *what* he is saying here than it is to understand *how* Foucault proposes this happens. And an even more salient question is: How is this possible?

Foucault encourages the self to be discriminate in the face of 'representations' or ideas and accept ('in relation to the self only') those which depend on the 'free and rational' choice of the self. While some lack of clarity is associated with Foucault's term, 'in relation to the self only', my concern lies more with the 'free and rational' choice of the subject. Foucault insists that the self, through examination and monitoring, 'makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing – central to the formation of the ethical subject' (1984:68). On Foucault's view, any elaboration of what one is and what one does is always, in the last analysis, defined 'by the rule of the individual' over itself. This concept is somewhat difficult to marry with the notion that the subject is always constituted.

2.5 The role of language

In *The Order of Things* (1970) Foucault discusses two previous methods of modern thought which have had some control over language. One method dealt

with the purification of a language by means of idealized formalizations of language while the other method centred on critical interpretation. Foucault describes the first method (idealized formalizations) as belonging to the positivists. He includes in this group the work of Boole and others who attempted to devise a method independent of language, a method of 'symbolic logic'. The second group, on the other hand, were not intent on purifying language or seeking an independent means of expression, but were concerned with the critical interpretation of language, namely, the implicit meanings within it. He sees this method as being characterized by the works of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche. The aim of this group was not to reveal fundamental truths within language, but rather to expose beliefs by which '...we are governed and paralyzed' by language (Foucault, quoted in Gutting, 1989:196). These are the new approaches to language associated with modern thought.

It is Foucault's belief that there is a link between the above two methods of approaching language - idealized formulations and critical interpretation. Both approaches recognize language as an historical reality, and both approaches see language as an 'object of knowledge'.

Another approach to language which is evident in modern thought is what Foucault describes as an interest in 'literature'. Mallarme was a strong proponent of this approach. The term, 'literature', here, represents a particular form of writing which purports to be in an autonomous realm:

> ...a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming – in opposition to all other forms of discourse its own precipitous existence ... the cautious deposition of a word upon the whiteness of a piece of paper. (Foucault, 1970:300)

This 'literature' is autonomous and speaks only of itself. Questions such as, 'Who is speaking?', would elicit the reply, suggests Foucault, 'It is the words themselves'.

While Foucault understands language as just another object of knowledge, he believes language can never really be solely an object for it is always with the subject trying to express it. In order to avoid a subjectivist reading of this, we should note that he also holds that the historical nature of language has a stultifying effect on the subject:

> ...precisely because of its historical nature, our use of language burdens us with meanings and presuppositions that confuse and distort what we are trying to say. We express ourselves in words of which [we] are not the masters. (Foucault, 1970:297)

In an interview with Raymond Bellour, Foucault further clarifies his understanding of the role of language: 'I am not so much interested in the formal possibilities offered by a system like a language. Personally I am rather obsessed by the existence of discourses, by the fact that words have happened, that these events have ... left traces behind them' (quoted in Bellour, 1971:201). Foucault uses the word, 'discourse', in place of the terms, ideology, dominant class and social forces. He is also far less interested in the text than the *con*text. Foucault explains:

> The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another? (Foucault, 1972:27)

Foucault is referring to the unseen, often unconscious rules, which are accepted by speakers and writers. These 'rules' have also a habit of not only telling the speaker what to say, but over time they also have the potential to tell people how to think and feel.

Foucault freely admits that he uses the term, 'discourse', in three different ways:

> ...instead of making the rather hazy meaning of the word 'discourse' more distinct, I think that I have multiplied its

> meanings: sometimes using it to mean the general domain of all statements [*enonces*], sometimes as an individualisable group of statements [*enonces*], and sometimes as an ordered practice which takes account of a certain number of statements [*enonces*]. (Foucault, 1972:16)

Frank rejects the idea that Foucault may have been '...using the term "discourse" with a view to criticizing it in a way which would lead to subsequent clarification; as a term from which we need to escape' (Frank, 1992:113). And Foucault's comments, above, would give credibility to that view. Some commentators like Barrett (1991:39-143) argue that Foucault is not really interested in all speech acts (such as everyday language), rather, he is mainly interested in those statements which are deemed to have some autonomy and are perceived to contain a truth.

Foucault's analysis of language begins with his interpretation of the ordering of signs and language in the Classical Age. Language, according to Foucault, was a system of signs which represented thought. He asks what it was about linguistic representations which had the edge over any other sorts of representations of thought and afforded it the defining role it had. Foucault suggests the reason, or perceived benefit of linguistic representation over other representations, was that language 'analyzes representations according to a necessarily successive order' (1970:82). He suggests that linguistic representation, or language, is in some way foreign to thought in that thoughts themselves form a unity within which there is no temporal division. Language, on the other hand, demands successive order and temporal division. Foucault claims that the 'general grammar' of the Classical Age was the 'study of verbal order in its relation to the simultaneity that it is its task to represent' (1970:83). It is difficult to arrive at a clear meaning concerning Foucault's claim here. Is he not saying that language was required (and also thought) to give a faithful account of the representations (thought) it expressed? Foucault adds that 'general grammar' was of importance to Classical philosophy because the discourse that it studied, ('natural language'), represented 'unthought-out' thought.

Foucault states that there is a necessary condition for any linguistic representation of thought. That necessary condition is the connection of two 'mental representations': *attribution* and *articulation.* He describes the connection as occurring through '...the verb's affirmation of the co-existence (in thought) of the two mental representations' (1966:81). This affirmation, on Foucault's reading, is the central role of the verb of which the essence is always some form of *to be.* He further describes the resultant *being* asserted by the verb as not being a 'reality' but a 'connection of co-existence in thought' (*attribution*). The connection itself tells us nothing of the representations; it is the words themselves which do that. *Articulation*, Foucault defines as the process whereby words express different meanings. Historically, it is through the two mental representations of attribution and articulation that a grammar provides the structure of a language which has traditionally been seen to be an autonomous structure.

There are two other features of language which Foucault considers as a part of a language's representative function. Those two features are *designation* and *derivation.* His simple example of *designation* is when someone hears a cry; they may link that cry to the same representations (thoughts) that have been associated with their own cry. Thus, the cry is a linguistic sign; a language of action develops. However, as Gutting elaborates, Foucault's notion is that language is not a true language until that language 'detaches itself from the world' and is not 'merely a biological response' (Gutting, 1989:159). Basic linguistic signs are obviously linked to that which they designate. There is a strong causal tie between the two.

Derivation is a much more complex feature of language. Over time it is sometimes difficult to see any association with initial roots and the constant changes, although possibly subtle, are nonetheless complicated and with far-reaching effects. There occurs change in the form of words and in the meanings of the words.

Foucault's own critique of language emphasizes the context, rather than the text. He describes a 'discursive field' in which there are systems of dispersion which create 'discursive regularities'. It is in the study of the regularities, that is, in the common descriptions of, for example, medicine or grammar, that he locates the discursive formation (often referred to as discourses). He argues that giving rise to the discursive formations are discursive unities. These unities result in the regularities of which he speaks.

So, for Foucault, discursive formations are not only signs of a concept or statement, but they also 'systematically form the objects of which they speak'. The rules of discursive formation are not interested in the object ('referent') but in '[constituting] the conditions of their historical appearance' (Foucault, 1972:47-48).

We saw earlier on in this Chapter that Foucault does not believe that discourse is a place where the subject comes to the fore. It is a place where transformations occur between 'differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions' (quoted in Barrett, 1991:58). It is the dependencies between these transformations which hold Foucault's attention. Foucault describes three major dependencies:

> (a) intradiscursive dependencies (between the object, operations and concepts of a single formation);
> (b) interdiscursive dependencies (between different discursive formations, such as, natural history, economics, grammar and the theory of representation);
> (c) Extradiscursive dependencies (between discursive transformations and transformations outside of discourse: for example, the correlation studied between medical discourse and a whole play of economic, political and social changes). (as outlined in Barrett, 1991:58)

Foucault stated: 'What is important to me above all is to define the play of dependencies between the subject-positions and subject-functions' (1970:13). He made it clear that he wanted to 'suspend' the idea of there being one cause (economic) in determining social changes. Foucault could not accept the unilinear determinism of Marxism. His theory of the discursive field attempts to show that

determinism is polymorphous and his concerns lay well outside economic considerations and class dominance.

What is more, Foucault regarded his theory of the discursive field as liberating human freedom. He saw a 'tight embrace' between words and things which can 'be loosened by attending to the processes that govern the construction of objects in discourse' (Barrett, 1991:130). This was the intent of *The Birth of the Clinic* (c.1973), *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1979), *Discipline and Punish* (1991) and *The History of Sexuality* (1984). His interests relate to how criminality became criminality and how it came to be treated as a medical disease; and, additionally, how sexual deviance could become a psychiatric interest. In an interview Foucault was asked why he had not created an archaeology of sexual fantasies rather than a History of Sexuality. He replied:

> I try to make an archaeology of discourse about sexuality which is really the relationship between what we do, what we are obliged to do, what we are allowed to do, what we are forbidden to do in the field of sexuality and what we are allowed, forbidden, or obliged to say about our sexual behaviour. That's the point. It's not a problem of fantasy; it's a problem of verbalization. (quoted in Kritzman, 1988:8)

It is clear that questions around language ensure language to be a central theme in modern thought. Foucault suggests 'the whole curiosity of our thought' resides in language: 'What is language [and] how can we find a way around it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plentitude?' (1970:306). Further, he proposes that we are unable to answer such questions and that we will never be in a position to understand why it is that we are 'condemned to ask them' (1970:306).

2.6 The matter of 'truth'

According to Foucault, there are 'three great exclusions which forge discourse',

and these have been the focus of attention throughout his work. The three exclusions have been a prominent factor in all discourse in post medieval Western society. The three exclusions are: prohibitions on the who, what and when of speaking, the opposition between reason and madness, and, the 'will to know' or the 'will to truth' (Foucault, 1981:52-55). More precisely, Foucault suggests prohibitions concerning who may speak, what is allowed to be said and when that is appropriate, are particularly evident around the subject areas of sexuality and politics. Foucault describes the second area of exclusion as a rejection, or division, rather than a prohibition. The division is made quite obvious in the saying: *'Man* may become mad, but *thought,* as the exercise of a sovereign subject duty bound to observe the true, cannot be insane' (Sheridan, 1970:23; emphasis in original).

The third principle of exclusion is the most salient in the current discussion, namely, the 'will to know' or the 'will to truth'. Foucault purports this will to truth was historically constituted and tracks its development from pre-Platonic Greek thought. According to Foucault, a shift occurred between seeing the truth as an integral property of those in power (that is, their discourse), to the position of seeing truth 'as a property of the referent discourse' (Foucault, 1981:52-55). Foucault states that it was from these beginnings that the whole of the Western ethos pertaining to the 'will to truth' developed, was reinforced and regenerated, whether in science or literature, publishing or education. Foucault gives the case of legal discourse as a case in point. He states that legal discourse no longer holds justice as its justification but has moved towards the 'guaranteed truth' of sociological or medical knowledge: '...it is as if even the work of law could no longer be authorized in our society except by a discourse of truth' (1981:55). We will discuss this more fully later.

Foucault, like his former teacher, Canguilheim, talks about the disciplines and the role they have in managing 'truth'. Both Foucault and Canguilheim distinguish between the terms, 'truth', and, 'in the true'. Foucault gives a good example of what he means by this. He describes Mendel as speaking the truth but not being

'within the true' of the current biological discourse of the time (Barrett, 1991:143). All disciplines have their own rules and operate within them. Foucault sees science as institutionalized power and a discipline where the 'will to truth' is currently prominent and has historically been so. This is not to say that Foucault negates the existence of any absolute scientific truth, but rather, that his interest lies in the processes whereby that truth is secured:

> It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is 'in the true' only by obeying the rules of a discursive 'policing' which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses. (Foucault, 1981:60)

For Foucault contends, 'there are different truths and different ways of saying [the truth]' (1980:66).

Foucault again makes the point about where his interest lies in his answer to an interviewer who posed the question: 'Doesn't science produce "truths" to which we submit?':

> Why in fact are we attached to the truth? Why the truth rather than lies? Why the truth rather than myth? Why the truth rather than illusion? And I think that instead of trying to find out what truth, as opposed to what error is, it might be interesting to take up the problem posed by Nietzsche: how is it that in our societies, 'the truth' has been given this value, thus placing us absolutely under its thrall? (Foucault quoted in Kritzman, 1988:107)

For Foucault, each society has its:

> ...regimes of truth ... types of discourse which it accepts as true ... mechanisms ... which enable one to distinguish true and false statements ... means by which each is sanctioned ... procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; [and] ... those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault,1980:131)

The emphatic point which Foucault is making here is that there are many truths. These truths come to be accepted as such through numerous interplays and relationships. No one truth has permanence.

Foucault's work and his favouring the notion, 'regimes of truth', in place of 'Truth', established an important major re-examination of epistemology. Ideology does not escape this re-examination. Foucault stated that he had major problems with the idea of ideology, for it always stands in opposition to some other set of beliefs which have a truth claim. As we have observed, Foucault and other post-structuralists, have developed the idea of discourse as a substitute for ideology. For Foucault, the interest lay in 'power' and how power is integral to 'the politics of truth':

> If I wanted to pose and drape myself in a slightly fictional style, I would say that this has always been my problem: the effects of power and the production of 'truth'. I have always felt uncomfortable with this ideological notion which has been used in recent years. It has been used to explain errors or illusions, or to analyze presentations – in short every thing that impedes the formation of *true* discourse. It has been used to show the relation between what goes on in people's heads and their place in the conditions of production. In sum, the economics of untruth. My problem is the politics of truth. (quoted in Kritzman, 1988:118; emphasis added)

And yet, while Foucault is sometimes criticized for seeing power everywhere, he replies that he does not see power as purely negative. For power has a creative component, and while it is always dangerous, it can be the catalyst for positive 'truth' and knowledge.

Barry Smart (quoted in Hoy, 1986:160) suggests that the focus of Foucault's work has been on complex processes of power formations and how these have resulted in truth regimes or in 'the strategic constitution of forms of hegemony'. To this end, Foucault has succeeded in moving the debate away from ideology to discourse and an awareness of what constitutes discourse. Whether this move results in a less truth-laden knowledge base (and whether that was really Foucault's intention), is discussed in more detail below.

2.7 Discussion

While Foucault objects to Sartre's notion of 'absolute truth of consciousness', namely, the simple truth of 'I think, therefore, I am', and suggests that a sense of being, or life, can result in both the subject saying 'I am' and 'I am not...', I would suggest that his argument is not very persuasive in this regard. Even after his exhortation for the subject to continually ask questions: 'What must I be, I who think and who am my thought, in order to be what I do not think, in order for my thought to be what I am not?' (Foucault, 1970:325), one is left with a sense that Sartre's and Foucault's definitions of consciousness are, in fact, very similar. For Sartre in saying the subject has a sense of itself and is able, therefore, to say 'I am', is not, it seems to me, denying the subject the possibility of also saying 'I am not...'.

Both Sartre and Foucault speak of thought residing 'elsewhere', and of there being no division between the experience of the reflecting subject and the subject who is an 'apparent' object of that reflection. Both 'subjects' are inextricably tied together. Foucault (1970:325) argues that 'the [modern] cognito does not lead to an affirmation of being' but it should lead the subject to ask questions surrounding the nature of being. Is this really very much different from Sartre's position, remembering that Sartre's definition of the subject was '...no other than a series of undertakings ... the set of relations that constitute these undertakings'? (Sartre, 1948:34).

We saw in the section above that Foucault attempted to ward off such questions as: 'How can there be a history of thought if there cannot be a history of thinkers?', by introducing the notion of 'subjective unities' which are products of intellectual activity. Apparently, by introducing this notion that the subject's history is integrally bound up with laws of existence and discourse, one should arrive at the conclusion that it is impossible to give a history of thinkers. I fail to see, even with the introduction of Foucault's notion of 'subjective unities', that it is any more worthy to give an account of the archaeology of thought. While I

accept that such an account heightens an awareness of ever present underlying conscious and unconscious influences on the subject, it seems impossible to me to be in a position to escape this reality, or to be in a position of *not* referring to the consciousness/unconsciousness (cognito/'unthought') of subjects. How can it be that Foucault is afforded that omniscience *without* consciousness?

Foucault's criticism that the human sciences and the social sciences are culprits in depriving the subject of human freedom is curious. My concern here is not so much with the belief that so called 'knowledge' can be restrictive, but that Foucault singles out knowledge in the human sciences and social sciences as imposing the primary constraints on human freedom. In all fairness, all knowledge has the potential to restrict human freedom in that it is bound up with assumptions. Even the so-called pure sciences such as the physical sciences and mathematics surely face the same problem, for *all* knowledge stems from the conscious/unconscious duality.

In the body of this Chapter we saw how Foucault regarded both the human sciences (psychology and psychiatry) and the social sciences as culprits in constraining the subject from reaching human freedom. Foucault believes the human science disciplines do this by way of their definitions of the subject as both subject and object, and the social sciences do this by construing their interests as knowledge which is in itself a mechanism of power. On the other hand, Foucault believes that the natural sciences have escaped from having such a constraining interest on the subject and have become autonomous bodies of knowledge. He explains that the process by which this occurred was through the abandonment of the sixteenth century judicial investigative aspect of the natural sciences which arose from the Inquisition period. This abandonment allowed the natural sciences to become an autonomous, independent body of knowledge (Gutting, 1989:276). I cannot agree with Foucault here. Does it not seem very strange that the natural sciences are able to develop an autonomous body of knowledge, free from any connections with social practices and regimes of knowledge? Bearing in mind Foucault's own argument that a myriad of strategies, networks, mechanisms and

techniques contribute to a decision being made, how is it that the natural sciences escape such interrelationships?

Foucault's concept of power remains problematic. Prado (1995:73) suggests that it is Foucault's concept of the 'impersonal nature of power' which raises difficulty. There does seem to be some ambiguity here between Foucault's claim that power may be constructive and his notion that power-relations 'permeate, characterize and constitute the social body' (Foucault:1980:93). Is this also saying that when power is constructive and has positive influence, it has nothing to do with the subject's intention but is merely a result of influences of the 'social body'?

