# LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## Dialogue between John Searle and Crea

# JOHN SEARLE

## MARTA SOLER (Editor)

Back cover:

*Language and Social Sciences* includes new and inedited contributions from Searle and Crea about topics such as speech acts and postmodernism. Their analyses of the relation between language and social sciences clarify their respective critiques to Habermas' conception of speech acts and contribute specific insights that help to distinguish a free communicative act from one that includes psychological harm.

*John Searle* is Mills Professor of Philosophy of Mind and Language at the University of California, Berkeley. *Marta Soler* is Doctor by Harvard and Professor of Sociological Theory at the University of Barcelona.

# Introduction

**By Marta Soler**

This book presents a passionate debate about language and social sciences through a dialogue between John Searle and some members of Crea. John and I agreed that I would write an introduction providing the background ideas that readers might need in order to contextualize some of the key issues in this dialogue. Following a brief presentation, this introduction is made up of two parts: in the first I present a backdrop of the current debate about speech acts, and in the second I introduce the critiques to constructivism and postmodernism. The subsequent dialogue emerges from a shared interest in the relationship between language and social sciences. Both Searle and Crea members come from a trajectory of prior reflections and discussions that converge in a space for debate and exchange of our work and concerns.

John Searle is one of the most prominent and referenced philosophers of language in the social sciences. He graduated from Oxford and is currently Mills Professor of Philosophy of Mind and Language at the University of California at Berkeley. Throughout his life and work, he has made essential contributions to the study of language and the action of the mind, consciousness, human rationality and the processes of constructing social reality. His work is internationally recognized today, as demonstrated by his extensive bibliography and the numerous lectures he has addressed at universities and academic institutions around the world. The impact of Searle's work can be witnessed not only in the debates that take place within the field of philosophy, but also in those that emerge in various disciplines within the social sciences.

Crea is an interdisciplinary research center[58] dedicated to the analysis of social inequalities, as well as theories and actions that contribute to overcoming them. It belongs to the University of Barcelona and is located in the Barcelona Science Park. Crea's

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[58] We are over ninety people from different countries, ethnic groups, religions, ideologies, lifestyles, sexual orientations and disciplines.

theoretical contributions are focused on the development of the dialogic perspective, consistently attained through rigorous work based on original sources [59], on the use of this perspective and its subsequent re-elaboration in research projects, and on the debates directly held with most relevant authors in the social sciences. The questions that are posed to Searle in this dialogue arise from prior reading and discussion of all of the works of authors like Austin, Habermas and Searle himself, among others.

### 1) Language: background of the debate about speech acts

John Searle's first book, and probably the most internationally acclaimed, is *Speech Acts,* which the author wrote as a reflection on Austin's work with respect to this theme. Searle moved to Oxford with a scholarship to study Philosophy, Politics and Economy. There he became interested in the philosophy of language and particularly fascinated by Austin's ideas about speech acts. Austin and Toulmin were among his professors, in an academic environment where the study of language, verb functions, the utterance of expressions, the creation of meanings and, in fact, the linguistic turn, were the prevailing focal points of contemporary philosophy. This was in the fifties.

Austin's concept of speech acts, in fact, constitutes a brilliant contribution to the philosophy of language and the social sciences in general. Despite the way in which he arrives at his definition, or his almost unanimously questioned classification of speech acts,

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[59] We have an ongoing seminar since 1991, called "With book in hand". It takes place every two weeks, and it is attended by the majority of the members of CREA, that is, approximately seventy researchers from different disciplines and institutions. During three hours we debate on the most relevant works in sociology, philosophy, psychology, women's studies, anthropology, education, economy, etc. (from *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith, or *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir to *The Theory of Communicative Action* by Jürgen Habermas and *Discipline and Punishment* by Michel Foucault). In the debate, we attempt to make connections with the different projects we are carrying out and elaborate our own scientific contributions. When someone speaks they cite the page they are referring to, read the quote and build their comments based on it. In this way, we avoid the overspread dynamics of quoting or talking about an author or theory without having directly read the original source. The high intellectual level of the debate enriches our research and provides our work with scientific reliability and rigor. This type of discussion, in which we read, contrast and dialogue about original sources is what enables us to open up dialogues such as the one in this book. Periodically, we hold debates with authors (from different disciplines) of books that we read in the seminar like, for instance, Ulrich Beck, Judith Butler and Paulo Freire.

