

**TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE THEORY OF READING**

**by**

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There is something dizzying about reading ...that resembles the irrational impulse... this impulse is connected to desire, which is a leap, an infinite leap, just as inspiration is a leap: I want to read what has nevertheless not been written.

Maurice Blanchot.

FOR

Lilian, and Nadine,  
for your love and patience.

TO

Mummy and Daddy  
for your belief in me.

TO

GOD  
for his love and support

## SUMMARY

This study focuses on meaning construction as it occurs in the reading act. It explores and challenges the view that the reader usually uses language to construct meaning in a referential way. This study envisages that the reader who engages in a literal reading of the text may encounter serious epistemological and ontological problems which ensue from such a narrow reading of the text.

In the context of the dynamics of meaning construction, this study subsequently problematizes the notion of language vis-a-vis the notion of subjectivity and representation. It challenges the taken for granted assumption that meaning is pre-ordained and which has to be extracted by a sovereign and authoritative reading subject. The question of precision and correctness of grasping textual content is addressed by exploring those views which seek to go beyond Cartesian representationalism. This study therefore critically explores an alternative reading theory by examining the pioneering dialogical views of earlier theorists to include, ultimately, those subversive attempts of radical theorists. The latter group clearly seeks to subvert and even displace the dialogical reading practices of their predecessors. This study ultimately proposes the notion of a differential reading discourse. Such an integrative theory postulates an alternative theory of reading which in fact provides a more expansive, yet inclusive, framework of reading. This would entail a form of reading which would combat the mere consumption of meanings and acquiescence into ideology-building. It would be a reading framework that is more in keeping with our socio-political reality in South Africa, in which people can enjoy a far more critical and comprehensive view of themselves and of the society in which they operate.

I declare that TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE THEORY OF READING is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*J A Van Wyk*

.....  
SIGNATURE  
(J A VAN WYK)

1/6/98

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DATE

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CHAPTER 1ORIENTATION OF THIS STUDY.1.1 A CASE FOR METHODOLOGY

I think I read in at least two ways. First by following, breathlessly, the events and the characters without stopping to notice the details, the quickening pace of reading sometimes hurtling the story beyond the last page - as when I read Rider Haggard, the *Odyssey*, Conan Doyle and the German author of Wild West stories, Karl May. Secondly, by careful exploration, scrutinizing the text to understand its ravelled meaning, finding pleasure merely in the sound of the words or in the clues which the words did not wish to reveal, or in what I suspected was hidden deep in the story itself, something too terrible or too marvellous to be looked at. (Manguel, 1995:13)

Alberto Manguel, with his usual erudition and wit appears to move deftly through a mass of written material, emphasizing in his questioning stance not so much the human dimension of reading and readers, as indicated in his own experiences above, but more particularly highlights his fervent search after the elusive intrigues of the reading act and the process of meaning construction which the Argentinian writer Ezequiel Martinez

Estrada proclaims, "This is one of the most delicate forms of adultery" (see Manguel, 1995:20).

If the reading act is to be compared to a "form of adultery", it certainly suggests a pleasurable relationship between a reader and a text, engaging in a self-surrendering, almost impenetrable private affair into which few, if any, outsiders have any approval for or insight into. Whatever intimacies pass through and in this relationship, one fundamental question remains unsolved: did we, the readers, reach out and capture letters on a page, or did the letters reach out to our senses? Does the notion that we are capable of reading, hark back to the Platonic assumption that ideas of knowledge exist in us before the thing is perceived, i.e. that we "discover" a word because the object or idea it represents is already in our mind, "ready to be linked up with the word?" (Stern, 1985). These, and many other related questions, mark the onset of the dilemma this study grapples with - which essentially pursues an inevitable problematizing of the reading act in terms of its sense and meaning making dimension.

Understanding the entire range of intricacies involved in the construction of meaning, as exemplified in the reading act, may usually follow a research route of either the theory-testing type or the theory-building type (Rose, 1982:11). First, there is research executed primarily to test theories and the second type concentrates on theory construction in which case the whole research process proves to be a much more flexible and qualitative process than the quantitative structured techniques

of theory testing. This significant distinction also usually marks extreme perspectives of, on the one hand, human beings responding in an almost mechanistic or even deterministic fashion to the situations encountered in their external world, and on the other, human beings as being much more creative and not merely being manipulated by outside forces. Burrell and Morgan (1979) believe that, whilst there are social theories which tend to adhere to each of these extremes, the assumptions of many social scientists are usually pitched somewhere in the range between them.

It is our intention in this study, regarding the reading act, to adopt a theoretical/conceptual route which pursues an overriding qualitative emphasis, for this approach tends to give greater credence to "... the grounded theory approach [which] tends to emphasize the importance of processes of interaction and the way in which individuals play a part in "constructing" their social environment" (Layder, 1993:5). An examination of the issues surrounding the analysis and clarification of the reading act is thus strategically based on a qualitative methodology whereby the relevant literature/ideas are to be researched for the purposes of rigorous inference, interpretation, explanation and prediction. The preferred methodology used in this study is more than likely to help us to understand, in the broadest possible terms, not necessarily the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself (see Kaplan, 1973). While Merton (1958), among other social scientists, has come to abandon the spurious choice between qualitative and quantitative data, he emphasizes the concerns

of both, making use of the most valuable features of each. The problem is essentially at *which points* the research shall adopt the one and at which the other. While methodological sophistication is our aim, technical precision is not necessarily, for the elusive dynamics of the reading act inevitably defy precision and complete certainty.

## 1.2 THE DIFFICULTY OF POSITIVISM

In our post-information era which emphasizes the purposeful application/use of information in people's everyday lives, there seems nevertheless to be an increasing tendency to base our reports, poll results, surveys, analyses, etc. upon scientific fact, and those who cannot understand how the "facts" have been reached, will generally be unable to separate fact from speculation and wish. On the other hand, the status and prestige of the "scientific study" proves persuasive enough so that many reports, poll results, surveys, etc. are give this label without adequate justification. We remain however mindful that the growth of every science (including information science) has been accompanied by the development and sophistication of research techniques in that field. The inevitable epistemological assumptions in these "research techniques" are critical, even in this study. Cohen & Manion (1960:6) are quite clear on this issue:

"How one aligns oneself in this particular debate *profoundly affects* how one will go about uncovering knowledge of social behaviour. The view that knowledge is

hard, objective and tangible will demand of researchers an observer role; to see knowledge as personal, subjective and unique, however, imposes on researchers an involvement with their subjects and a rejection of the ways of the natural scientist. To subscribe to the former is to be positivist, to the latter, anti-positivist."

A qualitative conceptual approach to the reading act will thus *profoundly affect* what understandings we arrive at regarding the reader, text and the role of language - which an objectivistic - positivistic approach will not be able to do.

This study declines to pursue a positivist, empirical approach as overriding methodology. While the positivist tradition in no way claims that observation of the reading dynamics, as in this study, occurs without theorising - one cannot make *meaningful* observation and analysis of the reading act without first formulating hypotheses and theories (Mouton, 1993). According to Mouton (1993:7) the positivist insists on the uncompromising empiricist component of research "...that in order to qualify as scientific knowledge, all scientific research must originate in empirical observation, and all theoretical constructs must in the final analysis be able to be tested against the reality of empirical facts."

This study, however is moreover mindful that where positivism seems less successful, is in its application to the study of

human behaviour, in this context, the interaction between text and reader, "...where the immense complexity of human nature and the elusive and often intangible quality of social phenomena contrast strikingly with the order and regularity of the natural world" (Cohen & Manion, 1980:12). In practice, therefore, this implies scientifically that the tenability of any theory or hypothesis of reading depends on the nature of the empirical evidence for its support. In fact, we believe that an empirical approach for this study would build on nothing more than naive assumptions of "law-like" generalizations of the reading act and, as a result, impoverish our already shackled understanding of deeper information and discoveries of the reading dynamics. The reading act, of necessity, has to contend with infinite variable, unique and non-measurable situations of reader-text interaction, rather than the investigation of repetitive, simplifiable and obviously observable reading behaviour. We have noticed that there has been considerable overstatement and often more misunderstanding concerning the application of scientific methods to social data and therefore enhancing the trivalization of the real issues we in fact need to clarify. In this regards Shipman (1972:19) concludes:

"The more effort, it seems, that researchers put into their scientific experimentation in the laboratory by restricting, simplifying and controlling variables, the more likely they are to end up with a pruned, synthetic version of the whole, a constructed play of puppets in a restricted environment."

Against this formidable background, this study charts a conceptual, theoretical approach to the analysis of the meaning making dynamics in the reading act, precisely in order to avoid the crude trivializing of it by reducing the reader and its interaction with the text to a "play of puppets in a restricted environment", as pointed out by Shipman (1972:19).

### 1.3 THE CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL ROUTE

It has in many instances become evident that the strict distinction between theory-testing and theory-constructing is not always clear-cut (see Layder, 1993:45). In this study our emphasis is swayed to a predominantly theory-constructing approach simply because *theorising* moves the researcher away from the empirical world into an abstract world in which the appeal to theory becomes viewed as a constant and flexible accompaniment to the incremental collection/sifting of ideas and the unfolding nature of the research (see Glaser & Strauss, 1971). In order therefore to develop a theoretical, conceptual framework for the analysis of the act of meaning construction, as it unfolds in the reading act, we need to develop a system, i.e. we ought to pursue ordering principles of how we conceive of reading. Our assumptions are that any reading act earns its orientation *as reading* because we assume that *someone is* involved with a text, the interaction of both which constitutes *more than a mere* decodification process. The mere decodification of written/printed letters and words in the text assumes that no variables interrupt what would otherwise be a smooth process and understanding the text. The act of reading

therefore makes significant assumptions regarding the *concepts* of subjectivity and representation. It is not unusual to assume that it is a *subject* who *represents* the object in language, to make meaning. Instead of embarking on any empirical verification of these actions, this study rather explores the "specialized" area of reading (as opposed to literal decodification) in terms of how and what the concepts of subjectivity, representation and language have evolved in their interplay and therefore to theoretically demonstrate what we mean when we refer to reading, and not only the translation of words and sentences.

It is by ordering the notions of subjectivity, representation and language in a meaningful way in terms of their *relationship* and status that we are likely to develop theory. For without theory this study would not seem to yield any predictions and without the latter we simply have no mechanism to exercise "control" over our material world where people live among many messages, emanating from a diverse range of sources. In order to elucidate the rationale behind the theoretical/conceptual approach this study adopts, Hatt & Goode (1978:8-10) point out five valuable purposes of *theory*, viz (1) it defines the major orientation of a science, by defining which data are to be abstracted; (2) it offers a conceptual scheme by which the relevant phenomena (eg. language, subjectivity, representation) are systematized, classified and interrelated; (3) it summarizes facts into (a) empirical generalizations (b) systems of generalizations; (4) it predicts facts; and (5) it points to gaps in our knowledge.

Our conceptual approach highlights the orientation of this study by narrowing our focus down to the dynamics of meaning construction in the reading act, the latter of which we assume to be *something more and even other* than the literal decodification of sentences. The conceptualization of the reading act refers to the *relationship* and ensuing understanding of subjectivity, presentation and language. These concerns are embellished on a "developmental" level in this study, tracing their ideas since early Cartesian representationalism through the psycho-analysis, post structuralism and post-modernism. We inevitably extrapolate from the known or accepted assumptions of reading as a masterable, replicable and controllable act of meaning construction - to the unknown and critical assumptions of reading as possibly being an unmasterable, non-replicable and uncontrollable act of meaning construction. Finally this study seeks to highlight the possible gaps and/or weaknesses in our understandings - pointing at other possibly different areas of understanding of meaning construction that may not have been explored. This will, of necessity, change/modify our conceptual scheme by systematically questioning the deficient, anomalous or spurious assumptions. Therefore, on the basis the thinking of the selected philosophers/theorists presented in this study, we envisage to gain greater clarification and redefinition of the theories/thinking that inform a much more integrated and enriched understanding of the reading act than the myopic limitations of literal representationalism.

## 1.4 OVERVIEW OF STUDY

### CHAPTER 2

This study departs from the assumption that the reading act remains hamshackled in that it tends to operate in terms of the notion that if the reading had been concluded successfully, it in fact had been received, interpreted and understood - even if some difficulty had to be resolved. This chapter therefore sets out to problematize the problematic issues involved in meaning-construction in the reading act, particularly by unravelling the role of language, the authoritative role the reading subject plays and how the notion of representation has given rise to tricky pitfalls. The essential question that is problematized, is what separates the reading act from the mere act of decodification, i.e. to what extent can language be used in a tool-kit fashion and suggest to literally unlock meaning for whatever purpose readers propose. It emerges that this dilemma is in serious need of redress.

### CHAPTER 3

In this Chapter we seek to shift the boundaries to address the question of how meaning gets constructed, pursuing a more expansive understanding of what views of language, subjectivity and representation have come to be held. Having realized the limitations of the production of literal meaning in the form of Cartesian logical representationalism, Nietzsche, the first of the pioneers in this study, departs on the basis of casting

radical doubt on our meaning-giving practices, including the central role of a sovereign subject using language in a manipulative way. These pioneers, which include Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur, all in their respective ways, seek to rethink the subject-object dualism in the context of pursuing an immediate and literal correspondence between words and meaning. In their respective phenomenological and hermeneutic attempts they set out to question the Cartesian and Kantian views but also seek to cast a new and refreshing perspective on the role of language as it unravels in reading discourse, in the context of a brave and creative attempt to bridge the subject-object dichotomy - hence subverting the notion of an authoritative subject, manipulating the object in the reading act. Their attempts, however, only initiate the arduous task of rethinking the complexity of meaning construction as it occurs in the reading act.

#### CHAPTER 4

Here we explore further ramifications or, in instances almost subversive dimensions, than the stage-setting attempts of the old pioneers, departing from the cul-de-sac of co-determining and sharing dispositions of subject and object in the construction of meaning. In their subversive attempts these new masters, Eco, Lotman, Barthes, Derrida and Lacan, variously, postulate critical discursive practices which are to be "encapsulated" in the ideas of semiotics, post-structuralism, post-modernism and even psycho-analysis. While they generally-speaking do not claim to have a consistent range of "common"

notions, they however all do seek to deconstruct the act of reading in radical ways as to lay bare the deeper or even other or different layers of what it is to conceive of representation and subjectivity. These attempts include questioning the validity of the latter concepts as well. They intelligently question the contriving status of the afore-mentioned concepts as been fixed "masterable" and "controllable" mechanisms within their very definite understandings of language. Their incisive problematization would moreover explore attempts of suspending the centrality of the action of a fixed subjectivity vis-a-vis the act of language. The new masters' attempt therefore push their own thinking beyond the pioneering masters', towards plurality of meaning and, as a result, opening the text to many more different readings than that which it seemingly carries within the literal written text.

## CHAPTER 5

This chapter attempts to critically synthesize the unravelling processes of the shackled nature of the literal reading act where meaning - which already exists in the text - is "fished out" by an all-knowing and controlling subject. The developmental "sequence" of the theories of the pioneers and the new masters have been gleaned to propose a much more expansive and heterogeneous notion of meaning-construction, exploring *many* other meanings that may not at first be obvious to or controlled by the reader. The expansive and more integrated approach to reading ushers into our meaning construction practices the inevitable presence of the conflictual, uncontrollable, often

unreadable and unmasterable dynamics which mark our daily interpretive practices and ultimately our definitions we coin of ourselves in the present-day context.

## CHAPTER 6

We attempt ultimately to postulate an integrated reading discourse which will hopefully transform our otherwise usual and limited ways of understanding the "location" and "purpose" of language vis-a-vis or within the constantly reconstituted engagements of subjectivity and representation. Beyond the centralizing and totalizing tendency of subjectivity and representation, this study ultimately demonstrates the theoretical underpinnings of a new or transformed way of reading. In this way the possibility of multiple readings become inevitable, conceiving of the act of reading, and the "identity" of the reader, which becomes nothing more than a discursive practice of constantly reflecting back and forth, within and beyond, imposed and disclosed, conferred and deferred, between and among reader(s) and text(s). This study thus proposes a new framework of what can be referred to as differential reading, as a means of addressing the demands of an ever expanding post-information society. As a significant way of managing the often unmanageable volume, complexity and diversity of textual and information challenges in our newly-found democracy in South Africa, this study concludes its theoretical exploration of meaning construction by proposing a differential reading discourse where there cannot necessarily be any pre-established meanings. In our political transition there can only be an

engaged here-and-now, productive moment or meaning construction of texts, as well as the construction of meaningful identities of ourselves as *persons*. Alberto Manguel (1995: 21-22) poignantly vindicates the challenge of the most pleasurable (or most practical) of solitary acts, i.e. reading:

"...the artificial dichotomy between life and reading is actively encouraged by those in power. Demotic regimes demand that we forget...totalitarian regimes demand that we not think...both, by and large, require that we become stupid and that we accept our degradation meekly, and therefore they encourage the consumption of pap. In such circumstances, readers cannot but be subversive."

The ultimate subversive attempts entailed in differential reading are attempts to remind us that no reading can ever be definitive.

CHAPTER 2THE HAMSHACKLED STATUS OF READING: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF A PROBLEM2.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.2.1.1 THE READING ACT AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

Generally-speaking, we accept that the main task of a text is to communicate a message and the act of communication embraces all the aspects pertaining to messages, their senders, their receivers and what transpires during the interaction among the three (Hatt, 1983: 16). We moreover believe that access to the recorded word presupposes the ability on the part of the reader to decode it for specific purposes in life. It is this view of reading, besides its communicative function, we believe constitutes the very fabric of what we regard as civilization:

"... progress (especially scientific and technological advancement) in any civilisation is dependent on the ability of that civilisation to record its knowledge in an interpersonal or symbolic manner so that this memory can be shared and expanded from generation to generation" (Kesting, 1980:151).

We have also come to accept that it is expedient to commit the text, as "representing" the product of human thought and, owing to the limitations of man's memory, to record - a view which has proven to be both positive and negative. The complexity of the reading act resides especially in the "negative", i.e. the resuscitation of the meaning that had been committed to record.

We assume that "a meaning" exists in the text. The conventional role of the reader is to divine or unlock that meaning.

Since we have long ceased to operate in an exclusively oral society, we have come to realize the importance of the reading act in order to construct or extract meaning from the text. For beyond the basic literate levels of identifying signs on roads, shops, buses, toilets, etc., schools, government, the press, the advertising world, commerce and science, we as readers constantly engage in a multitude of "reading acts" via documents, texts, reports, policy documents and notices to convey our ideas, findings and information to a broad spectrum of audiences. Such "reading acts" normally suggest attempts to give meaning to "what" we have read as opposed to "how" we have read. It is characteristic of the signs of our times that people have become results-driven, operating usually within the constraints of time limitations. Since contemporary life has become increasingly hurried we usually tend to just scan through newspapers, magazines, office memos, telephone messages, minutes of meetings, advertisements, sales pamphlets, etc. in order to grasp the essence contained in the document. This is precisely the difficulty of the nature of the reading act, viz. does one actually understand the implications of what one reads? Are all readings of a text a legitimate and complete reading of that specific text? Moreover, the wider implication of this is whether we grasp the function of reading in the life of a community and the nation at all. How do we grasp the reading act as a signifying practice? Does reading have to signify and produce meaning at all? Burnett (1995: 10-11) is quite correct in remarking that the "...eye and the body are in constant conflict...Seeing and feeling are not separate; both traverse and are traversed by desire". Kristeva (1990: 90) argues:

"... the desire to give meaning ... is not innocent but, rather, is rooted in the speaking subject's need to reassure himself of his image and his identity faced with an object".

Kristeva therefore already touches on an issue, i.e. the identity of subject and object, which is inescapably part of the reading act but one which we have not seriously reflected on. Whilst we assume that the purpose of all reading of documents or texts is to communicate certain information for specific purposes, which in turn would be implemented for personal and social advancement (Bernson, 1981; Crosman, 1980), the difficulty of regarding reading as a meaning-giving practice does not always seem to guarantee these purposes. This is the gist of our problem in this study: a text is regarded as an object that our Western culture consumes, it is viewed as a finished product and the process of its productivity is usually ignored.

The problematic assumptions of the reading act is furthermore exacerbated when it is believed that reading, if concluded successfully, had been received, interpreted and understood but it usually may not occur to the reader that while the action was received and conceived "successfully", even if conflict and difficulty had to be resolved, does not necessarily imply that the process of signification and meaning-giving had been correct or qualified.

On the whole, the reader's habitual meaning-giving practices, as it occurs in the act of reading, is often taken so much for granted, to the extent that at first glance it would seem that nothing need be said of it. As Kristeva pointed out, *reading is*

perhaps not such a "natural" or innocent activity, nor does it represent an easy act of unanalyzable communication between the reading subject and a text (Culler, 1980; Clegg, 1993). Any attempt therefore to problematize the reading act may reveal deeper complexities which constitute, first and foremost, a subjective act - emphasizing the predominant identity of a reader. It is only subsequently that the reader may question how generalizable an individual interpretation of a text really is. It is therefore only upon critical reflection that the *reading act* comes to be viewed as an objectified act that had taken place in which I, the reader, realize that I may have been involved in a meaning-giving process.

The fact that we have, generally-speaking, given little serious thought to the meaning-giving practice of reading has perhaps greatly got to do with the fact that we have not sufficiently pondered its purpose and application in real life and humane situations. This has been clearly evidenced by the numerous misreadings, distortions, superficiality or even dogmatism of interpreting documents - and how they ultimately impact on individual and social behaviour. Looking at reading in this problematic way could imply that its fabric may entail more than Ryle's view that it is "... an act of interpretation performed upon an artifact (the text) produced by a communicator (the author) in the process of expressing a particular mental content" (see Coetzee, 1977: x). Understanding the complexity of the meaning-giving role of the reading act can be assisted by reflecting on the views we hold of language since language, as the generally accepted dominant vehicle for meaning construction, is so closely associated with our human endeavours in all social contexts - and this assumption, too, forms part of our bigger dilemma in this study.

2.1.2 LANGUAGE AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

The essential problem of understanding the reading act has got to do with the uncritical or often contradictory assumptions we have come to hold of language. If reading is believed to be embodied primarily in and through language, i.e. language as a tool to unlock, create or express meaning, then language could assist us in clarifying the ultimate dynamics of reading, i.e. the dynamics and exchanges among people. (Virilio, 1993: 7-8)

The question of the meaning-giving function of language departs from the assumption that language does not function in a clinical vacuum - or so we have come to believe. We accept that it is people who use language and people who give or ascribe meaning to, with the assistance of linguistic tools. Ultimately the reader, in our conventional use of the concept, is assumed to be a human subject who gives meaning to textual content. In this regard Kristeva (see Oliver, 1993: 91) highlights the gist of this study, i.e. any theory of meaning must necessarily be theory of the subject. Who or what exactly this subject is, is the problematic question of this study.