And, now, to an even more sensitive issue. How was it possible that Foucault's own history of thought, published as *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), could in any way escape the inescapable - that *all* knowledge and ideas are inextricably linked to the social regimes of which they are a part? We recall that Foucault claimed that the subject, by being given specific intellectual resources, would be able to break away from the constraints and enjoy human freedom. The specific intellectual resources required are presumably the 'knowledge' imparted by Foucault in his critique of the history of thought. The difficulty is that knowledge, although useful and original in many ways, remains susceptible in its production to current power structures.

In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault encourages discrimination of representations in order that the subject accepts in relation to the self only those representations which depend on the subject's 'free and rational' choice. This is the process which Foucault believes will finally afford the self the human freedom it desires. My concern is, if the subject does accept in relation to itself only those representations which depend on it, what does the self do with representations which are not of its 'free and rational' choice? And if we do not abandon in its entirety Foucault's earlier works, what of the influence of consciousness and

unconsciousness on choice? Just how 'free and rational' can the subject's choices be?

In respect of Foucault's critique of the role of language, I believe Barrett (1991:123-156) voices a valid concern in stating that Foucault does not adequately explain why he chooses some statements rather than others for analysis. What creates the discursive unities which give rise to the discursive formations Foucault would choose, and would someone else assess the formations differently?

Barrett makes a further point, with which I agree, concerning the common-sense meanings of the word, 'discourse'. These common-sense meanings give no indication of the complexity and originality of Foucault's exposition on 'discourse' (Barrett, 1991:125). There has also occurred inappropriate labelling in several arenas, labelling which has no resemblance to Foucault's analysis, for instance, 'the sociological discourse'. Just what does this mean, and how useful is it?

Foucault proposes that post-medieval Western society forged the discourse for the whole of the Western world. Specifically, here, we are concerned with the 'will to truth' which Foucault proposes is a major principle of that discourse. We saw how Foucault gives an example of the 'will to truth' principle in legal discourse. He calls for justice to be the justification for legal discourse and decries what he sees as a substitution for justice – that is, the guaranteed 'truth' of sociology or medicine. However, it is difficult to see why Foucault assumes that the discourses of sociology and medicine are any more laden with complexities and impurities than is the discourse of justice. Why would a discourse on justice be afforded such a privileged position as to be a more pure representation of thought? Again, Foucault seems to afford the biological sciences with at least the potential to possess the absolute truth. This strikes me as rather curious since it is difficult to comprehend how any discipline could escape the imperfections of the history of thought and be autonomous.

Foucault commented that it is possible to speak the truth outside of discourse. However, that truth cannot be recognized as 'in the true' because the arena in which it is voiced is not the current dominant discourse. Barrett believes that this view of Foucault is, in fact, outside his general thesis on discourse (1991:143). I do not see any conflict here between Foucault's idea that one might be able to speak outside of discourse and his general view on discourse. Discourse, for Foucault, is not necessarily every statement but only those which purport to hold a 'truth' or current view. So, in this sense, statements can occur outside of discourse.

I have more difficulty with Foucault's belief that a 'truth' can be spoken at all. Further, Foucault's work does seem to lack any clear, specific definitions of 'truth'. He explains clearly his notion of 'regimes of truth' and the reader has some understanding of his reasons for the term. That said, he reverts to the use of the term, 'truth', even though he emphasizes his interest lies in the politics of truth. At best, some ambiguity remains around Foucault's notion of truth. My own view is that 'truth' should always remain in scare quotes. A 'truth' may be temporarily so, or may be a statement or belief which has the largest current following, but its permanence is always in doubt.

In setting ideology 'aside', Foucault does appear to purport some other set of truth claims. It is quite clear that his statements on mental illness, crime and sexuality are, at the least, an exhortation to gain a better knowledge (truer knowledge?) of these phenomena. Whilst his concern is to expose 'unities of discourse' within the discursive field, it does seem clear that he was also intent on redrawing and reshaping those unities of discourse in order to have an influence on knowledge.
Is this not Foucault stating that his understanding is more 'true' than historical understandings?

In his criticism of Marxism and 'the economics of untruth', Foucault asserts that his interest lies in the effects of power on the production of truth. He suggests that it would probably be wiser to examine 'regimes' of truth', rather than search

for a 'Truth'. On the other hand, his criticism of ideology and his encouragement to investigate regimes of truth has been described by some commentators as a substitution of the truth claims for ideology with truth claims for discourse:

> So at the bottom Foucault's enterprise seems stuck on the horns of a huge epistemological dilemma: if it tells the truth, then *all* knowledge is suspect in its pretence of objectivity; but in that case, how can the theory itself vouch for its truth? (Merquior, 1991:147; emphasis in original)

Prado (1995:121) believes that to reject Foucault's work as 'implicitly claiming to be a theoretical account of the truth' is to miss the point. That point is: Foucault's intention is always 'what counts as true or truth', not what *is* truth.

Notwithstanding the criticisms, Foucault, with a great deal of expertise, heightens one's awareness of the regimes of truth in all discursive formations. If it is ironic that such awareness is also present in the critique of his own work, this does not seem a bad thing.

So, to return to our question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness? How does Foucault seem to answer this question? I would suggest that Foucault's answer is somewhat ambiguous. As we have noted, for Foucault, 'regimes of power', 'regimes of truth' and knowledge are inextricably interwoven. On the one hand, Foucault is likely to concur with the statement that we are prisoners of our own consciousness, for all bodies of knowledge are interwoven with 'techniques of social control', all knowledge is constituted on the basis of mechanisms of power. On the other hand, Foucault attempted to free the individual from regimes of power by showing how the history of thought is merely a history of discursive unities. Moreover, once we are in possession of the intellectual resources which come from this knowledge, we will be in a position to overcome the constraints on consciousness. I am not convinced that Foucault has successfully achieved his goal in this respect. And yet, as Eagleton (1991:47) asks: If there is nothing beyond the power/knowledge/regimes-of-truth triumvirate, then, there is nothing

to be blocked from, or nothing that the subject can be imprisoned by. If power/knowledge forms the basis of all subjectivity, why is there need to worry?

3 Jacques Derrida

3.1 Introduction

Jacques Derrida (1930 -) is Algerian born. Although his work is difficult to classify, he is generally regarded as a philosopher. However, as was stated in the Introduction to this thesis, Derrida himself has said: *'Il y a peut-etre des pensee plus pensantes que cette pensee qu'on appelle philosophie'*. (There are perhaps thoughts more thoughtful than thinking that goes by the name of philosophy) (Derrida, 1987; 11-21).

Derrida is a prodigious writer who has produced some thirty-four books and two hundred and seventy texts. He is a writer who has received much attention:

> ...and has had an enormous impact on intellectual life around the world. So much so that his work has been the subject, in whole or in part, of more than 400 books. In the areas of philosophy and literary criticism alone, Derrida has been cited more than 14,000 times in journal articles over the last 17 years. (Rawlings, 1999, *Stanford Presidential Lectures*)

Derrida has taught at the Ecole Normale Superieure in Paris (1965-1984), the Sorbonne (1960-1964) and John Hopkins and Yale Universities. Since 1986 Derrida has been Professor of Philosophy and Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine. He continues to teach on both sides of the Atlantic.

While Derrida has been described as 'perhaps the world's most famous philosopher – if not the only famous philosopher' (Smith, 1998:7) in an article written for the *New York Times* entitled, 'Philosopher Gamely In Defence Of His Ideas', it should be said at this stage that there is also enormous controversy surrounding the works of Jacques Derrida. In 1992 nineteen philosophers from around the world in a letter to *The Times*, 9 May 1992, registered their objections to Derrida's use of 'tricks and gimmicks' (*Cambridge Review* 113, 1992: 99-127,

131-139). Prior to this letter there had been a furore earlier in the same year when Cambridge University proposed giving Derrida an honorary degree. There were objections from staff. Finally, the matter was put to a vote. This was the first time such an action had been taken in twenty-nine years. The result of voting was 336-204 in Derrida's favour. There are suggestions that philosophers, if not being hostile towards Derrida's work, have remained 'aloof' in their assessment. The teaching engagements in the United States have mainly been organized by literature departments. Amongst his fellow philosophers, Derrida 'remains an outsider – interesting to be sure, but an interesting external phenomenon...' (Garver and Lee, 1994:174). The same commentators report that in France Derrida engenders the same reaction, a reaction of interest whilst maintaining a 'professional' distance. In a recent review of *Derrida: Christina Howells,* 1998, Howells is praised for exposing Derrida as a philosopher '...who has taken pains not to acknowledge his influences – had he done so, we would have found out much earlier on whose thought we ought to concentrate' (Giorgiou, 1999: 54).

Notwithstanding the above comments, Derrida remains a key figure amongst the post-structuralists. The theory of the 'sign' developed by Saussure is central to postructuralism and to Derrida. Saussure saw the sign or language as fixed, structured prior to its utterance. Thus, his position on linguistics is termed 'structural'. Language for Saussure was an abstract system, a 'chain of signs'. Each sign had two components: a signifier (sound or written image) and a signified (meaning). The two are only related arbitrarily. Derrida questions Saussure's logocentrism, that is, the fact '...that signs have an already fixed meaning recognized by the self-consciousness of the rational speaking subject' (Weedon, 1987:23). Derrida moves the focus away from any fixed meaning of the sign, to a focus on 'difference' and deferral. These aspects will be dealt with in greater detail in this Chapter.

Derrida's work covers four main areas: structuralism, speech and writing, deconstructing the text and psychoanalysis. However, the main focus of his work is text – not only the written or spoken text but also body language and the rules

governing such 'texts'. It is his contention that many false assumptions have been made about the nature of texts, especially in regard to text being unchanging and having a unified meaning. Further, he denounces any assumption that the author is the source of meaning of a text. Derrida is known as the founder of 'deconstruction' which highlights multiple layers of meaning and origin in language. For Derrida it is an assumption to believe that speech is a clear and direct way to communicate. By engaging in the deconstruction of language we are better able to see the unavoidable tensions between the content intentions of communication and the rules which govern the utterance of those content intentions.

Derrida's style of writing, or of delivering an address, is the topic of much debate. Some of his audience find him to be helpful in demonstrating what he sees as the free play of signification, that is, in demonstrating that all meaning is temporary and referent. For others, Derrida's text, written and spoken, is 'on the limit of readability' (*Interviews*, 1974-1994, Stanford University, 1995). So, on the one hand, Derrida's style has been termed:

> ...distinctive and quite remarkable. It is especially good in presenting the reader with linguistic pitfalls, reminding us through his constant attention to alternative semantic possibilities of how the most ordinary statement contains horizons of absurdity. He is lively and witty in the course of this mischievous activity'. (Garver and Lee, 1994:187)

On the other hand:

> Anyone who has heard him lecture in French knows that he is more performance artist than logician. His flamboyant style – using free association, rhymes and near-rhymes, puns and maddening digressions – is not just a vain pose (though it is surely that). It reflects what (Derrida) calls a self-conscious, 'acommunicative strategy' for combating logocentrism.
> (Lilla, 1998:36-41)

The above two comments are just an example of the divergence in thought surrounding Derrida's work. How useful Derrida's method of delivery is in

communicating his message, and how serious or original is his contribution, are questions for consideration.

3.2 What is the 'subject'?

Although a critic of 'subjectivity', Derrida does not seem to negate the idea that '...the state of affairs 'subjectivity' is correctly described as the auto-reflexivity of thinking' (Frank, 1992:223). However, Derrida's position is somewhat different from Heidegger who is also a critic of subjectivity and understood 'being' as being 'true'. Derrida accepts that the modern theory of the subject interprets 'being' according to a presence, but he hastens to point out that mental phenomena take place through a system of sign usage, and subjectivity is not excluded from this process. Therefore, 'Meaning, including the meaning in whose light the phenomena of consciousness come to grasp themselves, is dependent on signs' (Frank,1992:227).

Derrida describes the event of hearing oneself speak as a recognition of self, 'pure self-affection':

> As pure self-affection, the operation of hearing oneself speak (*s'entendre-parler*) seems to reduce even the inward surface of one's own body; it seems capable of dispensing this exteriority within interiority, this interior space in which our experience or image of our own body is spread forth. This is why hearing oneself speak is experienced as an absolutely pure self-affection. (Derrida, 1967:88-89)

What Derrida is saying, however, needs close attention. He is not claiming that in hearing oneself speak one experiences the purest sense of the self. For we have already seen that he views mental phenomena, including a sense of realization of self, as occurring through a system of signs. Those signs have many layers of meaning and many rules associated with their production. Derrida challenges the idea that the subject is, in fact, the author of the signs. What Derrida is saying is

that *that which is experienced* is a sense of self, but through a process of deconstruction (which will be outlined later in the Chapter) we can see that the subject is not the author of its thought.

Derrida aims to demonstrate that our traditional thinking has involved accepting that the subject is 'identical to itself', that it is a coherent personality free from internal difference' (Lilla, 1998:36-41). 'Identities' have been developed through membership of particular groups: male, female, families, nations and so forth. Derrida purports that there are no such things as 'natural' groupings. All such categories, which include mother, father, brother, sister, friends, communities and so on are, in fact, derivatives, dependent on language and conventions.

In 1989-89 Derrida gave a seminar in Paris on the 'politics of friendship', the title of his most recently translated work. At the beginning of each seminar Derrida would address the audience: '*O mes amis, il n'y a nul ami'* ('Oh my friends, there is no friend'). Whilst this address apparently infuriated many, Derrida's intent was to deconstruct the term, 'friend', and offer several possible sources and meanings of the term. Similarly, regarding the identity of the 'subject', notions of the subject are derivative and dependent on language.

When the question: 'Do you mean to say that you do not want to have an identity?' was posed in an interview with Derrida on *Birth and Intellectual Development*, Derrida replied:

> On the contrary, I do, like everyone else. But by turning around this impossible thing, and which no doubt I also resist, the 'I' constitutes the very form of resistance. Each time this identity announces itself, each time a belonging circumscribes me, if I may put it this way, someone or something cries: Look out for the trap, you're caught. Take off, get free, disengage yourself. Your engagement is elsewhere. (Derrida, 1974-1994, *Stanford Presidential Lectures,* 1974-1994)

Undoubtedly, Derrida's intention here is to demonstrate that he is continually aware of the subject not being the author of its own concepts. But there are other

indications here that the subject can be other than in this predicament. I develop this idea further later in this Chapter.

3.3 Consciousness

As we have seen, Derrida's notion of the self always has reference to *'l'autre'* (the other). The 'other' does not refer solely to another person but 'other' in terms of a myriad of texts which define the self:

> ...the relation to self is precisely not specular ... there is always alterity before (any) self ... We can sense that this alterity cannot simply be stated in the form of theses, that it is not really thematizable, not a phenomenon, that it does not exist. (Bennington and Derrida, 1993:144)

Bennington and Derrida go on to say that it is because of this (always the presence of other before the self) that they have an interest in psychoanalysis. However, they make clear their suspicion in regard to psychoanalysts' conception of the unconscious which they criticize as remaining 'metaphysical' - 'because the term is only defined with respect to consciousness, itself thought of in terms of a presence' (1993:144). A further concern they have is that any theory of the unconscious may have the effect of defining and 'reinforcing the (deep) identity of a subject' whose consciousness is able to 'link ... to a more secure substratum or sub-ject'. Thus, the attraction of psychoanalysis appears to be due to the shared view of the presence of *l'autre* in the formation of the subject. That said, the shared view does not seem to extend to the definition or essence of *l'autre.*

For Derrida, the unconsciousness cannot exist without a form of preparation. That preparation is repetition: '...an event arrives in its singularity only if the possibility of a certain repetition prepares its coming and its identification' (Bennington and Derrida, 1993:145). Here again, there is a reference to the role of text and deferral in forming unconsciousness:

> And as, in the generalization of writing, it is voice with its effects of presence that becomes mysterious; here it is consciousness which becomes enigmatic. (Bennington and Derrida, 1993:145)

If one accepts that the unconsciousness as well as consciousness have a dependence on text or language, it remains unclear just what prompts 'an event to arrive in its singularity', and just how the process of preparation for the presence of unconsciousness occurs.

3.4 The role of language

Derrida's interest in language centres on the history of text, and how that text can be used in many ways. He is interested in what '*...befalls* a text, the chances and changes it encounters when lifted from its original context or read in other ways' (Hart, 1989:19; emphasis in original). While we will see that 'deconstruction' involves a move away from Western metaphysics, and calls for a reconstruction of text in order to make better sense of our present and future, Derrida is more concerned with the discovery and revelation of hidden meanings and representations in the text than he is with the history of Western metaphysics.

Regarding text, Derrida states:

> A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its law and its rules are not, however, harboured in the inaccessibility of a secret; it is simply that they can never be booked, in the *present* into anything that could rigorously be called a perception. And hence, perpetually and essentially they run the risk of being definitively lost. Who will ever know of such disappearances? The dissimulation of the woven texture can in any case take centuries to undo its web. (Derrida, 1995:119; emphasis in original)

Derrida's thesis is that the subject is not the author of text. Text comes with layers of meanings and rules which constantly change and which cannot be unravelled. Derrida speaks of the 'possibility of extraction and of citational grafting' which is associated with every 'mark' or 'sign' (Derrida, 1988:19-45). The marks and signs to which he refers are spoken, or written, and as we saw above, mental phenomena such as thinking, consciousness and unconsciousness do not escape the association with this 'citational grafting'. 'Every sign, linguistic or non-linguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, put between quotation marks' (Derrida, 1988:19-45). Derrida suggests that this process highlights the fact that text can be broken from its current context and given new contexts. However, he hastens to add that should this process occur, it does not suggest that the 'mark' is valid outside of its context, 'but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring' (Derrida, 1988:19-45).