his idea about "how to do things with words"[60] is highly clarifying in today's society and in the lives of many people. Just one word, a "yes", depending on where we say it, can create the institution of marriage. Words play a key role not only in communication, but also in the construction of social reality[61].

Moving beyond the traditional distinction between language and the word, Austin develops pragmatic linguistics with his concepts of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts[62] and, in this way, establishes a framework to study the relationship between meaning, force and resulting action. The difference between locutionary and illocutionary resides in the distinction Austin makes between meaning and force. For example, the utterance "Can you close the door?" and "Close the door!" have the same meaning, but the latter is an illocutionary act because it has illocutionary force, it includes the speaker's intention with an imperative.

Searle, Austin's main disciple, considers that every complete utterance includes an indicator of illocutionary force as part of its meaning and that, therefore, what Austin calls locutionary acts in reality are illocutionary acts (the utterance "Can you close the door?" has illocutionary force). This is why he does not distinguish between locutionary and illocutionary acts, but between propositional content and illocutionary force. As we will see in this book, Searle states that Habermas did not understand this difference and believed it was the same as Austin's differentiation between locutionary and illocutionary acts[63].

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[60] Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[61] In order to avoid any exaggerations of their differences, we must remember that both Berger and Luckmann, like Searle agree that social reality is socially constructed: for example marriage. What Searle very accurately and categorically denies is that brute facts are socially constructed, such as the moon and the stars.

[62] According to Austin (1962): "Thus we distinguished the locutionary act (and within it the phonetic, the phatic, and the rhetic acts) which has a *meaning*; the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is *the achieving of* certain *effects* by saying something." (p. 121) For example, "He said to me, 'You can't do that'" is a locution, while "He protested against my doing it" is an illocution for indicating a force (a protest) and "He annoyed me" is a perlocution because it includes the effect of this speech act. (p. 102)

[63] See page 292 of: Habermas, J. (1984) *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol I. Reason and the Rationalization of society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

We will also see Searle's critique of Habermas for not understanding the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary. He states the concept of understanding in Austin's illocutionary act does not include agreement and Habermas's does. That is to say, while for Austin "Let's go home!" is an illocutionary act which intention when uttered is understood by the hearer, Habermas also includes agreement in this understanding[64]. For Searle, agreement is a perlocutionary effect and is not part of the understanding or the illocutionary act.

We agree with Searle in that Habermas does not understand his idea of speech acts. However, we concur with the author of the theory of communicative action in his interest to develop a theory of speech acts related to different types of action. We also coincide with Searle that the associations Habermas makes between illocutionary acts and communicative action and between perlocutionary acts and strategic action are confusing. Nevertheless, we believe that in current society, on both theoretical and practical sides, it is very important to be able to distinguish between dialogic interactions and power interactions with the greatest possible accuracy. In other words, we have to be able to identify, for instance, when (and on what terms) a speech act (or a communicative act) is a proposal based on freedom and when it is sexual harassment. In this sense we believe some contributions from Habermas's work, such as the importance of including consensus and sincerity, are key. We do not however think that the most adequate course to take is linking illocutionary acts with action oriented towards understanding and perlocutionary acts with action oriented towards success[65]. Instead we must complement the differentiation between illocutionary acts and