If we assume, as we have done, that the reader *uses* language to construct meaning, we also assume to have a very definite understanding of the nature of language. The most commonly-accepted approach to language is that it has been regarded as having a referential function in everyday life. This view of the nature of language seems to have become the entrenched manner in which language is used in meaning construction. If readers use language wrongly or not in accordance with the usual linguistic or social conventions, it will block full understanding and could

give rise to misinterpretation (Sapir, 1949:11). Hence, it is constantly impressed on all authors (especially in policy documents, manuals, guidelines, documents, etc.) to formulate their ideas accurately (choice of words, correct spelling and sentence construction) as well as that readers should read correctly in order not to formulate spurious conclusions. This very limited grasp of the nature of language therefore places epistemological constraints on meaning construction. De Beer (1993: 81) refers to Maclean who emphasizes that it is the very search for precision in language which is the cause of ambiguity, obscurity and unintelligibility.

Language moreover has been accorded with responsibility to act as the medium of conveying meaning, i.e. that a message has been put into the text by an author, which, in turn, the reader has to extricate for accurate understanding and use in a particular context. Herein lies the assumptions of the problematic of language, that it is perceived as "... the stable representation of an intention" (Bagwell, 1986:31). Language, in the reading act, has usually been charged as embodying *somebody's* meaning - if not the author's then the reader's. Indeed, it is this human or anthropological element contained in language that prompts readers to plead for a sense of authority, i.e. any sequence of words means nothing until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it. Our pursuits of the meaning of a text also raises essential epistemological concerns and this requires us to examine the nature of the source or giver of meaning, which inevitably raises anthropological concerns - i.e. if we believe that the source is a human subject.

### 2.1.3 THE SUBJECT AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Our conventional assumption of language as a neatly-packaged commodity which functions as a tool to construct meaning, has given a challenging, albeit problematic, role to the human subject as sole knower who controls the language embedded in the text.

This has meant that the view that our use of language has always sought to stabilize and even totalize meaning-giving in and through the reading act. It moreover implies that the reader, as the master of this event, inevitably controls what is derived from the text. The reader as a result always assumes both the ability and the responsibility to name, describe, infer and explain - even his own nature *as reader* - through or in language. It is in this regard that Emile Benveniste (in Scholes, 1989:71) emphasizes:

"Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as I in his discourse. Because of this, I posits another person, the one who, being as he is, completely exterior to "me", becomes my echo to whom I say *you*, and who says *you* to me. This polarity of persons is the fundamental condition in language, of which the process of communication, in *which we share*, is only a mere pragmatic consequence.

This act of *sharing of intentions*, i.e. the giving and deriving of meaning has been privileged by the way we use language. It privileges the reading subject not only as the creator, shaper,

designer, definer and controller of meaning but moreover fulfils his own desire for creating an identity. In other words, within the reading act readers are clearly busy with a seemingly habitual act of *subjecting* (i.e. in the first place defining myself as the subject who has dominion over myself and the world around me) and *objecting* (i.e. as subject I determine objects, their status and use). The reader is subjecting his own identity as reader, i.e. defining and asserting himself. He is furthermore subjecting the construction of meaning to his own intentions and conventions - even if the facts are exploited, distorted or misunderstood. Subjectivity becomes thus the original source or basis of what can be regarded as objectivity. Objectivity, in as far as the text embodies an *object* which is separate from the *subject*, yields a distance in positions. The *object* (i.e. the words, the text) becomes *my human construction*. Deutscher (1983: 19) argues that:

"Objectivity is an intelligent learned use  
of our subjectivity."

The very construction of meaning is an anthropological endeavour executed in terms of human intelligence. The relation from a sovereign subject to an object is our big stumbling block, for this referential stance proves to have far reaching epistemological consequences such as validity, consistency, variety, expansiveness and innovation of knowledge.

The problem of the imposed status of dependence of the object on the subject, is a position that has been unilaterally created by the subject and over which the subject believes to have control and confidence. In the reading act the reader's view of objectivity therefore always requires an accurate sense of his potential and limitations as a subject when dealing with the

object at hand. Clearly, to be objective readers always seem to take the lead to evaluate what is important and what is not. As creators, judges, shapers and definers, readers assume absolute responsibility in making judgements about the general or specific value of things, texts, enterprises, people and actions. This split in the responsibility and authority of subject on the one hand and object on the other, produces fundamental epistemological implications in terms of how meaning about these objects and events get constructed. It has become evident that the status of the sovereign reading subject as controller, definer, shaper or as "poacher" and "consumer" (De Certeau, 1995) is in radical need of re-evaluation. This easy and inherently superficial one-way representation of *subject to object*, challenges our views of representation and how, as well as what kind of meaning, gets constructed in the reading act. Burnett (1995:11) problematizes this process of "seeing" from the position of the subject by questioning whether "... "to be seen" refers as much to a subjective of mind as it does the fact that someone is looking...". This view raises an important component in this study, viz how exactly "representations" occur in the construction of meanings.

#### 2.1.4 REPRESENTATION AND MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

Our concern is in this study that the reading act continues to occur under the yoke of educational practices and of how we have learned to see the world. Whether we read a picture, landscape, film or text the reader starts a "seeing" of *something* which is usually about *something*. "Seeing" has therefore become a subjective reading which has been initiated in the domain of the reader's subjectivity to mean something, i.e. to refer to something (the object). Virilio (1993: 7) paves the way when he

argues that it is through language that we "...put ourselves in the other person's place, to see with his or her eyes, to take advantage of his or her optical system, to be warned of an event to re-present to ourselves people and objects we cannot see or cannot yet see, and to finally act accordingly". Nicholson (1984:38) argues that human actions (including the human act of reading) is always seen as *projects*. The reader's projection and gazing upon the object proves to be problematic because it implies an outside position of the subject looking into the text as Scholes (1989:5) explains:

"... as people we "see" in the painting only . signs that we read as people. We cannot enter the world of this or any other painting. The reader is always outside the text".

This problematic of separate or an outside position of the reader vis-a-vis the object, yields a form of one-way meaning construction which is firmly rooted in the fallible human endeavours which seek to attain coherence, objectivity and accuracy. In other words, objectivity, accuracy, truth, falsity, etc., inevitably become fickle and subjective concepts, depending on the subject. It is evident that a dual discourse emerges, i.e. the one pertaining to an internal world and the other to an external world. However in the reading act this image described above furnishes a one-sided or biased approach on the part of the reader who campaigns for legitimate meanings of the external objective world. A one-sided relationship of *referring* to the object becomes of prime importance if we wish to understand the act of meaning construction. This egotistical act of looking at the content of the text is comfortable and ideal to the reader who assumes the role of knower, acting in relative predictable

ways of making his world known to himself through language. Representation essentially becomes a human (i.e. subjective) or at best an intellectual exercise. In this way language which is used to represent with may very well be rendered the status of a "tool-kit". This view of representation ushers us into nothing less than a cul-de-sac as far as meaning construction is concerned.

On the other hand the language of objectivity in meaning construction becomes primarily the language of vision, that which can be seen and read, that which is controllable and hopefully verifiable. Descriptions of the same "objects" (i.e. the world, texts, etc) carried out in the terms of any other modality would be viewed with caution and suspicion. Within the literal way of meaning construction it is advantageous to be "compelled" by the facts and what one sees, rather than to search for facts or findings that are agreeable with other variables within any reading context. This literal approach of representation which unfolds under the authority of the reading subject ensures an epistemological legitimacy imposes serious limitations for knowledge-production and ultimately personal being.

#### 2.1.5 THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM OF THIS STUDY

- Our essential concern in this study is how we as humans construct meaning. More specifically, our focus is on the *reading act*, as a special act of the reader involving himself in a text. The critical question is, what separates the reading act from the mere act of decodification.
- Our problem is moreover the notion of *language*, for it has

been usually in terms of linguistic dynamics that we support and construct meanings in the reading act.

- Furthermore, the reader of the text has traditionally been regarded as the *subject* who uses language and controls language. Our concern is what assumptions underpin this sovereign position of the subject in the reading act.
- Finally, our concern is how does *representation* in the reading act occur? Traditionally the human subject uses language to represent meaning in the reading-act. It is precisely because language is a human fabrication for use, as well as defining himself, that it can theoretically be put to any use - calling into questions the validity of our human and subjective *re-presentations* of our world and of ourselves. Is reading and the construction of meaning a true reflection of how things really are, or are they a representation, a reconfiguration of the subject's conventions and intentions? Is reading necessarily such a one-sided, act, which is initiated by the reading human subject?

The key concepts of language, subject and representation as deployed within the context of the reading act need to be examined more closely in terms of the statement of the problem. But the attempt of problematization of these key concepts needs more substantial elaboration.

## 2.2. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE.

### 2.2.1 THE POTENTIAL OF LANGUAGE

It is clear that the crux of the reading act is how readers, generally-speaking, make sense of information for their own understanding within their specific contexts - particularly in view of the reality that "... reading meaning and deciphering

letters correspond to two different activities, even if they interact" (De Certeau, 1995:154). This difference between "reading" and "deciphering" becomes problematic. The role and purpose of "reading" differs radically from that of "deciphering" in that the latter is including in the former (see De Beer, 1992; Leenhardt, 1980; Mumby, 1993). This is our dilemma that deciphering is exactly just that viz, unlocking what *is there* in the text, whereas the reading act would appear to be *far more* than a mere literal extraction of meanings contained in a text.

Our concerns in this study is to grasp what variables (if any at all) "mobilize" the reading act - not so much in terms of oral communication but rather the reader's engagement with the written/printed text - whether in the form of literature, books, magazines, reports, minutes, stories, memo's, etc. The question is essentially what makes readers represent the content of a text and how do they represent or interpret such messages contained in these texts. This dilemma is important when we consider our usual interpretive strategy in reading which essentially relies on a habitual literal translation of words by a sovereign subject who controls the use of words - making the act of representation a very vulnerable and manipulative act.

By focussing on the referential function of language we realize how much we as readers rely on language to fulfil the job of *producing* meaning. It may hardly occur to us as language users that language may not have any producing capacity at all. But in order to function as humans amongst people who "use" texts (Bunch, 1990) we need to function both in a quality as well as in a humane way - a view that impacts on our understandings of the meaning of language. Representation therefore, epistemologically, seems to suffer at the hands of its

vulnerability and credibility status.

Chomsky clarifies the distinction in terms of how language facilitates our human interactions. Chomsky (1986) refers to an *externalized language* which embodies the technical notions of language that corresponds with grammar and universal grammar, and *internalized language* which is the elements of the mind of the person who knows the language, acquired by the learner and used by the speaker-hearer. In the case of face-to-face communication a message is generally rendered *immediate*, whereas texts which have been codified in writing are usually *mediated* by the reading act. This mediative act through language and its possibilities for the development of meanings and understandings is our concern in this study. The importance of *language* as fulfilling a mediational act in reading, consequently proves tricky and therefore complex in terms of the problematic assumptions which reproductive or literal reading have come to pose and in which people so easily acquiesce into.

Kristeva (in Oliver, 1993: 5-8) refers to the abstract dimension of language which includes the rules of language and where language is used essentially as a tool. The reader either uses language in a manipulative way, or may assume that a text contains a pre-ordained meaning, which, with the help of the right linguistic tool, one is able to divine or extract. Chomsky (1986: 15) similarly raises the dilemma of what he calls "rule-guided linguistic behaviour" which coincides with Kristeva's abstract dimension of language.

The habit of employing or using language predominantly or exclusively in terms of its abstract dimension and rule-guided approach, originates greatly from our human conventions of

seeking quick solutions and seeking comfortable modes of expression amidst all the demands in a rat-race society. Given the convenience and importance of the function of language, in our acts of representation, we moreover do not only seem to take it for granted but moreover often have unrealistic expectations of it. Within this human state of either being too zealous or too blasé we fail to see how language potentially proves to be double or multi-edged in nature. While words may enlighten and inspire, they may also confuse and mislead. Language furthermore fulfils a human need in that it assists us to impose a measure of order on our experiences while at the same time it could deceive us by letting us believe that this order is greater than it really is. In this context we may possibly have come to be expect too much of language and have not usually pondered on its inherent limitations:

"Not aware of the inexpressible, what we cannot say, what we should not expect to be able to say. Not aware of the vagueness and uncertainty that clouds much of our understanding. Not aware that language only enables us to communicate with one another when the conditions are right. Not aware of the emptiness of language, when they are not" (Moore & Carling, 1988: 40).

Our problem with language, as sketched by Moore & Carling, would therefore compel us to look at reading as being really more than an act to communicate information. This act of communicating information would, at its most basic level, purely entail a decodification or decipherment of what authors had put into the text and what they had intended it to mean. Our conventional understandings of the reading subject and the text as object,

represents a narrow position of positing a distance and a sense of opposition between reader and text. The reader as the subject that usually directs, controls and manages the meaning-giving project of the reading act has come to use language in a very logical, rule-guided manner. Part of our purpose in this study is to problematize this view of the subject and its treatment of language at a level which could challenge the usual polarization of subject and object, i.e. the subject who *sub-jects* an object to its purposes, and an alienated apparently awaiting object which *sub-jects* itself to the subject.

Beyond the polarized nature of subject and object which is embedded in our use and manipulation of language, we realize how complex the issue of language is. Given Kristeva and Chomsky's distinction of the function of language as outlined above, words which make up language have come to assist us to acquaint ourselves with the facts or descriptions of things and people and yet may effectively have hidden our ignorance from us. We have come to use language to super-impose order and structure to a chaotic life and as such regard language as a logical instrument which we falsely believe can achieve coherence in an otherwise chaotic and paradoxical world. Lecerle (1990: 5-6) speaks about the fact that we have treated language as a "scientific object" which we hope will be ideally "susceptible to comprehensive description in terms of system and coherence". We realize that life is generally unpredictable, that events change so quickly, and that human nature is fallible and fickle. To expect language to be the panacea that had acquired an all-powerful and waterproof mechanism to construct meaning, would be foolhardy.

Another problematic assumption about language is that if conditions were "favourable" for effective and meaningful

communication, we may easily be able to employ symbols, words, phrases and conventions to represent or make sense of a certain kind of "terrain" - and if detached from that "terrain" (eg. politics or labour) they appear to take on a life of their own. For example, we often assume certain meanings in a particular area of knowledge or topic when we speak of "the disadvantaged", "the bosses", "the government", "rights of minorities", "equal opportunity", etc. These expressions, used in a particular subject area, have allowed us to generalize or locate similarities in situations that may be completely different - allowing us to assume that just because we know the words, we necessarily understand much about that "terrain". As mentioned earlier, the double- or multi-edged nature of language often proves sometimes to be more confusing than clarifying. The confusing or worst still, chaotic nature of language, in the reading act has problematic implications for how we grasp the nature of the subject and object in terms of their neatly oppositional stance. Are subjects who interpret their perceived objects by "representing" them, all-knowing and sovereign in their making sense of the meaning of the object? On the other hand, do objects willingly surrender themselves (almost passively) to *be interpreted and given meaning* by the gaze or look (no matter how analytical) of the subject? What kind and what quality of meaning construction (if any at all) pass between them? Does the act of representation tell us more of the subject than the object itself?

For, in the reading act our understanding of the subject who reads and believes he understands the language, does not always realize that there may be a struggle to get the balance right between the private "I", and the "we" - the struggle of generalization. Herein resides our problem of opinions, fact,

truth, lie, accuracy, science, fallacy, scepticism, etc. Our conventional understanding of language also super-imposes another dilemma of the subject, i.e. that the latter still holds sway over the criteria of truth, validity and consistency in terms of his all-embracing subjective judgements of the text. It is more important, apparently, to understand what makes subjective or human judgment of things true, rather than the other way

### 2.2.2 LANGUAGE AND JUDGEMENT

In the reading act we generally assume that there is almost a [human] obligation to *make sense* of or derive meaning from the linguistic content of a text. Our chief concern is *who* (rather than *what*) makes this sense or what will this meaning be. What this meaning will be (eg. in a politically-correct environment) assumes an almost pre-ordained meaning which has to be fished out of the text or document by the reader.

Whether by convention or intention there appears to be a human desire or obsession to pursue correctness. Life no doubt has become hurried, deadlines have to be met and time is of the essence. Within the broader framework or ethos of life's demands we seek to manage ourselves efficiently and effectively and therefore seek to avoid situations, messages, interactions, etc. which are not correct.

While "correctness" (especially of a factual nature) undoubtedly has its place, it certainly has its limitations too. Insisting on the "correct" concept can, in some circumstances, be misleading as much as using the "wrong" one. It hardly occurs

to the average reader who has to fill in official forms, read policy documents or scrutinize manuals, eg. "how to use your appliance", that there may be some or other judgement involved. It is often an accepted practice that the content of such documents are "given", true and therefore "should be accepted" as such.

Our use of language in verbal communication or reading, rarely turns out to be simple. Language inevitably involves judgement especially when such language refers to or are anchored in the external, objective worlds, even when the words may seem testable against their familiar context. In this regard we encounter a fair share of problems:

"... the sheer absurdity of the use of verifiability as a meaning criterion: how can one ever say that a theory was gibberish because it could not be verified" (Popper, 1976:80).

The scientific or "tool kit" use of language would turn out to be especially problematic if it always has to be verified in terms of an external, objective world. How do we verify (for the sake of correctness) our internal, i.e. subjective feelings and thinking? Who is to be the judge of the correctness of what is expressed and offered as valid meanings? Against the notion of verifiability as an "ill-designed instrument" or "defective device" (see Botha 1992:18), Chomsky (1972:10) argues that, "... the normal use of language is innovative, in the sense that much of what we say in the course of normal language use is entirely new, not a repetition of anything that we have heard before and not even similar in pattern". This challenge suggests the paradox of language that, in as much as it is "understandable"

and perhaps "generalizable" in a given context of familiarity it, in the final analysis, seems to remain utterly unique and non-replicable for each individual hearer/speaker (Baker & Hacker, 1984).

Having recognised the problematic of verifiability, the question is how much space or opportunity is left for uncertainty and for differing judgements, when it is essentially the intangible, invisible and immaterial that we are dealing with in the reading of a text. It is undoubtedly part of the human condition to speculate, feel, imagine, suppose, fear and hope through language. Any commonsense approach to language would suggest that this "dichotomy" of visible and invisible, fact and speculation, thinking and feeling does not imply two separate worlds, though in writing about them we have been forced to treat them separately. It is because they are interdependent, that we have to challenge language which is only seen as a mode which "refers to", "moulds", "interprets" and "discovers experience". In other words, is language only to be grasped in terms of its "referential organization" (Sapir, 1949: 11) in order to construct meaning? The epistemological link between subject and object becomes an axiomatic exercise for precision and certainty.

Moreover, the problematic relation between language and judgement in reading proves essentially a question of the generalizability of textual reading. John Locke in An essay concerning human understanding (1960) argued that to grasp the role of language in meaning construction is acknowledging the ultimate privateness firstly of meanings:

"Man, though he has great variety of Thoughts, as such, from which others, as well as himself, might receive Profit and

Delight; yet they are all within his own Breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made appear" (III, II, 1).

Parallel to this scenario in his problematization, Locke identifies another man as a social creature who wishes to break out of his privacy and isolation and create a world with others:

"The Comfort, and Advantage of Society, not being to be had without communication of Thoughts, it was necessary that Man should find out some external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible Ideas which his thoughts are made up of might be made known to others" (III, II, 1).

Part of the dilemma of the reading act therefore is the subject's intention to make known or give expression to his thoughts to others, i.e. to render the invisible visible and the unreadable readable. Locke argues that we make links between our subjective language and "the world", for words "... belong not to the real existence of things, but are the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding, made by it for its own use" (III, II, I). This subjective generalizability of understanding language in making judgements, whilst it has been made in terms of excellent judgement, does not mean that its meaning is necessarily well understood. We often arrive at specific judgements, believing that we had grasped the meaning just because the meaning is shared by (and communicated to) others. The dilemma we still encounter is operating in a framework in which limited meanings have been constructed and therefore regarded as justified valid meanings at that, just because we had played the meaning construction game by the rules. Our concern is "how else"

meanings are constructed, other than spearheaded by a master-mind subject, imputing from the outside meaning into a text. Is "judgment" or "correctness" the only valid criterion for legitimate meaning construction? Even if this was the case, how do we define these concepts and in which contexts are they applicable? "Correctness" in its conventional use of the term implies likeness, correspondence and literalness, as is often encountered in and applied to conventional everyday reading of texts such as memos, newspapers, circular etc. The strategy of reproducing meanings is based on the assumption that texts are adequate and complete and that readers are self assured and capable of manipulating the textual content.

### 2.2.3 LANGUAGE AND LITERAL MEANING

In the act of representation, our essential concern regarding the role of language is the practice of using it in a "tool-kit" fashion in order to achieve a specific end. The assumption that informs our subjective and almost uncritical "use" of language, in as far as language represents issues, events, objects and people in the external world, is the essence of "literal reading". At an academic level literal reading may not always be the case (and it may even be scoffed at) but one does not need to search far to realize how on a daily basis eg. newspaper or magazine readers virtually buy into reports or articles as reporters (whether in a sensational manner or not) present them to us. In literal reading usually the word or sentence seems firmly trapped within the decodification process where it is safe and where it is judged and analyzed. The conventional way of grasping the meaning is that the text holds the capacity to convey or transmit the literal sense which is usually attached to each of its sentences. Meyer (1983: 67) argues that literal

or sentential meaning normally embodies "knowledge of which is presupposed". Language would therefore be "safe" and remain firmly in the hands of the subject of speech who acts as the judge, master, analyst and decoder of the reading act (see Barthes, 1986: 64). This view precipitates the radical questioning of the notion and the object in the reading act, as we have come to understand it. Does the object always fall captive to the reader's eye, and become trapped in human opinion?

Part of our dilemma in grasping the reading act, particularly in examining the role of the subject who, in everyday life is confronted with newspapers, minutes of meetings, statistical data, memo's, advertisements, etc., is whether literal meaning have validity for full meaning construction and if so, to what extent. What is clear in everyday life is the fact that literal reading still holds great sway over our interpretation of things around us.