An example of Derrida's thinking lies in the following sentence: '*La signature tombe*', meaning both, 'the signature falls', and, 'the signature encrypts' (Derrida,1986a:19). The point Derrida is making is that there is neither signature nor 'authorial presence' outside the text which can take possession of, or have surveillance over the text's meaning. 'Not only is the signature a name written on a crypt but also it becomes a crypt itself' (Hart, 1989:20). Hart describes this state of affairs as 'trespass of the sign' (Hart, 1989:14). This means that the sign which is intended to *mark*, or describe, a concept, is itself already *marked.*

The concept of *differance* which originates with Derrida, appears frequently in his works. Essentially, with this concept Derrida is attacking what he sees as traditional views that dichotomies or contrasts in all linguistic and non-linguistic settings are simple and given. Garver and Lee outline Derrida's thesis:

> They are not truly simple because they come with judgement built in, one member of the contrastive pair being 'marked' as superior to the other. And they are not simply 'given' because

> this predetermined superiority of one over the other is imposed on us rather than given to us. (Garver and Lee, 1994:128)

Examples of these pre-determined contrastive pairs are: legitimate/illegitimate, rational/irrational, fact/fiction or observation/imagination (Rawlings, 1999, *Stanford Presidential Lectures*). The predetermined ranking of concepts, while far less obvious than that imposed on contrastive pairs, is still present. Thus, when 'philosophy' is distinguished from literature the difference includes a predetermined ranking' (Garver and Lee, 1994:127-128). There are similarities here with Foucault's concept of 'hierarchies'.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, *differance* is explained by Bennington and Derrida in a way which clearly highlights the necessity for reference to the written text for a trace of speech. *Differance* is described as:

> ...a witticism of Derrida: in French, the difference between *difference* and *differance* is only marked in writing, which thus takes a certain revenge on speech by obliging it to take its own written trace as reference if, during a lecture for example it wants to say this difference. (Bennington and Derrida, 1993:70)

Without '*differance*' no language can exist. It is the characteristic of signs, both the actual difference which makes them possible, but also the fact that they can only really be understood in terms of other times where the instituted difference appears (Garver and Lee, 1994:91). *'Differance'*, therefore, has the dual role of denoting both difference and deferral.

Derrida takes pains, though, to explain to the reader that '*differance*' does not exist:

> Already we have had to delineate that *differance is not*, does not exist, is not a present-being (*on*) in any form; and we will be led to delineate also everything *that* it *is not*, that is, *everything*; and consequently that it has neither existence or essence. It derives from no category of being, whether present or absent ... *Differance* is not only irreducible to any ontological or theological – onto-theological – reappropriation, but as the very opening of the space in which onttheology – philosophy – produces its system and its history, it includes onto-theology,

> inscribing it and exceeding it without return. (Derrida, 1982:6; emphases in original)

Derrida's insistence on his proposition that '*differance*' does not exist, relates to his belief that any presence is already a representation. A phenomenon is a representation which has a presence, that is, it is '*within* the realm of presence, but as transcendental it is *outside* that realm because it is the condition of possibility for that realm' (Hart, 1989:186; emphases in original). How '*differance*' escapes from being a phenomenon or concept , and has a favoured position of nothingness, is difficult to see.

The 'school' of deconstruction is attributed to Derrida. If Derrida was not the 'father' of deconstruction, as Mark Lilla suggests (Lilla, 1998: 36-41), he is certainly a 'chief proponent'. There are numerous definitions of deconstruction but, in the first instance, it is perhaps more useful to look at the components of the method, of which there are three:

- recognition that Western thought is organized into structures of oppositions, for example, historical and material phenomena;
- a critique of the structures in Western thought;
- a transforming, or deconstruction of the current system, or as Derrida says, 'thinking otherwise'.

In attempting to outline Derrida's thoughts on deconstruction above, I have stated that the 'method' consists of three components. Derrida himself does not accept the term, 'method'. He prefers to speak of deconstruction 'questions'. While this preference initially seems to be somewhat curious and pedantic, his explanation is consistent with the stated purpose of deconstruction:

> ...even if one attempts to preserve the idiom of the method ... of a system of rules which others are going to be able to use, so even if one wants to preserve, then, the idiom of the method ... well, by the fact that the idiom is not pure, there is already method ... I have tried to mark the ways in which, for example, deconstructive questions cannot give rise to methods, that is, to technical procedures that could be repeated from one context to another. (*Interviews-Derridean Method*, 1995: 199-201)

Derrida points out that concepts which we have traditionally seen to be separate from, or devoid of philosophical content, for example, value, property, work and the like are riven with philosophical undertones (Hart, 1992:146).

The process of deconstruction is not to destruct but to undo and unravel, to analyze the signs. The text is not destroyed but what is questioned is one mode of signification over another. Deconstruction can also be called an undermining of the so-called 'logic' of the oppositions within text.

There have been claims that since 1967 deconstruction has incited 'dread and hysteria' amongst critical theory (*A Dictionary of Critical Theory*, 1991). Further, it is claimed that deconstruction has become a 'fashion mark' of commercialism, a term which launches products such as clothing, sports equipment and political attitudes. In an illustrated fashion article from an American magazine in April 1993, we find:

> Deconstruction may be the darling of Europe but in the U.S. it's a love-hate thing. Creases are ironed out, raw edges refined, grunge given a touch of polish.
>
> In New York, memories are not only short, they are entirely selective. Grunge – the so-called fashion revolution which has launched a thousand headlines in the past six months – seemed, at the American collections last week, never to have happened (quoted in Cixous, 1994:xx-xxi).

This, of course, is Derrida's very point: there are totally unforeseen uses of signs so that authorship and meaning are never given. Derrida himself has been surprised at the proliferating use of the term, 'deconstruction': 'Even "civet!" (speaking of a wine stew of rabbit). "Deconstructed rabbit!" I saw it in an article in *The New York Times*!' (quoted in Smith, 1998:7).

Derrida's own definition of deconstruction highlights the fact that his concept of text, as we have already discovered, is far broader than the written word. In answer to 'What is deconstruction?', he replied:

> It is impossible to respond. I can only do something which will leave me unsatisfied. I often describe deconstruction as something which happens. It's not purely linguistic, involving text or books. You can deconstruct gestures, choreography. That's why I enlarged the concept of text. (quoted in Smith, 1998:7)

On another occasion, Derrida wrote:

> If I had to risk a single definition of deconstruction, one as brief, elliptical, and economical as a password, I would simply say and without overstatement: *plus d'une langue* – more than one language, no more than one language'. (Derrida, 1986b:14-15)

We recall here that Foucault's definition of text was also very broad. His particular focus, however, was more on *con*text than text. Comparisons between the two theorists will be made in Chapter 5. Derrida is far more interested in textual questions than Foucault. He elaborates on text, using metaphors and association of ideas as part of the technique of *explication de texte.* His interest does not lie in logical analysis or formal argument.

Deconstruction clearly questions any fixed meanings and identities of text. The intention of the speaker may not be fully achieved due to there being no 'essentials in either language or society'. 'The intention of neither speaker nor hearer are therefore sustainable notions, for they presuppose a fixed essential identity which none of us possess' (McLennan, 1992:37).

Culler argues that in the case of deconstruction meaning is always historical, 'in processes of contextualization, decontextualization and recontextualization':

> As should now be clear, deconstruction is not a theory that defines meaning in order to tell you how to find it. As a critical undoing of the hierarchical oppositions on which theories depend, it demonstrates the difficulty of any theory that would

> define meaning in a univocal way: as what an author intends, what conventions determine, what a reader experiences. (Culler, 1982:31)

To elaborate on this point, Derrida uses philosophical language only when he is at the same time making it clear that he is playing a 'game'. This game is one of 'intention', and Derrida again asserts that intention does not anchor or give fixity to meaning. For Derrida:

> ...the letter never gets to its destination, even though, like a postcard, it is exposed where all can read it, including even the one to whom it is apparently addressed. The letter, for Derrida, is condemned to wander interminably in distinerrance. (Hillis Miller, 1996:153)

Nonetheless, Derrida believes that deconstruction must reveal itself. But deconstruction reveals itself 'only under the species of the non-species' (Derrida quoted in Hart, 1989:117). An unknown element is being introduced through the process of deconstruction. What was normative language becomes deconstruction as a critique.

This again leads us to Derrida's concept of *l'autre*, a key concept in deconstruction. We have seen that it refers to 'the other'. In Derrida's words, '*Tout autre est tout autre*' – every other is completely other. Miller suggests that as in the case of the interpretation of the 'letter' (above), 'the lines of direct communication are down between me and the other' (1996:153). On being questioned as to whether language can refer to anything other than itself, Derrida has replied:

> It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with 'the other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the opposite. Certainly deconstruction tries to show that the question of reference is much more complex problematic than traditional theories supposed... (Derrida, 1984:123-124)

However, he goes on to say that distancing oneself from the text, or trying to analyze where it comes from, is not saying that 'there is nothing beyond language'. He sees deconstruction not as a reduction or an enclosure, but as an 'openness towards the other' (Derrida, 1984:124).

Perhaps there remains one further matter to discuss under this section on language. This is what has been referred to as Derrida's style, that is, 'maddening digressions', which Derrida terms an 'acommunicative strategy' for dislodging logocentrism:

> What I try to do through the neutralization of communication, theses, and stability of content, through a microstructure of signification, is to provoke, not only in the reader but also in oneself, a new tremor or a shock of the body that opens a new space of experience. That might explain the reaction of not a few readers when they say that, in the end, one doesn't understand anything... (quoted in Lilla, 1998:36-41)

No matter what one's own view is on Derrida's style, it is fair to say that Derrida takes great pains to demonstrate the unavoidable tension between the intent of the text and the very obvious shortcomings of production of that text.

3.5 The autonomy of the subject

It is necessary to return to Derrida's concept of *l'autre* to gain some understanding of his views on the autonomy of the subject. *L'autre* is wholly other (*tout autre*); this means that for Derrida there is no way that the subject can have any confrontation with this 'other'. This does not mean, though, that 'the other' is unable to enter the realm of the subject, to somehow both construct and dislocate the subject (Hillis Miller, 1996:159).

We have seen that Derrida believes that all text has reference to other and deference to another time and other circumstances. We also recall that text

includes consciousness and the unconsciousness. 'The voice *is* consciousness' (Derrida, 1967: 89, emphasis in original). Therefore, the 'vocal self-affection' of which Derrida speaks:

> ...cannot be – despite its capacity to reduce exteriority – a matter of pure undivided hearing-oneself-speak. Alterity will always already have been operative in the production of vocal self-presence, dividing one from oneself in advance of the very production of oneself, of subjectivity, of consciousness. (Sallis,1992:132)

In the process of hearing oneself speak, one perhaps has a sense of the self, subjectivity, consciousness. However, Derrida's contention is that it is misguided to believe that there is first a subject which comes into effect by hearing itself speak, for the imperceptibility of text, consciousness and unconsciousness have already constructed and determined that subject.

Unconsciousness, for Derrida, could be defined as 'the reserve of repetition'. This refers to the preparation (repetition) required to bring an event into consciousness. This is why Derrida is able to say: 'One cannot have begun. For one will always have begun again, redoubling what will always have already commenced' (quoted in Sallis, 1992:120).

Practical problems are seen by Hillis Miller as part of a 'highly structured and powerful economy of concepts'. He suggests that Derrida shows us the language to trace the laws of that economy and allow us to turn that economy on itself. In other words, what he is suggesting is that Derrida's thesis is that 'no decision is simply an individual's one'. Hillis Miller also admires Derrida for the fact that the latter does not 'prescribe how we are to do it'. This opens up the opportunity for chance and allows more room for variation. For all this, Lilla is skeptical. If all concepts need to be deconstructed, it follows that all practical problems need the same attention. Derrida questions the Western philosophical tradition. He questions the givens: will, subject, self, consciousness, propriety, intentionality.

Does this mean that after deconstruction we will be able to tell the difference between right and wrong, justice and injustice (Lilla, 1998:36-41)?

Commentators such as Spivak, Ryan and Rogozinski do, in fact, see a moral framework within Derrida's concept of deconstruction. That is, they see a possibility in the practice of deconstruction for correcting social injustices and, for at least, pointing to a future freedom. Spivak believes Derrida is encouraging deconstruction in order to offer the possibility of another realm 'constituted by ethical-political contingencies' (Spivak,1981:514). In the practice of deconstruction Ryan sees the possibility for a 'countering [of] the structures of power whose interests are served implicitly by the angelic disinterestedness of liberal detachment' (Ryan, 1982: 41). Finally, Rogozinski claims that one of the political views found in Derrida's rendering of deconstruction is the enjoinment to 'a radical revolution' (Rogozinski, 1981:523). But Derrida, himself, does not promote, nor address a future state.

3.6 The matter of 'truth'

Deconstructionalists abandon the search for meaning and stability. There are no such things as fixed identities; these are illusions to which we cling in order to give us comfort (McLennan, 1992:43). The illusions are traditional ideological discourses which need to be criticized and deconstructed. Derrida, thus, criticizes 'logocentric reasoning' - views which search for explanations of how things are or should be. The term, 'logocentrism', for Derrida is a term which describes a philosophy that says the world has a rational essence. Another term which he uses is 'phonocentric'. This refers to audiences 'who are constructed within philosophy to hear the voice of reason itself speak' (McLennan, 1992:69). But those who believe that there is an essential logic have been the victims of a huge con trick, according to Derrida, who believes that all the traditional philosophers,

from Socrates onwards, have presented themselves as the voice of 'truth'. According to Derrida, this has been an illusory enterprise.

If we are logocentric and looking for fixed meanings in text, searching for the 'truth' about life or society, then, we are faced with problems. For from the deconstructionalists' point of view there is no rational coherence in a particular text. Meanings will always be imperceptible. All text has equal claim to 'truth'. What any text means at a given moment depends 'on the discursive relations within which it is located, and it is open to constant rereading and reinterpretation' (Weedon, 1987:25).

Montefiore in an interview following his paper entitled, 'The Idea of "Crisis" in Philosophy', which was given at a philosophers' conference (Southampton University) in April 1999, said he believed Derrida had aroused people's already growing suspicion of rationality: 'Derrida, it seems to me, is one of the people who has given most strikingly influential expression to such suspicions...' (Montefiore,1999:28). Montefiore echoes other commentators who have said that Derrida does not so much give general arguments to demonstrate contradictions in discourses, but he tries to show how discourses undermine themselves, negating the possibility of a universal philosophy.

We have already seen that Derrida is keen to deconstruct contrasting pairs. Amongst those pairs are law and right (*loi /droit*). Derrida does not recognize nature or reason as being standards for anything. However, he does see the 'idea of justice' as being an 'infinite idea of justice' and irreducible. The concept of justice, according to Derrida, cannot and should not be subjected to deconstruction. The reason Derrida gives for the favoured position of justice, that is, its exemption from deconstruction, is that this infinite idea of justice cannot be articulated, it is something beyond all experience, and what cannot be articulated cannot be deconstructed (Derrida, 1992). It is Lilla's view that Derrida is turning to the messianic writings of Benjamin and Levinas, either as a result of 'intellectual desperation', or in order 'to give hope to the dispirited left' (Lilla,

1998:36-34). Be that as it may, while Derrida does term this infinite idea of justice which is beyond deconstruction, 'an experience of the impossible', it does appear as though Derrida sees a fissure in the far distance for experience beyond the self.

3.7 Discussion

In my view, Derrida is very successful in alerting his audience to the pitfalls in communication. He makes it quite clear (albeit, for some, through maddening digressions and word play) that the intent of both the speaker and writer, for example, is often thwarted by the complexity of production of text.

On the topic of consciousness, Derrida makes it clear that both consciousness and unconsciousness defer to language or text for existence. In regard to unconsciousness, Derrida's explanation is less clear or complete in its elaboration. He speaks of unconsciousness being unable to exist without 'preparation' and the preparation is defined as repetition. Just how this occurs, or examples or specifics as to what Derrida means here, are elusive. One is left second-guessing as to his meaning. In the case of individuals unfortunate enough not to have the use of language, how does unconsciousness form itself? I am not suggesting that there could be anomalies here in any possible explanation, or that those without language cannot be conscious. We have already seen that, for Derrida, text goes beyond the spoken and written word and includes such phenomena as mental capacity and gestures. My criticism is that Derrida seems to fall short in giving detailed explanations of how certain events (here we are dealing with 'consciousness') occur.

I do have some difficulty with Derrida's reply to his interviewer on the question of identity. We have seen from Derrida's response that '...each time this identity announces itself, each time a belonging circumscribes me', he is alerted to

'...look out for the trap, you're caught. Take off, get free, disengage yourself' (Interviews, 1974-1994, from 'A "Madness" Must Watch Over Thinking', 339-343). But Derrida has taken pains to point out that even mental phenomena such as concepts and thinking occur through a system of signs. Even the concepts are derivatives of language and dependent on language. So how can it be that the subject has the ability to 'disengage' itself, to 'get free'? To be aware of the traps in derivation of text (mental, spoken, written, body language) is one thing, but to speak of being 'free' and the possibility of 'disengagement' is surely to suggest that there is a pure, absolute form of the subject which is able to transcend the boundaries and limitations of text. And yet this is definitely not the suggestion Derrida wishes to make. Therefore, there remains conflict in his statements here.

I have to agree with Norris's criticism that the use of quotation marks around 'names-as used and names as merely cited' seems ludicrous:

> ... what kind of dejure regulation can back up this confident policing operation 'placing around names-as-used and names as merely cited quotation marks' designed to cure language of its bad propensity for conjuring up phantom nominal presence? (Norris, 1992:178)

Neither can I understand why 'names' should be selected for the quotation marks. Surely, if the suggestion had some benefit, the whole text should be placed in quotation marks.

As Norris explains, such a practice as outlined could only be effective if language had attained what Habermas describes as an 'ideal speech-situation'. For Habermas, that situation was one where there are no impediments between meaning and intent and there exists a 'wished-for meeting of minds'. However, Derrida says this situation can never exist because it relies on a 'structural consciousness' that forever divides the speaking self ('subject of enunciation') from the self spoken about ('subject of the enounced') (Norris, 1992:178).

We have noted that, for Derrida, '*...differance is not*, does not exist' (Derrida, 1982:6; emphasis in original). This is an important premise for Derrida, since any phenomenon is a presence which already has a representation. But '*differance*' is outside the realm of representations, it is transcendental, and must be, because, according to Derrida, it offers the *possibility* for another realm, an *outside* realm. This is mysterious, to say the least. Hart attempts to explain the difficulty here:

> Strictly speaking, *differance* is constituted by a doubled origin, at once phenomenal and transcendental. The transcendental is implied by the phenomenal, and the phenomenal turns out to be conditioned by the transcendental. (Hart, 1989:187)

Hart's attempts to explain how the concept of '*differance*' can enjoy a favoured position of transcendence outside the normal realm do not convince me. In all fairness, any concept is a phenomenon which has a presence of sorts, and therefore also has a presentation?