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[64] In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas (1984) states that for there to be understanding all utterances must be *accepted*, "the speech act ["Mp], composed of an illocutionary and a propositional component, is presented as a self-sufficient act which the speaker always performs with a communicative intent, that is, so that a hearer may understand and accept his utterance" (p. 289) He follows by arguing: "From the perspective of the hearer to whom an utterance is addressed, we can distinguish three levels of reaction to a (correctly perceived) speech act: The hearer *understands* the utterance, that is, he grasps the meaning of what is said; with his "yes" or "no" the hearer *takes a position* on the claim raised with the speech act, that is, he accepts the speech act offer or declines it; and in consequence of an achieved agreement, the hearer directs his action according to *conventionally fixed obligations.* (p. 297)
[65] According to Habermas (1984) "Perlocutionary effects can be achieved by way of speech acts only if the latter are *incorporated as means* into actions oriented to success." (p. 292)

perlocutionary acts by distinguishing between power relations and dialogic relations[66] in communicative acts.

Our concept of communicative acts tries to respond to the theoretical challenges of the social sciences and the practical struggles of today's societies. In what follows we point to four of its characteristics. We differentiate them from Austin's, Searle's and Habermas' conceptions of speech acts.

The first characteristic is that communicative acts do not only refer to speech acts, but also to acts that use any other type of sign for communication, such as body language[67]. If the boss invites one of his employees to have a coffee, by saying "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee?", he is carrying out an illocutionary communicative act[68]. However, the communicative act includes different forms of language, not only words. There is a whole range of communicative signs aside from words (looks, tones, gestures, etc.) which provide elements that indicate the boss's reasons for inviting her to coffee.

The second characteristic is the distinction between illocutionary acts of power and dialogic illocutionary acts. Habermas links illocutionary acts to actions oriented towards understanding, although he also relates some illocutionary acts with power claims[69]. However, the key issue is interactions; they are not reducible to claims. The boss can say to his employee, "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee?", with a claim that is

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[66] We have developed the concept of communicative acts in different research projects and in the book *Dialogic Societies*. In this book, we develop the concept of dialogic relations and interactions and power relations and interactions. For example, James and Kathy can be friends but he can also be her boss. Therefore, although their relationship is dialogic it includes dialogic interactions based on friendship between equals and power interactions based on their positions within the work hierarchy. See: CREA. (in process) *Sociedades Dialogicas.* Barcelona: El Roure.

[67] Habermas (1984) also mentions communicative acts, which include "speech acts or equivalent nonverval expressions" (p. 278), but he does not elaborate on this concept.

[68] Searle is right, unlike Austin, by suggesting that an utterance, for instance a question, contains illocutionary force such that it cannot only be a locution. A question is not neutral, it includes illocutionary force (the boss tries to make his employee go to the cafe). Habermas differs on this issue, but he states that the difference between locutionary and illocutionary is analytical (1984, p. 292); the important distinction for him is situated between these two acts and the perlocutionary acts.

[69] See Habermas (1984), p. 300.

totally based on freedom and equality, but she can feel coerced to accepting because she is afraid to miss opportunities within the company. Thus, in order to overcome situations of harassment there is a need for more of a Weberian ethic of responsibility rather than an ethic of intentions. The speaker (in this case, the boss) must not only be concerned about his intention of not harassing, but also that the context of the interactions does not lead the listener (in this case, his employee) to a coercive situation.

An illocutionary act that is fully dialogic can only take place in an ideal dialogic relationship (totally free of power interactions), which is impossible within the current social structure. Therefore, these ideal projections serve simultaneously as Weberian ideal types for the analysis of reality as well as to normatively orient social action[70]. The difference between dialogic illocutionary acts and power illocutionary acts serves to distinguish, for example, proposals based on freedom and equality from others that include the offense of sexual or labor harassment. This distinction cannot be established solely through speech; it must also accommodate other signs of communication and the context of the interactions. The question, "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee?", can be a dialogic communicative act if it does not include other signs of coercive communication and if it takes place between equals. The order, "We will finish work in the café!", that contains signs of coercion (a threatening tone) between boss and employee is a communicative act of power.