In our problematization of the views of objectification and subjectivity it appears that we cannot totally ignore the effects of literal language as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, for "literal" is a word which is already firmly established and frequently used in our everyday use of language. Literal meaning moreover can be assumed to yield valid meanings that words have, independently of where and how they are used. In this context-free sense "... words by themselves do not ever have metaphorical meaning, only literal" (Way, 1991:16). Novitz (1977:20), in dealing with the notion of representation, problematizes, for example, "pictures" and "depiction" (similarly "texts" and "meanings") when he asserts: "How do we determine what a picture is of, if not by determining what it stands for or denotes?" It is typical of our hurried life in contemporary society to want

to have quick answers. Office circulars or memo's are often given a cursory and superficial glance, yielding often literal message constructions.

Quine (1960) emphasizes the sentential view of language. His view of language regards the act of learning language to be the learning of a network of sentences - a process which can be performed by direct conditioning, association, and by analogy, construct sentences. Needless to say, this view is heavily criticized, among others by Chomsky (1968) who thought this view to be "perverse" since Quine confuses performance with competence in characterizing language.

Wittgenstein on the other hand addresses the question of language in the hope to eradicate what he regards as "philosophical problems" that may be caused by the misuse of ordinary language. Wittgenstein's Tractatus (1922) renders the picture theory (or correspondence theory) of language in a sentential and representational way.

Although the later Wittgenstein of the Philosophical investigations (1967) corrects and expands this position by viewing language as a game which takes on meaning when in use, he still remains trapped in what Kristeva refers to as the abstract dimension of language. Katz (1966) argues that Wittgenstein underestimates the complexity of language especially when he postulates no condition/s that may be necessary or sufficient for what the latter calls "language games". The Wittgensteinian view moreover seeks to insulate language and its essence from dealing with the more uncontrollable aspects of making sense of a text other than in its logical and totalizable pursuit. This view still places the reading subject in firm

control, acting upon the object in a unilateral way, yielding very definite *subject-ive* meaning. The problem clearly is that in the act of literal reading readers generally still enjoy the supreme role of the subject who remains master of the reading act. The object is patently separated from, and subjected to his control in an apparent uncomplicated manner.

The implicit assumption of literal reading is that words present a smooth surface, containing pre-ordained and neatly-packaged meanings which, through the *simple act* of decodification reveal their meaning. In problematising the act of representation, our concern about the reading act is that it may not have occurred to readers that, as in real life, they may possibly have to encounter contradictions, rough surfaces which would precipitate what Botha (1992: 20) refers to as the "war of words". Do words or does the textual object readily surrender to the controlling endeavours of a human reading subject? The danger of this view is that it is naïve and tends to diminish the complexity of life at large. Bredella (1989: 33) argues that in literal reading (i.e. one-way reading from subject to object, via the decodification route) we tend to be "... in danger of explaining away the heterogeneity and contradictions of our experience". We may add that explaining away the "rough surfaces" in literal reading makes us patently vulnerable to surprise, crisis or even lurking disaster in terms what we normally think to be easy reading and easy interpretation. The tool-kit use of language may not be as efficient and effective as we may think.

The "tool-kit" status of literal reading for meaning construction is, according to Bakhtin (*in* Volosinov, 1973), a "perversion" which exists between subject and object, and as a result raises both critical epistemological and anthropological concerns. For

ultimately the dangers of mere literal reading have implications for what it means to be *human* in a post-information era which emphasizes the judicious application or use of information in our society (see De Beer, 1992; 1993; Mumby, 1993). This challenge for representation moreover proves crucial in view of the subject's unilateral extraction of meaning from an object - a position which could prove limiting. Whether we view the reading act, on the other hand, as an author expressing a particular message for the consumptive subject, this could prove equally limiting or even disastrous. In terms of literal reading Said (1972) expresses concern for the totalizing strategy which claims for textuality a privileged stake in the production of meaning. This view, according to Said, shows scant concern for the text's (object's)

situation in the material world. The epistemic dangers and validity of the literal reading discourse is recognised as our major problem in this study. Literal decodification or decipherment implies the supremacy of "... the reader as a processor of texts" (Jauss *in* Machor, 1993: ix) pursuing a complete and homogeneous view of "interpretation" and "meaning" - i.e. by using language like a *recipe* according to its logical and rule-guided nature we hope to guarantee success of communication and understanding in life. Not only does it imply an oversimplification of life and all its events, but moreover an oversimplification of the nature of the *subject* who constructs these meanings. Both the noun *subject*, and the verb *to subject*, speak of key or controlling interests vis-a-vis the action of meaning construction and, as a result, require closer scrutiny in our problematization of the reading act. Representation has become so entangled with the preoccupations of subjectivity, the one cannot, it seems, be understood without thorough insight into the other.

### 2.3 THE SUBJECT AND THE READING ACT

In the act of representation the question we face is: *who* or *what* constructs meaning during the reading act? There is still the accepted notion that the reader assumes the sole role of controlling subject, the one who creates, shapes, designs, defines and controls the meaning contained in the text. Not only do we assume that the text is "dead" and that the human subject usually takes it upon himself to reclaim, extract and exploit the meaning, but moreover that he determines the depth, slant and credibility that a textual message will have. The sovereign human subject *acts upon* the textual object in a one-way relationship in which the text is *subjected to* the subject's intentions and in this very unilateral process the subject also *subjects* (i.e. defines and describes) himself as reader. What we face here is, through the use of and dependence upon language, the subject defines and describes himself as person, as well as produce of body of knowledge that he himself has created. The anthropological and epistemological consequences of this situation is essentially a biased and therefore limited understanding of how things, meanings and people are. Things, meanings and our idea of people are represented by the reading subject from a distinctly separate or rather an oppositional stance, i.e. the reading subject positions himself *opposite* his textual object and *confers* subjective meaning upon what he sees and believes he understands. Is this the correct stance, and moreover is it the only stance which readers have come to adopt in making sense of the document or text in front of him? Our rather uncritical use of the concept "subject" also exacerbates the problem furthermore. Despite the fact that subject or subjectivity has always been associated with that which is "human", these notions have also undergone changes at the

theoretical conceptualization level. It would therefore be useful to explore the development of "subjectivity" in order to problematize the meaning-giving process in the reading act. Subjectivity may very well be better understood by looking at the attempts that representation has come to hold, in as much as understanding representation would clarify our perceptions and conceptualizations of subjectivity.

### 2.3.1 THE NOTION OF SUBJECTIVITY.

The use of the notion of "subjectivity" or the "subject" is in danger of becoming extremely obscure and imprecise, especially if it is taken to be more than a social, cultural or political concept, i.e. one which includes theorizations such as a "space" or an "opening" within discourse - a location which might be called "the subject position" or the "subject effect". De Bolla (1989:240) clarifies:

"This involves more than simply readers and texts; at its base it is concerned with the place of the subject, how it is constructed and who or what can be said to own it".

In the arena of representation our dilemma in this study centres around a crucial aspect of reading, i.e. the position of the reading subject, the role of textual representations, whether pictorial or verbal, vis-a-vis the construction of textual meaning and knowledge. We have normally been confronted with the subject who may be the author or the reader who desires to limit the text to the expression of a particular meaning - a view associated with the "representational thesis". Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, as we will see, were of the first to postulate clearer views on the difficulty of critiqueing subjectivity in

language and within the ambit of modern metaphysics.

One could question the view that it is generally held that the "... quarrel of the subject is ... when all is said and done, a scholastic quarrel" (Descombes, 1991:133). Part of the difficulty of the "subject" or the "subject position" is what Derrida (1991:101) argues as the getting away "... from this contract between the grammar of the subject or substantive and the ontology of substance or subject". There seems, generally-speaking, to be a necessity or even an obsession to have a subject in the reading act, despite the attempts to remove or decenter it - at least the notion of a homogeneous and certainly a biographical subject (see Caws, 1998:240). This dilemma in the act of representation has unequivocally impacted on the stability and intelligibility of the subject in terms of meaning-construction of content and of self. The quest for the subject's identity in the reading act (whether the reader or author) generally tends to impose sole ownership and sovereignty over others.

The other problem is that we seem to refer a philosophical notion when we talk about the subject. The philosophical subject usually functions as an empirical historical and autobiographical subject. The problem proves to be exacerbated by the fact that the philosophical subject is itself double: it operates both as a transcendental and an empirical entity. As transcendental subject it serves often as the condition of *possibility* of all other subjects - and this transcendental subject is represented in the text by the same "I" that designates all other empirical subjects. Therefore, the text confronts the reader with the confusion of a special subject (i.e. the transcendental subject) with all other subjects. However, the empirical subject represented in terms of the reading act creates the illusion that

the philosophical and literary subject are one and the same.

As already mentioned, the role of *language* becomes of central importance in the reading act, for subjectivity constantly refers to the reality of discourse. It is within this context and workings of language that the reader constitutes himself as subject and it is moreover within this context that the "I" does not necessarily refer to an individual but probably more a locutionary position within an utterance - where subjectivity is seen as a discursive effect.

Despite the fact that postmodernism, in the realm of representation, has sought to declare the death of the subject, for many readers, there remains an uneasiness to live with all these and other often confusing views. Part of this dilemma has probably to do with our definitions of the subject and specifically how we have come to conceptualize the anthropological notion of mankind and how knowledge, as a result of the interaction between the subject and textual object has been construed. These conceptualizations naturally have a direct bearing on deeper held world-views.

In the European philosophical tradition, subjectivity had come to refer to the Cartesian roots as the conditions of *possibility*, i.e. viewing it from a transcendental perspective, whereas the Anglo-American philosophical tradition refers to subjectivity as an empirical subject, whose content is generally subjective, i.e. intentional, personal and individual. (Flam, 1965; Payne, 1993).

The prelude to our Western problematization of the subject is perhaps best encapsulated in the seminal thinking of Descartes and Kant. It will therefore be helpful for our understanding of the reading act to reflect on and draw from the Cartesian and

Kantian subject - both of which cannot be fully understood without their reference to "representation" and ultimately, meaning construction.

#### 2.3.1.1 DESCARTES'S SUBJECT.

It seems that the Cartesian subject cannot ordinarily be equated with what we now call "a subject", i.e. a subject or person defined as a social, psychological and moral entity. In fact it rather represents a particular *interpretation of consciousness* whose status is defined in terms of mathematical principles.

The Cartesian use of the Nominative "I" indicates the autonomy of a subject vis-a-vis the objective status of the world. The problem is that the epistemological constraints imposed upon the Cartesian subject result in its actual disenfranchisement as self or subjective being. The very definition of the Cartesian subject, as a result, would delimit its personal, psychological and historical essence.

Furthermore, Descartes's notion of a mathematical and philosophical subject appears not to function descriptively but rather prescriptively. His version of subject, based on his mathematical model, parts with any anthropological-humanist account. The subject is particularly posited as a mathematical reductionism of the world and proves, as we will see, perhaps an empty formal entity, devoid of human or divine content (Kenny, 1968:170).

Descartes essentially seeks to resolve the question of the self and that of sceptical doubt through a new theory of knowledge. Against the backdrop of his Praeambula (1619) Descartes presents his view of a subject as linked to the project of founding a

universal science on mathematical principles. His rejection and fear of illusion in the Praeambula, the Regulae, and the Discours illustrate his refusal to consider the problematic nature of the relation of knowledge and how such knowledge is represented (representation). We may thus infer that in terms of the reading act this pursuit of certitude represents the search for an ideal view of language in which truth can hopefully be equated with propositional correctness and where language itself ceases to exist materially as discourse (see Curtis, 1984:29). In fact, the philosophical language used by Descartes has been developed according to mathematics - a view which we may deduce is not far from seeking a literal meaning in a text.

The Cartesian attempts therefore to propose a redefinition of philosophy on the basis of subjectivity nevertheless paved the way to a new concept of mankind and what it means, in his terms, to be human. However, by perhaps not problematizing the relation of man to representation, he clearly omits that which could be the defining essence of man - language.

#### 2.3.1.1.1 CARTESIAN EPISTEMOLOGY AND REPRESENTATION.

The Cartesian model of a new science seems not restricted to the sciences alone but is extended to a mathematical formulation of knowledge in general. The Regulae formulates a generalized form of logic and a new form of symbolic language, fashioned in terms of mathematics. This is to be interpreted in a more abstract and general sense as universal mathematics. This conceptual interpretation of mathematics postulates a new perception and yardstick for things which is not at all derived experientially, but which is rather imposed upon them as an axiomatic order to which they must submit. Representation, as the manner in which knowledge gets constructed, becomes thus no

longer an inquiry into the essence of things but an exercise in certitude, the criteria of which have been set up in advance. For our purposes, in the reading, act these "pre-established" logical criteria could therefore postulate nothing less than dogmatism and perhaps one-dimensional reading - one in which the subject is fully in control of.

#### 2.3.1.1.1.1 RESEMBLANCE.

The Cartesian concept of universal mathematics is furthermore deployed as a critique of the notion of resemblance. Resemblance is rejected by Descartes as a false way of acquiring knowledge - one that will fall prey to the danger of illusion. (see Wright, 1993:50).

Descartes's critique of experience, as presented in his discussion of resemblance, involves a new interpretation of knowledge vis-a-vis its relation to nature. By reducing things and forcing them to fit the rules of mathematical criteria, Descartes in effect transforms them into signs. Thus, a sign can communicate what it signifies without necessarily resembling it. Descartes clearly sees no need for images to resemble the things they represent (see Joachim, 1957:21).

The reduction of things to mathematical signs implies not only their uniformity within its symbolic signs, but also their break with the natural order. This view of Descartes pronounces the emergence of a new kind of discourse that processes special analytical and inferential properties. The *self-referential* character of certitude replaces the referential character of experience as expressed by the principles of resemblance and difference. This new order moreover involves the *use of signs* as instruments of analysis, for the true referent of the sign is

the system itself which is constituted through its axiomatic order. Given these views, we may infer that an axiomatic form of reading puts the reading act in a straight jacket, operating perhaps exclusively in the realm of the controllable and under the dominion of logic.

#### 2.3.1.1.1.2 THE NEW CARTESIAN ORDER OF ENUMERATION, INTUITION AND DEDUCTION.

Descartes's development of concepts goes hand in hand with the categorization of mental operations and the emergence of a new order of deductive judgements, resulting into *intuitive judgements*. In Rule 3 Descartes states that, "... intuition is the undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind, and springs from the light of reason alone". (see Joachim, 1957:25). It is primarily by deduction, Descartes argues, that all inference can be made from other facts that are already known. This is attained through intuition and intuition is in fact more certain than deduction since it is by definition simpler. This "superhuman" subject relies on the process of intuition, for intuition, according to Descartes, is an *unmediated* and continuous act of clear vision. This may appear to be in contradiction to Descartes's mathematicized version of representation of knowledge-construction which does not rely on experiential factors. However he believes that deductive judgements are conferred by *memory* - a faculty Descartes often rejects as unreliable. Descartes thus sets up an opposition between intuition and deductive arguments where intuition replaces concepts like "senses" and "imagination". Whilst the latter are not significant or legitimate in their own right, Descartes presses on his mathematical pursuits in that he argues that the senses and imagination are dependent on understanding (see: Joachim, 1957:51-55). However, the Cartesian definition of intuition postulates an identity in the light of reason -

since reason remains identical to itself regardless of the objects that it reflects.

The unity of human reason, according to Descartes, as *experienced through intuition* can be made tenable by maintaining an absolute resemblance between human and divine reason. It would appear that this self-sufficient subject in fact embodies a super-human who is endowed with pre-established meaning.

#### 2.3.1.1.1.3 ENUMERATION

In Rule 6 Descartes expounds the concept of enumeration as a special kind of deduction which reflects the unity of sciences. Enumeration embodies a serial system of order, intended to replace the hierarchical judgements of *genus* and *species* which were used by the Aristotelians to classify things by reference to ontological categories (Gaukroger, 1992:100). The process of enumeration *reproduces* the object as a series of propositions which define the object in the area of knowledge within the order of understanding. It appears that what is simple in Descartes has meaning only by reference to understanding and its conventions and does not concern anything but the categories of knowledge themselves. We may thus conclude that the reader could perhaps already have a blueprint of what the reading before him could entail, i.e. by using the right logical "tool" the subject would be able to construct meaning. This is precisely our dilemma in this study.

#### 2.3.1.1.2 THE CARTESIAN SUBJECT.

Up till now the problematic of the Cartesian subject has been hidden in the order of discourse and Descartes' vision of representation. It becomes apparent that he does not coherently

develop the notion of the subject as a philosophical and discursive entity until Le Discours de la méthode (1637). Here we encounter the *philosophical* subject of the method as well as the *empirical/autobiographical* subject. The idea of subjectivity in relation to his views of the mathematical order is not explicitly presented in the Regulae. The multiplicity of locutionary positions in the Regulae can however be seen as the index of the problematic presence of subjectivity which is *implicit* in the order of representation. Despite his use of a mixture of pronouns the subject does exist, even if its presence is implied. Thus, the subject in the Regulae proves a purely symbolic construct, lacking in terms of the real dynamics which constitutes what Hannah Arendt (1958) calls the human condition. The subject proves purely a theoretical construct used by Descartes to explain his view of representation.

Descartes's mathematical view of language and his criteria of certitude constitute the backbone of his entire system. It is evident that the main feature is the axiomatic relation to objects (representation), i.e. an object can be constituted only if it can be accommodated within both the foundational project and the proper order of knowledge.

The dilemma with Descartes is not merely the submission of physical experience to the conditions of mathematical knowledge but rather that mathematics is interpreted by him in a philosophical sense as a logical order (Marion, 1992:116-120). It is not just the elements of mathematical language that relate to nature or things but that its meta-mathematical assumptions are applied to and qualify in the area of rationality.

Despite the implications of Descartes's seminal thinking for this study of how the reading act could unfold, the obsessive Cartesian scientific method involves nothing more than the

interpretation of nature, things or people according to mathematical laws which have been set up in advance. Judovitz (1988:79) believes that the "... submission of past knowledge to the criterion of certitude leads to a decontextualized and dehistoricized truth". The implications of this for the reading act would mean that the theoretical Cartesian subject potentially excludes any notion of the historical and linguistic context. Epistemology in his view tacitly absorbs the historical reference since the notion of clear and distinct ideas defines itself by reference to the thinking subject and not to tradition. Whereas Heidegger, as we will notice, posits a subject that is always already present for representation, the Cartesian subject is constituted in the strict order of representation as the symbol of a discursivity which cannot reflect upon its own practical reality. As an empty sign or symbol, this subject is used to refer indiscriminately in the Discours and Meditations both to the transcendental subject and the empirical autobiographical subject.

In order to grasp the "subject" we must remember that representation in the Cartesian fashion implies a special form of control and therefore predictable interpretation of being, as a form of certitude in so far as it conforms to *logical norms* determined in advance. This new symbolic system therefore frees words and things from their analogical relation by viewing them in terms of the normative criteria applied to representation and understood as certitude (Gaukroger, 1992:108-111). "Subjectivity" is therefore a "disconnected" entity which is constructed on the basis of logical certainty.

Judovitz (1988:80) highlights the inextricable conceptual bond of subjectivity and representation and believes that the Cartesian epistemology embodies "... a theory of representation

where the order of discourse is predicated on the order of reasons, dissimulating within it a nascent theory of subjectivity". Thus, the Cartesian subject of the Regulae is not defined by its content as a narrative, autobiographical or polemical entity but by its power to perform, to execute, i.e. to present. This absolute power base is logically patent and the nature of the subject is like that of intuition, a schematic entity produced by the reduction and absorption of metonymic chains. What we encounter is a prescribed Cartesian subject which is defined as the axiomatic substrate of representation rather than as one representation among many (Loeb, 1992:213-218). If we were to apply this subject to the reading act, language may still be regarded as a tool which is used according to the rules of a mathematically constructed subject.

It is interesting that Descombes (1991:128) argues that the philosophical subject discovered in the cogito is ultimately a "pseudo-subject" posed in terms of the cogito. As a result, it may be safe to infer that this could be a subject which functions autonomously regardless of the presence of the world of things. This implied theoretical construct ultimately would yield a "dogmatic" or rather an incomplete view of subjectivity. According to Descombes (1991:129), there is a difference between the human being and being the subject, "... and each of us can say "ego cogito", I think. In other words, it is I who think: I am, when I think, not a human being, but a thinking subject". This clearly renders, in our view, the Cartesian subject nothing more than an axiomatic, logical subject trapped in its own mathematicized representation. This apparently unimaginative view, when applied to reading, presupposes nothing more than the "non-human" ability to decodify a text acontextually. We can infer that this form of reading moreover predates the referential mode of meaning construction since it remains essentially incarcerated

in the myopic, albeit intuitive order of representation. We can also infer that the Cartesian subject as reader embodies a "super-individual" in a way which makes it difficult for other subjects to have reasonable access to his thinking, for it has nothing to do about being human but certainly everything about executing logical thinking. The result would be that the dogmatism of each individual making sense prompts an authoritative voice which reflects merely a sequence of words, devoid of a true human subject - let alone an object. The Cartesian subject, however limited, nevertheless paves the way for Kant and other thinkers who subsequently develop a more expansive notion of subjectivity further.

#### 2.3.1.2 KANT'S SUBJECT

Essentially Kant claims that the subject does not *as subject*, have a location within the world of its object of representation. However, Kant realizes that as humans we are aware of ourselves as objects within our respective worlds. The difference between these two modes of being aware of ourselves stands behind most classical formulations of the mind-body problematic. The Kantian picture is clear:

"there are two stems of human knowledge, namely *sensibility* and *understanding* ... through the latter, they are thought" (Kant, 1960: 29).

Kitcher (1982) claims that for Kant there is no subject, certainly not in any sense that entails that it is a significantly unified entity. She argues moreover that Kant's I is nothing more than an interconnected "system of diverse states" but contrary to this view of Kitcher we need to revisit

Kant's complex thought of self-consciousness.

Kant argues that the certainty of self-knowledge as postulated by Descartes for his notion of "subjectivity" had been wrongly described. For Descartes, whatever the world contains, contains the thinking being that I am.

According, to Kant (1960: 133) the "cogito" proves that there is a thought but not that there is an "I" who thinks it:

"As my representations (even if I am not conscious of them as such) they must conform to the condition under which alone they can stand together in one universal self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not all without exception belong to me".