Lilla is highly critical of Derrida's stance on the future of democracy: 'Derrida is convinced that the only way to extend the democratic values he himself holds is to destroy the language in which the West has always conceived of them, in the mistaken belief that it is language, not reality, that keeps our democracies imperfect' (Lilla, 1998: 36-41). Whilst there are no doubt many criticisms which can be made of Derrida's work, this criticism appears to have misread Derrida. Derrida does not call for the destruction or replacement of language but the careful deconstruction (analysis) of it in order to be able to recognize the myriad of inbuilt meanings and imposed structures.

While I believe interpreting Derrida's intent as an intention to destroy language and replace it is a misreading, I do question the very possibility of deconstruction. It seems to me that there is an assumption made by Derrida in regard to deconstruction. That assumption is that the process of deconstruction (analysis) is somehow able to result in a text, or communication, which is somehow more clear and direct and less bound by traditional structures and traditions than it would otherwise be. I find this notion rather curious. After all, the process of

deconstruction just replaces one construct with another construct, one text with another, the latter being no more pure than the first.

However, there are several aspects of deconstruction which, I would suggest, assist in a greater understanding of our wider text. Deconstruction clearly alerts one to the presence of forever changing and diverse meanings of text, many of which will remain fathomless. The authorship of the subject is clearly questioned by deconstruction and any suggestion that thoughts, consciousness or unconsciousness are somehow exempt from the imposition of text is refuted. Further, it appears to me, Derrida has been particularly successful to date in raising the consciousness of his audience to the impossibility of any future universal philosophy or rationality.

The suspicion I do have here, though, is that Derrida seems to be very confident that his particular brand of 'philosophy'/practice is the closest one there is to 'reality'. I accept that Derrida's notion is that deconstruction can never be totally successful in unravelling text and that some text will always remain imperceptible. I accept that Derrida is not trying to engage in the destruction of text, or destroy language. I believe Lilla misreads Derrida in this regard. Nevertheless, as raised above, I do have questions regarding the usefulness of deconstruction beyond an acceptance and awareness that our communication and thought processes have been constructed via a myriad of imperceptible and unfathomable texts far broader than language texts. What is more, I question the very possibility of being able to deconstruct text. To say that it is possible to go further than analysis, in view of both the awareness and acceptance that our text is given, to deconstruct text, is setting oneself up outside of language and in a position free from the impositions of it. Surely, the tools which Derrida uses, and encourages others to use in the deconstruction of text, are themselves text.

Hillis Miller praises Derrida for allowing us to see the laws of economy and being able to turn them on themselves. He also commends Derrida for not prescribing how we should go about doing this – allowing us flexibility and difference! What

Miller sees as a strength in Derrida, in my view, is a weakness. Once again, what I find lacking is any clear direction concerning how to achieve the end result - be it deconstruction, disengagement of self. Accepting that lack of explanation and logical argument can be a stylistic mode, and resorting to those methods would itself be a worthwhile exercise in deconstruction, Derrida's work does have a sense of incompletion about it, a criticism he would probably be most happy to accept.

Finally, there remains one more aspect of Derrida's work to discuss. If, as Derrida says, 'voice *is* consciousness', how can it be that he appears to become very upset if one asks him the question: 'Is there anything beyond language?' He has already made it abundantly clear that in his terms texts (written, spoken, consciousness, unconsciousness, gestures) are prescribed and the subject is not the author of them. Just what is there beyond this? We have seen that in his later work Derrida has said that only one concept, the concept of justice, can withstand and must withstand the workings of deconstruction. Derrida goes further and says deconstruction must not be applied to justice (*Lecture, 1989, Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, New York Symposium*). For Derrida, 'the idea of justice' is invincible and indestructible, it is an 'infinite idea of justice' which does not yet exist. It is fair to say that there are yearnings for a 'truth' or at least mystical leanings here. Derrida's reference to the modern messianic writings' of Levinas and Benjamin may be what Lilla terms as 'signs of intellectual desperation', or, an attempt 'to give hope to the dispirited left' (Lilla, 1998:36-41). Whatever it is, it does seem as though Derrida is taking a new turn in his work. We await future developments.

4 Pierre Bourdieu

4.1 Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-) is currently Professor of Sociology at the College de France, reportedly France's most prestigious intellectual institution. In a French survey conducted in 1981, Bourdieu rated at number thirty-six in the public's reply to the question: *Who is the most popular and influential intellectual in France?* In 1989, Bourdieu was in fifth place when the same question was asked (Murray, 1992:135).

Over the past two decades Pierre Bourdieu has had a major influence on the development of sociological theory and practice. He calls for an epistemological break with the past, with pre-notions and pre-concepts. This requires a new way of looking at the social sciences. A 'sociology of sociology' is called for in order to be rid of 'ex-cathedra prophesying' of the past, and in order to create an 'autonomous object' to assist social scientists with their research.

Bourdieu is a keen defender of sociology. He praises the excellence of sociology and its 'scientific' virtues, particularly in relation to such disciplines as philosophy and psychology, which Bourdieu sees as less empirically based. He contends that sociological research provides a means to the 'truth' about the world, or at least a far truer version or interpretation of the world than does philosophy, which Bourdieu describes as 'metaphysical', 'posturing' and 'prophetic'.

While Bourdieu explores questions regarding the moral use of sociology, the influence of language in the social sciences, linguistic capital in academia, the socially constituted use of the body and a whole range of other questions, he prefers to see his role as a sociologist as one who shares his *modus operandi* with others, rather than one who offers an *opus operatum* (Wacquant, 1992:ix).

Bourdieu's work is heavily associated with practice. Amongst his works which emphasize the importance of establishing sound, scientific practice and the epistemological break from the past, and which have been referred to in this thesis, are: *Homo Academicus* (1988), *The Logic of Practice* (1990), *The Craft of Sociology* (1991), *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992), *Sociology in Question* (1993) and *Academic Discourse* (1994). An example of Bourdieu's interest in sociology-in-practice, and the practice of sociology, is in the detailed study (*Homo Academicus*, 1988) he undertook with his colleagues on the role of language in teaching within the university setting. One of the conclusions of this study was that academic discourse (which includes assessments of students' work) is a means for the reproduction of pedagogical power and respect.

A key concept in Bourdieu's work is the *habitus.* In Bourdieu's words: 'The *habitus*, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1993:86). Bourdieu emphasizes the historical aspect of *habitus*, the fact that the permanent dispositions have been arrived at from a 'genetic mode of thought', linked to 'individual histories'. Bourdieu terms 'habit' as repetitive and mechanical but sees *habitus* as 'powerfully generative': 'To put it briefly, the *habitus* is a product of conditionings which tends to produce the objective logic of those conditionings while transforming it' (Bourdieu,1993:87). Bourdieu also describes *habitus* as a 'transforming machine' which reproduces the social conditions of our own production, but in a relatively unpredictable way…' (1993:87).

In referring to his own work, *The Craft of Sociology* (1991), Bourdieu claims that the epistemological position set out in this work remains an undeveloped one by fellow sociologists in two respects: firstly, in the area of 'the logic of discovery as opposed to the logic of validation'. He suggests that, for too long, sociologists have ignored the importance of the generation of 'ideas' or 'hypotheses'. These have been placed outside the logic of validation. Validation has been regarded as scientific, but 'ideas'

have not held the same status. And yet, (Bourdieu uses Weber for support in his belief) it is the 'inspiration', the 'idea', which is the decisive factor which in the final analysis wins any accomplishments for science (Weber, 1948:135). The second aspect of the epistemological position outlined in *The Craft of Sociology* which Bourdieu believes remains underdeveloped, relates to the constructedness of knowledge and the 'construction of a specific scientific object'. These concepts will be dealt with in more detail in the body of this Chapter. Suffice to say here that in regard to the construction of a scientific object, Bourdieu calls for a 'break' with the past, a 'breaking free' from the representations of common-sense understanding which are 'pre-notions' and 'pre-concepts', and the establishment of a sociology of sociology which questions the illusion of absolute knowledge. Concomitant with the establishment of the sociology of sociology is a break from 'ordinary language' and the development of a new language with non-animist representations. Bourdieu's belief is that the physical sciences have been much more successful and effective in this regard.

In the Preface to *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992), Wacquant comments that whilst Bourdieu's work is not without gaps, tensions and contradictions, it is free from any attempt by Bourdieu to '*normalise* sociological thinking'. Wacquant commends Bourdieu's opposition to any dogmatisation of thought (quoted in Bourdieu et al., 1992:xiii). Whether or not Bourdieu is successful in his intent will be discussed later in the Chapter.

4.2 What is the 'subject'?

> *Esse est interesse:* Being is being in, it is belonging and being possessed, in short, participation, taking part, according importance, interest ... In the beginning is the *illusion*, adherence to the game, the interest *for* the game, interest *in* the game, the founding of value, *investment* in both the economic and psychoanalytic sense. The institution is inseparable from

> the founding of the game. (Bourdieu, quoted in Montefiore, 1983:1; emphasis in original)

For Bourdieu, there is no social existence outside of subjects. Subjects transform their social world, their society and practices; subjects modify their social structures and institutions. Everything with which sociology deals has to do with subjects who constitute through their actions (Bourdieu et al., 1991). Sociologists themselves are also agents in the social process. It is not possible for them to remain outside the world and look down from above. One could very easily read a subjectivist viewpoint into the above if it were not for the fact that Bourdieu also sees institutions and social structures as autonomous, resisting the will of the subjects.

In *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1992:121), Bourdieu explains that the main purpose of his concept of *habitus* is to break '...with the intellectualist (and intellectualocentric) philosophy of action represented in particular by the theory of *homo economicus* as a rational agent...' *Habitus* is a theory of practice, a structure ('scientific habitus'), to use in accounting 'for the actual logic of practice':

> I wanted initially to account for the practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc. – by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free product of a conscience positing its own ends and maximizing its utility through rational computation. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:121)

A second essential function of *habitus* for Bourdieu is the break with positivist materialism, 'the theory of practice as practice posits that objects of knowledge are constructed and not passively recorded...' With the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu's intention is to '...escape from under the philosophy of the subject without doing away with the agent', but also to escape from under the philosophy of structure '...without forgetting to take into account the effects it wields upon and through the agent' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:121). Bourdieu suggests that *habitus* is an old concept and he compares it with Hegel's *ethos*, Husserl's *habitualitat* and Mauss'

hexis. It is Bourdieu's contention that those who have used these concepts shared his intentions in regard to his philosophy of the subject and the object.

It is 'the field', however, and not the subject which is the primary focus for sociologists. The fact that one cannot construct a field without individuals is not lost by Bourdieu who recognizes that individuals both construct the field and often have the research data attached to them. It is not to say that individuals are 'illusions':

> ...they exist as agents – and not as biological individuals, actors, or subjects – who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field under consideration by the fact that they possess the necessary properties to be effective, to produce effects, in this field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:107)

In his call for reflexive sociology, Bourdieu contends that such a method teaches us '...that we must look in the object constructed by science for the *social conditions of possibility of the "subject"*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:214; emphasis in original). Bourdieu goes on to say that the conditions for the possibility of the scientific object and the conditions for the possibility of the scientific subject are the same. Each new development in scientific research into the knowledge of the scientific object is a development in the social conditions of the production of the scientific subject.

For Bourdieu, reflexive sociology is the opposite of classical philosophy which encouraged us to look within the subject for an explanation of objectivity. The adoption of reflexive sociology means that:

> It is to work to account for the empirical 'subject' in the very terms of the objectivity constructed by the scientific 'subject' - in particular by situating him or her at a determinate place in a social space - and, thereby, to acquire the awareness and (possible) mastery of all the constraints that may impinge on the scientific subject through the ties which bind him to the empirical objects, those interest, pulsions, pre-suppositions, with

> which he must break in order fully to constitute himself as such.
> (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:214)

Perhaps a simpler way of putting this would be to say that reflexive sociology or a sociology of sociology pertains to understanding the subject through a method of 'scientific' objectivity which produces knowledge of a 'scientific' subject in the context of the many historical and social pre-suppositions from which the scientific subject must break.

Bourdieu sees the debate on the philosophy of the subject as a debate of many forms which continues between the social sciences and philosophy. He seems somewhat sensitive about announcements of the 'return of the subject', '...the *resurrection* of the individual savagely crucified by the social sciences' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:179; emphasis in original). Even in everyday life Bourdieu believes that there is a constant struggle between subjectivism and objectivism: 'Everyone seeks to impose his subjective representation of himself as an objective representation' (Bourdieu, 1993:58). But what Bourdieu's work is about is to raise the subject to a higher objectivity so-to-speak. This is the sole purpose of reflexive sociology. Again, he makes a distinction between agents and subjects and believes that, whilst agents have some degree of subjective experience, that experience 'is not the full truth of what they do but which is part of the truth of what they do' (1993:58). The higher objectivity which Bourdieu believes a sociology of sociology would afford, would result in making room for, or releasing, subjectivity.

4.3 Consciousness

In *Sociology in Question*, Bourdieu raises what he sees as one of the major problems inherent in the theory of the perception of the social world, namely, the relationship between 'scientific' consciousness and what Bourdieu sees as everyday consciousness (Bourdieu, 1993:54). Already we are seeing Bourdieu's insistence on

there being a 'scientific' method to unravel the 'scientific' subject, the 'scientific' object, and now the 'scientific' consciousness. According to Bourdieu, there must be an abandonment of 'spontaneous sociology' which is presented as a quasi-scientific sociology. He suggests sociologists have difficulty with this notion for two reasons: firstly, they try to reconcile the rights of individuals with the scientific process and, secondly, they fail to subject their own practice to any scientific rigour or, indeed, fail to even base it on any scientific methodology (Bourdieu et al., 1991:17).

Durkheim finds favour with Bourdieu in his distinction between the non-conscious and unconscious, and in Durkheim's assertion that representational life extends beyond consciousness:

> The idea of an unconscious representation and that of a consciousness without an ego that apprehends are basically equivalent. When we say that a mental fact is unconscious we mean simply that it is not apprehended. The question is merely, which is the more suitable expression. It is no easier for us to imagine a representation without a thinking subject than to imagine a representation without consciousness. (Durkheim, 1953:23)

Bourdieu calls for the 'principle of unconsciousness' (*sine qua non*) in order to reformulate 'methodological determinism' in the logic of sociological science. He insists that no scientist can abandon a process for 'methodological determinism' without also abandoning the discipline of science to explain the work produced. Further, Bourdieu suggests that it is this very notion which is lost on sociologists who continue to express the 'principle of non-consciousness ... in the vocabulary of the unconscious' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:16).

A second principle inherent in the theory of knowledge which Bourdieu calls for, is what he describes as the 'positive form of the principle of unconsciousness'. By this he means that social relations are not formed by relations between subjects and their motivations. Social relations are formed through social conditions and positions and, according to Bourdieu, have more 'reality' than the subjects that they link.

The whole emphasis built into the above principles of theory, has to do with recognizing that certain phenomena occur which are not known to our conscious selves. As Durkheim says, 'Whether they are known to some other unknown "self" or whether they are outside the realm of all apprehension is not for us a matter of primary importance' (Durkheim, 1953:23). What is of importance to both Durkheim and Bourdieu is the simple recognition that representational life extends beyond current consciousness.

4.4 The autonomy of the subject

We have already seen that Bourdieu, while stating that subjects constitute their lives, realize them, transform them and modify them through their own activities, also holds the belief that the very institutions and social practices which the subjects construct become 'autonomous entities', resisting the will of those subjects. Bourdieu's focus, however, is not so much on the autonomous entities but on the 'practical operators' which are at work in the social constructions. The *habitus*, the key concept in Bourdieu's work, is also structured through social relations, *habitus* being *the* 'practical operator' through which subjects work to construct their social world.

Bourdieu clearly sums up his position on the autonomy of the subject in a further explanation of *habitus*:

> To speak of *habitus* is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is socially collective. *Habitus* is socialized subjectivity ... the human mind is socially bounded, socially structured. The individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped - save to the extent that he becomes aware of it – 'within the limits of his brain', as Marx said, that is, within the limits of the system of categories he owes to his upbringing and training. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126)

The epistemological break for which Bourdieu calls, is necessary, according to him, in order to gain some kind of valid scientific knowledge about the scientific object. It seems that what Bourdieu is saying here is that such knowledge would free up sociological scientists 'to move beyond pre-scientific concepts and questions', and allow them to establish a 'systematic barrier against *ex cathedra* prophesying, a temptation which sociologists cannot resist...' (Krais, 1991:viii). So Bourdieu, at least, is affording a degree of autonomy to sociological scientists to establish scientific knowledge, if they engage scientific methodology to study the field of human behaviour. Lest this sound too subjective, Bourdieu does make it quite clear that sociology as the science concerned with the social world is itself socially constructed, a construction of knowledge about an object which also is a ready-made construction.

In answer to a question put to him on the implications of a deterministic view in his work, Bourdieu replied that determinism has two aspects to it – 'objective necessity, implied in reality itself' and 'subjective necessity, the *sense* of necessity or freedom'. He adds that it is not a matter of opinion as to the degree to which the world might be determined or 'free'. He repeats that it is the social scientists' role to 'discover necessity'. He refers to the 'objective necessity' which is reality (the laws of the social world). Bourdieu goes on to say that better knowledge means more possible freedom and choice. He gives the example 'if X, then Y ... The freedom that consists in choosing to accept or refuse the *if,* has no meaning so long as one is unaware of the relationship that links it to *then'* (Bourdieu, 1993:25; emphasis in original). It is in knowledge, or to reflect Bourdieu's concept more accurately – it is in 'known law' that the 'social agent' has the possibility of freedom. An 'unknown law is a nature or a destiny' but when social agents become aware of the laws, this allows choice (quoted in Murray, 1992:138). For as long as the nature of the 'game' is not recognized or is unknown and, according to Bourdieu, mere consciousness is not enough to dispel any illusion, every action of the social agent, even those which seem the most creative and original, are nothing more than encounters between 'reified and embodied history' or between the *habitus* and the 'necessity immanent in the field',

the *illusio* (quoted in Montefiore, 1983:3). According to Bourdieu, the social agent is providing the scene of action but is not the subject of it.

Whilst it may appear that Bourdieu through his emphasis on establishing scientific research methods to study scientific objects is attempting to establish absolute universal truths about the social world, he counters this possible criticism with a reminder that scientists are mere recorders:

> ...in the form of tendential laws, the logic that is characteristic of a *particular game, at a particular moment*, and which plays to the advantage of those who dominate the game and are able, *de facto* or *de jure*, to define the rules of the game. (Bourdieu, 1993:26; emphasis in original)

So for Boudieu, social agents are products of history but they can also determine their social world which, in turn, determines them.