The third characteristic is the distinction between dialogic perlocutionary acts and power perlocutionary acts. Like Searle, we do not agree with the association Habermas establishes between illocutionary acts and actions oriented to understanding, and

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[70] Habermas has a very similar conception regarding this idea. Those who state that the Habermasian conception is based on the belief that social reality is like a seminar of academics where everyone wants to dialogue, have not read his theory of communicative action or the texts in which he specifically denies this statement: "First of all, I never say that people *want* to act communicatively, but that they *have* to" (p. 111). These people also make erroneous analyses of social reality, providing that the portrayals of neighborhoods where everyone fights and academic circles where everyone wants to dialogue are fictitious.
See: Habermas, J. (1994) *The past as future* Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press (o.p.1991).

perlocutionary acts and actions oriented towards success[71]. On the one hand, these linguistic concepts are attributed excessive importance from a normative perspective. On the other hand, communicative acts are frequently oriented simultaneously to understanding and success. If the perlocutionary act is what evokes effects in the listener, nothing impedes it from being based upon both understanding and success. For instance, the proposal, "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee? Let me reassure you this is not a date", can be made to seek going to a café if, and only if both people want to, in a situation free of coercion. The success sought is consented between all the participants in the interaction. The speaker wants to have coffee with the listener if, and only if she agrees to it, and his speech act has the effect of reassuring her in the face of the possible danger of it turning into a date.

The existence or the lack of a sincere agreement free of coercion marks the difference between power and dialogic perlocutionary acts. In a process of selecting personnel, the boss says to the aspiring employee "I am eliminating you from the second round of the selection for not accepting to join me for a coffee". The effect produced by the threat (eliminating her from the selection) is clearly based on power interactions. In contrast, in the former example, "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee? Let me reassure you this is not a date" if it is sincere and uttered in a context of interactions between equals, it constitutes a dialogic perlocutionary act.

The fourth characteristic is the condition of sincerity as a requisite for dialogic illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. We agree with Searle that a perlocutionary act can be explicit, and we subscribe to his critique of Habermas for contending that it is always concealed behind a strategy. It is clear that when the boss says to the aspiring employee, "I am eliminating you from the second round of the selection for not accepting to join me for a coffee" it produces a perlocutionary effect that is very explicit. Therefore, perlocutionary acts may or may not be explicit.

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[71] In the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action,* Habermas (1984: p.279) states: "I shall try to make Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts fruitful for delimiting action oriented to reaching understanding from action oriented to success."

Sincerity is a requisite in dialogic perlocutionary acts. For the utterance, "Shall we finish the conversation over a cup of coffee? Let me reassure you this is not a date", to be a dialogic perlocutionary act, in addition to a context of dialogic interactions there must be sincerity in order to eliminate the possible date-like character of the proposal. If there is no sincerity and the speaker in reality aims to create a date-like situation, the act continues to be perlocutionary. However, the effect that is provoked by the act is based on deception, which restricts the hearer's freedom and, therefore, is not a dialogic perlocutionary act but one of power.

## 2) Social sciences: reflections about postmodernism and constructivism

*The construction of social reality* had a key role in clarifying some of the errors of postmodernism and social constructivism. Searle has taken a position on this issue in diverse areas of his work and has criticized the lack of meaning of postmodern ideas for anyone who wants to do serious work and believes in the progress of science. In a conference on Dialogic Reading recently held at the University of Barcelona, he was asked about his opinion on whether reality is socially constructed and if it depends on individual interpretations that originate from our culture. Constructivism has had a significant influence in our country and Searle's arguments are highly clarifying. The following paragraph is his response, which explicitly reflects this author's point of view:

> I would simply like to say that the idea that all reality is socially constructed is preposterous… I mean, if you have a broken leg, or you have a cancer, or a brick falls and hits you on the head it's no good saying oh, well, a cancer is just a social construction or my broken leg that's just a matter of collective acceptance. I mean, think of real life, you call up your doctor and say: "what were the results of my cancer test?". And if the doctor says: well, you know, disease is just a text, and it's all "la textualité du text", I mean, you are going to get another doctor. Or take the practical things, you leave your car with the mechanic and you want to know if you need a new carburetor and you call the

mechanic and he says: "well, I'm a deconstructionist mechanic and we think of a carburetor as essentially textual, it's simply a matter of textual construction and you can construct it anyway you like." You'd better hire a different mechanic. I mean, reality is brute. Now, in our little corner of the universe, in our little corner of the solar system, there is a part of reality that is socially constructed. Money is socially constructed, property, and government, and marriage and universities are socially constructed, because we think they are what they are, that they are able to function, but beyond them is an enormous universe and that universe is not socially constructed. That universe has a brute reality, and it doesn't care the least about us. I cannot imagine why anybody would think, let's say, that the solar system is socially constructed…people have to get together and conduct investigations, but the reality that language is about, the reality that knowledge is about, that's not socially constructed, that's there, that has a brute natural existence, and that's what makes it different from this little corner of the universe, name it the corner of the universities, and marriages, and divorces, and private propriety which really are socially constructed. (Searle, Barcelona Science Park, December 3, 2003)

In *The Construction of Social Reality*, Searle emphasizes one of the essential characteristics of language: the existence of symbolic mechanisms (words) that, in accordance with a convention, they mean or represent things beyond the very mechanisms. Institutional facts contain words, symbols and other conventional mechanisms, all of which are subordinated to collective agreements that express things that can be publicly comprehensible. However, there are brute facts that are an objective part of reality and do not depend on how individuals or groups interpret that reality. There is a reality that is separate from our representations, which does not depend on language. In order to speak of this reality we need language, but the existence of these brute facts is separate from the statements that refer to them.

The critique to external realism slows down the progress of scientific knowledge, given that it is centered on the denial of ontological objectivity and it questions truth and reality, which is typical of postmodern perspectives. In the debate that is presented further on, Searle refers to postmodernism as a profoundly reactionary perspective, although at times there have been attempts to shroud its political implications, by impregnating some vanguard movements that do not appear to have or seek any relation with the social sphere. These movements renounce the possibility of a rational assessment of society, as well as rational social change based on rational political assessments. Searle sustains that postmodernism is reactionary because it is anti-intellectual, not based on any solid theoretical critique, but rather on a series of irrational responses. The author adds that postmodern philosophers have a desire for power rather than a desire for the truth, and want to make the world respond to them rather than to the real world. Finally, he attributes the rise of postmodern thought to an anti-scientific reaction that responds to a crisis in trust in the fields of humanities and social sciences.

We agree with Searle's critique of postmodernism as well as with Merton's when he contends that throughout the history of the social sciences we can identify these anti-scientific reactions in the form questioning the original emancipatory character of the social sciences, but also as a questioning of its scientific basis, through denying our rational capacity to understand reality and even the existence of this reality. Merton identifies them in the following way:

> In part, the anti-science movement derives from the conflict between the ethos of science and of other social institutions. A corollary of this proposition is that contemporary revolts against science are *formally* similar to previous revolts, although the *concrete* sources are different. Conflict arises when the social effects of applying scientific knowledge are deemed undesirable, when the scientist's skepticism is directed toward the basic values of other institutions, when the expansion of political or religious or economic authority limits the autonomy of the scientist, when anti-intellectualism questions the

value and integrity of science and when nonscientific criteria of eligibility for scientific research are introduced. (p. 266)[15]

Nevertheless, the problem arises when "the value and integrity of science" are endangered and the questioning emerges from people who are unfamiliar with the mechanisms social scientists have developed to face certain analytical obstacles, but also when the questioning comes from people who belong to the very social sciences community. We can think of philosophers like Foucault, Derrida or Lyotard who, without any real intention of developing a scientific analysis of reality (because they deny it), challenge the existence of universals, truth and reality. In other words, they deny the scientific nature of the social sciences. Some scholars aim to base the social sciences on postmodern perspectives, for instance on the works of Foucault. This means that they are not only unfamiliar with the bases of the social sciences, but also with the Foucaultian perspective. Foucault did not aspire to developing any social science: he was against science and in favor of genealogy. Such basic errors occur in the intellectual context, where it is common to speak and write about things that people have not actually read.