Kant moreover argues that neither experience nor reason alone is able to provide knowledge. The former provides content without form, while the latter form without content. Only in their synthesis does knowledge become possible - hence there is no knowledge that does not bear the marks of reason and of experience *together* - a departure of the clear and distinct ideas of Descartes. Kant too seems not able to develop an understanding of "subjectivity" apart from the idea of "representation"

Objects do not depend for their existence upon the subject's perception of them but they can be perceived. Experience contains, according to Kant, within itself the features of space, time and causality. Bennett (1974: 52) therefore points out that objects are appearances or representations and *not things in themselves*: This notion of a "thing in itself" and the

associated notion of "noumenon", will give trouble at several points in the Dialectic. A thing in itself is, roughly-speaking, a thing considered independently of any fact about how it *might* impinge upon our experience. Therefore, in describing my experience, I am referring to an ordered perspective on an independent world.

In the reading act, by focussing on the "description of experience" as above, does not mean that the reading subject who performs this act is a psychological entity, neither is it an authorial voice for which no true subject can be found. For Kant the subject can be identified as being essentially the *subject of experience*: the single premise of self-consciousness. And this consciousness is neither empirical but rather transcendent-al, suggesting that the subject is *presupposed* in the self-conscious experience of reading and not derived from it. Kant (1960: 406 - 407) states:

"I do not know myself through being conscious of myself as thinking but only when I am conscious of the intuition of myself ... The object is not the consciousness of the *determining* self, but only that of the *determinable* self, that is, of my inner intuition."

Unlike the contrasting view of Kitcher (1982) that the subject is a system of informationally interdependent states, Kant did not think that the mind is not a simple substance. On the contrary, he insisted that the mind could be just that. The self is a result of synthesis and not an agent of it. All the reader's mind consists of is of representations. Cassirer (1968:253) clarifies the Kantian position:

"Every thinking being is, as such, a simple substance - [this] is a synthetic a priori proposition: it is synthetic in that it goes beyond the concept from which it starts, and adds to the thought in general (i.e. to the concept of a thinking being) the mode of existence: it is a priori in that it adds to the concept a predicate which cannot be given in any experience".

Like in the case of Descartes, Kant also develops a definition of the subject which is intricately tied up with his view of representation. If all the mind consists of its representations then they include representing oneself as subject. Our usual response is that every representation of something represents it to *someone* or is intended by *someone*. Here we encounter a departure of the conceptual or clinical Cartesian reader, for the Kantian reading subject constitutes *someone* and as such ushers into the reading act the human element.

However, the Kantian notion of representation is limited for it embodies an intrinsic representation - not necessarily the representation to represent to someone, for "... so long as we are not conscious of ourselves as ourselves, we shall be confronted with presentations which lack any objective reference; and none of our presentations will be recognised as belonging to an object" (Cassirer, 1968: 67).

The Kantian reading subject is thus that aspect of a system of representations that does the judging (interpreting) and recognising of representations, someone who can take representations up, let go of them and transform them into new representations

without itself changing in any essential way. The autonomous subject is able to refer to itself as itself (Brook, 1994). However we have seen that the only constraints are (i) that there must be a single common single subject (Kant, 1960 :35) of all representations and/or objects of representation united in a global representation and (ii) that the awareness this subject has of objects and/or representations must be unified eg. unity of consciousness, unity of apperception and the absolute unity of the thinking being (Kant, 1960: 353).

According to Kant, I am therefore the subject not just of single states of awareness but of a great many states of awareness in a single representation - and I am the same subject of each of them. Kant believes "... the only permanent appearance which we encounter in the soul is the representation "I" which, for all we know, may be in the same state of flux as the other thoughts which by means of it, are linked up with one another" (Kant, 1960: 364).

The Kantian subject therefore does not embody a substance in the empirical sense but is purely a human *designation* of the object in the inner sense in so far as we know it through no further predicate (Kant, 1953: 98). To examine the peculiarities of our self-awareness is to examine them in the world - not an "I" seen as the object of consciousness. The "I" is merely an expression of my perspective but denotes no item within it - a view which later influences Heidegger and Wittgenstein.

Sometimes Kant implies that the "I" of self-consciousness refers to a transcendental object. For it might seem that having argued that the "I" is not part of the empirical world, Kant has given us reason to refer to the world of the thing-in-itself which

resides beyond experience. Since we experience nothing but changing representations in terms of inner experiences, this perception is possible only through a thing in me:

"... the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things which I perceive outside me" (Kant in Wilson, 1974:53).

With regard to the reading act, Kant certainly progressed further than the Cartesian mechanical-cum-mathematical subject which functions prescriptively. Instead of the Cartesian mathematical deduction of a new order of enumeration, Kant posits a form of transcendental deduction of categories, the reading subject which is enabled, for the first time, to become conscious of objects proper, as distinct from purely private impressions. At least there is a sense in the reading act that the reader becomes the point of designation who connects with the text that is his object, instead of conjuring up his own private readings in an abstract domain.

Despite Kant's "Copernican turn" towards subjectivity he decidedly leaves the main feature of traditional ontology intact, viz. the centrality of substance, the thinghood of the thing remains uncontested. The dependent "thing" in its very being remains separate from the subject. The general assumption of the subject somehow continues in the Cartesian-Kantian tradition to bestow "form" or "meaning" on objects, giving the reader sovereignty over the reading text. Truth is still conceived as the correspondence and verifiability between thoughts (or the content of our consciousness) and the outside world as embodied in the text.

It is this notion of language, knowledge and truth that is generally taken to "represent" what is "there" in an outside, objective world, and raises major questions with regard to representation and all its ramifications. Therefore, the latter requires closer examination in terms of its significance and validity in the reading act which we are seeking to problematize in this study. The subject who reads is usually always assumed to pre-exist any meaning, for the latter normally comes about as a result of the referential function of literal representational reading of any text. The difficulties we encounter in understanding the act of meaning construction in reading is whether the text in actual fact does "represent" anybody's ideas, and moreover whether the reading subject is responsible for the activation of all representations that occur in the "seeing" or "perception" of the words or objects that are being read. Part of the hamshackled status of the reading act is the problematic coupling of subjectivity and representation. This "contract between grammar and subject" (Derrida, 1991: 101) may hold some validity but the full extent of this contract may also hold the potential of unexplored spaces for new meanings and, moreover, for new or innovative ways of constructing meaning, as expressed or implied in the act of representation. The use of the concept "representation" is also in need of more clarification.

## 2.4 REPRESENTATION AND THE READING ACT

Our key concern is how does representation, as the "inevitable" practice of the meaning-construction process, occur in the reading act. Traditionally it was taken that the controlling and sovereign subject interacts with his objective world and assumes the initiative of how, when and what the quality of representation shall be. It has become evident that the separate outside (of the object) position of the reading subject vis-a-vis the textual object is problematic because it inevitably results in a one-way meaning construction which is rooted in the biased endeavours of the subject to attain a sense of coherence and accuracy of the information contained in the text. This representational act in the process of *referring* to an object, is often executed according the rules of language which are often used as tools to extract or divine meaning from the text. This "rule-guided" practice of language assumes relative predictable ways of making the objective world known to the subject. In representation this oppositional stance of subject and object poses major problems in which we often acquiesce into short-sighted and biased knowledge construction processes of the world and of ourselves. It would be helpful to look at the notion of representation more closely in order to grasp the problematic contained in its application in the reading act.

### 2.4.1 THE NOTION OF REPRESENTATION

In order to understand the dichotomy of subject-object in the reading act it is essential to reflect on the dynamics of representation. Woolgar (1988:30) states:

"Representation is the means by which we generate images (reflections, representations, reports) of the object "out there". Representation is axiomatic not just to science but to all practices which trade upon an objectivist epistemology, in short, to all activities which claim to capture some features beyond the activity itself."

Reading may therefore be grasped in that activity which resides beyond the representation of the textual word itself. Expounding on the notion of representation is a way in which the subject can write about nothing *but* representation, because a structure governed by a privilege of representation is what seems to make it possible for the subject to say anything at all. Foucault (1970:364) thematizes this problem:

"The human sciences, when dealing with what is representation (in either conscious or unconscious form), find themselves treating as their object what is in fact their condition of possibility. They are always animated, therefore, by a sort of transcendental mobility. .... They proceed from that which is given to representation to that which renders representation possible, but which is still representation".

The notion of representation as a "condition of possibility" is of key importance in the reading act since the reading subject

is always bent on seeking a representation of an outside reality or of himself in the text as object. Foucault's problematization of representation resides between two extremes, i.e. those who operate firmly within correspondence theories of truth and those who out rightly reject any validity of representation (Rorty, 1970). The aforementioned requires elaboration as this constitutes our dilemma in this study.

The pre-Modern conception of what was regarded as "thought" gave a central role to a difficult concept "in-form-ation": it is the concept of a "form". In the pre-Modern framework there was no concept corresponding to "thinking" - although there were conceptions of "seeing", "contemplating", "calculating", "dreaming", "remembering", etc., but these were not united under the umbrella notion of "thinking" (see Pratt, 1987:11). For Aquinas, *seeing* was a matter of "grasping" the form of the thing (Störig, 1972:242) - but we may ask what exactly does this in essence mean? Aristotle on the other hand asked the question: what is it that makes a thing the kind of thing it is (the "it" being "form") (Störig, 1972:170). The root of this dilemma is our assumption that any account of *perception* in the reading act must address itself to the problem of *how contact* is made between the perceiver, i.e. the subject, and the object perceived - contact across the assumed divide that separates the two.

Rorty (1970:144) explains that this pre-Modern conception of "knowledge-as-identity-with-object" is at least half retained in the thesis of the "indubitability of our sensory impressions held by John Locke" - the basis of our understanding the problematic of literal reading.

It is our Modern view of the human subject as reader who

constitutes someone distinct from "the world" and on that account constituting the kind of person who must have some sort of "relationship" with the world. This notion is a 17th Century innovation. Following the lead of Descartes "... the new thinkers drew screens round the human being, as round a hospital patient ... The patient surrounded by screens is the mind, and the patient him or herself is the mind's eye. In perception, it is the mind's eye that does the "seeing" : and what it sees are the images of things as they are thrown up on the screens. The world is accessed in perception only via representations" (Pratt, 1987:15). Accessing "form", i.e. accessing the world through "seeing", while being generalizable, is in the final analysis, utterly unique - leading to the conclusion that there could be as many "theories" of representation as there are people.

Be that as it may, the act "to represent" traditionally centres around a human agency of a reading subject - an assumption which inevitably generates anthropological views on the one hand, but also clear epistemological (representational) views on the other. The epistemological and anthropological concerns may even impact on tricky ethical concerns in the representations in the reading act. However, in the context of representation where the reader is usually assumed to give expression to meaning construction, various aspects of the "seeing" act of the reader may be emphasized eg. the biological, neurological, intellectual, computational, cognitive, perceptual or sensory functioning. These various "processes" or "acts" of representational functioning, however overlapping and integrated, in the act of meaning construction merit their "place" in this study in that they clearly highlight the fact that there is no quick and direct access to the literal translation of the world and subsequent knowledge construction. For the purposes of the problematization

of the act of representation, the varied (various) views as postulated by Cummins, Bobrow and Maund have been gleaned, as examples to highlight the potentially multiple strands of reasoning and reflection that interconnect the reading subject and reading object in the act of representation. Representation, any way, is strictly an absolutely "unique" experience and, paradoxically, it could also be such a "generalized" form of behaviour which relies on automatic cues for meaning construction. It is however useful to look at the examples of the following theories.

#### 2.4.1.1 CUMMINS' THEMATIZATION OF REPRESENTATION.

In his views on representation Cummins (1989) distinguishes two problems about mental representation. First, the Problem of Representations (plural) constitutes a theoretical problem in empirical science. For example, the states of and the processes in the nervous system play the role of representations in biological systems. These may however open to question. Connectionists, for example Rumelhart et al (1986), hold that mental representations are realized as mere activation levels of ensembles of simple processors and/or as the strengths of the connections among processors.

The second problem - the Problem of *Representation* (singular) constitutes, according to Cummins (1989), a paradigmatic problem in the philosophy of science. The empirical sciences of cognition, to a large extent, take the notion of mental content as an explanatory primitive. If it appears that the notion of mental representation cannot be given a satisfactory explanation then that empirical theory must be regarded as ill founded. For the purposes of meaning construction, these views operate very much on a cause-effect basis and as such are closer to literal

representationalism. Cummins, as a result, goes further to problematized the notion of representation as not being purely a simple connection between subject and object.

Cummins (1989:2-6) believes that the above notions of representation are interrelated, and in order to contextualize the concept he refers to to its components: (i) Mind-stuff inFORMed: A theory in perception holds that the immaterial mind becomes inFORMed by the same FORMS that inFORM the thing perceived. There appears to be two basically different kinds of stuff: mental stuff and physical stuff. (ii) Images: Here the favourite theory of Berkeley and Hume is that mental representations are images. At a simplistic level this is nothing other than the "picture" theory. (iii) Symbols: If mental representations are symbols, then the former cannot be founded on similarity because symbols do not resemble the things they represent. The advantage of symbols, however, is that they can be the inputs and outputs of *computations*. Putting these two things together gives us a quick account of the possibility of thought and abstractions. Symbols do not resemble numbers but they can be readily manipulated. (iv) Neurophysiological states: The point here is that mental representations cannot be identified at any level more abstract than actual neurophysiology. Mental representation, in this regard, is essentially a biological phenomenon.

Given the multiple strands that interconnect the reading subject and his representations Cummins (1989:9-10) identifies four problems related to representations: similarity, covariance, adaptational role, and functional role - acts which the reading subject acquiesces into almost unconsciously when "making meaning" of the text.

- 2.4.1.1.1 Similarity. The idea that representation emanates from similarity is what drives the idea that mental representations are inFORMed mind stuff, or images. If we think of any object we need something to go proxy for those objects in thought. One cannot literally turn over objects in one's mind; all one can do is turn over ideas. Readers are therefore assumed to have encountered objects in the world to have ideas about them. On this basis they construct "new" or their "own" ideas through coveriance.
- 2.4.1.1.2 Covariance: The idea that representation derives from covariance or causation is naturally motivated by reflecting on vision research. We may, for example observe that a certain characteristic activity in the structure covaries with the presence of moving objects in eg. a frog's field of vision. It seems, as a result, natural to suppose that what causes that structure a motion detector is just the fact that it fires when there is motion in the frog's field of vision. If one is attracted to covariance theories one is not going to think much of the idea that representations are images, because the similarities images promise to deliver are going to be irrelevant. Representation is therefore an ongoing process of reflection based on vison.
- 2.4.1.1.3 Adaptational role. The idea that representation is rooted in adaptational role is most easily understood as a reaction to certain problems facing covariance theories. The bee dance, for example, represents the location of flowers to spectator bees, but it does not covary with the location of flowers any better than it covaries with lots of things it does not represent eg.

the absence of an insecticide cloud in the indicated direction. Millikan (1984) argues that we take "flowers over there" to be the content of the dance, even if flowers are not "over there". The view that representation is essentially an act of adapting what we "see" to make new meaning, is probably the most plausible.

2.4.1.1.4 Functional or computational role. This is just functionalism applied to mental representations. Functionalism says that a mental state is what it is in virtue of its functional role. It is functional roles that individuate mental states. But mental representations are, by definition, individuated by their contents. Therefore content must depend on functional role.

The representational mode of referring to an object or state of events is, according to Foucault, "individuated by their contents". This may be problematic in that the reader normally seeks to establish similarity (of the known world), covariance (causal explanations), adaptation (fitting things into what is familiar) and function (being lucid and in control of the reading act). Readers would therefore be compelled by "the facts" or what they see - and under the authority of the reading subject, establishes epistemological legitimacy. Cummins' arguments remain fairly "technicist" and as a result places great emphasis on the controllable, predictable and masterable disposition of the reading act. The reading subject remains the centre-stage brain box responsible for virtually all dynamics of what could happen between text and reader - paying scant explicit attention (even if implied) to the social, cultural and other contexts, or even other intuitive and emotionally explicit elements.

#### 2.4.1.2 BOBROW'S COGNITIVE REPRESENTATION

Bobrow (1975) on the other hand proposes perhaps another a framework where representations are viewed as being the result of a selective *mapping* of aspects of the world - an approach which he sees as systemic and procedural in order to promote understandability and communicability in the reading act. Central to Bobrow's specific understanding of representation is the notion of INFERENCE. Not all of the facts in any knowledge state need be kept explicitly in a scheme of representation. If partial knowledge is available in the system, he argues, then some set of explicit facts may have implications, that is, determine further facts which satisfy the constraints represented in the particular knowledge state. *Inference* is the process, according to Bobrow, of deriving implicit facts from the initial set of explicit formulas according to some fixed rules of inference without interaction with the outside world. These "fixed rules" are exactly the problem the reading act faces, for literal reading suggests "using" language, generally-speaking, in a tool-kit fashion - even in inferences. The *form* of inferences available according Bobrow and the *structure* of the data to support these inferences are important design decisions for a system. Bobrow (1975:10) subsequently distinguishes four different forms of inference:

- 2.4.1.2.1 Formal inference: covers the family of techniques used to predict calculus representational systems.
- 2.4.1.2.2 Computational inferences: describes a process in which facts are derived through bounded known computation.
- 2.4.1.2.3 Meta-inference: covers techniques by which knowledge about structure and content of the data base is used to derive further facts consistent with the original set.

2.4.1.2.4 Preferred inferences: these are often what give a representation much of its power - especially in idiosyncratic reading.

In this theory of representation of Bobrow's, greater leeway seems to be afforded to the "expandable" and creative dimension of the reading act by allowing greater space for the uncontrollable, unpredictable and perhaps unmasterable potential of the reading act. His elaboration on the range of inference principles in representation assists us in escaping the otherwise more "technicist" approach of Cummins. Bobrow's cognitive approach to representation proves sophisticated but still however operates very much within definite knowledge transactions based on an objective perception to structure a subsequent body of knowledge. The centre-stage reading subject, endowed with the cognitive abilities to think, still makes sense, via inferences and therefore control meaning. In a way this view resembles the Kantian subject who "synthesizes" (Bobrow's "inferences") meaning. It seems as though the subject can "smooth over" and explain his object (the text) in a self-assured and authoritative manner. The divide between subject and object is still clearly patent, the latter being given meaning, even through the process of inferring of a sovereign subject.

#### 2.4.1.3 MAUND'S NEO-CLASSICAL VIEW.

Maund's theory on presentation can, finally, be postulated as another kind of attempt at "sophisticating" the attempts of how meaning gets constructed between subject and object. He believes that he is one up on his "classical" predecessors. Since the "classical" representation theory of perception (i.e. the literal correspondence between the subject's interpretation of the

object) has not proven to be very popular, according to Maund (1993), he proposes the "neo-classical theory" and wishes to defend it in that form. The neo-classical theory according to Maund entails that conscious perception generally involves an awareness of sensory states (images, items, contents, etc.) by the subject and which in turn have two sets of (expanded) features (Maund, 1993:52):

- (i) They have representational properties, i.e. they represent, and
- (ii) They have non-representational features. It is not by virtue of having the latter features that the sets represent, but they do not represent because these features resemble features of physical objects, for some of the features used to represent do not resemble.

Maund defends his views against those who object to Representationalism (especially Smith & Jones, 1986; Dennett, 1969 and Searle, 1983). Their criticism is essentially (i) that the theory requires sensory states that lack objective significance; (ii) that the explanation proposed by the theory are either circular or lead to an infinite regress, and (iii) that the theory requires a notion of "resemblance" that is incoherent. It is exactly the notion of "incoherence", call it uncontrollable or unmasterable, that the reading act may bring about if such reading is taken beyond its rule-guided tendency.

Maund quite rightly finds these objections untenable in that Representationa-lism is not committed to them and, while there is some role for resemblance to play, in reading this role is quite legitimate. The objection is that it does not rest on the conflation of different senses of resemblance.

Representation and its impact on meaning in the context of the reading act seems to have a sharper focus in view of the problematic of a subjectivity which "holds" or "locates" the ideas which are represented. Yet again the reading subject shapes, defines and controls the meaning (in the process of representation) of the text in very much the same way as Maund's "improved" view of representation.

The reading subject in Cummins' and Bobrow's representationalism rules from an "outside position" (Scholes, 1989) - a relationship of referring to the object. In this view we still regard the reader as the knower who controls and verifies the reading "content" before him according to his intentions and conventions. Hardly does it occur to the proponents of representational theories that an object may hold and direct the gaze, vision and intention of subjects. The prevalent notion of the dichotomy of subject and object seems to be the biggest stumbling block in our understanding of meaning construction. The "split" or divide between subject and object has necessitated the use of the term *representation* in the reading act. The question is whether we in fact do need to depend on this concept or better, do we need *representation* at all! The modernists and post-modernists, as we will notice, have sought to overcome this dilemma. Virilio (1993:6) points out how mediatization (i.e. the media/press, as object) has stripped the subject of his or her immediate rights and sense of purpose, for "whenever a people can be mediatized, they are!" In this study however we would need to examine the "split status" of subject and object in order to do justice to, and as a result, problematize the key concept of *representation* which has claimed a foothold in the reading act.

## 2.5. THE SUBJECT-OBJECT SPLIT AND THE READING ACT

The problem that has been highlighted in terms of subjectivity and representation still clearly revolves around the split which exists between the subject and the object. We have noticed that Descartes and Kant tend to explain subjectivity in terms of representation - in their separated state. Even the respective views of Cummins, Bobrow and Maund constitute representation as a process which has been generated by a subject. Our concern is the entrenched framework in which limited meanings are constructed and, as a result, are regarded as justified and as valid meanings - only because the autonomous subject has played the "rules" game in constructing meaning. It is a seemingly simple process which is driven by a master-mind subject, imputing from the outside (of the text) meaning into a text - based on "judgements" that prejudice the variety of meanings that could be possible in the reading act. It is clear however that in reality life is unpredictable and chaotic, so that we cannot pretend or assume that our description and interpretation of events can be a smooth and easy process. Words which seek "to capture" and "interpret" events and people, similarly, will experience difficulty in representing and constructing meaning adequately. Words may possibly also be in conflict with each other in seeking to establish coherence and consistency of meaning - if that is our pursuit.