4.5 The role of language

Bourdieu is firmly of the opinion that sociology is a science, but he recognizes that it is a science 'not like others' due to the presence of the relationship between the scientific experiments and what Bourdieu calls the 'naïve experience' of the social world. In addition to this, he notes a further complication which is in the 'naïve expression' of that experience.

For Bourdieu, it is not enough to acknowledge, or denounce the *illusio* in order to make the necessary break from the pre-concepts and pre-suppositions of 'spontaneous sociology'. Language is a major prohibiting factor in social agents' attempts to be free from 'illusory constructs'. What appear to be simple words of expression and definition, are really 'a legacy of words, a legacy of ideas' (title of a book by

Brunschvicg). The apparent simplicity of language goes unnoticed '...because it *is* so ordinary, but it carries in its vocabulary and syntax a petrified philosophy of the social, always ready to spring out of the common words, or complex expressions made up of common words...' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:21).

Bourdieu suggests that when language appears to be erudite and in the guise of science, pre-notions 'insinuate themselves into sociological discourse' (1991:21). He is insistent that language be subject to a scientific methodological critique. Until this happens, objects which are pre-constructed by language will continue to be seen as data.

Bourdieu sees urgency in sociologists undertaking a scientific methodological critique of language. Sociologists are merely 'complying with the language which gives them their objects', if they continue to organize and express their work around terms simply borrowed from everyday vocabulary. One such instrument which would assist sociologists to engage in this scientific critique of language, would be a nosography (systematic description) of ordinary language. Bourdieu gives recognition to Wittgenstein for the development of such an instrument and encourages its use. He writes that:

> Such a critique would give the sociologist the means of dispelling the semantic halo, the 'fringe of meaning' [William James], that surrounds the most common words, and of controlling the fluctuating meanings of all the metaphors, even the seemingly most dead ones, which threaten to situate the coherence of discourse in an order other than that in which he seeks to set his formulations. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:22)

Examples of images which Bourdieu gives which he suggests could be placed into specific categories of 'biological or mechanical' are: equilibrium, pressure, force, tension, reflection, root, body, cell, secretion, growth, regulation, gestation, withering-away and so on. It is Bourdieu's contention that these images are very likely to 'smuggle in an inadequate philosophy of social life and, above all, to

discourage the search for specific explanation by supplying too easily the appearance of explanation' (1991:22).

The above images or 'schemes' are used in both 'naïve utterances' and 'erudite discourse'. Bourdieu contends that it is from this double life that they 'derive their pseudo-explanatory force':

> Hiding their common origin in the garb of scientific jargon, these mixed schemes escape refutation – either because they immediately offer a blanket explanation or awaken the most familiar experience ... or because they imply a spontaneous philosophy of history... (Bourdieu et al., 1991:23)

Bourdieu sees urgency in the need to break with the pre-constructions and pre-concepts of the past. He sees this need as particularly urgent in sociology for, in his estimation, three-quarters of research merely converts social problems into sociological problems. He cites several examples of such conversions: old age, discrimination against women, youth problems and so forth. He points out that many of these problems correspond to bureaucratic agencies or ministries – Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry for Youth Affairs and so on. As we are all products of the State and functionaries within in it we need to break away from these pre-thought objects.

The problem with our pre-constructions, according to Bourdieu, is that our instruments of knowledge (or language) serve to construct what we perceive as objects of our knowledge, when those instruments themselves should be taken *as* the object. Bourdieu sees an added complication in the growing use of videos in science. Discourse '...is taken at face value, as it presents itself, with a philosophy of science as *recording* (rather than a construction)'. The danger here is that this leads one '...to ignore the social space in which the discourse is produced, the structures that determine it, and so on' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:249; emphasis in original).

It is clearly obvious to Bourdieu that any attempt to break away from pre-constructed objects is a difficult one, if only because the 'given' is seemingly self-evident. Any scientific work developed with the purpose of a break from common-sense faces difficulties:

> So long as you take it as you find it, as it presents itself, the social world offers ready-made data, statistics, discourses that can easily be recorded, and so on. In a world, when you question it as it asks to be questioned, it has a great deal to say for itself, it tells you whatever you want to know, it gives you figures ... It likes sociologists who *record,* who reflect it, who function as mirrors. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:249-250; emphasis in original)

Although Bourdieu encourages the use of a nosography instrument devised by Wittgenstein, it is clear that his real preference is for an instrument (language) far more elaborate than a classification of ordinary social language. He believe that the physical sciences have been successful in this regard, making a 'categorical break with animist representations of matter and action on matter' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:23). Social science must also make this epistemological break '...that can separate scientific interpretation from all artificialist or anthropomorphic interpretations of the functioning of society' (ibid.). Bourdieu calls for rigorous testing of any such schemes to 'avoid contamination ... from any structural affinity with ordinary language'.

Bourdieu regards it as inevitable that everyone perceives himself/herself as 'a bit of a sociologist'. This is because the sociologist is concerned with those things which are part of 'everyday chatter'. Because sociology currently draws on words 'from the common lexicon', this in turn lends such use (even when used in systematic senses) to abuse and misrepresentation when spoken 'outside the circle of specialists'.

In proposing a sociology of sociology Bourdieu believes that the one thing it will offer which differs from all other sociologies, is that it '*continually turns back onto*

itself the scientific weapons it produces' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:214; emphasis in original). It recognizes what determines it and uses that knowledge.

4.6 The matter of 'truth'

Bourdieu's belief is that sociology offers a far 'truer' version of the world than do many other disciplines. He sees sociology as a science which demonstrates, at its best, stringent methods of verification and systematic hypotheses. This emphasis on sociology as a 'science' and, indeed, the excellence of sociology, is an evident theme in most of Bourdieu's work. There is no doubt that Bourdieu is committed to the potential of sociology as a science: '...sociology is an esoteric science – the initiation is very slow and requires a veritable conversion of a whole world vision' (quoted in Murray, 1992:136).

Bourdieu's commitment to sociology as a science is motivated by the fact that he considers sociology as a means of accessing the truth about the world, of finding the truest version of the social world (Murray, 1992:136). He is explicit in his belief that the purpose of sociology as science is to seek the truth:

> If the sociologist managers to produce any truth, he does so not *despite* the interest he has in producing that truth but *because* he has any interest in doing so – which is the exact opposite of the usual somewhat fatuous discourse about 'neutrality'. (Bourdieu, 1993:11; emphasis in original)

The discovery of a truth in science, according to Bourdieu, is dependent on two factors: the degree to which the sociologist or scientist is interested in knowing and making known the truth, and the capacity of the scientist to find it. However, Bourdieu stresses the importance of any scientific truths which are revealed being '...accompanied by a scientific knowledge of what determines them and of the *limits* that they set on knowledge' (Bourdieu, 1993:11; emphasis in original).

In the *Introduction* to this Chapter we saw that Bourdieu is concerned with moving the notion of the 'idea' or the 'inspiration' of scientific research from the realm of 'intuition' or chance to the position of *ars inveniendi*, 'scientific invention' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:vii). There are two aspects of the construction of the scientific object which are central to this: the 'constructedness' of knowledge and the construction of a *specific* scientific object (Bourdieu et al., 1991:vii). Here again Bourdieu warns that knowledge, even what may be called scientifically grounded knowledge, is not all that it seems. It is merely 'fabricated knowledge, generated only through the work of the scientist, in other words, a constructed knowledge' (Krais, 1991:vii). The second aspect of *ars inveniendi* which demands attention, concerns the construction of the specific scientific object. This is where Bourdieu eloquently calls for the 'break' from pre-notions and pre-concepts in order to develop the 'autonomous object area'. This arena would have its own systematic design and 'formulate its own questions' (Krais, 1991:vii). Integral to the systematic design would be the development of a new language free from any animist or historical representations as mentioned in the above section on *The Role of Language*.

The construction of the object is a major theme in Bourdieu's work:

> I believe more than ever that the most important thing is constructing the object ... All through my work I've seen how everything, including the technical problems, hangs on the preliminary definition of the object...(Bourdieu et al., 1991:252)

He also recognizes the fact that one does not 'confront the object totally disarmed', but comes to it with some general principles and 'master[s] in a practical state everything that is contained in the fundamental concepts: *habitus*, field, and so on' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:253). The recognition of, and working to these principles, is termed the sociologist's *metier*. This means that one of the principles paramount in the construction of the scientific object is the making explicit of pre-suppositions, constructing 'sociologically the preconstruction of the object'. For Bourdieu, the 'real' is always 'relational', a relationship between one or more components and another.

He gives as an example students who wish to study at a particular *Ecole* in Paris - this is a common subject for research. Bourdieu's contention, however, is that each *Ecole* is 'related' to another, to all others, that is they are not independent of each other, each has its definition as opposed to, in contrast to, as a development of, all others. The subject area for study should be all the *grandes ecoles.* The real is always relational. What emanates from a partial study is a naïve result:

> So these people are studying an object which is no object at all ... the more naïve the object you study, the more easily the data present themselves to be studied. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:253)

There are considerable difficulties, though, in studying what would be seen as the total subject area of study in such cases as the *Ecole* example. Bourdieu frankly admits these: firstly, the field is exceptionally wide, secondly, the data and statistics differ in recording and collection in different venues and, thirdly, the results are less likely to be accepted as scientific due to the problems encountered in attempting to 'empirically grasp the constructed object'. That said, Bourdieu insists that it is always important to think 'in terms of relationships', to employ an 'analysis of correspondence' which recognizes that the construction of the object cannot be separated from the tools which construct the object.

Durkheim's notion that one of the obstacles to scientific knowledge is the illusion of absolute knowledge, is a concept which Bourdieu shares. Furthermore, the possibility of a 'scientific illusion' being created as a result of the sociologist constructing against common-sense knowledge is acknowledged by Bourdieu as being a potential risk:

> The sociology of sociology, which, for me, is an integral part of sociology, is indispensable for calling into question both the illusion of absolute knowledge which is inherent in the scientist's position, and the particular form that this illusion takes depending on the position that the scientist occupies in the space of scientific production. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:250)

In *Homo Academicus* (1988) Bourdieu attempts to make the above point very clear. He states that in his study of the academic world he says he learned two major lessons: the fact of not understanding oneself as a scientist and, secondly, not knowing the implications of the observer's position. He believes these factors generated errors about the truth of the object, and they could have given an illusion of absolute knowledge if they had not been identified as such. According to Bourdieu, in order to reach the truth of a situation, it is the scientific stance itself which must be taken as the object.

4.7 Discussion

Bourdieu appears, at least on some occasions, to distinguish between the subject and the individual/agent, as is seen in his explanation of the *habitus* and the importance of the sociologist focusing on the field rather than the individual. We recall that Bourdieu does not purport that individuals are illusions. However, what he does say is that individuals 'exist as agents ... and not subjects' (Bourdieu, 1992:107). It seems that he is making an important distinction here, a distinction which more clearly highlights his stated intention to escape from under the philosophy of the subject. However, there does seem to be a lack of consistency in the distinction between subjects and individuals-as-agents in Bourdieu's work. If nothing exists outside the social world, and subjects determine, modify, construct and transform their social world, how can it be that individuals 'exist as agents and not subjects'? Bourdieu also says that '*social agents are determined only to the extent that they determine themselves*' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:136; emphasis in original). If this is so, where does the subject fit – and how is the transformation from social agent to subject made?

In the Introduction to this Chapter I made reference to Wacquant's claim that Bourdieu is non-dogmatic and has no wish to normalize sociological thinking (Wacquant, 1992:xiii). Perhaps that claim needs to be investigated further. Bourdieu himself likes to believe that what he is doing in his work is giving the audience a *modus operandi* and not an *opus operatum*. Wacquant tells us that this opposition 'is dear to him' (Bourdieu). On the one hand, one could say that suggesting that the only way to achieve an epistemological break with the past consisting of pre-notions and pre-concepts, is to develop a sociology of sociology (which includes the development of a new non-animist 'language' or representations such as the physical sciences have employed) which does not normalize sociological thinking but frees up thought from the hackles of past encumbrances.

But the above view proposed by Bourdieu is surely flawed if language itself, animist or non-animist, is produced by socially conditioned agents - and what other agents are there? Bourdieu's own explanation is '...the social sciences have to perform the epistemological break that can separate scientific interpretation from all artificialist or anthropomorphic interpretations of the functioning of society' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:23). I am unsure as to how this could be possible. Bourdieu hastens to add that any schemes used for sociological explanation would need to be rigorously tested to 'avoid contamination' to which 'even the most purified schemes are exposed whenever they have a structural affinity with ordinary-language schemes' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:24). The questions remain: how can one be in a position of being outside of text (or *con*text), in order to be in a position to develop a new, pure language/representation? How can any agent arrive at the favoured, omniscient position of having a non-anthropomorphic interpretation? Is this a non-human privileged arena?

To come back to the question of the degree to which Bourdieu might be attempting to 'normalize' sociological thinking, it is interesting to note Bourdieu's use and definition of the term, 'propaganda', in his sociological work. In 'Social Theory as Habitus', Brubaker considers the implications of 'reading' Bourdieu's sociological

work (Brubaker, 1993:216). He suggests that students attending Bourdieu's lectures would be more 'structurally disposed' to appropriating Bourdieu's theory, and would undergo a 'partial re-socialization'. This mode of appropriation would correspond to Bourdieu's 'propaganda', defined non-pejoratively as 'the effort to propagate and institutionalize a particular way of sociological thinking, to establish a collective modus operandi' (quoted in Brubaker, 1993:232). Brubaker considers that:

> ...a purely theoretical reading of Bourdieu ... mistakes the point and purpose of his texts. Their point is not simply to interpret the world; it is to change the world, by changing the way in which we - in the first instance, other scientists - see it. (Brubaker, 1993:216)

The question I remain with is: Why would a specified *modus operandi* be less inclined to be regarded as dogma, or 'truth', than an *opus operatum*? Is not establishing and defining a specific 'scientific' method for studying a 'scientific' object engaging in the normalization of sociological thinking?

If Bourdieu is seriously considering the use of a new unencumbered language for sociology, and it seems he is, then, he appears to fall short of explaining just how that language will remain 'pure'. It must be said that there is more to language than the produced word. Bourdieu, himself, acknowledges this. The intention inherent in the author's message and the interpretation of the text by the audience, seem to me to be two essential components of communication which Bourdieu has not developed enough to be convincing. The potential gap between the intention of the author and the reception by the audience can be substantial. The development of a pure language, in my view, ignores the wider text, that is, it ignores the text in which the language is 'produced', it ignores problems and 'interference' in production. Further, in my view, to suggest that a new language would make possible a sociology of sociologies, is to ignore the text of reception of the product. I am unable to go along with Bourdieu's thesis that the physical sciences have been somewhat more successful in being able to presenting valid and scientific arguments than the social

sciences due to their 'break with animist representations of matter and action on matter' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:23).

Bourdieu is very keen to have sociology accepted as a science. While other sociologists (Foucault, Habermas) have perhaps questioned the sacredness of 'science' due to the text in which it is produced and enmeshed, Bourdieu's view is that if other disciplines such as the physical and biological disciplines are 'sciences', then so is sociology. While one might have some sympathy with this idea, to suggest that in order to achieve true scientific status the social sciences need an epistemological break with the past and with pre-notions, which need to be replaced with an 'autonomous object' which has 'systematic foundations' (aided by a new language), suggests to me, something beyond 'common sense'. This, of course, is exactly the position for which Bourdieu strives, a 'beyond common sense' milieu. However, I do not share his confidence in a non-animist system of representations being any more pure a form of communication than other forms. Moreover, I do not share Bourdieu's confidence in the physical sciences, at least in their system of representations, as being either autonomous or contamination free.

Reflexive sociology's intent to reveal the scientific subject through a scientific method of objectivity is, indeed, grand. Again, I feel less confident than Bourdieu in regard to separating the 'scientific' object from the object and separating the 'scientific' subject from the subject. What is more, my confidence does not even extend as far as formulating a 'scientific' subject. I base my reservations on my contention that one does not exist outside of the *habitus*, that one is always in *con*text, and for this reason, a 'scientific' subject is an impossibility. Of course, Bourdieu's definition of 'scientific' is far more encompassing than the implication of empirical dexterity pertaining to scientific rules. And I find Bourdieu's elaboration tantalizing here, for he asks a pertinent question: Why not call sociology a science if other disciplines claim the nomenclature? To that extent, I find Bourdieu's thesis attractive. That said, I am far less convinced about the possibility of the presence of autonomous entities than Bourdieu, be they autonomous objects or subjects.

In affording agents some kind of transforming power and not 'sentencing agents to the iron cage of rigid determinism', Bourdieu believes the sociologist offers them 'the means of a potentially liberating awakening of consciousness' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:215). On the face of it, his exhortations sound redemptive and inspirational. But exactly what does the 'liberating awakening of consciousness' mean? Unfortunately, that question remains unanswered.

We have seen that, on the one hand, Bourdieu states that the subject constitutes and transforms its world, that subjects are agents who through their actions are able to modify their social world and social practices, and that there is, in fact, no social existence without agents. On the other hand, Bourdieu is clear that these very social agents are powerless against the very institutions which, although socially constituted - 'the consolidated product of the social activity of individuals' (Krais, 1991:ix), are autonomous entities resisting the intentions of the subject. How can this autonomy occur? It remains unclear as to what processes are involved here. Further, if there is merit in Bourdieu's notion of 'autonomous entities' resisting the will of subjects, how can any social change occur?

Bourdieu gives recognition to others before him who have used similar concepts like *habitus*, 'which being itself structured through social relations, it functions as the practical operator through which the action of the subjects becomes social action, the practical construction of the social world' (Krais, 1991:ix). Amongst those to whom Bourdieu gives recognition and who 'were inspired by a theoretical intention akin to my own', are Hegel and his *ethos*, Husserl's *habiltualitat* and Mauss' *hexis*. It is not the fact that these philosophers are included which draws attention, but rather the fact that Foucault is excluded. Surely, Foucault's *discourse* is a similar concept, remembering that Foucault was interested in *con*text rather than text.