The problem, thus, is not the direct, intended or explicit questioning of the scientific premises of the social sciences, but basing a seemingly scientific analysis on the contributions of these authors. Mario Bunge terms this reaction the anti-scientific movement or the "post-Mertonian era". He argues that instead of respecting the legacy of social scientists, this reaction gained popular acclaim mainly during the 1960s because it denies "that basic scientific research is peculiar, rational, objective, disinterested, and benign" (p. 234)[16]. If we observe the works of the most important postmodern authors it is easy to demonstrate that it is impossible to develop a thorough scientific analysis based on their contributions.

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[15] Merton, R. K. 1973. *The sociology of science. Theoretical and empirical investigations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
[16] Bunge, M. 1998. *Social science under debate: A philosophical perspective*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

For example, Searle contends that Derrida is far from making any scrupulous scientific analysis and that, in fact, his ideas are outdated. The author argues that poststructuralism is focused on themes that the philosophy of language resolved already years ago. According to Searle, the fact that there is imprecision and indecision in language is something that philosophers have simply taken for granted. We can use the same word to refer to different meanings. For instance, I can say 'Quixote' to refer to the novel by Cervantes and I can also use this word to call my dog or to mention my brother's favorite restaurant. This does not present any new contributions to the use of language in the social sciences; it is merely, in Searle's words, "a bad argument". He critiques the notion of *itérabilité* – playing with a number of unlimited meanings and signifiers, while proclaiming the death of the author – as he considers that it is the result of this French philosopher's confusion about meaning and interpretation.

Starting from a Heideggerian legacy, Derrida sustains that existence is subordinated to and created by language. Mental representations generate the presence of reality, subject to variables of space and time. In this way, he argues that any presence has multiple existences in relation to its context. He explores this idea in his book the *Spectres de Marx*[17], in which he plays at contrasting real images with imaginary images. There he dedicates a chapter to the current relevance of Marx, where he mixes up his person and his work with his specter. We can even find examples where Derrida explicitly questions the existence of the object of sociological study. For example, in an interview with the journal *Radical Philosophy* he affirms that "there are no pre-established norms which can guarantee that one is making contact with actuality (…) even violence and suffering, war and death- is said to be constructed and fictive, and constituted by and for the media, so that nothing really ever happens, only images, simulacra, and disillusions." (Derrida, 1994: 28)[18].

[17] Derrida, J. 1993. *Spectres de Marx.* Editions Galilée.
[18] Derrida, J. 1994. The deconstruction of actuality. An interview with Jacques Derrida. *Radical Philosophy,* 68, http://www.radicalphilosophy.com

If we follow this reasoning, does it leave any room for the social sciences? Derrida de-legitimizes any scientific attempt to understand reality because he literally denies its existence. However, his "science of deconstruction" has had a real social impact in social science departments around the world. In the study of *De la Grammatologie* he defends the predominance of written language over spoken language, to the point that the essence of language would have to be understood in accordance with the written model, given that its existence transcends the death of the human being. The written text becomes part of the human legacy when it is freed from its context, its reference, the author's intentions and even the interpretations of its readers[19]. Derrida defends the possibility of multiple interpretations of the same text. Each text is independent of its initial intentions, whether they are scientific or literary, because each reader decides on its value. The method of deconstruction has numerous consequences for the social sciences, because any theoretical text or research report can be freely interpreted without taking into account its social context or its foundation. What is worse, it can be considered in the same way as any other text, for instance fiction, without the expectation that it corresponds to any reality. In fact, Derrida denies the existence of a reality outside of the individual and contends that truth does not exist, nor can it be reached.