In the problematic of subjectivity and representation, and their relation, the "war of words" (Botha, 1992) or the "hysterical" nature of reading (Barthes, 1986), essentially hinges on two very definite and tricky realities, i.e. the fickle behaviour of the reader and the elusive text. The reader and the text traditionally characterize a radical distinction between subject

and object - a problematic dualism which has come to reside at the very root of Western thinking as fundamental and prior to any other (Palmer, 1992: 1). Since the subject has come to be regarded as the habitual inaugural point of language and meaning construction, Kristeva suggests that "... any theory of meaning must necessarily be a theory of the subject" (Oliver, 1993: 91). It moreover seems that the inverse is true as well, i.e. the theory of the subject has become of necessity entrenched with the theory of representation. The essential anthropological concern is that without any confrontation between subject and object the subject will lack identity and placement in the world. Similarly, our epistemological concern is how the object is identified (represented) and according to which specific conceptions or guidelines of the interpretation the object will be determined. This almost enclosure of subject and object in the dualism mode postulates a conception of meaning-construction which has generated and maintained a distinct *distance* between interpretation of the subject vis-a-vis the object, between theory and practice, yielding the classic binary polarization. This is what Latour (1991) warns us of in his anthropology of science - how we should be rethinking the separation of the human and nonhuman, the subject and the object. While the interaction of subject and object constitutes an anthropological question and an epistemological question, it may also inevitably pose an ethical question - important questions for this study, which needs more clarification.

#### 2.5.1 THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL QUESTION

The human subject clearly dominates the meaning-giving process. Our understanding of "human nature" or "mankind" is usually approached from many different vantage points and as a result

raises a wide variety of issues. When we speak of "subjectivity" or the effects of subjectivity, we continue to link it with the human element. In this study we do not specifically wish to postulate an interpretation as to what human nature *is*, i.e. we do not intend advocating whether a particular view of the structure or substance of human nature is the correct one. Our guiding question in our problematization rather is at what point do we refer to or invoke the "subject" as corresponding to human nature in the reading act. This view broadly refers to a philosophical anthropology without necessarily dealing with narrow analytical questions. Landman (1966), for example, conceives of a philosophical anthropology which comprises of (i) man and God (*religious anthropology*: the creation, theocentrism, anthropocentrism, the doctrine of guilt and grace, etc.), (ii) man and mind (*rational anthropology*: the apotheosis of reason, the dethronement of reason, creative reason, etc.), (iii) man and animal (*biological anthropology*: Darwinism, naturalism, etc.), (iv) man and culture (*cultural anthropology*: man as creator and product of culture; social; historical values, etc.).

Beyond the views of philosophical anthropology there also seems to remain a psychological approach - at least psychological in the scientific sense (Jordaan, 1980:135), but everyone familiar with the difficulty and complex discipline of psychology will realize that the science of psychology cannot necessarily, in its present stage of development, furnish us with ultimate truths about human nature and conduct. In this regard the psychologist,

"... deals with phenomena that are often thought of as complex, incomprehensible, unpredictable and uncontrollable - people, things and events. He believes ... that reality is not capricious and that it is his

challenging task to simplify this reality by observing and inferring, through scientific procedures ... so that reality becomes to some extent more comprehensible, predictable, controllable" (Jordaan, 1980: 137).

In fact Toulmin (1990: 114) claims that there can be no science of psychology:

"Human thought, consciousness, and experience follow a more or less rational or logical course: they are not trapped into regularities, so there is nothing in them for "scientists" to study. About human thoughts and actions, the questions to ask are never of the form, " How do they [casually] happen?", but rather, "How well or badly are they [rationally] performed?".

It is so that the reason for invoking the notion of human nature through the subject is to make that which is incomprehensible, unpredictable and uncontrollable become comprehensible, predictable and controllable. It means having to deal with these afore-mentioned issues when constraints are placed upon the subject when reading. Moreover, if we speak of the universality of human nature, we understand that when the concept "subject" is invoked (eg. in the reading act) it is asserted that what is attributed to human nature is usually true for all humans.

It seems that the most universal conception of man is that he is uniquely rational and therefore self-conscious - a view which appears to be the most commonly held interpretation of human nature in Western culture. According to Hegel (1975:50) the

"fundamental character of human nature" is man's ability to think. Therefore, to say that man alone can think is almost to regard man as being uniquely free. Agacinski (1991:9) argues that the "... claim of subjective consciousness consists in believing that, essentially it can question itself and answer for itself". Therefore, if humans are held to be rational, self-conscious beings, then this means that they are also responsible for their actions. This also applies to their acts of meaning construction as problematized in the reading act.

The Hegelian notion of a "thinking man" which is behind all of what we regard as humanity, is echoed in Hannah Arendt's notion of *people*. It is usually people who create meaningful experiences and who make sense of themselves and others. This sense of plurality in personal awareness according to Arendt, is the *condition* of general human behaviour because while we are all the same, that is, human, nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived or will live. Hannah Arendt (1958: 9) as a result does not seek to equate the *human condition* of people with that which we call "human nature":

"The human condition comprehends more than the conditions under which life has been given to man. Men are conditioned beings because everything they come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of their existence. The world in which the *vita activa* spends itself consists of things produced by human activities; but the things that owe their existence to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers".

As subjects we have come to usurp the dominant role to design and

control our objects. But if we wish to develop a profound understanding of the reading act, we have to realize (according to Hannah Arendt) the way in which we can also be conditioned by those very things we have created and have come to "master" on our terms. This is the very crux of this study, viz. whether the subject has sole propriety over meaning construction or whether we as subjects would not perhaps also become aware of the *conditioning effects of things* around us, including the text we read.

This would mean that the subject's environment or the world of people and objects conditions or influences how and what subjects feel, think and produce. In his anthropology of science, Latour (1991), urges us to rethink our problematic distinctions, between ourselves and our world, between nature and society, between human and thing. We have become bent on not to "... mix up knowledge, interest, justice and power... not mix up heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, the human and the nonhuman" (Latour, 1991:3). This state of alienation and separation, as pointed out, is at best limiting and partial, and at worst, false and deceptive about the way life really is. The production of ideas and views, i.e. the construction of knowledge in terms of the subject's existence proves reciprocal rather than being inalienably dualistic:

"The impact of the world's reality upon human existence is felt and received as a conditioning force. The objectivity of the world - its object - or thing - character - and the human condition supplement each other, because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would

be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence" (Arendt, 1958:9).

Michel Serres, in his *Philosophy of Science*, questions how a discourse can derive its power from the legitimacy it claims for itself. The subject, according to him, cannot claim absolute domination, for it would be nothing more than a rationalization of personal power. Serres (*in* Harari, 1979:48) speaks of the fallacy of separating events or issues on the basis of power and control - as science, from the beginning, was bent on mastery and accuracy. Social and historical events may also influence how science had developed - a view which is easily ignored. Latour proposes the word "collective" to describe the reciprocal association of humans and nonhumans (things etc.) and it is not reducible to the one or the other. Latour (1991: 139) argues for

"...the nonseparability of quasi-objects, quasi-subjects. Every concept, every institution, every practice that interferes with the continuous deployment of collectives and their experimentation with hybrids will be deemed dangerous, harmful - we may as well say it - immoral."

Similarly, in the reading act, in terms of the reciprocal and conditioning view of subjects (which would be impossible without things) and objects (the conditioners of human existence), there develops an unavoidable situation which would hold clear epistemological consequences in our attempts at meaning construction in the reading act.

2.5.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUESTION.

Our essential dilemma with the epistemological consequences of the subject-object split is that of representation, i.e. the feasibility and adequacy of subjective ideas referring to objects. More specifically, is any test of judgement and truth conceivable which does not appeal to human experience, and especially to human thinking? Badiou (1991:25) problematizes this position: "To conceptualize the subject outside of any object position makes no sense except from the point of view of a doctrine of truth that has so completely recast as to go beyond the critique of correspondence theories of truth". This has been the age-old problem: what is truth? What are the criteria for truth and can we speak about truth at all? Badiou believes there can be a notion of "truth" if we do not blindly embrace the tenets of any form of representationalism. If we have to live within the precarious borders of our subjectivity, and therefore live in the precarious borders of human society, it will mean, according to Kristeva, that we will have to live with the precarious borders of "truth" (Oliver, 1993: 13). It is in this context that Nietzsche calls for the radical reevaluation of "truth" when he exclaims., "... es gibt keine ewigen Tatsachen so es keine absoluten Wahrheiten gibt" (Nietzsche, 1979: I, 448). Since there are no eternal truths, everything is permitted - this is the challenge for our concerns about representationalism, i.e. to question the narrow confines in terms of which we view the subject and object, and their interaction.

It has become common practice that if the subject had reached a coherent account of objects, he feels often justified in saying that he now *knows the truth* about them, i.e. he has knowledge of that object in his grasp. If one claims that knowledge

production is an act of one's mind, it could very well be, that which one knows, is other than one's knowledge of it.

Part of the crisis of the act of representation is the problematic binary of subject-object or mind-matter in the reading act which raises the question of what criteria we have attributed to "truth" in order to know and, as a result, understand the "content" of the text. Moreover, the universe is so large and the "knowing subject" so small that it seems strange that the latter should know reality as it is. This epistemological idealism "... arises from the radical ontological distinction which entails that thought cannot "reach out" and grasp being" (Palmer, 1992:2).

"Reaching out" between thought and being, according to Palmer, raises a crucial criterion of truth in terms of the notion of *correspondence*. In examining the latter, we may argue that our ideas cannot be compared with other objects, for whenever we know real objects, it is always by *means of our ideas*. Subjectivism becomes the decisive operative practice where naming and knowledge-production is executed from the point of view of the sovereign subject (Badiou, 1991: 27). The human desire for identity i.e. acknowledging the centrality of "subjectivity", (i.e. that I am the reader) almost always becomes the departing point for epistemic certainty.

The subject thus becomes that knowing entity which uses names in the tool-kit sense of using language to make hypotheses about truth. The problem here is that if one's idea and the objects which one knows are incapable of being directly compared, how does one know that there is any reality beyond one's immediate ideas. Similarly, if there were a real universe, how can one

know anything about it at all? (Ayer, 1971; Taylor, 1982).

Consequently, what starts with Descartes as a form of doubt, is the inverse of reasonably establishing the scope and foundations of knowledge and meaning. This implies that to claim that experience is a guarantee for certainty, is "... to suggest that knowledge is a necessary feature of existence because of the nature of language and not because claims of knowledge correspond with objects existing independently of language" (Palmer, 1992: 3). The use of the word *object* would apply to anything and everything that can be known, wherever spatio-temporally situated and whatever its nature. This being the case, we come to realize the problem that *correspondence* in the act of representation cannot be the criterion of truth because the idea cannot always be compared directly with the reality that is its object.

Epistemic dualism thus suggests a split where knowledge consists of idea and object, neither of which is identified with or can be reduced to the other. Moreover, the object appears not to be identical with the idea of it or that the idea refers to or knows it. The problem with this dualism is that it is not always a solution to the problem of knowledge; it is only a statement of the problem; for on the one hand we have *thought* and on the other an *object*. Between them remains a great gulf which remains the dilemma of subjectivity and representation.

Russell, in The Problems of Philosophy (1912) raises the notion of *knowledge by acquaintance* and *knowledge by description*. Acquaintance with an object, he suggests, is knowledge we have when the object is immediately present to and before the mind, while knowledge about the object or knowledge by description constitutes what arises from inferences, reasoning and explanation. Thus, *acquaintance* for the subject is direct or

immediate or intuitive knowledge, while *description* is indirect or mediate or inferential. To what extent are acquaintance and description dependent on each other for meaning-construction in the reading act?

In the reading act the issue of knowledge by acquaintance appears to be the more difficult. It raises the question of whether knowledge by acquaintance presupposes that the idea and object are one. It only suggests that the reading subject's personal experience of *seeing* is one that is directly given and not necessarily derived from reasoning. There may moreover be intuitive truths which are different from the psychological fact of one's perception. Moreover, how do we deal with the case of personal self-consciousness? In any act of self-experience there aren't normally two realities. Whereas self-experience in the reading act is clearly inevitable, self-knowledge remains a difficult exercise for the latter remains dualistic. Thus, living within what Kristeva believes to be "precarious borders" of our subjectivity, our notions of "truth" (especially in the light of Nietzsche's exclamation that everything is permitted) clearly would entail ethical implications for ourselves as well as human society, for ultimately any epistemic concerns regarding human nature do impact on social concerns regarding their ethical status.

### 2.5.3 THE ETHICAL QUESTION.

The ethical dimension of reading is not an essential focus of this study, but it remains nevertheless an important dimension of problematizing subjectivity and representation in the reading act, for reading ultimately has ethical implications, both in how and what is being read as knowledge construction. A great deal

has been said on the problems of the subject. If reading becomes an operation of "refiguration, situating itself at the intersection of two "worlds", those of the text and the reader" (Ricoeur in Greisch, 1991:67), our concern remains what the consequences of the subject's representation of the object entail. Miller (1987):1) questions whether the reading act is not perhaps primarily a cognitive act, after which some ethical reading might or might not be made but argues eventually that "... there is a necessary ethical moment in that act of reading as such, a moment neither cognitive, nor political, nor social, nor interpersonal, but properly and independently ethical". In other words, there is a peculiar and often unexpected relation between the affirmation of universal moral law, storytelling or whatever text is read. Miller (1987:2) argues:

"Ethics and narration cannot be kept separate, though their relation is neither symmetrical nor harmonious."

The issue is primarily what the reader's *responsibility* would be towards the text he "represents" in his thoughts and ultimately in his social behaviour. Levinas goes further and argues that the subject, when reading, confronts a *labour of reading* and also a *labour of thinking*, which is of capital importance for Levinas' conception of ethics in the experience of reading. It involves getting the "balance" of truth right insofar the subject-object engages in what Levinas calls a hypocritical act. Reading, according to Levinas, is hypocritical in that the encounter "... with the voice of a determinate text awakens other voices, the fruit of previous readings" (see Greisch, 1991: 68). This suggests that the hypocrisy resides in the fact that the truth or meaning does not adhere in the text, as many suggest, but rather what the reader claims it to be:

"...the instance of the letter and of the reading that has always already begun... making a plurality of contexts intervene..."

(Greisch, 1991: 67)

Which voice (context) is or voices are the correct ones to "produce" a meaningful representation - a view that brings us back to Nietzsche's "... everything is permitted". How are we generally-speaking to conceptualize our views of objects but more particularly how will we conceptualize the notion of subjectivity, for "... the truth and meaning of language cannot be dissociated from the speaking subject" (Kristeva *in* Oliver, 1993:91). It is claimed that mature and responsible readers are to evidence care, caution and accountability in terms of what meaning is or meanings are given to or derived from texts. The ethics of reading is concerned with the reader's "... response to something, responsible to it [text], responsive to it [text], respectful of it [text]." (Miller, 1987:4). The "ethical" notion is decidedly, first and foremost, an anthropological notion, for what "ought to be" right or wrong is totally tied up with the condition of the human reading subject - once again entrenching the centrality of a human subjectivity "bestowing" meaning in terms of universal laws upon an object. Even if the reading object fixed and determined the gaze or seeing of the reader, the latter may be tempted to manipulate it in the sense that it becomes congruent with social and other expectations - hence the "hypocritical" nature of reading, as suggested by Levinas, i.e. a reading is necessarily an "operation of refiguration" (Greisch, 1991:67). This act of refiguration is an attempt to destabilize the absolute claims of literal reading, i.e. looking beyond the schism of subject and object which has impacted on the beleaguered issues of ethics in meaning construction. The impact of our

meaning constructions has serious consequences for social interaction at every level, for this determines the quality of what it means to be human among other people in our society.

## 2.6. CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

It is clear from our afore-mentioned exposition of the hamshackled condition of the reading act that we will have to address the problematic of the subject-object schism, where the dominant subject usually assumes the ability and responsibility to extract meaning from (or even bestow meaning upon) a perceived and allegedly passive object. As a result, we are compelled to question this form of seeing and construction of meaning in the context of how we envisage the role of language. Burnett (1995:8) states the dilemma quite well:

"Vision, the cultural approach to seeing and thinking, privileges the objects of sight, as if they will provide some clear answers to the dilemmas of viewing and understanding, as if the questions, indeed possible contradictions of autonomy, need not be addressed."

It has been evidenced that by using language, vis-a-vis the subject-object problematic, in a narrow instrumental ("tool-kit" to decipher meaning) manner, we are decidedly likely to perpetuate the limiting view of the production of literal meaning in the form of Cartesian logical representationalism. As also illustrated earlier, it may even continue the entrenched practice of operating in the Kantian mode of a self-conscious subject who is more often likely, given our personal and social conventions and intentions, to manipulate the reading object.

In this study our challenge is clearly to seek ways to question the practice of an exclusive subject who uses the text as some

blueprint or recipe to construct meaning - a position which is perhaps nothing less than a naïve and often simplistic reading of a text. There would moreover seem to be the critical need to examine why we have come to grossly underestimate (or perhaps overestimate) the status and abilities of the reading subject on the one hand and the object on the other. What is clear, in the final analysis, is that we cannot simply use texts as complete, final, usable or even replicable objects - manipulated by sovereign subjects (see De Beer, 1992; 1993; Iser, 1978).

What clearly affects the reading act at a very fundamental level is what we can assume to be the vibrancy and energy with which language in society has been endowed. Ormiston and Schrift (1990:4) speaks of the inevitable "circulation" and "proliferation" of meanings which ensue as a result of the subject and object encounter in the reading act. If we are to question our level of *how we perceive* this vibrant encounter, it could possibly suggest a different dynamic than the perceived passive status of the "awaiting object". Untying the "knot of discourses" (De Bolla, 1989: 322) that constitute the problematic of the reading act, may compel the reader to challenge "... the level at which the "literary object" is perceived" (Harari, 1979: 39).

Since it seems that generally-speaking no mistrust interrupts the direct or literal impact of words on the reader in the case of simple, reproductive or literal reading, this easy mode of reading holds the inevitable promise of abuse, distortion, exploitation as has often been the case of ideological/political abuse, religious zeal, financial and administrative mismanagement. Such negative practices in the act of representation certainly do not necessarily imply that readers

of these documents are ignorant, less intelligent or down-right gullible. (Johnson, 1990; Spivak, 1987). But, in a sense, all ideologies can be related to pandering to oversimplified readings - and hence limited and incomplete readings.

It has been demonstrated that any form of oversimplification of a reading potentially results in experiences of catastrophe in that it could lead to some form of distortion and of course abuse, in whatever area of operation of documentation use. History evidences clear cases where, for example, ideological manipulation of socio-political situations have resulted not only in misunderstanding and exploitation but also anarchy.

Moreover, imagine a newspaper heading reading: 6 000 TEACHERS TO LOSE THEIR JOBS IN THE WESTERN CAPE. How would the average teacher (or any reader) perceive this message and how would he unmask the supposedly "uncontrollable" elements that characterize the unwritten or unseen message. If we argue with our usual confidence and bravado that no text is really as "uncontrollable" as it appears, we clearly need to question the social construction of reading or any news-gathering process to understand the role subjective "control" plays in the act of representation. It can generally be argued that the social construction of meaning does not occur in a political or social vacuum but is the working and product of various constellations of power and socio-political interests (Mumby, 1993:6-7). It is inevitable that interests are held by subjects and in their assumed "divine" conventions and manipulation of language they structure texts (objects) which will of their own accord later influence or reinforce positions and views held by readers. Is the headline of 6 000 teachers losing their jobs, for example, to be read by all teachers, of all backgrounds or persuasions in

the same way? What socio-political and ethical role do newspapers, for example, play to create and reinforce a particular view of education in South Africa? Does the power of "control" in this reading operate in the textual representation of content or in the gaps, omissions, limitations, or in all of these? This is the multi-faceted dilemma of the reading act and eventual meaning and knowledge construction.

Our challenge in this study is the realization that language or discourse hold fundamental implications for the notions of "truth" and "validity" and could, as a result, problematize the tendency of reproductive or literal reading's insistence on an objective, scientific or even neutral reading of a text. While Crosman (1980: 164) argues that "... meaning is made precisely as we want it to be made", Foucault actually wishes to further problematize this view for "... it is not a certain power with which certain people are endowed; it is the name one gives to a complex *strategic situation* in a given society" (see Harari, 1979:42). The Foucaultian argument clearly calls into question the centrality of the power of the author, of meaning in literal or reproductive reading particularly, and the functioning of this power-ful notion in its relation to reading discourse. What Foucault challenges is that textual objects do not simplistically mirror a social reality but rather that the author of a text represents a certain function/dimension of power by which certain discourses in a given context are made explicit.

In the arena of representation the problem facing the reading subject therefore is to engage a reading act which hopefully seeks to critically unmask or deconstruct his own identity and role in terms of which his reading may seek to limit, exclude, choose, impede, free, compose, decompose and recompose a textual

object (Foucault, 1972:216).

The value of problematizing the literal act of reading in this unmasking and emancipatory fashion (i.e. the movement of discourse) would unsettle and eventually dismantle the notion of mastery and control of texts which generate fixed messages. How would students for example, challenge a supposedly respectable political science journal which proclaims: THE WEST SEEKS PEACE TALKS WITH TERRORIST MOVEMENT? In communicating ideological conceptualizations such as "West", "peace", "terrorist", and so forth, the question arises whose notions are these and how these discourses have been constructed, for what and whose benefit? To get to understand the *complex strategic situation* (according to Foucault) which operates in meaning construction, would require of us to challenge the tendency to gloss over the application of *language* especially in how we construct meaning with regard to our notions of subject and object. The preponderance of any single one (be it subject or object) would compound the already beleaguered pathology of meaning-distortion and human relationship-distortion as experienced in our day and age.

A community of readers has no option but to challenge the seminal view but nevertheless the sense of dogmatism of the Cartesian or Kantian approaches to meaning construction and, as a result, re-examine the potential distorted communication which often hallmarks the falsification of taken-for-granted justifications which ensure entrenched interests (see De Beer, 1993 (1):91). This challenge presupposes essentially an all-encompassing willingness by all readers to disengage ourselves from taken-for-granted and partial views of subjectivity and representation and distance ourselves from our traditional attachment to or

association with the separated status of reader and text. Whilst bearing in mind that the working concepts of "reader subjectivity" and "textual representation" are by no means rendered obsolete, our pursuit in this study remains unequivocal, i.e. to re-think them differently and hopefully reconceptualize them in more expansive ways that would eventually enhance the quality of meaning-construction (including of ourselves as people) and the quality of human interactions in ever changing contexts.