In discussing the necessity to break away from pre-notions and pre-concepts (a notion which comes up repeatedly in Bourdieu's work) Bourdieu, while suggesting that

some such scientific instrument like nosography would allow this necessary break to occur, does not take account of the fact that social agents in 'breaking away' take with them their own framework of text, or *con*text. Bourdieu believes the use of videos in the sciences today is an example of 'science as recording', without taking into account 'the social space in which discourse is produced, the structures that determine it, and so on' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:249). But is there not some inconsistency here? Is Bourdieu not guilty of the same action – by promoting the use of another language to explain social science, or at least an instrument of systematization such as nosography? Is he not guilty of failing to take into account 'the social space in which [*that*] discourse is produced, the structures that determine it'?

Does Bourdieu perceive subjects to be 'prisoners of their own consciousness'? In Bourdieu's words, 'the individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped ... "within the limits of his own brain", as Marx said' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126). This does appear to be a statement akin to seeing subjects as prisoners of their own consciousness. However, for Bourdieu, the entrapment of the individual is only real 'save to the extent that (the subject) becomes aware of it'. So perhaps a more correct reading of Bourdieu's position is that subjects are prisoners of their own non-consciousness and, indeed, of their consciousness, until they become aware of that fact. Only, then, are subjects able to escape that entrapment, and only to the degree or extent to which they do become aware. While this notion offers the possibility of liberation, and perhaps even autonomy of the subject, just what is the subject escaping from, and into what new realm is it being freed?

5 Commentary: the subject, consciousness, language and truth

In this final Chapter of my thesis, the intention is threefold: firstly, to outline the major contributions of each of the writers to our understanding of the world in which we live. Secondly, my intention is to engage in a comparative analysis of the writings of our French thinkers concerning the particular issues outlined under the chapter headings. This includes a discussion of the similarities and differences amongst the writers and, thirdly, I again ask the question: Are we prisoners of our own consciousness? I answer this question, not only from the perspectives of the writers whose work has been the basis of this thesis, but also from my own perspective.

5.1 Major Contributions

Each of the four writers whose work I have been examining, has made a major contribution to the knowledge of our social world. Sartre's work is provocative, to say the least, on the nature of freedom. For Sartre, 'freedom is both the starting point and ultimate goal' (Sartre quoted in Busch, 1975:55) of the individual. Any rules are those which the subjects or players invent. They have total responsibility for themselves from the moment they come into the world. For Sartre, the 'authenticity' of individuals and, creation, are linked with the choice of freedom:

> Therefore, authentic man never loses sight of the absolute goals of the human condition. He is the pure choice of his absolute goals. These goals are: to save the world (in making there be being), to make freedom the foundation of the world, to take responsibility for creation and to make the origin of the world absolute through freedom taking hold of itself. (Sartre, 1992:448)

It is freedom which creates the world; it is freedom which gives meaning to the world, but it is not the case that humans choose to be creators. Sartre contends

that it is not possible to have the choice of *not* creating. Humans are 'free consciousnesses that cause the phenomenal world to appear out of the full positivity of being' (Anderson, 1993:56).

Concomitant with Sartre's contribution on the freedom of the individual, is his rendition of the subject. He took pains to make clear his rejection of both phenomenological reduction and the transcendental ego: 'The ego is not transcendental, it is simply transcendent, an imaginary construct rather than an origin' (Howells, 1997:29). The 'being-in-itself' is simply that – in-itself. It is there in-itself for no purpose, for no-one. It has no conscious intention, '...no foundation and no explanation or justification for its being' (Anderson, 1993:56). Sartre's notion is that humans must respond to this situation by 'losing [themselves] ... in order to save being', in order to find themselves as free consciousness which gives meaning to 'being'. 'There is no other reason for being than this giving' (Sartre, 1992:449). Sartre states that it is only through 'the other' that the subject can attain any idea of itself, but he warns:

> Even if I could see myself clearly and directly as an object, what I should see would not be the adequate representation of what I am in myself and for myself ... but the apprehension of my being-outside-myself, for the Other; that is, the objective apprehension of my being-other, which is radically different from my being-for-myself, and which does not refer to myself at all. (Sartre, 1956:242)

What Sartre seems to be saying is that, whilst it is only through 'the other' that the subject can gain any knowledge of itself, the resultant knowledge will always be incomplete. The representation of the subject as a being-other, a subject apprehended by the 'other', is not the exactly the same as the subject who is the being-in-itself, - there in-itself, for no purpose, for no-one.

According to Busch (1975:55), Anderson (1979:5) and Detmer (1988:1), Sartre's work continues to be misread, misunderstood, and misrepresented.

There is no doubt that Michel Foucault is acclaimed by many as being one of the greatest thinkers of our time. '...Michel Foucault was perhaps the single most famous intellectual in the world' (Miller, 1993:13), '...he was the most famous intellectual figure in the world' (Ryan, 1993:12), '...he was without doubt France's most prominent philosopher ... his international reputation has almost eclipsed his reputation in France' (Macey, 1993:xi). Prado suggests (1995:9) that it has been feminist scholars who have been the most ready to engage with the works of Foucault. Amongst those are: Weedon (1987), Diamond and Quinby (1988), Bartky (1990), Hartsock (1990), Barrett (1991), Sawicki (1991) and Ramazanoglu (1993). In the main, what these writers have done is focus directly on those parts of Foucault's work which have relevance to their own projects. For example, Foucault's views on discourse and the relationship of power have been of interest.

Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) is arguably his most far-reaching work. It gives an interpretation of truth, knowledge and rationality from an historicist perspective. His interest lies in how it is that we come to believe the things we do. As I have previously noted, Foucault's understanding of discourse is far broader than that of Sartre, Derrida and Bourdieu: 'We express ourselves in words of which [we] are not the masters' (Foucault, 1970:297). While I have noted above that both Derrida and Bourdieu would agree with this statement, it is Foucault's work which is the most 'original, monumental, general theory as to why this theoretical lexicon [discourse] is preferable to that of ideology, social formation, class and so on' (Barrett, 1991:126). Rather than being interested in language per se or text, Foucault's interest lay in *con*text. In a lecture entitled, 'Politics and the Study of Discourse', Foucault's makes his interest clear:

> I am a pluralist: the problem which I have set myself is that of the *individualization* of discourses. There exist criteria for individualizing discourses which are known and reliable (or almost): the linguistic system to which they belong, the identity of the subject which holds them together. But there are other criteria, no less familiar but much more enigmatic. (Foucault, 1991b:54)

Foucault does not seek a unitary form of discourse: 'Nothing, you see, is more foreign to me than the quest for a sovereign, unique and constraining form' (Foucault: 1991b:55). Foucault agrees that, while his intention is one which 'emphasizes discontinuity', he has been prepared to '*add* to the plurality of distinguishable systems' of discourse' (Foucault, 1991b:55).

Jacques Derrida has made a major contribution to our understanding of language through the deconstruction of it. His intent is to show that meanings are not fixed, but are positional. His term, '*differance*', encapsulates his concept of language. That is, no language can exist without '*differance*' which has a bifold role: one to denote difference in signification, and the other to denote deferral to a past history where the meanings originated. '*Differance* can be neither self-present nor self-identical; it is never constituted, only ever constituting...'(Hart, 1989:37). For this reason, Derrida finds the notion of philosophy ('the fixation of a certain concept and project of translation') difficult:

> What does philosophy say? What does the philosopher say when he is being a philosopher? He says: What matters is truth or meaning, and since meaning is before or beyond language, it follows that it is translatable. Meaning has the commanding role, and consequently one must be able to fix its univocality or, in any case, to master its plurivocality. (Derrida, 1985:120)

However, Derrida does believe it is possible to master 'plurivocality'. Furthermore: 'If this plurivocality can be mastered, then translation, understood as the transport of a semantic content into another signifying form, is possible' (Derrida, 1985:120). Derrida is firmly of the opinion that there can be no philosophy unless such translation occurs.

Montefiore, in an interview following his presentation to a philosophers' conference at the University of Southampton, 12-13 April 1999, commented that Derrida had awakened people to the contradictions in the notion of rationality:

> I do not in fact think that Derrida has so much led people to a deep suspicion about rationality as that he has given peculiarly disconcerting expression to suspicions which were already at work ... We cannot simply retreat to a 'pre-Derridean' stage;

> this would be like burying one's head in the sands of self-imposed ignorance'. ('The Idea of "Crisis" in Philosophy', in *The Philosophers' Magazine*, Summer 1999:28)

Montefiore suggests that many find Derrida's work disturbing, because '...it seems to confirm doubts and uncertainties that people, who would wish to be more uncomplicatedly rational than they really know themselves to be' (*The Philosophers' Magazine*, Summer, 1999:28). It is no wonder that, for many, Derrida's work is regarded as disturbing. Taking away authorship from text raises many questions pertaining to the nature of the subject.

Bourdieu is the only one of our French thinkers who is proud to call himself a sociologist. In fact, Sartre, Foucault and Derrida, not only do not label themselves sociologists, but , at least in the case of Foucault and Derrida, attempt to denounce any labels at all. Bourdieu's interests span across many topics: academia, photography, museums, education, language, philosophy and literature, to name a few. Perhaps his major contribution is in the area of 'practice'. In *The Craft of Sociology* (1991), Bourdieu proposes a scientific method to approach studies in the field of social science. His contention is that sociology is a science like any other science, but it must engage in scientific practice if it is to be taken seriously. He promotes:

> ...a distinctive approach to the production of sociological knowledge, one which among other things unites profound theoretical knowledge and reflection with the constant challenge of empirical research and analysis. (Postone et al., 1993:1)

In Bourdieu's view, we must resist the temptation to engage in spontaneous sociology, which has no scientific basis:

> All the techniques for performing breaks – logical critique of ideas, statistical testing of spurious self-evidences, radical and methodical challenging of appearances – remain powerless, however, until one has overthrown the very principle of spontaneous sociology, i.e. the philosophy of knowledge of the social and of human action on which it is based. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:15)

Instead, sociologists must move away from existing methods and develop a new conceptual scientific method in order to be able to research the scientific object. 'Sociology cannot constitute itself as a science truly separated from common-sense notions unless it combats the systematic pretensions of spontaneous sociology...'(Bourdieu et al., 1991:15).

Bourdieu does see science and scientists as products of the social world. It is for this reason that he encourages the use of his brand of reflexive sociology which incorporates a stringent method to ensure that scientists' own construction of their reality, '...the scientific field and the motivations for scientific behaviour', are recognized (Postone et al.,1993:3). For it is Bourdieu's belief that:

> A sociologist who communes with his object is never far from succumbing to indulgent complicity with the eschatological expectations that the wider intellectual audience is now tending to transfer to the 'human science', which should rather be called sciences of man. As soon as he agrees to define his object ... in accordance with the demands of his audience ... he offers a larger audience the illusion of gaining access to the last secrets of the sciences of man. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:25)

What Bourdieu calls for, then, is a scientific object of research which must be 'defined and constructed in terms of a *theoretical problematic* which makes it possible to conduct a systematic questioning of the aspects of reality that are brought into question...' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:35; emphasis in original). This proposed practice is what Bourdieu terms, a sociology of sociology; it is the 'necessary pre-requisite' of any rigorous sociological practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:68). Bourdieu's work is an outstanding contribution to the problems of sociological research and the practice of social science.

5.2 Problematic Issues

The elusiveness of the subject

While the writers themselves may not necessarily wish to recognize the fact,[1] there is some consensus of opinion on the nature of the subject amongst our four writers. Each of the four seems to accept that the subject is, to some degree, bound by its social existence and is somewhat elusive. In *Derrida* (1999), Howells purports that Derrida's own 'description of the subject "today", as it is deconstructed, [is] extraordinarily close to the subject of *L'Etre et le Neant* fifty years earlier' (Howells quoted in *The Philosophers Magazine*, Summer 1999:54). Howells' attack on Derrida is scathing. She regards Derrida's concepts as being 'strikingly close to Sartre's, and the foundations of his critique of phenomenology almost identical' (*The Philosophers Magazine*, Summer 1999:54).

Notwithstanding the points of congruence amongst the four French thinkers, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu, each has a different understanding of the subject. For Sartre, the subject first of all exists, encounters itself and then 'surges up in the world'.[2] It defines itself later. The subject is a 'series of undertakings ... the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings' (Sartre, 1948:28). Foucault defines 'man ... as the unique reality capable of knowing the world of which he is nonetheless a part [but who originates] from what is essentially other than him' (Foucault, 1972:325). Already we see a divergence in views. For Sartre, the subject defines itself 'later'. For Foucault, the subject is already defined, although it does take part in the defining process. Foucault continually asks, through what practices, through what historical and social references, do we recognize ourselves as having a self-identity? He challenges the idea of: '...a sovereign subject which arrives from elsewhere to enliven the inertia of linguistic codes, and sets down in discourse the indelible trace of its freedom' (Foucault, 1991b:61). He also challenges the idea '...of a subjectivity which constitutes meanings and then transcribes them into discourse' (Foucault, 1991b:61-62).

On closer examination, perhaps Sartre's and Foucault's positions are not so opposed as they first seem, at least in terms of the defining of the subject. If, as Sartre says, the subject is 'a series of undertakings ... the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings' (1948:28), then, the subject, in defining itself, can only do so in relation to others, and, being the 'sum' of a series of undertakings, it is also defined by others.

For the existentialists, 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre, 1945:34), and it is that essence which is the defining and the defined aspect of existence. If the subject is the sum of a set of relations, the defining of the subject must surely begin at conception. It would be an incorrect reading of Sartre to take it that Sartre does not believe that the subject is socially produced. The rendering Fourny et al. give is: 'The subject then, like the ego, is a product. It is the product ... of the reflexivity of consciousness' (Fourny and Minahen, 1997:33).

However, I suggest, it remains unclear why Sartre contends that the subject defines itself 'later'? The point of departure for Sartre's and Foucault's understanding of the subject, at least on the matters discussed so far in this section, appears to be in relation to when that defining period begins.

Derrida's notion is that the subject comes to the fore in 'vocal self-affection'. Vocal self-affection is '... no doubt the *possibility* for what is called subjectivity, or the for-itself' (Derrida, 1967:89; emphasis added). It is through the different operations of self-affection '...that the self-coherent self, the self, itself, would be produced' (Derrida, 1967:89). What Derrida seems to be saying is: somewhere in the process of becoming conscious of oneself, there is the *possibility* for subjectivity to emerge.

However, the idea of a 'self-mediating identity which absolutely precedes or succeeds all difference, is a delusion' (Hart,1989:10). From Derrida's reading, it is impossible to define one's own identity:

> ...the 'I' constitutes the very form of resistance ...The gesture that tries to refind of *itself* distances, it distances itself again.

> One ought to be able to formalize the law of this insurmountable gap. This is a little of what I am always doing. Identification is a difference to itself, a difference with/of itself. Thus *with*, *without*, and *except* itself. (*Stanford Presidential Lectures: Interviews with Jacques Derrida,* (1999:3; emphasis in original)

As with Sartre, the elusiveness of the subject is obvious in Derrida's rendering.

Bourdieu also concedes to the *possibility* of a subject position. He clearly outlines his intention which is: '...to escape from under the philosophy of the subject without doing away with the agent' (Bourdieu, 1985:120). He believes that it is in 'the object constructed by science' that we should look for 'the social conditions of the *possibility* of the "subject" ' (Bourdieu, 1985:214; emphasis added). All of this is rather confusing. In addition to these difficulties, what clear definitions do we have of closely related concepts such as: 'self', 'individual', 'ego', 'cognito', 'id', 'agent'? Are these terms interchangeable with the 'subject'? Barrett lists still more terms which are often not clarified: 'the individual subject', 'the speaking/desiring subject', decentred subjectivity', 'subject position' and so on (Barrett, 1991:91).

Bourdieu, at least on some occasions, attempts to make a distinction between the individual, the subject and the agent. For Bourdieu, it can be said 'individual' is the term given to the genre of the person. 'Agent' is the term given to that individual when it is in action, or when actively participating in the construction of its world. This is not to say that the agent is autonomous in its actions, since it, too, is socially constructed (Bourdieu, 1992:107). However, it has to be said that Bourdieu is not consistent in the use of his own definitions.

When discussing the importance of 'field' rather than the 'individual' as the focus of scientific research, he states:

> This does not imply that individuals are mere 'illusions', that they do not exist; they exist as *agents* – and not as biological individuals, actors, or *subjects* – who are socially constituted as active and acting in the field... (Bourdieu, 1992:107; emphasis added)

The inconsistency I speak of is Bourdieu's insistence (above) that individuals are not subjects. When this statement is seen against Bourdieu's claim that everything with which sociology deals has to do with subjects who constitute their actions (Bourdieu et al., 1991), and his notion of the *habitus*, the ambiguity becomes clear.

The *habitus* is structured through social relations. '...it functions as the practical operator through which *the action of the subjects* becomes social action...' (Krais, 1991:ix; emphasis added). Notwithstanding the obvious inconsistency which, to be fair, may be the result of a commentator's error, it does seem that Bourdieu has more clearly enunciated the differences between the subject and the agent and the subject/agent and the individual in his more recent works, such as *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (1991). Furthermore, in that work Bourdieu describes a point where an 'agent' has the possibility of becoming a 'subject', '...agents become something like "subjects" only to the extent that they consciously master the relation they entertain with their disposition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:137). In *The Craft of Sociology* (first published in 1968), Bourdieu's terminology centred more on 'social facts' and the necessity for constructing scientific objects, both for an object of research and as a methodological tool to carry out that research (Bourdieu, 1991:33-38).

Barrett's view (1991:91) on the definition of the subject is that it is problematic from two points of view. Firstly, there is often an association of subject with the Western philosophical tradition and, secondly, the notion of subject often has attached to it, either the idea of an all-power subject, or the notion of a subject in subjection.

Barrett goes on to define 'subjectivity' as the sense which individuals make of their experiences and reflections, both conscious and unconscious. She believes the term to be a useful one, '...allowing one to situate oneself at a distance from the narrow rigidities of "consciousness" ... and yet to speak of questions of affect and private experience... ' (Barrett, 1991:92). The 'individual', Barrett claims, is a sociological term used to denote 'personal existence', but its use has associated

problems. The term, 'individual', is often seen as opposed to, or separate from, society. It has the connotation of being a 'non-social, or pre-social, self ... The *individual subject* is a very unsatisfactory hybrid and is best avoided' (Barrett, 1991:92; emphasis in original).