Umberto Eco responded intelligently to Derrida's concept of deconstruction when the French philosopher sent him an invitation letter to support the creation of the Collège International de Philosophie in Paris. Eco, in his response letter, counter argues Derrida's ideas applying them to the same response, thus challenging the nihilistic nature of his ideas:

> I bet Derrida was assuming that (i) I had to assume that he was telling the truth; (ii) I had to read his program as a univocal discourse as far as both the actual situation and his project were concerned; (iii) my signature requested at the end of my letter would have been taken more seriously than Derrida's at the end of "Signature, évenement, contexte." Naturally, according to my *Erwartungshorizon,* Derrida's letter could have assumed

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[19] Derrida, J. 1967. *De la grammatologie*. Édicions de Minuit.

for me many other additional meanings, even the most contradictory ones, and could have elicited many additional inferences about its "intended meaning"; nevertheless, any additional inference ought to be based on its first layer of allegedly literal meaning. (Eco, 1990, p. 54)[20]

In the same book, Eco recognizes his sympathy towards the project of opening the text, but without threatening the intention of meaning or the possibility of communicating, in order to be able to progress in scientific knowledge and to differentiate it from any other genre. In our case, we completely concur with Eco in the need to dismantle postmodern discourses that deny the possibility to do social sciences and to communicate with each other. We think, however, that it is necessary to differentiate our critique of postmodernism from the critique of the errors and limitations of constructivism.

Constructivism does not deny science, or the truth. For example, we know that the Holocaust has existed because a community of historians has constructed this reality. Therefore, this is a truth, and this truth is part of our scientific knowledge. Contrary to this, Derrida would defend that the Holocaust is text, and thus, each person can deconstruct this text and attribute new meanings and different interpretations to it, regardless of what historians and the international scientific community might say about it. Historical revisionism has deconstructed the existence of the Holocaust, denying that its truth can be scientifically affirmed and placing the findings of historians on the same level as the interpretations of people who say that it has not existed. The reactionary character of postmodernism that Searle points out becomes explicit in the relationship some of its concepts have with Nazism, from the Heideggerian origins of the very concept of deconstruction (elaborated by an ex-Nazi, Paul de Man) to the most extreme consequences, which reach to justifying the negation of the Holocaust.

Constructivism is very different. The notion of the social construction of reality includes a scientific construction of truth (for example about the existence of the

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[20] Eco, U. 1990. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Holocaust). In any case, we share Searle's rejection of constructivism because it leaves the door open to relativism. The Holocaust was a reality that was socially constructed, an institutional fact, and we all (humanity) could have constructed another reality back then (in the 1940s). Nevertheless now, the veracity of the Holocaust is not a social construction; it does not depend on historians' interpretations. These interpretations are bound to an external deed that cannot be modified, which is the reference point for the veracity of their interpretations. The truth does not depend on historians' interpretations, rather on the relationship between their interpretations and the real facts that occurred in the 1940s. By considering the truth as a social construction of knowledge, constructivism reduces social reality to knowledge and sociology to the sociology of knowledge[21].

Searle's critique of the limitations of constructivism (explained earlier) provides us with useful elements to be included in this debate, which we consider key for advancing the social sciences. His work – from his initial reflections about speech acts through to his recent works on rationality – has contributed numerous concepts and important ideas in a clear and concise language that invites reflection and debate about interpretation and analysis of social facts.