In our attempts at rethinking and reconceptualizing our understandings of the notions of subjectivity and representation, this study wishes to shift the limiting boundaries in terms of which the subject has come to deploy representational modes of referring to objects and claiming or implying that the meanings constructed in this way could possibly pass as true and legitimate knowledge. As mentioned earlier, with regard to the notions of subjectivity and representation, these are concepts which since Descartes, Kant and others, have gone through a process of development, becoming increasingly flexible and expansive concepts which seek to address the critical stumbling block in this study, viz. the schism between subject and object. Our rethinking of this dilemma also tends to pursue a "developmental" stance, if you wish, in Chapter 3 - starting with the critical Nietzschean disposition of healthy scepticism in order to start anew in our re-evaluation of notions like representation and subjectivity, and ensure that we arrive at a more balanced, expanded and integrated basis for the construction of knowledge.

CHAPTER 3SHIFTING THE BOUNDARIES OF THE READING ACT: THE PIONEERS3.1 INTRODUCTION

Shifting perspective and looking with new eyes at practices which we have often taken for granted either does not go off well with many people, or requires, metaphorically-speaking, a jolt in the direction which would precipitate a radical break from the old. If we assume, as we do in this study, that the reading subject uses language to represent meaning from what he perceives, we might also at the same time, have particular critical assumptions about the nature and ability of the subject, language and the object (textual or otherwise). Whatever the detail of the assumptions, Chapter 2 problematized the usual smoothness and simplicity with which we have come to grasp language; its inevitable meaning-giving implications, but moreover how the human subject has assumed the status of the divine life-giving agent of language and its ensuing meaning-giving dynamics. This dilemma, as has been largely argued, almost posits a view that no ambiguity, obscurity or imprecision might intervene between subject and object. If any did it could be ascribed to a careless reader who did not decode properly or a careless author who did not encode his thoughts properly - hence the imprecision, ambiguity or obscurity. Without rendering the concepts of language, subjectivity and presentation obsolete, we do however have the opportunity in this study to re-orientate our assumptions about them, as well as their interactions, in order

to posit another, perhaps broader and more integrated approach as to how we construct meaning.

Nietzsche, strategically, is perhaps the ideal starting-point, for standing on the threshold of the twentieth century, he inaugurates a substantially different, and therefore seminal way of rethinking subjectivity and representation, and upon whose shoulders a great many significant subsequent theorists/philosophers as selected for discussion in this study, stand.

Our purpose is to critically draw on Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur to address the crisis whether we have to *represent* things for meaning at all, and whether the contract between object and subject in which the latter has ingratiated itself in an almost sovereign position, is tenable at all. Our ultimate intention has been to elucidate the hitherto limited and partial constructions of meanings (Margolis 1987; Margolis, 1988) that had ensued as a result of the role language had come to play in the "dangerous, harmful and immoral" (Latour, 1991:139) separation of subject and object. Following Nietzsche's critical and suspicious jolt of unsettling traditionally held views of language, subjectivity and representation, this study advances to rethink our dilemma by revisiting the "new" views of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur as representative theorists/philosophers who pioneered new pathways of thinking and of conceiving the meaning construction process in a far more critical and expansive manner.

### 3.2 NIETZSCHE AS THE MASTER OF SUSPICION OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

#### 3.2.1 THE RADICAL CHALLENGE OF THE READING ACT.

There seems to be general consensus that modern philosophy begins with Descartes's inward turn of the subject - seeking certainty through doubt. Descartes, as a result, labels this self-certain subject *res cogitans*, which he distinguishes from all else, described as *res extensa*. As the locus of certainty and truth, subjectivity is the first principle from which everything arises and to which everything returns. The sovereign subject relates only to what it constructs and therefore is unaffected by anything other than itself. Absolute knowledge is actualized in the full self-consciousness of the subject.

The radical rethinking of the reading act in terms of the views we have come to hold of subjectivity and representation seems to find a definite foothold in Nietzsche's thinking of "philosophizing with the hammer". Standing on the threshold of the twentieth century, the master of suspicion of the entire world order and the way we as readers have come to describe it, Nietzsche takes up the battle axe and contemptuously sets out to radically critique everything with the "hammer". His thinking proves to be helpful in this thesis since he wants to destroy all knowledge, including that of the subject, object and language as notions which have deceptively come to gain legitimacy based on those spurious and illusory assumptions we hold of them. These concepts have all slipped, into our perceptions and knowledge-

base as having absolute stability and eternal truth. It is for this reason that Nietzsche (III: 424) exclaims that everything is false and everything, as a result, is deemed permissible.

"Alles ist falsch! Alles ist erlaubt!"

The implications of "freedom" of "Alles ist erlaubt" is Nietzsche's critical point of departure to propose a critical re-evaluation of all notions (which would ultimately include in the reading act), i.e a re-evaluation of the "truths" of what we have come to believe about the subject, its thinking and the interpretation of the world. In short, the truth is a sum of human relations. To re-evaluate the reading act, for our purposes, in terms of Nietzsche, we need to look at his proposed metaphysical "revolution" in terms of his notion of the "will to power" - and its ultimate effects on subjectivity and representation in the reading act.

### 3.2.2 THE NOTION OF "THE WILL TO POWER".

Since Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, absolute truth cannot adequately be proved or refuted in any rational or discursive way, which leads Nietzsche consequently to demonstrate that in meaning construction the intellect constructs its own world, transcends it and ultimately destroys it. Nietzsche critically disengages himself from the traditional metaphysical and epistemological concepts such as matter and form, knower and known, and truth and falsity. These concepts ultimately hold significant implications for our rethinking of literal, representational reading. Our conception of truth and its formulation in intelligible language, according to Nietzsche, rests upon illusory and shaky foundations (Nietzsche, III: 539).

To grasp Nietzsche's "new" understanding of subjectivity and language as representation we need to grasp his view of reality as captured in his notion of the will to power (*Wille zur Macht*).

According to Nietzsche's metaphysics, there is nothing else besides the will to power and all essences, senses or interpretations, including those of ourselves as readers and the world, will ultimately depend on nothing else but the will to power (Nietzsche, III: 917). The very nature and composition of the notions "will" and "power" present a sense of plurality and complexity. Nietzsche views the "will" as a form of reality which wields immense quantities of energy and power. Since the will to power is characterized by what he regards as the dynamic process of continuous unfolding and differentiation, it would seem to differ from those metaphysical views of a complete, homogeneous and unified substance (including the subject and object), as evidenced in the Cartesian sense. Nietzsche therefore believes that the amount of power which constitutes the driving force of power quanta is activated by the intensity of opposition (*Gegenstände und Widerstände*) that is experienced (Nietzsche, III: 778). For our purposes, this view places the act of meaning construction under pressure to reconsider its emphasis of regarding reading as a simple act of extracting information from a text.

What we experience is that the notions of subject and object, as opposites (*Gegenstände*) are, in their "opposition", in fact a positive stance which may assist readers in bringing new and creative dimensions to the construction of meaning. In fact, according to Nietzsche, their apparent "opposition" or "separation" is paradoxically also an equally false state of how

we have come to view things and the world around us. What we regard as an absolute view of a sovereign subject looking upon an object in front of us, in the act of meaning construction, is nothing but a "bad habit" which is based on the consequence of the artificial nature of logicality. Nietzsche is thus suspicious of the smooth causality pattern between objects and words, and therefore words and meaning. There are only *differences of degree* but no absolute opposites; and these differences are dependent on the amount of power that is mobilized - a form of metaphysics which radicalizes meaning construction:

"Es gibt keine Gegensätze: nur von denen der Logik her haben wir den Begriff des Gegensatzes - und von da aus fälschlich in die Dinge übertragen" (Nietzsche, III: 541).

What determines, according to Nietzsche, the differences of degree in the problematic divide between subject and object, is only the dynamic working of the will to power. The effects of the dynamism of the will to power may cause an increase (*Steigerung*) or decrease (*Verminderung*) of the will to power, arranging themselves ultimately into constellations of power. This is the essence of Nietzschean meaning construction and the implication is that, since there is no complete state of being of the subject in the construction of meaning but only a constant sense of becoming (*Werden*), the "essence" of power resides precisely in their performance (*Wirkung*). We may infer that in the reading act, there is no stable *essence* of a thing as content, for according to Nietzsche, there are no longer objects or subjects as we have come to know them, but only "interpretations" thereof. This radical shift in thinking implies that a being or a thing essentially does not have one

specific form but could potentially have several. Nietzsche rejects the limiting Kantian *Ding an Sich*, for thinghood or even subjectivity is purely a matter of "projecting one's interpretation into something", i.e. *hineininterpretieren* (Nietzsche, III: 424). In the reading act the act of "seeing" or perception of an object, including the perception of the reading subject of himself as the designer and master of things, would therefore, according to Nietzsche, be nothing more than the constant working (*Wirkung*) of power quantities. Meaning construction is therefore not a once-off-interpretation of textual words. Meaning construction is therefore also not a controllable activity over which we assume the reader holds sway.

In contrast to the mechanistic view of subject and object in the Cartesian sense, Nietzsche's Dionysiacally-conceived view of "chaos" in everyday life, and therefore we assume in the reading act, embodies a multiplicity of vigorous impulses which are constantly attuned to the increase of power. We can conclude that even the reader's perceptions of things or textual content would be attuned to the ebb and flow of power. This "multiplicity nature" of conceiving of the world and its subjects marks the break with Descartes and Kant's "correspondence" between subject and object, in which the subject imposes stability, order and ultimately meaning on the object. In contrast to the reading subject putting "labels" and meaning on an object, Nietzsche is helpful by positing a new way of thinking of the reciprocal relationship of power struggles. In terms of the dynamic invigorating impulses, subject and object constantly assert themselves to overcome each other's resistance and, as a result, gain ever more power. In the act of meaning construction, this process of becoming (*Werden*) creatively marks

an infinite process which defies stability of their being as well as the stability of their being named and labelled through language - a view is valuable and which radicalizes the epistemology in the reading act we wish to explore.

"Dem Werden den Charakter des Seins aufzuprägen - das ist der höchste Wille zur Macht" (Nietzsche, III: 895).

### 3.2.3 THE DYNAMISM OF POWER AND OF TRUTH.

In rethinking the act of reading, we draw on Nietzsche's manifest suspicion of any form or substance supports his argument of not relying on any "stable" world-order based on any logicity in the Cartesian sense. This new view leads Nietzsche to rethink all values in that he approaches the notion of "truth" of reading content (in our case), very much in the same way as the will to power. The objective world, in terms of the increase or decrease of the will to power, is in a constant state of flux - nothing, not even the reader's views of the truth of things and events, remain stable and definite. If in the reading act events and meanings do seem to appear stable and fixed to us it is only as a result of the "coarseness" of our senses to simplify and make life easy for our own convenience (Nietzsche, III: 555). What subjects perceive in making meaning can be assumed, according to Nietzsche, to be nothing more than perspectives: "Es gibt nur perspektivisches Sehen, nur ein perspektivisches "Erkennen"" (there is only perspectival seeing and perspectival knowing) (Nietzsche, II: 861). The implications of this view marks the significant break with the past where the reading act is seen as an objectified act that had taken place in which I, the reading

subject, gives a specific meaning a text. Even the reader's conceptualizations of subject and object would therefore reflect nothing more than a biased (or one-sided) attempt to impose a sense of "order" as we see it in the reading act.

For Nietzsche the only "stability" or "permanence" is constant change. The criterion for truth in the act of meaning construction lies therefore in the increase of power. A literary object, for example, or some event imparts the "truth" if it increases my will to power and contrarily, an object or event is deemed false when it decreases my will to power. We may construe this view as a "subjective" criterion of truth, but Nietzsche argues that, something might be true or false, depending on the *perspective* from which the judgement is executed. This form of "perspectivism" changes the problematic view of correspondence between object or word and meaning.

Nietzsche has been clearly influenced by the rise and development of science of his day which would give impetus to his concerns with the dynamism which is the driving force behind his challenging thinking. He argues that his "new" conception of truth has nothing to do with the logical or representational content of a proposition. In fact, we can deduce that readers as subjects have no "organ" (*kein Organ*) for knowing the truth. While this is the case in meaning construction it does not imply that readers would have arbitrary notions of truths, for the "truth" represents nothing but *layers of interpretations*. The intellect is also impounded by this notion of multiple perspectives - a view which challenges the view of Descartes and Kant. (Nietzsche, III: 539).

3.2.4 THE FALLACY OF LANGUAGE IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

Nietzsche's challenge to rethink the notions of subject and object is closely linked to his view of language - a concept which has to be understood in the same way as his view of truth. Like Pascal, Nietzsche argues that there are questions which one cannot answer merely in terms of one's intellect but rather with one's entire being. This implies looking at the reading act beyond the logical representational mode. Despite the fact that Nietzsche may himself have been a first class stylist in terms of the use of language, he argues that *language* as a means of expression, ultimately remains impotent and, at the best of times, proves inadequate to express that which we actually wish to say. Behind every Apollonian form and symbol resides another abstraction, for behind every opinion expressed hides another opinion and every word effectively masks another word (Nietzsche, VIII: 268). We can assume thus that in meaning construction subjects therefore cannot plead for a sense of authority, i.e. they cannot posit a stable representation of an author's intention. Compared to music, language for Nietzsche embodies a defective device, precisely because language has come to be linked to the rational thought of a "fictional" notion of the subject. Nietzsche's view of language is pivotal in this study, for it cannot be separated from his view of subjectivity, for in terms of the limited view of language we created a limited view of subjectivity.

If logic, according to Nietzsche, is merely a fiction which is based upon the assumption of "identity" to which nothing in reality corresponds, the notion of a reading subject consequently too proves nothing else but fiction. The "ego" or the reading

subject, we can assume, does not exist at all: "It is a fable, a fiction, a play on words" (Nietzsche, II: 899). The notion of a sovereign "subject" seems only to embody an interpretation that the ego seeks to pass on as a form of substance, as the cause of all action, as a doer. The actions of thinking, perceiving, knowing, willing, etc. are normally attributed to "the doer" - the latter of which remains a fallacy and an invention for Nietzsche. (see Schlacht, 1993: 40). We deduce thus that in terms of Nietzsche's perspectivism he would challenge the notion of a sovereign subject who assumes the ability and responsibility to name, describe, infer and construct meaning.

If the notion of the subject is only a fiction, so is the object too. We can infer that since we as readers have created ourselves as subjects we have also invented the reality of things and projected them into the medley of our subjective sensations. Nietzsche's challenge is helpful in that we get rid of all forms of "thing-ontology" and develop a different way of thinking about the world and therefore a different way of meaning construction.

The subject and his world embodies mere fragments and decadence (Nietzsche, II: 393), and therefore we infer that in the reading act our conscious experiences are selective and are therefore a matter of self-willed and subjective choices. Consequently our interpretations would be deemed as nothing more than erroneous. We can assume that the subject according to Nietzsche has come to believe in an intellect whose procedures are essentially illusory since they operate in terms of a vacuous tool, i.e. language, which seeks to construct fictitious subjects (Nietzsche, II: 959):

"Das Vernünftige Denken ist ein  
Interpretieren nach einem Schema, welches

wir nicht abwerfen können" (Nietzsche, III: 862).

This pattern of interpretation or meaning construction in terms of language, implies how we as readers and our entire human existence have become entangled in seemingly indispensable patterns and schemas created by the intellect. The notions therefore of body-mind, subject-object, as binary concepts constituted by the conscious subject, are also convenient (albeit fallacious) schemas created by the intellect in trying to construct meaning in an intelligible way. It is precisely by challenging this sense of intelligibility and stability in terms of a preconceived world order that Nietzsche proposes an alternative view, to destroy all neatly-packaged thinking, including ourselves as divine meaning-givers.

If the implication is that the subject constantly changes his identity and defies all sense of stability (in terms of Nietzsche's universal "will to power"), subjective thought changes and remains irreducible to any single object, event or experience in the act of meaning construction. According to Nietzsche (III: 311) everything is not only one, two or three dimensional, but rather multidimensional. In terms of this multiplicity, as opposed to correspondence, we ought to become suspicious, including of the subject-object status that the reading act pivots on. Since the use of language sets the subject up as the knower of the known (the object), readers would need to radically doubt these very truthful metaphysical and epistemological "fallacies" constructed in terms of the text. Therefore, our only stance is to radically reconceptualize these fallacies and regard every view, opinion or reading as only being tentative. The reading subject and the textual object would

continually appear differently so that no particular perspective can ever be considered final and complete. In this way the reading act would challenge the pursuit of absolute validity and truthfulness which constrains the variety and expansiveness of meaning that gets constructed.

### 3.2.5 NIETZSCHE'S ALL-EMBRACING PERSPECTIVISM IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

Nietzsche's views are helpful so that we will seriously rethink the notion of referential and literal reading, executed by the master subject. He ushers in the power of suspicion which would help interrogate the spurious and fictitious use of language by readers. This fictionalism is to be destroyed by his very suspicion of all metaphysics and epistemology. This stance also paves the way to what Nietzsche regards as a form of all-embracing perspectivism and ultimately the notion of multi-subjectivity. This marks Nietzsche's break from "a form" of meaning construction where the subject would believe to have control and confidence in what he sees as being objective and therefore an accurate reading of the text. Nietzsche challenges this one-way representation of subject to object. In the reading act we cannot assume to have one final notion of the subject, for it changes with every "seeing" of an object. We can deduce that this is the working or effect (*Wirkung*) of the turbulent will to power of Nietzsche's perspectivism, which in our case, will break the grip of referentiality and correspondence in meaning construction.

Despite the fact that Nietzsche breaks with the Cartesian-Kantian tradition, he postulates a hypothetical subject who, we believe

in the reading process, will still fulfil the decisive roles of perceiver, experiencer and judge. However, this notion of the subject would be compelled to creatively deal with the demands of constantly shifting perspectives of the object and the variety of ensuing knowledge which, unlike the literal reading of the object (i.e. text), is constantly being challenged, destroyed and resurrected. Since Nietzsche raises the value of critical awareness and radical doubt, he forces us to restart from the premise that there is no sense in anything ("Alles hat keinen Sinn"). The implication is, in the construction of meaning the force of necessity (Notwendigkeit) in every reading encounter would remain unique, including the notion of the reading subject, in order to be reconstituted every time, many times. It is obvious, we still encounter with Nietzsche a subject or what he would like us to believe to be a multiple subject, who operates separately from the object. Although he acknowledges the reciprocal roles of the conceptual subject and object, he nevertheless seems to neglect the object as a meaningful component of the reading act. Important however, is the implication of Nietzsche's critical stance of approaching every word, every sentence with suspicion so that we consequently would not acquiesce into any practice of seeking completion and coherence of meaning, including a "stable" notion of reading subjectivity. The significance of Nietzsche's command to "philosophize with the hammer" initiates far reaching effects on many subsequent thinkers who have sought to challenge the problematic of a stable sovereign subject and object in the reading act and meaning construction.

The implications of Nietzsche's radical challenge for our concerns regarding the reading act is to destroy the notion of a pre-packaged body of meaning which is to be unlocked by a manipulating reading subject in a referential way. The influence

of his sense of perspectivism clearly goes contrary to the literal approach of representation which always unfolds under the control and authority of a single, unitary reading subject to ensure the debilitating consequences that we have come to refer to as epistemological accuracy and legitimacy. In this way Nietzsche sets the scene regarding our concerns about the status of the reading act in this study, by assisting us to shift the boundaries by way of radical doubt and opening the process of meaning construction to allow for multiple perspectives of meaning and meaning-giving. In this way Nietzsche has "forced" us to problematize the relative smoothness and simplicity with which we have come to conceptualize language, including our notions of subject and object - a view which Heidegger, in his own way, expands and elaborates on.

### 3. HEIDEGGER'S TRANSCENDING OVER IN THE READING ACT

#### 3.3.1 THE HEIDEGGERIAN RESTART OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

The implications of Heidegger's rethinking of the nature of the subject and the object forms a dominant theme throughout his concern with the meaning of Being and with language as a speaking of the truth of Being. Heidegger undoubtedly stands on the shoulders of Nietzsche in that he too wishes to critically restart with the Abbau of all thinking (literally "deconstruction") in order to start anew. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger also critically rejects the Kantian dualism in which a phenomenon is contrasted with a mysterious "thing in itself" (see Macquarrie, 1973:11). Heidegger challenges the notion of a subject that would normally perceive the objective world and in turn describe it in terms of what we would call "language". The inextricable connection between language and postulation of a subject, vis-a-vis a *perceived* object, constitutes the core of Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology. Since reading, at least in its literal sense, has everything to do with *seeing* and therefore with *perception*, we rely on Heidegger's restart regarding the perceiving subject.

In the reading act the notion of *perception* becomes crucial to this study since when the meaning of one subject is different, or worst still, incompatible with the meaning construction of another subject, arguments arise concerning the criteria of meaning and therefore the validity of the meaning construction. As the reading act is usually approached by a controlling subject from a particular angle, the phenomenological approach focuses on a description of that phenomenon as it presents itself to the reader's consciousness and moreover, wishes to clarify how meaning is given to or derives from it in the reading act.

### 3.3.2 THE THRUST OF PHENOMENOLOGY IN THE READING ACT

In order to shift the boundaries in terms of looking at the phenomenological approach to reading, we realise that it does not evidence a unitary or monolithic movement and would as such elude complete description. (see Misiak & Sexton, 1973; Kochelmans, 1967; Gras, 1973; Suleiman, 1980). It would be helpful to understand that there are a variety of typically phenomenological issues or concerns rather than attempt to grapple with a definitive conceptualization of all areas of inquiry it impacts on. In order to understand the reading act, the focus of phenomenology seems to be on direct intuition, emphasizing primarily the efforts of the reading subject who establishes the textual object and its meaning as an object of consciousness within the context of a specific intention. Moreover, since phenomenology proves not to be monolithic, it spills over into other approaches precisely because its focus is on the nature of the subject that *intends* (means, imagines, conceptualizes, is conscious of) an object - a process which consequently unfolds in a given context of perception, intuition and ultimately meaning construction. How this process unfolds becomes Heidegger's focus in order to expand our own view of reading.