It is Lacan who uses the terms, 'the speaking/desiring subject' and 'decentred subjectivity'. The first term denotes a subject who 'is fully inserted into the cultural, "symbolic" order and can "speak" its desire in the context of that plenitude' (Barrett, 1991:92). The second term, 'decentred subjectivity', refers to a critique of the 'unified' subject which has come about through the limitations of a patriarchal system and culture. 'Subject position' is Derrida's phrase, allowing us to interpret the amount of interest or investment that a speaker/writer might have in the current topic. Foucault uses the nomenclature, 'self', as in, *The Care of Self – The History of Sexuality* (1984). However, the term, 'self', has neither existentialist nor autonomous resonances associated with it.

While it may be useful to analyze the above terms with their associated definitions just outlined, what real benefit is there if the terms are not used 'universally', or even consistently by one author? And does it really matter, in any case?

I believe it is important to have some general understanding of just what the subject is, in order to answer questions about it, even if those questions are more centred on the 'field', knowledge of the field itself allowing us 'to best grasp the roots of their [for Bourdieu – "individuals"] singularity, their point of view or position ... from which their particular vision of the world ... is constructed' (Bourdieu, 1992:107). It is important to gain some understanding of the 'nature' of the subject in order to answer such questions as: Are we prisoners of our own consciousness? I would suggest that interest in the 'nature' of the subject is not confined to sociology, or philosophy, but it is in these and many other disciplines that people place their hopes for an adequate explanation.

I would argue that the essence of the subject is always in a state of movement. The subject may be continuously emerging, regressing or remaining static. It is being continuously defined and is continuously (through that conscious and non-

conscious part of itself) defining itself amidst all the historical, cultural and social constraints which impinge on it. To the degree that the conscious component of the subject is aware of its constraints, and to the degree that it can manoeuvre those constraints to suit itself, the level of opportunity for choices increases and the chance for further emergence of the subject is heightened. While there are some similarities with Bourdieu's thinking here, as I have already outlined, our views are divergent in many other respects.

The problem of consciousness

When comparing our four French thinkers of the late twentieth century, it is in the area of consciousness that the greatest lack of synergy in opinion arises. Not only is there a lack of synergy, but there is also a dearth of explanation of exactly what consciousness is, and how consciousness works. The notable exception to this comment about our four French thinkers is Sartre.

Sartre was keen to reject any inclination towards phenomenological reduction. His motivation for this was what he saw as the impossible 'idealistic' thesis of phenomenological reduction, which contends that 'consciousness is constitutive of the being of its object' (quoted in Detmer, 1986:14). Sartre believed that all objects have some kind of existence apart from any constituting consciousness. His position is summarized, thus: objects are not solely constituted by a 'constitutive consciousness, therefore a transcendence of objects occurs' (Olafson, 1967:290).

Sartre's argument is that certain phenomena cannot be explained except with reference to 'real beings outside of consciousness' (Detmer, 1986:15). This is particularly noticeable in defining *perceived* objects, as distinct from *imagined* objects. Regarding the latter category, one can call the object to mind and freely alter its appearance and form. But when I perceive an object, my conscious

attempts to alter it are to no avail. It is an experience which arises, so to speak, *against* my consciousness (Detmer, 1986:15).

Sartre is insistent that phenomenology gives an inadequate account of consciousness. He argues against its reductive emphasis, saying it will not teach us:

> ...that consciousness must be constitutive *of* ... a world, that is exactly the one where we are, with its earth, its animals, its men and the story of these men. We are here in the presence of a primary and irreducible fact which presents itself as a contingent and irrational specification of the noematic sense of the world. (Sartre, 1968:233; emphasis in original)

Sartre's point here is that the idea of intentionality of consciousness to produce a world is implausible. While some experiences may stem from consciousness, the 'factical' component of our experience cannot be attributed to constitutive consciousness (Detmer, 1986:15).

'Being-for-itself' is Sartre's term for conscious human experience. This experience is open-ended to the past, the present and the future. Its perception of itself is one of possibility rather than fact. Neither the ego nor consciousness can identify the subject. This is because consciousness is always 'present to itself'. Pre-reflectively, it cannot coincide with itself in complete self-identity...' (Anderson, 1993:13). An individual's self-awareness is conditioned and limited by social structures and culture. Does this not sound very much like Bourdieu who, I noted, believes that the individual is always trapped 'in his own brain' (to use Durkheim's phrase)? The individual can only escape from this entrapment to the degree to which it 'becomes aware of it' (Bourdieu, 1992:126).

Already noted has been Foucault's difficulty with Sartre's notion of Cartesian inference: 'I think, therefore I am'. His argument is that, while I may have a sense of myself, I am equally able to say that I am not all of this (Foucault, 1970:325). Again, I do not see any major differences between Sartre's and Foucault's rendition of consciousness, although Foucault did not pay the concept the attention which Sartre did. An example of their consensus on consciousness, bears on Foucault's insistence that consciousness is inextricably bound to

unconsciousness, the latter not being able to be 'entirely incorporated into the clarity of the *cognito's* thought' (Foucault, 1970:324). For Foucault, there is an irreducible distance between thought and unthought, consciousness and unconsciousness. Modern thinking must continue to ask '...how thought can reside elsewhere ... how it can *be* in the form of non-thinking' (Foucault, 1970:322; emphasis in original).

Both Sartre and Bourdieu are in agreement with Foucault on the equal importance of unconsciousness:

Sartre states:

> ...we may be conscious of objects or events without being explicitly conscious of being so ... like consciousness, then, the unconscious is not experienced directly as a reified entity, or thing. (Sartre, 1987:xvi –xviii)

Bourdieu calls for the 'principle of unconsciousness' (*sine qua non*):

> If the principle of non-consciousness is only the reverse side of the principle of the primacy of relations, the latter principle must itself lead one to reject all attempts to define the truth of a cultural phenomenon independently of the system of historical and social relations in which it is located. (Bourdieu, 1991:19)

As we can see in the above two quotes, unconsciousness, as unapprehended consciousness, is obviously a key concept for both Sartre and Bourdieu. Both acknowledge that unconsciousness is a capacity or phenomenon of which we are not explicitly aware. It is both formed by, and dependent on, the social realm for its existence. To see unconsciousness as the *real* self, a self which is uncontaminated by discourse, knowledge or consciousness is anathema to both Sartre and Bourdieu.

And yet, Bourdieu sees no such similarity in thought between himself and Sartre on the matter of consciousness. He believes Sartre's approach lacks a sense of 'social institution' (Fowler, 1997:19):

> ...from the reified state of the alienated group, to the authentic existence of the historical agent, consciousness and thing are irremediably separate as they were at the outset, without anything resembling an institution or a socially-constituted agent having been observed... (Bourdieu, 1977:76)

But is this so? Does Sartre ignore history, social structures and constraints on the subject? I think not. Anderson relates Sartre's position on the conditioning of the individual:

> ...as transcending consciousness I am free from the factual dimension of myself and am not causally affected by it. Insofar as it exists, its body, consciousness is 'conditioned' by worldly objects, this Sartre admits; but insofar as consciousness is free transcendence, it is not, he insists. (Anderson, 1993:18)

I do not accept that Sartre ignores the constraints social institutions place on the individual. By the time *Critique de la Raison Dialectique* was published in 1963 Sartre was bemoaning the phenomenon by which individuals are so influenced by social structures that 'serialization' (loss of self-identity) results. However, Sartre's language does at times suggest that it is easier than it may, in fact, be in reality to get rid of such constraints and to transcend the objects of oppression.

Derrida's understanding of consciousness and unconsciousness in some ways echoes the above. By this I mean that Derrida emphasized that '...there is always alterity before (any) self' (Derrida, 1993:144). For Derrida, 'alterity' is *l'autre* (the other), which includes language but also context (thought and unthought). Again, Derrida stresses the importance of unconsciousness, that which is 'beyond language':

> The other, which is beyond language and which summons language, is perhaps not a 'referent' in the normal sense which linguists have attached to this term. But to distance oneself thus from the habitual structure of reference, to challenge or complicate our common assumptions about it, does not amount to saying there is *nothing* beyond language... (Derrida, 1984,107-26; emphasis in original)

While Derrida may share with Sartre, Foucault and Bourdieu the importance of unconsciousness, he least comprehensive exposition on consciousness.

So while we have noted some similarities amongst our writers, I would argue that there are major gaps in the understanding of consciousness. None of our writers has adequately explained just what consciousness is, nor how consciousness works. I would suggest that Sartre's explanation of consciousness goes some way to describing the function of consciousness, but it is less than adequate to give a complete understanding. None of our thinkers attacks the question as to whether consciousness is anything more than a collective memory bank.

A recent article in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (1997) made the comment that only certain disciplines are seen has having anything relevant to say on the matter of consciousness. The article purports that there is a 'widespread view' that only three disciplines are currently regarded as '*kosher*' in the study of consciousness. These are: philosophy, neurobiology and cognitive science. Physics, sociology, phenomenology and several other disciplines, according to the article, are not seen as acceptable disciplines to undertake a study (*Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 4, no.5-6, 1997:285-388). The authors of the article do not agree with the current widespread view for these reasons:

1. No one has yet come up with any evidence for a theory of consciousness that will satisfy the demands of various sceptics, so the decision to focus the investigation, at, say, the level of the neuronal network has to be for pre-theoretical reasons.
2. We only know consciousness through our own experience, so arguments against including a first-person phenomenological approach are a contradiction in terms.
3. The only form of consciousness that we know directly is human, and this is characteristically shaped by social, cultural and environmental factors. (1997:385-8)

The editors of the above journal go on to say: 'What is not acceptable, though, is when approaches that have their rightful centre of gravity in the humanities try to masquerade as science – obvious examples here being psychoanalysis and certain schools of sociology'. No doubt this comment would find favour with Bourdieu,

who, although he believes that sociology is a science, regards it as imperative that sociological studies are set up on a scientific basis with the use of a scientific methodology.[3]

David Chalmers, philosopher at the University of California, has produced a considerable amount of work on consciousness. His paper, 'Facing Up to the problem of Consciousness', was published in the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* in 1995. Since then he has produced several further studies on consciousness including: 'Moving Forward on the Problem of Consciousness' (http://ling.ucsc.edu/~chalmers/papers/moving.html), which is a response to the twenty-six commentaries on his first paper, and, 'Absent Qualia, Fadimg Qualia, Dancing Qualia' (http://ling.ucsc.edu/~chalmers/papers/qualia.html). He accepts the notion that conscious experience has a physical basis. And he explores how phenomenal properties, or qualia, depend on physical laws, and what sort of physical laws give rise to conscious experience. He asks the question: Why should physical processing give rise to a rich inner life at all? (*Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 1995). For Chalmers, *the* problem of consciousness is in explaining the experience of consciousness.

Obviously, for as long as we remain uncertain as to the 'nature' of consciousness, our understanding of the social world and, therefore, of its subjects, will be grossly limited.

The role of language

Although Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu give different renderings of the importance of language and its role in defining the subject, and, although their interest in language lies in different fields, each of the four thinkers accepts that language moulds thought and has been designed to further the ideas of society.

For Sartre, the ultimate intention of our learning is that there should be one meaning only: 'Our historical task ... is to bring closer the moment when History will have only one meaning...'(Sartre, 1963:52). In some ways, Sartre sees language as an impediment to the confrontation with reality. That is, 'being-in-itself' is rarely confronted, at least not directly, but only through institutions such as mores, traditions and language. So while Sartre, of the four French thinkers, gives the least recognition to the role of language in constituting the subject, he is clear that language comes with its own references and history.

On the other hand, as we have seen, Foucault's interest in language (or more properly – discourse) resides in seeing it '...not as a theme of reviving *commentary*, but as a *monument* to be described in its intrinsic configuration' (Foucault,1991b:60; emphasis in original). Discourses, for Foucault, are 'limited, practical domains which have their boundaries, their rules of formation, their conditions of existence...' (Foucault, 1991b:61). Foucault contends that it is erroneous to treat discourse as 'an indifferent element devoid of intrinsic consistency or inherent laws' (Foucault, 1991b:62). What discourse *is*, is not what was *meant*. By this, Foucault means that intentions in discourse are often lost over a period of time. Discourse is constituted by linguistic and social rules of a specific time for a specific purpose. It is the history of 'things said' which holds Foucault's interest (Foucault, 1991b:63).

There are obviously strong similarities between Derrida's explanation of the hidden meanings and layers of text in language and Foucault's. Derrida states that the rules of text run 'the risk of being definitively lost. Who will ever know of such disappearances? The dissimulation of the woven texture can take centuries to undo its web' (Derrida, 1999:119). For Foucault, the two aspects of language which he considers as having a representative function are *designation* and derivation. It is the concept of derivation which is very similar to Derrida's notion of hidden meanings and lost rules of a text. Foucault believes that over time it is very difficult to see any association with initial roots and constant changes have far-reaching effects.

Foucault's explanation of text is far broader than that of Derrida. Foucault was not so much interested in the written language but in the *con*text which gave rise to it. For all Derrida's concentration on text and his explanation that text is far broader than written text, and includes thought, the spoken word and gestures, his main interest in text appears to be in the written and spoken word.

Regarding the authorship of text, Foucault and Derrida again give similar explanations. Foucault suggests that when reading 'literature', the answer to the question, 'Who is speaking?', must be: 'It is the words themselves'. Compare this with Derrida's challenge as to who has authorship of the 'signs'. He challenges the notion that it is the subject who is the author. The 'mark' or the 'sign' are not valid outside their context, 'but on the contrary, there are only contexts without any centre of absolute anchoring' (Derrida, 1988:19-45).

There are further similarities between Foucault's and Derrida's views on hierarchies of disciplines. Foucault speaks of intellectual products which have traditionally been objects of standard history, for example, the disciplines of the human sciences, physical sciences, mathematics and so on. He says these disciplines have their own hierarchy imposed on them dependent on different periods and traditions. This is very similar to Derrida's suggestion that contrasting elements, the superiority of one over the other, the predetermined ranking of such contrastive pairs, are imposed on us, rather than given to us.

There seems no doubt that Derrida's style infuriates people. His continual habit of 'deconstructing' the text maddens some of his audience, and it has been said that one has to have read Derrida to read Derrida. My own view is less circumlocutory – in order to understand Derrida's spoken word at a seminar, for example, when he appears '... to veer off into a rambling discussion' of a phrase with possible meanings and derivations, a beneficial pre-requisite would probably be an understanding of his writings on deconstruction.

Bourdieu is in agreement with Foucault and Derrida on the point that language brings with it a 'legacy of ideas'. It is as a result of this state of affairs that Bourdieu proposes for all social science research the constitution of a scientific

object accompanied by appropriate methodological tools to 'prevent the contamination of concepts by preconceptions' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:21). Bourdieu agrees with Wittgenstein's view that certain accepted standards of expression prevent us from seeing facts. Failure to subject ordinary language - 'the primary instrument of the "construction of the world of objects", to a methodological critique entails the risk of mistaking objects pre-constructed in and by ordinary language for data' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:21).

We have seen that Bourdieu recommends a nosography of ordinary language. He believes:

> ...such a critique would give the sociologist the means of dispelling the semantic halo ... that surrounds most common words, and of controlling the fluctuating meanings of all the metaphors ... which threaten to situate the coherence of his discourse in an order other than that in which he seeks to set his formulations. (Bourdieu et al., 1991:22)

Just how a nosography of ordinary language could prevent contamination of ideas is not clear. Surely explanations of any sort are open to such contamination. Bourdieu appears to afford much weight to 'scientific rigour', but again I fail to see how such a schema could be characterized by the privileged state of purity of process. Bourdieu does concede that all 'ordinary-language' schemes risk contamination, but he contends that a non-animist scheme of representation such as used in the physical science would negate any contamination. I do not share Bourdieu's confidence in this matter. In my view, any scheme of representation comes with the history, knowledge, intentions and motivation (conscious and unconscious) of the developers and cannot escape contamination.

The matter of truth

We recall Sartre's statement that '...there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to

itself' (Sartre, 1948:44). The absolute truth, for Sartre, is one's immediate sense of oneself. But one must have 'authentic knowledge' in order to accept this truth. That is, 'to unveil (rather than ignore or falsify) Being, which means "letting-it-be-as-it-is"' (Anderson, 1993:181n54). To ignore this truth, or to falsify it, is termed 'bad faith' by Sartre. There can be no truth, or good *a priori*, since there is no infinite consciousness to think it. It is somewhat difficult to grasp Sartre's notion of truth. Or more to the point, should we examine whether it is discomfort, rather than difficulty, which is experienced? For while one may accept that there is no truth *a priori*, that all the human subject can achieve is the 'authentic knowledge' that he/she exists, I think it is fair to say, that for centuries and across cultures, there has been a 'traditional' epistemological yearning for a truth outside of oneself. Sartre terms this notion, 'bad faith', which occurs when 'the great majority reassure themselves by thinking as little as possible about death and by worshipping idols such as humanity, science or some objective divinity' (Sartre, 1948:14).

So Sartre, although his notion of truth remains problematic, does define an 'absolute truth'. While he admits that not many people are capable of 'authenticating their existence' (the only means whereby one can arrive at the 'truth'), he does not indicate precisely how one should achieve such authentication.

On the matter of truth, there is some similarity, *at least in the area of motivation and intent*, amongst Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu. That intent is to expose both philosophy for logocentrism - the belief that there is a 'rational essence' to the world, and, phonocentrism - the phenomenon whereby we are constructed. While Foucault's concept of discourse has the intent of revealing both logocentrism and phonocentrism, his focus is on a very broad contextual framework:

> The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other statements be made? (Foucault, 1972:27)

We have seen that Foucault specifically contends that 'there are different truths and different ways of saying [the truth]' (Foucault,1989:295). There are mechanisms which enable one to site what is true and what is untrue and, people are charged with assessing and defining truth. The 'will to truth' is, according to Foucault, a key dimension of the institutionalized power which is science. He does not dispute the existence of absolute scientific truth, but his interest is more specifically in *how* effects of truth are secured.

Whilst I accept the fact that Foucault's main interest relates to how a particular regime of truth is chosen over any other regime of truth, I find it puzzling that he does not dispute the existence of absolute truth. It is my contention that it would be more congruent with his thinking to arrive at the position whereby the truth of one particular time may be substituted by the truth of another time. I would have thought that to accept the presence of an absolute truth, is to negate this whole thesis of the archaeology of knowledge and discursive formations.