He has dedicated many of his books to discussing the relationship between consciousness, language and intentionality, on the basis of speech acts and the philosophy of language. He sets out that the link between our consciousness, the existing reality (the characteristics of our world that exist independently of us) and our actions in this reality lies in intentionality. Along with the idea of intentionality, Searle develops the notion of

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[21] Habermas explains this idea in the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987:139) "In the phenomenological tradition stemming from Husserl and Schutz, the social theory based on such a culturalistically abridged concept of the lifeworld, when it is consistent, issues in a *sociology of knowledge.* This is the case, for instance, with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who state the thesis of *The Social Construction of Reality* as follows: '*The basic contentions of the argument of this book are implicit in its title and subtitle, namely, that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the processes in which this occurs.*' (1967: 1) The one-sidedness of the culturalistic concept of the lifeworld becomes clear when we consider that communicative action is not only a process of reaching understanding; in coming to an understanding about something in the world, actors are at the same time taking part in interactions through which they develop, confirm and renew their memberships in social groups and their own identities. Communicative actions are not only processes of interpretation in which cultural knowledge is "tested against the world"; they are at the same time processes of social integration and of socialization." See: Habermas, J. 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. II. Lifeworld and System: Critique of functionalist reason.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

*Background,* which has many implications for different areas of the social sciences. The Background of intentionality is a series of capacities and assumptions that allow us to cope with the world. It is the implicit knowledge that we take for granted, that conditions our beliefs, hopes and fears, and consequently, the meaning of what we try to say. If we think of today's multicultural and multilingual societies, this concept becomes highly relevant. We find that a part of the Background is common to all cultures and languages (*Deep Background*), although there are some elements that vary between them (*local cultural practices*).

Furthermore, Searle considers it essential to have a solid theory about rationality that can firmly uphold coherent theories on human beings and societies. For him this would be a form of invalidating the aforementioned positions of irrationality that, arising from different currents of thought, have a direct influence on many actions and practical decisions. Searle attempts to refute the idea defended by many philosophers that rationality is linked to a particular culture, as if the issues that are rational for one culture would not necessarily be so for others. In short, he questions the perspectives that deny the idea of a universal rationality. According to Searle, rationality is a biological phenomenon, and consequently, it is common to all humans. It is universal because it is a feature present in other universal phenomena, like intentional states and language. He affirms that people have a consciousness and intentionality, which allows us to produce speech acts, and through them, construct reasons to act. He also considers that uniting cultural relativism and intentionality is an illusion derived from the fact that the principles of rationality can be implemented differently in relation to different capacities and assumptions of the Background.

Searle's reaction to the studies on artificial intelligence is another example of his interest in the mind and how consciousness and intentionality affect the form in which we create meaning and produce speech acts. The author conceives of consciousness as a central mental phenomenon around which he constructs his perspective in relation to the study of the human mind. He points out that no theory of language is complete if it does not consider the relationship between mind and language and if it does not examine how

meaning arises from the intentionality that is more biologically basic and intrinsic to the mind/brain.

Searle sets out that the connection between the cerebral and mental processes, that is, the connection between brain and consciousness, between body and mind is a mystery. He ponders over and over again how it is possible that a multitude of physical particles without meaning can produce rational arguments, meanings, feelings and emotions. This is the mystery that Searle attempts to unveil. He emphasizes the lack of knowledge there still is about the functioning of the human mind and introduces the debate on the theories of Artificial Intelligence. How could we explain it? Could we use the well-known metaphor of the computer? Can computers think? Searle firmly rejects this hypothesis and illustrates it with the example of the "Chinese room". He questions the principles set out by those who defend Artificial Intelligence, by showing how the functioning of a computer system, able to combine codes and construct symbols, does not imply understanding meanings, contrary to what occurs in mental processes. The author critiques the reductionism that places the human mind on the same level as computer programs, and he states the need to observe consciousness and intentionality in order to be able to tackle understanding semantic content.

The dialogue that we present in this book reflects these and other scientific debates on key issues in the field of contemporary social sciences. The debate focuses on Searle's and Crea's reflections about how we do things with words, about the subject, literature and art, about dialogic imagination, collective intentionality and intersubjectivity, about the creation of meaning, and definitely, about the numerous debates that are still unresolved regarding language and the social sciences. We invite the readers to join us and to continue this debate.