In the respective views of existential phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the common thrust embodies a critical characterisation of the reading subject who is conceived as what is regarded as "being-in-the-world". Heidegger's *Dasein*, expresses the pre-reflective and reflective processes of consciousness whereby meaning comes to being. The subject, for Heidegger is therefore, not so much an entity but rather a *process*, in which it experiences its being-in-the-world through temporality which constantly seeks to interpret the emerging world while simultaneously creating its own identity (Heidegger:

1993:53). In our own understanding of the reading act, we observe that phenomenology presupposes that every moment of consciousness or intention presumes both a subject and an object, reciprocally constituting each other as an act and as structure (see: Kockelmans & Kisiel, 1970; Kockelmans, 1967; Gras, 1973). Phenomenology proves particularly useful for meaning construction in establishing what type of relationship exists between the objective reality outside of the human mind and the thought which we as subjects have of it. In this way readers are able to critically revisit the subject-object dichotomy that we have inherited particularly since Descartes. In the reading act the phenomenological method asserts that only *phenomena* can reveal to readers what and how objects essentially are, and any clarity or understanding of the reading experience must, as a consequence, begin with the phenomena of the subject's *consciousness* since they are the only givens accessible to readers. How the subject and the objective reality relate to each other in this type of "disclosure" finds peculiar expressions, as we will notice, in the respective phenomenological approaches pursued by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

Heidegger's critical phenomenological approach aims to search beyond the mathematical Cartesian subject which conforms to logical norms, determined in advance. Despite Kant's progress, Heidegger does not want to conform to the Kantian transcendental subject which, for the first time, becomes aware of objects as distinct from private impressions. Even Heidegger's predecessor and teacher, Husserl, conceives of a subject as a thinking "I", caught in the object-subject relationship which can only possibly be illuminated or activated in terms of consciousness i.e. intentionality. Heidegger realizes that Husserl arrived at a deceptively simple model of consciousness where every instance

of consciousness presumes both a subject and an object, i.e. we infer that the same textual object can exist in the consciousness of both author and reader - a consciousness which emerges during the reading act (Kochelmans, 1967: 31). It is in the light of his challenge of the notion of *language* and his critical rethinking of metaphysics that Heidegger (1993:160) develops a different or new way of thinking about the subject and the object and their implication for the act of meaning construction.

### 3.3.3 UNITY OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Beyond the "subject-centred" Cartesian-Kantian view, Heidegger (1993:230) in a critical way, pushes the question of how there can be a notion of truth if it is conceived of as the correspondence between our thoughts (or the content of our consciousness) and the outside objective world. Heidegger's approach contrasts sharply with that of Descartes's of an external world which exists via representations, in that he argues that one cannot be in the world without knowing that world. In fact Heidegger (1993: 134) prefers to drop the notions of subject and subjectivity as much as object and objectivity, for such concepts, according to him, only emphasize and reinforce the dualism of subject and object and, of the problematic of what seems to be an unbridgeable gap between them.

In our concerns of the reading act we can infer that Heidegger departs from what he believes to be the unmediated acts of the subject, i.e. *Dasein* - i.e. being-in-the-world. In contrast to his predecessors this notion of being is for Heidegger *prior* to the notions of subject and object. In meaning construction Heidegger wants to re-engage the world (contrary to the Cartesian *worldlessness*) as an ontological property of *Dasein*:

"The more the world is embraced, namely, the more penetratingly the conquered world is

exposed, i.e. the more objective the object appears - by so much more is the world subjective" (Heidegger, 1950: 85-86).

Heidegger's significance is to assist us to abolish our view of a subject who campaigns for legitimate meanings of the external world. The subjective side of the world is for Heidegger as much necessary for Dasein as the objective side of subjectivity. Taylor (1993) argues that the Heideggerian subject becomes therefore an "engaged agency" who confronts the world in the concrete world. More than constituting purely a sovereign "engaging agency", Heidegger advocates that the subject should be discovered in what he believes to be the deeper layers of reality than in mere substantiality, for ultimately the subject cannot be expressed merely in terms of what we regard as substantiality or subjectivity:

"Self and world belong together in a single entity Dasein. Self and world are not two things ... (they) are the basic determination of Dasein in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1982: 297).

The implication therefore is that the subject cannot exist logically and ontologically only as a subject but also has the capacity to transcend towards the textual objects which is a process he refers to as a "passing over" to the world (Heidegger, 1993:145). The Heideggerian concept of the world therefore passes completely over into the domain of Dasein. In what seems to be a tautological approach, Heidegger emphasizes that, "... the existing things that we call "human beings" are possible in their being only because there is (*es gibt*) a world" (quoted in Olafson, 1987:72). Whereas Nietzsche, in his radical *Umwertung* of the subject-object, still resides in the realm of a stark dichotomous state of struggling against each other to increase

their power, Heidegger, surpasses this and proposes a closing of the gap between subject and object. In the reading act this would mean, we assume, that there cannot any longer be a sovereign, master-mind reading subject who manipulates, controls and imposes meaning on an awaiting textual object. We can deduce that the subject engages the objective side of his subjectivity, as much as the textual object engages the subjective side of his objectivity. For the first time, we encounter in Heidegger a form of discourse in which the object seems to be as "alive" and responsive as the subject (Heidegger: 1950:86).

Taylor (1993: 317) elucidates and argues that Heidegger's critical attempt to "ontologize all rational procedure" is to be found in his non-conformity between subject and object, which ultimately, effects transcendence. In the reading act, we assume that Heidegger would seek to avoid the pursuit of objectivity in the subject's subjective impressions and argues that subjects project their existence into the world in terms of the *possibilities* within the design or projection that they make of ourselves (Heidegger, 1993:329).

### 3.3.4 EXISTENTIAL POSSIBILITY IN THE READING ACT

Heidegger's radical departure from the Cartesian representationalism continues in terms of the Husserlian notion of intentionality, viz. that *Dasein* can only be meaningful if it occurs as being-in-the-world. This idea of concrete situatedness with others (Heidegger, 1993: 53) facilitates our human understanding not only of others but also of ourselves. The early Heidegger forever still adheres closely to the Husserlian demand to "return to the things themselves", which embodies a demand of us to relinquish all *laissez-faire* constructions or even accidental discoveries, for we ought to let our "seeing" be guided by that

which reveals itself immediately. The implications are that only in this way, are we as reading subjects, if we draw on Heidegger's view, able to penetrate the meaning and foundation of the phenomenon as gleaned from the world. (Heidegger, 1993: 29).

If Husserl insists, as Heidegger also does, that the phenomenological approach should discard all preconceived logical and epistemological constructions, their ultimate aims however prove different. For Husserl phenomenology still remains essentially a method, whereas Heidegger (1993: 53) has come to regard it as existential possibility. In a sense Heidegger proves to be very Platonic because he regards the phenomenological "seeing" as "to-let-be-seen" which is the being of *Dasein* which is concealed or that which was once revealed but has slipped back into oblivion. The implications for reading is that Heidegger attempts to argue how meaning is "revealed" in a non-correspondence way between the subject and the world or, in our case, the textual object.

The notion of *possibilities* (Heidegger, 1993:329) is crucial for the reading act. It is used in the context of the world as a *Verweisungszusammenhang* - a referential context. The latter does not represent mere logical possibilities, nor are they necessarily reducible to other causal possibilities, although they are closely related to the latter (Olafson, 1987: 41). Heidegger's notion of language, or more accurately, his view of speech and discourse, becomes relevant for meaning construction, for it is through the process of *possibility* that *Dasein* discloses itself. Whereas Nietzsche goes no further than to problematize language as an incompetent tool to construct meaning, Heidegger proves to be more rigorous in his approach. Language becomes the medium which facilitates the temporal unfolding of the being of *Dasein* in meaning construction.

Heidegger (1993:53) departs from the Platonic notion of being (*Sein*) in which he regards the notion as being thoroughly temporal (*zeitlich*). It is within this relationship or medium of language that temporality holds the possibility of what Heidegger calls the "opening up" (*entschlossen*) of being. *Sein* and *Zeit* becomes an indissoluble couplet, for as subjects we live time and its only within this process that we can fully grasp Heidegger's claim that phenomenology is only possible in relation to ontology (Heidegger, 1993: 35). In Heidegger's words, language is the "house of being", language exists prior to being and it is therefore constitutive for Heidegger of the pre-reflective consciousness for all being which is to emerge (Heidegger, 1993:60). We infer that in the reading act this pre-reflective consciousness *Dasein* (which is not a subject) and its capacity for communication, holds the promise of potential (*Seinkönnen*). Meaning construction may occur beyond the concrete reality of *Dasein* where an entire realm of possibilities resides ("*Hoher als die Wirklichkeit steht die Möglichkeit*") (Heidegger, 1993: 38). In contrast to a literal and stable reading of an objective text where meaning is rendered *immediate*, Heidegger's clarification of the subject-object would defer meaning construction from the immediate reality (*Wirklichkeit*) to the possibility (*Möglichkeit*) which can be achieved in terms of a process Heidegger (1982: 314) calls disclosure or uncovering. Nietzsche saw this possibility as the working of power quanta which increase or decrease. Compared to the Cartesian logical conception of meaning where nothing *mediates* in the act of representation other than the processes of enumeration, intuition and deduction in a worldless context, Heidegger, beyond his predecessors, postulates a notion of ontological meaning which exists in language prior to the constitution of subjectivity and the objective world, the engagement with each other slowly "releasing" a disclosure or uncovering of the meaning of being human. In this way language

is prevented from being used to *represent* content and used as a "tool-kit" whenever needed.

### 3.3.5 DASEIN AND DISCLOSURE/UNCOVERY IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Heideggerian phenomenology is significant for our concerns of the reading act, since it pursues the essence of subjective and objective phenomena down to its ground in a way that is made evident in the "self-showing" of phenomena, a process Heidegger (1993: 37) conceives of as hermeneutics. We can infer that his phenomenological ontology aims to return to the original entities of the reading subject's experiences and, as a result, clarify these data by delineating the constitutive structures of its make-up. Such perceived entities, Heidegger argues, are always prior to our human logical and epistemological theories about them. By unlocking the essences of these perceived entities Heidegger believes we are able to postulate a comprehensive "reading" of such phenomena. Like in the case of Nietzsche, Heidegger (1993: 38) conceives of numerous possibilities which make up the construction of meaning, precisely because we can infer that reading is no longer a process where the authoritative reader extracts meaning from the text. Moreover, to achieve this disclosure in reading, Heidegger is helpful since he does not want to linger in the Husserlian realm of consciousness (intentionality), but pushes back to what he regards as a pre-cognitive awareness through which the, in our case, subject, already understands itself as being fundamentally limited to its world (*vorbegriffliches Seinsverständnis*) (Heidegger, 1993: 197). Heidegger's significance resides in the fact that, unlike Descartes, Kant and even Nietzsche, he enters a territory of consciousness which none of them ever dreamt of. Language is opened up into which it is possible that the subject takes an ontological position as he engages with the world (Heidegger, 1993: 53).

For the subject to perceive something as an entity, according to Heidegger, would in fact mean to grasp it as actually existing (in contrast with what does not exist). As a result, what readers are capable of doing as *Dasein* is to transcend such entities toward their being as entities and therefore toward the world. Every act of what Heidegger calls "disclosure" or opening up (*Erschlossenheit*) of being transcendental is in essence - an act which Bourdieu (1988:60) sees as nothing more than Heidegger's reinterpretation of Kantianism. This view seems not valid since Kant never problematized language as Heidegger did, for it is only through language, in this world that the subject constructs meaning, according to Heidegger.

The presence of entities moreover is always provided with a context of possibility and *choice* which determines the disclosure but also that which defines the practical meaning of the state of the world that will ensue (Heidegger, 1993: 329). The *choice* that comes with the dynamics of *possibility*, seems to express the non-static presence of entities that can be un-covered. For Heidegger it is a matrix of possibilities generated by *Dasein ab initio*. In this sense *Dasein* is expressed by the historicity of human existence, rather than by a particular theme or event (Heidegger, 1993:53). We can infer that this view of Heidegger destroys the assumption of meaning construction as being a package of pre-ordained meanings which the subject unpacks. Rather, language becomes the "breeding ground" in which numerous possible meanings are encountered as subject and object reciprocally reveal themselves to each other.

In the act of uncovering of possibilities Heidegger moreover ushers in the concept *diaphanes* (i.e. transparent), not in the sense of a medium of transmission, but in the sense of "laying out" (*Auslegung*) - i.e. representing an interpretive act which is regarded by Heidegger (1993: 153) as an ontological modality.

We conclude thus that instead, of an authoritative subject, *subjects* himself in the reading act in order to postulate a sense of identity and meaning, it will require that this will also require an object *objecting* its presence in the construction of meaning as well. Subjects will therefore be truly human *in and through* the world of things. This act of becoming *human* in the reading act would not suggest an easy acquiescence into the realm of things but is rather dependent on the variety of choices that possibility holds, which at the same time, becomes revealed or disclosed. We rely on the possibility of disclosure which is a result of Heidegger's departure from the polarization of subject and object - a position which is facilitated within the all-encompassing medium of language. Nietzsche was still trapped in this polarization of subject and object and was not able to close the gap between them. Heidegger (1993: 60) however problematizes language as a "pre-consciousness" for which we believe the subject and the text are to become one. In this Heideggerian sense, language is not deployed as a tool to create subjects and objects, for language pre-exists these notions already. The implication is that language rather represents the "womb" which supports an embryonic reading eco-system for meaning to emerge. Within this creative embryonic condition subjects-with-their-objects partake in a process which we borrow from Heidegger as "laying-out".

### 3.3.6 LAYING-OUT AS MEANING-CONSTRUCTION

Heidegger's thinking assists us to circumvent the simplistic view of reading which relies on the decodification and literal process between subject and object. The "laying-out" process assists us in a dimension of reading which none of Heidegger's predecessors could entertain. Heidegger's view of "laying-out" (*Auslegung*), as an act of meaning construction resides within his broader ontology which is centred around the question of the meaning of

being, constituted in a "space" where both truth and falsity become possible. (Heidegger, 1982: 314). This view of truth-falsity is close to Nietzsche's - which depended on the increase or decrease of power quanta of the subject-object exchange. Heidegger however no longer entertains the gap between subject and object as Nietzsche did.

Like with Nietzsche, the Heideggerian concept of "truth" however does not apply to its usual application with regard to the truth of its "subject matter" (*Sachangemessen*) (Heidegger; 1982), but rather where the notions truth and falsity become possibilities in terms of which we can infer how readers define themselves in the world. If there were no Dasein, there would be no truth, and there would consequently be no falsity either. We can argue that in the reading act this does not suggest a mere relativist position. Heidegger only asserts that things are the way they are - they are *uncovered*. (Heidegger, 1982:314). As subjects we are therefore compelled to engage with our worlds, for if it was not the case, life would be "false", i.e. devoid of meaning. Laying-out the uncovered, in the here-and-now, brings out a sense of being which is also a sense of meaning.

The link between Dasein and truth is for Heidegger the same as the link between subject and object. Dasein of necessity, mediates the relationship between being and truth:

"Being (not entities) is something which "there is" only insofar as truth is. And truth is insofar and so long as Dasein is. Being and truth "are" equiprimordially". (Heidegger, 1993: 230).

For our understanding of the reading act the above view has to be placed in the context of Heidegger's treatment of language and discourse which lends itself to multiple ways of authentic or inauthentic modes of personal existence. The authenticity and inauthenticity of being is a critical contribution in Heidegger's

critique which contrasts starkly with the mechanical views of his predecessors. Rather than focussing on the almost crude representational or logical powers of words as in referential theories of reading, we can rely on Heidegger's rejection of the subject-object dualism means that all traces of asymmetry in the relationship between *word* and *object* would have to disappear. The result is that there is no sense in which the word stands *for* the object or *for* the entity it utters. Meaning construction within the reading act can only makes sense in terms of subjects and objects engaging authentically with each other.

We thus go beyond the *referential* status of language, based on Heidegger who argues that language can only be possible when there is a disclosure or laying-out of the objective world, making language as discourse itself a modality of that disclosure of meaning (i.e. language as the house of being) (Heidegger, 1993: 160).

We also deduce that in the "disclosing" act of meaning construction the act of "making explicit" or "laying out" of being, occurs in a "non-referential way" in terms of what Heidegger calls "*interpretation*" which is a much more explicit or comprehensive notion than *understanding*. He believes that laying out is the process of understanding leading to interpretation, for the greater the measure of explicitness of being that is generated between subject and object (*Dasein*), the more the meaning of the text impacts on the "truth" or "validity" of the interpretation. Laying-out (*Auslegung*), according to Heidegger, is likely to assist the interpretive process not only in terms of understanding (*Verstehen*) but also in terms of feeling (*Befindlichkeit*) and discourse (*Rede*) - indispensable notions which Heidegger uses in his own peculiar way. Here Heidegger proves far more explicit and specific than Nietzsche

who only asserts that the subject makes meaning with his whole being.

Firstly, understanding (*Auslegung*) for Heidegger (1993: 160) becomes an ontological quality or act of uncovering entities. In the reading act we conclude that the latter act presupposes a very clear articulation of the world, making "understanding" an implicit and tacit notion of interpretation. In fact understanding, for Heidegger, to use his own terms, "passes over" into interpretation, and since understanding becomes what he regards as *reflexive*, there is no single cut-off point between itself and interpretation. Understanding thus constantly projects itself towards what Heidegger sees as the possibilities of Dasein (Heidegger, 1993: 145-46). The progress made by Heidegger is that he ushers in the reflexive component, which we believe assists the reading act, which none of his predecessors have done.

Secondly, feeling (*Befindlichkeit*) presents, for Heidegger, a concept which it seems he has not quite sufficiently worked out. He appears to be grappling with the notion of feeling which is not able to operate without understanding. (see Olafson, 1987). While Heideggerian concepts must be conceived in ontological rather than epistemic terms, it does not suggest that Heidegger repudiates knowledge altogether. According to him (Heidegger, 1982) the phenomenological tradition seems to appreciate the epistemic status of feelings more favourably. Heidegger's contribution to the rethinking of representation is that he wishes to abolish the notions of subject and object which exist in opposition. Therefore, since the subject, in his view, no longer has feelings about things or issues, the "subject's" feelings rather transcend over to the "object" in the world (Heidegger, 1982). Rather than having "subjective" feelings

"about" things, Heidegger ontologizes such feelings in that *Befindlichkeit* comes to be a process of an uncovering or disclosing the possibilities (which we believe) subjects are able to actualize in this world. (Heidegger, 1993: 134). We can thus conclude that while the feelings in the reading act is *someone's* feelings, these feelings are to be grasped in language rather than emotions as such. Language is the ontological dimension and therefore feelings take on an ontological quality.

Thirdly, discourse (*Rede*), for Heidegger, constitutes the very inception, medium and fulfilment of interpretation. Discourse or language constitutes *Dasein* (Heidegger, 1993: 148) and, at the same time, expresses a form of understanding of the entities in the text that it uncovers. In *Sein und Zeit*, at least, discourse is regarded as a modality of laying-out in meaning construction and shows at every point that it is both presupposed and embedded in existence. This can thus imply that the subject is effectively barred from gaining quick and direct access to meaning in the text. Heidegger meticulously constructs the various dynamics of meaning construction in terms of language in which the subject gains meaning which becomes revealed.

We can therefore safely infer that the bridging of the gap between subject and object in our concerns about the reading act, derives from Heidegger's engaged process of understanding, feeling and discourse (not necessarily in that order) in terms of which meaning becomes not merely a process of literal correspondence of words and meaning, but rather that it is repeatedly *transcending over* from subject to object, from object to subject - thus eliminating the false divide between them. Language in its rule-guided nature, in the Cartesian sense, where the reader shapes the meaning of a text, has been abolished to a form of discourse which engages a whole process of "struggling"

laying-out between subject and object.

Heidegger's later contribution to the notion of language is directed at a "showing" (*Zeige*), i.e. bringing first what is present into its presence and even when unspoken or silent would nevertheless show the presence and therefore the meaning attributed by the subject-object couplet. Heidegger (1993) therefore achieves the unitary essence of the subject and the object all in a shared world (*Mitsein*). He emphasises that this unity already exists but needs to be brought forth or revealed. We conclude that the presumed non-dichotomous presence of the reading subject and text as object already exists (in language) prior to being so that what occurs in the reading act emerges as an activation or sensitizing on the part of the subject to listen to language which, if it becomes appropriated and becomes disclosed, will *show* itself. We also conclude that the direct exchange between subject and object has been interrupted in order that literal inferences of what truth and knowledge is, can be problematized. The latter is achieved in terms of relying on Heidegger's postulation of the notion of "passing-over".

### 3.3.7 THE PASSING OVER OF THE READING ACT

Heidegger's radical contribution to our understanding of the reading act lay in his reconceptualized understanding of *language*. It is in terms of language which pre-exists, all forms of being that he reconceptualizes the traditional notions of subjectivity and objectivity. Nietzsche has reconceptualized subjectivity, but Heidegger problematizes objectivity without which he believes there cannot be any subjectivity. The "passing over" dynamics between reading subject and textual object becomes a "circular" process of constant revealing or disclosure to produce meaning. The circularity is at least an improvement on

the one-way process between subject and object. (Heidegger, 1993:445).

While it can be argued that this circular position may constitute an impasse, Heidegger sees this as his "ontological shift" in that this mode of understanding forms the most fundamental characteristic of the subject's being in the world. Heidegger's "hermeneutic turn" of transcendental phenomenology thus attempts to marry his critique of metaphysics and his critique of language where speech and being becomes the final congruence of expression and meaning (see especially Derrida, 1976: 160). Ingram (1984: 64) recognizes in Heidegger a hermeneutic holism of subject and object, especially when the understanding of entities becomes our concerns in reading. In the reading act, the "meaning" of the text would be determined by situating it within a not-yet-completed sequence of events in a coherent *totality* by way of an anticipatory completion of the narrative. Nietzsche's working of power quanta is still conceptualized in terms of the subject and object being separate. Heidegger, it seems, achieves "coherence" (not to say that conflict does not have to be resolved) of subject and object. Within this reconceptualized coherent totality, meaning construction illuminates or renders understanding of the subject, bringing the past, the present and the future together (Heidegger, 1993: 53). It would therefore seem, especially in the light of the co-determinative nature of *future*, that projected possibilities which do not facilitate understanding will fail to establish the subject's self-identity. We can infer that Heidegger's merit lay in the temporality aspect of meaning construction. It is in terms of time that the meaning of who the subject is and what the object is, becomes apparent (Heidegger, 1993:53-54). This is a great step forward in the construction of meaning, because none of his predecessors envisaged possibility or potential as a temporal mode to make meaning.