Derrida contends that the result of logocentricism is:

> ...within philosophy to hear the voice of reason itself speak ... But, says Derrida, if the world has no essential logic, and if there is always a cacophony of voices in play, philosophical reason is a coercive and illusory enterprise; a classic case of blinkered ideology, yet one that is held in great respect in western culture. (McLennan, 1992:44)

There is a link to Sartre's notion of the illusion of truth here. Sartre attacks the social sciences for assuming 'hidden realities' in the explanation of human behaviour, although his point of difference here is perhaps his explicit statement on the existence of Truth – albeit the definition of that truth being the subject's sense of itself. For Derrida, any claim for an absolute truth is suspect. He warns that philosophy not only views itself as a discourse on the truth, but one which also claims to tell the truth (Hart, 1989:152). Truth claims are part of the effect of all texts. All Derrida is seeking is an awareness that this is so.

A remaining problematic issue in Derrida's position, concerns his contention that justice stands outside of the law, that justice exists beyond experience; it cannot be articulated, nor deconstructed, but only experienced in a mystical way. I find this notion the weakest part of Derrida's analysis: Is Derrida saying that justice equates with absolute truth? If that is so, what about, for example, the concept of love? Derrida says that while there is no justice present anywhere, there is an infinite idea of justice. How come there is not, also, an infinite idea of love? Just what is this justice which is 'infinitely irreducible'? (quoted in Lilla, 1998:.36-41). Is being 'infinitely irreducible' a claim for an absolute truth?

We recall Bourdieu's stand that spontaneous sociology must be abandoned, that true sociology is a science and there is, therefore, a concomitant requirement to develop a scientific object for study, using scientific methodology for analysis. The purpose behind this proposed sociology of sociology, this idea of practice, is to be able to make truth-claims. He believes that the whole purpose of scientific rationality is to do just that, to interpret the world in order to gain access to the truth about the world. Bourdieu firmly believes that any illusion of absolute knowledge inherent in a scientist's position can be identified through robust scientific methodology.

In summary, then, we have seen that Sartre makes a claim for an absolute truth, that truth being a person's sense of oneself. Foucault concentrates on 'regimes of truth' , 'different truths and different ways of saying the truth' as perceived by the holders of that truth. He makes a differentiation between truth and 'within the true', the latter term referring to the dominant discourse of the day. Derrida calls for the deconstruction of language in order to expose layers of meanings which have given the illusion of fixity of meaning, but which are no more than that – illusions. Further, he leaves us with his claim for an 'infinitely irreducible' notion of justice. And Bourdieu, whilst acknowledging that there are obstacles to scientific knowledge, the most important one being the illusion of absolute knowledge, believes that through proper scientific practice truths of the social world can be revealed.

5.3 Prisoners of our own consciousness?

The question we have set ourselves is not an easy one to answer. Had the question been: Are there constraints on our consciousness?, then, the answer may have been more simple. That is, each of our four writers seems to acknowledge clear constraints and limitations on the individual's ability to 'be free' from its social environment. Even though Sartre speaks of a subject who has total freedom, he also makes it clear that any freedom is within the realm of human subjectivity. (This is also the contention of Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu.) So, on the one hand, Sartre's contention is: the subject is free. The subject *is* freedom. But Sartre also uses the phraseology: 'man is *condemned* to be free' (Sartre, 1984:34; emphasis added.). And it is as a result of this very condemnation that the subject is 'at liberty', because , on Sartre's reading, the subject did not create itself. I would suggest that there is a certain amount of ambiguity in the subject being 'condemned' to be free, and in the subject *being* freedom. What is the nature of a condemned freedom? Where is the freedom of choice in the first instance?

A further complicating factor in attempting to answer the question: Are we prisoners of our own consciousness?, and a more basic one: What is the essential difference between the subject and consciousness? It appears that sometimes the two lexicons are interchangeable. For example, Sartre describes consciousness as being a *diasporique* state. That is, consciousness cannot be located, or situated. When it does reflect, it ceases to be reflected consciousness and fails to see itself as a reflecting subject which it has become. But, let us pause, Sartre also describes the subject as fleeting, with no foundation. We are reminded, 'The "I" who was writing or busy ... has in fact disappeared by the time I try to examine it' (Howells, 1997:29). I contend that there is an unanswered question here: Exactly, what is the difference between the thinking subject which is forever emerging, and cannot be located; the subject which is not the central core of the individual; and consciousness, which, at least for Sartre is always somewhere else, escaping identity? It is Sartre's own contention that the subject cannot be identified with

consciousness, because both the ego and the subject are products of the reflexivity of consciousness.

In asking the question regarding the exact difference between the thinking subject and consciousness, the definition of the subject which I am using is more akin to Bourdieu's: e*sse est interesse*, being is being in. It is a definition of the subject which 'escapes from the philosophy of the subject', without doing away with the agent, an agent which acts in the realm of the social and its many constraints. The social agent, according to Bourdieu, provides the scene of action, but is not the subject of it. Bourdieu quotes Durkheim in support of his notion that representational life extends beyond the consciousness. His notion of the principle of unconsciousness' (*sine qua non*) is to recognize that phenomena occur which are not known to our conscious selves.

Perhaps, then, we should be asking the question: Are we prisoners of our own *un*consciousness? Are we prisoners of the historical and social discourses of which we do not have conscious apprehension? Are we prisoners of the hidden meanings and layers of language, the original meanings of which are now lost? Are we prisoners of the 'unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:40)? Are we prisoners of the 'collective scientific unconsciousness embedded in theories, problems ... and categories of scholarly judgement' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:40)?

Following on from Bourdieu's view that when a social agent becomes aware of the laws which link one relation to another, and to the extent that the agent discovers this knowledge, then to that extent, the social agent has choice and the possibility of freedom, mere consciousness is not enough to gain freedom. It is the knowledge of laws which governs relationships which offers the possibility of freedom. Thus, while one *could* say that we are prisoners of our own unconsciousness, it is not consciousness which will free us, but knowledge - at least according to Bourdieu and, to some extent, Foucault.

Foucault shares Bourdieu's belief that it is the domain of knowledge which result in constraints of power and freedom on the human subject. The whole intent of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) was to show both how those constraints occurred, and how the subject could overcome them. For Foucault, the world does not become a 'reality' except through consciousness. Consciousness, on the other hand is itself a product of a far broader context of human thought. Foucault believed that, by acquiring specific intellectual resources, the subject would be able to overcome the constraints of consciousness.

I would argue that there is a surprising amount of synergy in the views of Sartre, Foucault and Bourdieu . The apparent congruences are: there is no realm outside of the realm of the subject; consciousness and unconsciousness are products of the social world; consciousness, alone, will not afford the subject freedom; and, finally, it is possible to develop one's sense of freedom through knowledge of the laws governing the constraints of the social world.

What is Derrida's view on the above? Derrida agrees that both consciousness and unconsciousness are formed in reference and deferral to text and context. He offers deconstruction as a means of unravelling and undoing current representations or significations in language in order to think 'otherwise'. The freedom which this practice offers, for Derrida, is an 'openness towards each other' (Derrida, 1984:124). At no stage, at least in the readings for this thesis, does Derrida promote a future state of freedom. He is adamant, though, that he is not saying that 'there is nothing beyond language' (Derrida, 1984:124). If one assumes that by language he means 'text' in its broadest term, then, it is difficult to grasp exactly what Derrida does see beyond language. His reference to the 'infinitely irreducible' notion of justice which, according to Derrida, is beyond deconstruction, would obviously fall into the category of being 'beyond language' but, as stated above, I have real problems with this assertion. For Derrida, the idea of justice remains 'indestructible ... one can accuse it of ... another sort of mysticism' (quoted in Lilla, 1998:.36-41). It is my view that Derrida's concept of justice, or of any sort of mysticism, clearly falls into the category of 'text' and should accrue the same sort of scrutiny which any other text accrues.

My own view is that, while not being 'prisoners' of our own unconsciousness, we are, rather, beings of our own consciousness and unconsciousness. By this I mean, while recognizing that both consciousness and unconsciousness are products of our social world and are inextricably linked, it is through both that we have the potential and opportunity to develop into the singular self. I am using Durkheim's definition of unconsciousness as being consciousness unapprehended (1953:23).

Notwithstanding the fact that consciousness and unconsciousness do not lead to freedom, I am not in agreement with Foucault and Bourdieu that there is the '*possibility*' for freedom when one gains certain knowledge. For Foucault, that knowledge is knowledge of the archaeology of thought. He intended to demonstrate how, with this particular knowledge resource, one could overcome the constraints of freedom. On my readings Foucault was not successful in this latter mission. My point of difference with both Foucault and Bourdieu lies in the area of the alleged power of knowledge. Both Foucault and Bourdieu assert that with knowledge there is both the possibility of the subject emerging, and the possibility of freedom. I believe both of them fall into a fallacy similar to the one to which they exhort others not to succumb. That is to say, they ignore that text or discourse, whatever its derivation, will always come with its own limitations. Bourdieu, who described the human mind as always 'socially bounded and socially trapped' (Bourdieu, 1992:126), believed that this entrapment only exists to the extent that the individual is not aware of it. But when the individual becomes aware of this through *knowledge*, he/she, then, has the opportunity for choice and the *possibility* of freedom.

Both Foucault and Bourdieu seem to be saying that freedom lies in knowledge. As stated above, I do not agree with that view. If knowledge is also a product of the social world, how can one type of knowledge be less contaminated by social existence than another? Bourdieu believes that by developing a scientific method in order to examine the scientific object of a particular social field, there is the possibility that through such knowledge the individual will have a greater chance for freedom. As stated elsewhere in this thesis, I am not as convinced as Bourdieu that any knowledge, 'scientific' or otherwise, is likely to lead the individual to the possibility of freedom.

And what of this matter of freedom? Free from what realm? Escape into what realm? If there is no existence outside the realm of the subject, what is this notion of freedom? For this reason, I cannot endorse the proposition that we might be 'prisoners of our own consciousness'. In my view, we cannot be a 'prisoner' because a prisoner is detained *by* someone, *from* a realm which is regarded as 'normal'. If the realm of the subject is subjectivity and the social world, a notion which I share, then, where is this other existence? Further, while knowledge assists us to be aware of our predicament, I would suggest that Sartre's claim that 'man *is* freedom' is difficult to accept, given the problematic resonances associated with the term, 'freedom'. However, his notion that 'Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is' (Sartre:1956:104), reflects my own contention in regard to the question we have put ourselves.

I suggest freeing ourselves from ourselves is an impossibility, but that is not to say, for the reasons outlined above, that we are prisoners of our own consciousness or knowledge. To elaborate, I contend that it is not only an impossibility to 'free' ourselves, but it is also an unwarranted action because as human beings we are not imprisoned in the first place. While our discourses, both in the textual and contextual sense, may impose limitations on us, we are not prisoners of them. There is no 'else'. I also propose that each individual merely 'Is'. I cannot agree with Sartre that 'man *is* freedom'. Rather, I assert that 'the subject Is', or, in Sartre's words, 'Being Is'. I say 'the subject' because, unlike Derrida and Bourdieu, I contend that subjectivity is *not* dependent on a growing awareness of self, nor on the relationship individuals maintain 'with their disposition'. The 'subject Is', conscious or unconscious, with awareness or without, with knowledge or without. That is not to say, it is without limitations. Limitations are part of its Being. Furthermore, unlike Foucault and Bourdieu, I contend that freedom is not dependent on knowledge. 'Freedom', in fact, as a characteristic of human beings, is a non-issue. I am not referring to physical or mental ailments, or social or political oppressions inflicted on human beings, but as a characteristic of 'being', the subject is neither free, nor non-free, 'the subject Is'.

Notes

[1]An ongoing problem in current sociological/philosophical thought appears to be one of professional jealousy. This problem lies not in the disciplines themselves but with the practitioners of the disciplines. There seems to be an unwritten 'law' that to accept, or recognize the contribution to sociological/philosophical inquiry of a colleague, is a danger best avoided. More than that, there seems to me to be an active practice either of ignoring each other, or of criticizing each other in order to place distance between each other. The effect is to give the impression that a thinker is at the opposite end of a continuum from the colleague referred to, or not referred to.

This professional jealousy extends far beyond sociology and philosophy, and I suggest it is not only unhelpful but, in fact, impedes the development of knowledge about our social reality.

[2] What the editors are calling for is an open-minded approach, with the inclusion of several disciplines. They quote Stern's humorous comment:
I must say, modern discussions about the mind are astoundingly parochial. Physicists advocate qm, biologists neurons, and good computationalists like myself, computers, each looking with bemused condescension upon their eccentric neighbours. Can we not get some bakers to participate in this form, who will advocate that the roots of consciousness reside in the eclair? (Stern quoted in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 4, No. 5-6, 1997: 385-8)

[3] A point needs to be made, here, regarding Sartre's use of language. In my view, it is unfortunate that his more evocative phrases are those which attract one's attention and often distract the reader from persevering in gaining the total meaning of a concept as portrayed by him. Included amongst those phrases, which deserve more than a cursory glance, are: 'Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards' (Sartre, 1948:28); 'Man is free, man is freedom' (Sartre, 1948:38); 'There cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness' (Sartre, 1948:44). These contentions of Sartre are often quoted, almost as a summation of Sartre's work.

Conclusion

In drawing this thesis on the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Pierre Bourdieu to a close, I want to outline the conclusions drawn from our previous discussion in regard to their particular views on the question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness? I also want to suggest future areas for research which would assist in developing a better understanding of some of the remaining problematic issues.

I do not pretend to completeness in the foregoing accounts, but I hope to have captured the essence of the four French thinkers in regard to the topic of this thesis. It is vital to acknowledge the immense contribution that these writers have made to our understanding of the social world. Their contributions are not confined to the subject matter discussed in this thesis, but are much broader.

The question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness?, was not a question set by any one of the four thinkers whose writings I have been reviewing. This was my own question put, as it were, to Sartre, Foucault, Derrida and Bourdieu for comment. Of course, had the question been put directly to them, the replies may have been more specific and direct than the process we have engaged in – that is, in gaining 'replies' through the process of a review of their work under different subject headings. Nonetheless, in my view, we have managed to gain a very good understanding of the ideas of our four late twentieth century French thinkers pertaining to the nature of the subject, the autonomy of the subject, the role of language in defining the subject, and the matter of truth.

As has been noted, Sartre's major contribution to understanding the subject could be said to be in the area of freedom of the individual. According to Sartre, freedom is the birthright of humans. More than that, freedom is a defining feature of humans. We cannot, therefore, be a 'prisoner' of our consciousness. 'Being-in-itself' is not

contingent on conscious intention. In fact, 'being-in-itself' calls upon consciousness, structures it and gives it meaning. For Sartre, the goal of artistic creation, for instance, is to 'recover this world by giving it to be seen as it is, but as if it had its source in human freedom' (Sartre, 1988:63). I have argued against Sartre's notion of freedom, contending that human beings are neither free, nor non-free. Freedom is not an issue. It is my view that Sartre weakens his description of the subject with this notion of 'absolute freedom'.

It is in knowledge that Michel Foucault believes there is the possibility to overcome the constraints of consciousness. Specific intellectual resources are required to show how these constraints occurred and how they should be overcome. There is no reality except through consciousness. And yet Foucault encourages modern thought to ask: '...how thought can reside elsewhere ... how it can be in the form of non-thinking' (Foucault, 1970:322). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault gives an interpretation of truth and knowledge from a historicist perspective.

Whilst recognizing the considerable contribution which Foucault has made, especially in the development of the concept of discourse, I contend the weakness in Foucault's work has to do with succumbing to the same fallacy to which he purports the Western philosophical tradition has succumbed. By this I mean, Foucault has exposed the illusion of truth claims in discourse, revealing the multi-layers of meaning and history, yet proposes that freedom is possible through knowledge. He does not seem to admit that the 'knowledge' will have its own multi-layers of meaning and history. How, then, can it have the potential power to promote freedom through consciousness?

Derrida does not assert that the process of deconstruction will bring freedom to the individual. The closest Derrida gets to a notion of freedom is in the promise of a type of freedom which the practice of deconstruction offers. That freedom is an 'openness towards each other' (Derrida, 1984:124). What Derrida refers to, seemingly as a similar concept to freedom, is the notion of justice. This is 'an infinite idea of justice'

which does not yet exist. It stands outside the law. 'Deconstruction is mad about this justice, mad with the desire for justice' (Derrida, 1992). This sounds very much like a saviour coming to redeem the world from the contamination of its discourses, to bring freedom to a world tired of deconstruction.

As with Foucault, the possibility of freedom for the individual, according to Bourdieu, lies with knowledge. The human mind which is always 'socially bounded and socially trapped' (Bourdieu, 1992:126), has the potential for freedom to the extent that the individual gains the knowledge of the constraints imposed on him/her, and to the degree that he/she makes choices. I have not found Bourdieu's arguments convincing regarding the method of a sociology of sociology to arrive at uncontaminated scientific data. I suggest that whatever 'knowledge' is gained through such a method, will carry with it its own contamination by pre-concepts. Bourdieu asserts that his proposed method of science would give the sociologist 'the means of dispelling the semantic halo ... that surrounds the most common words' (Bourdieu et al., 1991:22). It is noteworthy that Bourdieu does not see any such risk in the use of a newly constructed non-animist scheme of representation, that he sees such a 'language' as being without contamination.

My own contention on the question: Prisoners of our own Consciousness? is that human beings are neither prisoners, nor are they defined by their consciousness. Individuals cannot be termed prisoners for they are not being detained from any other realm. *This* is the realm of their existence. Whilst conceding that there are most certainly social constraints placed on individuals, these constraints will always exist in one form or another and are characteristic of the nature of humankind. Neither are these constraints confined to those of consciousness. Unconsciousness as well as consciousness is a product of our social world and its role in formulating our representation life is no less significant. In this explanation I have described what human beings are *not*. To define what human beings *are*, I find Bourdieu's notion of *esse est interesse* most useful. Being is being in... Being is being in the social world, being a part of it, taking part in it, modifying it and being modified by it.

Much of the subject matter in this thesis has been of interest to philosophers since Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. That is not to say, questions pertaining to the definition of the subject or the nature of consciousness have been answered. I suggest, especially in the area of consciousness studies, that concerted, multi-disciplinary research would be beneficial. Although there is currently much interest in the nature of consciousness, it being the topic of current philosophy conferences, it seems we are still somewhat distant from a collegial, multi-disciplinary approach to furthering our knowledge of the social world. I contend that petty professional jealousies merely inhibit the development of knowledge, and that taking the opportunity to engage in serious research into consciousness would also have the potential to increase our knowledge of the nature of the subject.

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