The subject lives humanly according to Heidegger only by constantly projecting himself onwards, realizing new possibilities of being. In terms of passing over, the reciprocal reinterpretation of the world (in the text) and self (*Auslegung*) which transpires as a result of this critical disclosure, it is a process which is only possible in terms of his notion of historicity (Heidegger, 1993:33). We infer thus that instead of a sovereign, authoritative subject who acts as the supreme knower and interpreter, Heidegger elevates our understanding of meaning construction by his emphasis on *projection*, rather than *extraction*. This notion of projection is a co-operative form of being of object and subject over time, (deferred) through language. The pioneering aspect of the ontological act of reading is described by Rorty (1970: 317) as only being possible "within the parameters of a shared discourse". This "shared discourse" however does not appear to depend on anybody's sharing (whether subject or object) but rather "letting understanding happen" in terms of how they have been antecedently taken by their Dasein in the world to happen. The implications of this in furthering our understanding of the reading act is letting language speak and not the reading subject or textual object in the first place. This pioneering notion of Heidegger will have major consequences for the construction of meaning as will be noticed for example with Derrida. The implications of Heidegger's concern was not in the first place to determine the subject's nature and intentions but clearly to problematize the notion of disclosure which pre-exists all meanings, including our concerns of the meaning of the reading subject.

In meaning construction, Heidegger's view of subjectivity and representation ("non-representation") probably ultimately proves contrary to his initial faith in the primordial objectivity of perceived phenomena, for he too sees no way out of

the pervasive context of subjectivity, which constitutes as a result, its own ontological ground. It is clear that Heidegger nevertheless initiates a radically new perspective in that he decentres the Cartesian subject and the dominance of representationalism by emphasizing the "passing over" between subject and object in discourse. As a result he advanced more than all his predecessors in that he challenged Husserl's doctrine of an absolute subject as a metaphysical postulate by placing the subject with the object in a not-yet-completed circle of events in which already-established meaning becomes increasingly explicit.

Despite the fact that the subject and the object passes over and shares with each other, there appears a fair measure of "stability" in Heidegger's reconceptualization of subjectivity and representation. This at least refutes the simplistic one-way representationalism from subject to object. In the act of meaning construction this sharing or "showing" between subject and object seems only possible in terms of Heidegger's pioneering notion of pan-linguistic ontology which, in a seminal way, is expressed in the "transcending attempts" that may become possible between the separate, albeit interactive subject and object. Heidegger's merit in this study resides in his attempts to get out of the cul-de-sac of referentiality in our concerns about reading by addressing not *who* or *what* gives meaning but rather *how* meaning is constructed. His critical attempts to get rid of subjectivity and objectivity, if not completely successful, is achieved by setting *language* up before anything and in terms of which meaning becomes revealed over time. Heidegger at least averted the unproblematic and quick attempts to extract meaning from a text in predictable ways and to be used as a recipe for replication for that which is, strictly-speaking, non-replicable.

### 3.4. MERLEAU-PONTY'S IN-BETWEEN OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

#### 3.4.1 THE CRITICAL RESTART OF THE READING ACT

Merleau-Ponty (1966) presents what he believes to be a more concrete exposition than Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" and he wishes to move beyond what he regards as the explanatory impasses of idealism and empiricism. His version of phenomenology attempts to refocus our attention on an almost immediate and primitive contact with the world, and by doing so, attempts to reject the naïve view of objectivity of a world-in-itself and the belief in some absolute subject who gives meaning. As a result of this Merleau-Ponty in his re-evaluation of the reading act seeks to negotiate what he calls an "ontology of situations" in which he seeks to overcome the perpetual problems of the Cartesian subject-object dualism in a different way than Heidegger. This version of anti-Cartesian and non-intellectualist thinking he challenges in The Visible and the Invisible (1964). Merleau-Ponty essentially argues, that Heidegger has failed to render an adequate description of what precisely is to be understood by the expression "being-in-the-world". He moreover argues that most of the problems which Heidegger had left untouched, could be solved at the level of perception, for it is at this level that meaning really originates (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 9). Merleau-Ponty's notion of perception is completely tied up with his view of the body (*corps propre*).

#### 3.4.2 THE STATUS OF MERLEAU-PONTY'S CORPS PROPRE

Whereas Husserl emphasizes intentionality and Heidegger *Dasein*, Merleau-Ponty's challenge for consciousness is the notion of

*situation*, i.e. being phenomenally situated in the world. He argues that the reader's primitive contact with the world is through the body (*corps propre*) - a body which is conceived beyond an empirically-discernible object. It rather constitutes a phenomenal body which situates the subject in the world. Merleau-Ponty (1964: 89) reflects on the consciousness of the body which for him signifies a "certain landscape". This landscape, however, does not represent a physical locality but rather a mode by means of which the phenomenal body perceives and, at the same time, is part of the world, for "I" have a "... rigorous awareness of the bearing of my gestures or the spatiality of my body which allows me to maintain relationships with the world ..." (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 89). The body's "mediative" function, especially in terms of the extremes of idealism and materialism operates simultaneously as object and subject, i.e. as a physical being and as a mode of consciousness. Merleau-Ponty, like Nietzsche, therefore argues that we read with our whole being.

For Merleau-Ponty, therefore, the subjective and objective aspects of the reading situation cannot be isolated, since there cannot be purely subjective phenomena because they all seem to be embodied or *incarnate* in the body-subject. In this regard Merleau-Ponty (1964: 319) also seems to equate *incarnate* with *concretize*. The reading subject and the world are both concretized in the present situation so that the subject is "... identical with my presence in the world and to others, as I am now realizing it" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 340). My body, according to Merleau-Ponty, is thus nothing but that very *situation* insofar as it is realized and actualized in this world - an emphasis which Merleau-Ponty believes is very different from that of his predecessors.

Kockelmans (1970:274) underscores Merleau-Ponty's view that the subject is not pure consciousness which enables everything to unfold, but rather represents an experience of "struggle" in which Merleau-Ponty suspends the notions of consciousness or projections (in themselves or as objects). There are only "fields of intersection" via the body and wherein subjectivities are integrated (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:227). These "fields of intersections" become the embryonic state of reading as discourse or as language is for Heidegger. Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty moreover sought to avoid the use of the concepts of subject, body, consciousness and cogito. However for the construction of meaning he seems to have to employ them to emphasize the "field character" of his notion of "subjectivities" which postulates nothing else than the *possibilities of situations*. This corresponds with Heidegger's "existential possibilities" in which *Dasein* discloses itself. These seem to be overlapping similarities between the two philosophers, but which ultimately prove differently.

In the reading act the incarnated body-subject becomes the "field for being" in and with the world, which means that all existence or being constitutes a pre-reflective experience, brought about by the perceptual body-world relationship (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 239). As Heidegger posits the notion of *Dasein* as being tied to temporality, Merleau-Ponty similarly emphasizes the temporality of the body-subject which engages in a continual process of readjustment with others. In the reading act, instead of producing a definitive meaning, Merleau-Ponty's notion of consciousness posits not an "I think" but an "I am able" (Kwant, 1993). This view of "I am able", we will notice, holds the possibilities of producing multiple perspectives of multiple subjectivities, a notion which forms the foundation of Merleau-Ponty's variety of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 83).

Different to Nietzsche, with Merleau-Ponty, for the first time we encounter the notion of "multi-subjectivity" - a view which defies the solitary, sovereign subject initiated by Descartes, whose thinking seems to go beyond himself "as a person". Merleau-Ponty, in contemplating the *human* subject, also goes beyond Heidegger's subject who clearly operates vis-a-vis a reciprocal object in a mode of "passing over". Merleau-Ponty's "thoroughly-human" reading subject, in terms of its "concreteness of body", suddenly seems to have within it also the capacity to be both subject and object - as we will notice. This is a different unity of subject and object in the case of Heidegger. This "multiplicity" stance of subjectivity holds numerous and exciting possibilities for our understanding the reading act - a stance which changes the notion of literal and often representational approach to reading. This new shift has very much to do with how Merleau-Ponty (1964: 227) conceives of reader as a body-subject, acting as a "field of intersection".

#### 3.4.3 THE BODY-SUBJECT AS PERCEIVING PERCEPTIBLE IN READING.

For Merleau-Ponty consciousness is not necessarily present as an absolute transparent reality because at the level of perception the knowing subject expresses himself as a reality that exists between a true in-itself and a pure for-itself (Kockelmans & Kisiel, 1970). Merleau-Ponty seems to conceive of consciousness as an all encompassing or total project which includes time as well as the world which is to appear to people:

"It is necessary that consciousness be a global project ... of time and the world which, in order to appear to itself, in order to become explicitly what it is implicitly, that is to say consciousness needs to develop itself into multiplicity" (Merleau-Ponty,

1966: 485).

In terms of our rethinking of subject and object and, for the purpose of meaning construction, like Heidegger's subject, Merleau-Ponty (1964: 214) believes the body-subject as "field" can only express its full being in terms of the presence of the other. For Merleau-Ponty textual objects are only conceived as full correlates of subjectivity, since the textual object *unifies* the reading subject's perceptual capacities. Merleau-Ponty (1966:320) argues that "...the thing is correlative to my body and in more general terms, to my existence, of which my body is merely the stabilized structure." Since each experience of an object structure (eg. the text in front of the reader) is an articulation of subjectivity as a whole, it has a central place in the structures that constitute the reading subject. The body-subject, as reader, is what Merleau-Ponty (1964: 30) calls a "perceptible", who discovers subjectivity in the "intertwining" of the different senses. Merleau-Ponty argues that the idea of accidental relationships and experiences in the reading act are nonsensical, since the experience of reading in reality is the result of the reading subject's full co-existence with that text at its "maximum articulation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 367).

Within this "totality" of "maximum articulation" and inter-change of experiences, the objective reality ("flesh of the world" as Merleau-Ponty calls it), unites with the body-subject as perceivable perceptible. I as reading subject perceive a reality which perceives itself, for what I am interiorly is also out there in the world, and what is in the world is also in me:

"... the world is wholly inside me and I am wholly outside" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 407-408.

In shifting the boundaries of our understanding we encounter here

with Merleau-Ponty a completely new view with regard to the reading act in terms of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Merleau-Ponty appears to close the gap between subject and object differently to Heidegger in that the object and subject become completely intertwined. The "inextricable" closing of the divide between the subject and the "object" in the reading act, surpasses the form of closing of the divide which is suggested by Heidegger. Heidegger, as we noticed, speaks of a "passing over" between subject and object, and the other way round, whereas Merleau-Ponty merges them completely, which suggests that every reading subject already has the text within himself, as much as I, the reading subject, which "exists" within the textual object. However, this way of looking at Merleau-Ponty's notions of subjectivity and objectivity, in a way, suggests a form of meaning construction which is far more integrated than a form which still attaches itself predominantly either to a subject, or predominantly to an object.

Ultimately we all (object and subject) appear to communicate more intimately since we all constitute "perceiving perceptibles" - the same "flesh of the world" makes us see and perceive (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 347). Since consciousness, according to Merleau-Ponty, makes the world appear, there can be no in-itself outside of a perceiving consciousness. We can thus conclude that in the reading act, when I encounter the other within my field, I see him as one like myself because he is another potential focus of the same dimension, i.e. I see another potential perspective of my own which is in fact actualized by another - this is the radical, new perspective proposed by Merleau-Ponty.

For Merleau-Ponty (1973: 407) the reading subject "acts" essentially as a field for what he calls "mutual compenetration" with the real world, for no matter how rigorously we penetrate

into the reading subject, we always find the world, the real world in it (We choose the world and the world chooses us"). This view is different to Heidegger's notion of "disclosure" of meaning in the "passing over" through language. Merleau-Ponty's view naturally gives rise to what Waldenfels (1981: 28) calls "perceptual circular determinations" in as much as Rorty (1970: 317) refers to Heidegger's view as a "shared discourse".

Waldenfels's (1981) conclusion may not be completely correct in the sense that Merleau-Ponty argues that we do not perceive others as object bodies, nor their actions as physical processes. What we do experience in the reading act is that others are *available to us* in the same way as we are *aware of ourselves*, as body-subjects. This means we as readers perceive the other as a source of situations and his gestures visibly present us with "intentions" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 352) and structures whose subject-side and object-side are not necessarily readily present or expressed:

"I point to a world around me which *already speaks*, just as I point my finger toward an object *already* in the visual field of others"

(Merleau-Ponty, 1973: 6-7).

We thus infer that the closing of the gap is not a solitary subject passing over to a solitary object in the act of meaning construction, but that both have a dimension of the other within themselves - spawning the notion of a multiplicity of relationships.

#### 3.4.4 MULTIPLICITY OF RELATIONSHIPS IN THE READING ACT.

It is clear that the progress that Merleau-Ponty (1964) has made is that both the subject-side and the object-side of the encounter of subject-object relationship in the reading act have

implications for understanding the text in a much more expansive sense. The way the notion of Merleau-Ponty's subject is reconceptualized, suggests that texts (as objects) have a visible (readable) and invisible (unreadable) side. This new perspective on the idea of the "visible" and the "invisible" is clearly a major shift in our understanding of the reading act and of the construction of knowledge. The reader is able to read "more" and "differently" than sticking to a mere literal words and therefore a single reading of a text - a view which is made possible by the notion of reversibility (as we will shortly see), for to see is at one and the same time to feel oneself *seen* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:136)

Since the visible in the reading act cannot be grasped without the invisible, in as much as the invisible cannot be grasped without the visible, the body-subject seems to have no existence without the recognition and affirmation of other body-subjects or objects. As readers we therefore encounter a multiplicity of relationships for which Merleau-Ponty (1964) uses the illustration of the "chiasm" metaphor (a figure of crossed lines) which illustrates not mere complicity of parties but ontological dependency, since the elements of the *chiasm* have their identity only within the unity of the reading act. Contrary to Spinoza's attempts to deduce from the unity of a being an infinite number of modes and essential attributes, Merleau-Ponty in a radical way initiates with a reading being that is outside itself and expands into multiplicity in its pursuit of unity. The idea of chiasm which Merleau-Ponty proposes is marked by a constant process of renewal between the subject and object in the act of meaning construction:

"... self-consciousness ... is founded upon a series of exchanges between subjectivity and situation in which the *polarities* of

means and ends, and question and answer, are continuously established and renewed" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: xxxii).

Being, therefore, becomes conscious by unfolding itself into a multiplicity expression of presents (situations) which is essentially the coming to be of consciousness or "making visible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 487). The act of "making visible" in the chiasm of the reading act moreover characterizes many subjects who share the same "landscape" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 89) in which the one does not exclude the other but rather multiply because it is in the *opening up* reading procedure by which, as body, I am exposed to the world in the text - a much more expansive view than that of Heidegger.

The process of *opening up* in the reading act phenomenon is important to Merleau-Ponty's notion of subjectivity. Since the subject, according to Merleau-Ponty, can only partially perceive himself, the body-subject is not as visible to himself as are the other entities in the field. Therefore, in the reading act, by experiencing the other in a reading situation, I experience another *perspective*; thus in a disruptive way I perceive myself from the object-side. As reader I become more visible to myself in the reading act - an act which is perpetually delayed (Taylor, 1987: 68). This delayed action for meaning (including meaning of self) hopes to prevent any quick access to truth and knowledge.

The challenge of the notion of *subject* as embodied in the body-subject field is thus pivotal to being. Merleau-Ponty advances further than Heidegger for, epistemologically there can be several subjects (because of several *clearings* in several *situations*), for ontologically, Being *clears* or *opens* itself perspectively. Merleau-Ponty argues that within this clearing

field readers constitute a field of Being or a field of experience and "I am all that I see, ... an intersubjective field" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 227). This new emphasis on the intersubjective replaces the opposition stance of subject-object which holds sway in the literal varieties of reading which marks a dominant reader giving meaning to the text in terms of the "sense" he makes of the words and sentences.

We can thus deduce that the challenge of intersubjectivity, according to Merleau-Ponty, is inextricably coupled to the process of *making-visible*. The multiplicity of making-visible or clearings enlarges the reading subject's grasp of himself, making his status as "structurer" or "revealer" clearer to himself. This multiplicity dynamic in the reading act clearly does not propose a smooth *re-production* of different perspectives but rather what Merleau-Ponty calls, a continual restructuring and readjustment of the body-subject vis-a-vis the situation in terms of a continual struggle to address ever new "means and ends and questions and answers" (Merleau-Ponty, 1973: xxxiii). Restructuring in this sense, impacts on Merleau-Ponty's notion of reversibility.

#### 3.4.5 REVERSIBILITY OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to the notion of meaning construction seeks to address the old problem of representational theories, where the sovereign subject interprets the object (text), not in the Nietzschean manner of *perspective-building* but rather as the constant *restructuring* of the multi-subject over against the object - the latter contains already part of the subject. Merleau-Ponty's view also proves much more illuminating than that of Heidegger, precisely because of the more radical rethinking he invests into the notions of subject and object.

For Merleau-Ponty (1964:89-90) every subject already has an object side as every object already has a subject side - making the closing of the gap between subject and object almost "unnecessary". Subjectivity and objectivity intersect - never reducible to the differences it simultaneously joins and separates. The body is forever *entre-deux*.

Two or more reading subjects may, for example, hold radically conflicting opinions or derive their entire approach from different cultural worlds, but Merleau-Ponty believes that as reading subjects, we perceive the same thing because we share the same "thrown" and "primordial structures" that open us to these phenomena in the first place, for "... the world is what we perceive...The world is not what I think, but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: xvi-xvii).

Contrary to the referential views of language, the textual schemata, in the reader-subject, are not ready-made but must be constructed in the present. In the reading act, it is through the text that the "spatial position" of the other is given to me as reader as a possible position of my own, and conversely, my own past and future are given to me as reader as the other potential selves or the present fields of the other - these two temporalities are not mutually exclusive. For Heidegger there has to be a "passing over" from subject and object, and vice versa. Merleau-Ponty changes this position by "doubling-up" the process so that each position (subject or object) has both positions. Reading, for Merleau-Ponty, suggests that the opposition of the presence of subject-object and object-subject merge in their encounter or structure, leading to a form of intersubjectivity that consists in the intertwining of the two. Merleau-Ponty's notions of spatiality and temporality are essentially inseparable conditions for communication. As

indicated earlier, the spatio-temporal "clearings", he refers to, are not all that straightforward procedures in the reading act but must rather unravel in a struggle for a multiplicity of clearings in a continually renewed intersubjective field (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 515).

The notion of "reversibility of meanings" is Merleau-Ponty's radical contribution to the reading act which, according to him, is to be created in the total engagement of reader and text, in terms of their respective temporality and spatiality (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 485). As body-subjects, readers approach the text that already speaks in as much as the textual structures which engage our cognitive structures, which is the pre-reflective state of our existence. The "maximum articulation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 367) of our inter-change results in meaning which emerges as the reverse side of what the text depicts (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 515). Heidegger also conceives of the text that already "speaks", but meaning is only "disclosed" on the one side of subject-object encounter, whereas Merleau-Ponty develops a double side, i.e. the reverse side.

In the textual engagement Merleau-Ponty (1964:13) believes that signs assist the reading subject to construct meaning in terms of an already existing larger reality of meaning. This is a far cry from the notion of a divine, sovereign reader subject who takes it upon himself to make meaning of a text. For Heidegger the world, the object remains concealed in all revelation, while the Merleau-Pontian view is that the world, the object portrays a more diverse phenomenon, at once both visible and invisible. The reader is thus not a divine decipherer, for "... he is one of the visibles, capable, by a single reversal, of seeing them - he who is one of them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 134). Although Merleau-Ponty insists on the reversibility of the object-side and

subject-side of perception, in terms of his *corps propre*, the reading subject seems nevertheless to be significantly paramount, for it constitutes the very "... fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is at least in relation to the *perceived* world, the instrument of *my* comprehension" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 235) (own emphasis).

Merleau-Ponty's new perspective of the ontology of reversibility essentially characterizes an indirect or intra-ontology (between subject-object and object-subject) which undercuts the opposition of subject-object. This appears to be a sweeping resuscitation of nature, both human and nonhuman, subject and object, i.e. "my flesh" and "the flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966). He posits an ontology which hinges (*charnière, jointure*) in what he regards as the in-between and consequently destroys the opposition between consciousness and being, subject and object, ego and alter ego (see Waldenfels, 1981:29). The notion of *charnière* proves significant in the reading act when the subject tries to ideate reality via the text. What follows is a de-intellectualized readjustment of focus outside (reverse-side) of the text but, at the same time, this is sufficiently shaped by schemata to prevent the reader from total freedom of choice ("arbitrary interpretation"). The process of meaning construction is therefore initiated with the schemata of the text which encapsulates certain aspects of a *totality* that the reader must assemble: it is in the act of assembling (perception) that the subject will occupy the position set out for him (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 169) - a view Merleau-Ponty believes is more adequate than Heidegger's being-in-the-world. The simplistic view of the reader assuming an outside position to the text and imputing meaning into the text, has clearly been decentered by Merleau-Ponty. The reader rather becomes part of the meaning construction events than being the master of them.

The literary *exchange* between subjectivity and an objective text in meaning construction is best likened to two mirrors which Merleau-Ponty holds opposite each other, producing two infinite series of images which do not belong exclusively to the one mirror or to the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 139). Apart from this picture analogy of language, language essentially does not express meaning, for according to Merleau-Ponty, meaning ultimately emerges from the reverse side of the phenomenal world so that this form of "negativity", to use Iser's (1978:228) phrase, produces a twofold structure of (i) the cause of the deformation and (ii) the potential which is the basis for communication - a process which in terms of Merleau-Ponty's notion of temporality is continually renewed and recreated. In the reading act this historical "creation" of meaning and its ensuing dependent perceptions are, according to Merleau-Ponty, opaque because the act of perception is not as transparent as intellectual conceptions. This marks Merleau-Ponty's anti-intellectual stance. Meaning construction therefore becomes a dialectical activity of making explicit what is latently present in the incarnated cogito (Gras, 1973: 6). This view contrasts with Heidegger's "passing over" in the process of "showing" between the subject and the object. For Merleau-Ponty (1964:216) meaning already exists but is brought out on the reverse side of each of the subject and object: "...the visible is pregnant with the invisible."

In the reading act the reversibility of the act of constructing meaning allows each reading subject (in terms of the notion of intersubjectivity) to achieve a degree of recognition and self-identity. This happens in terms of a dialectical relationship with the other, for "There is this constitution and correlation of the other and myself as two human beings among all human beings" (Mallin, 1979:266). In addressing the schism which

exists between subject and object, Merleau-Ponty, in a far more profound way than Heidegger, also critiques the significance and depth of being human. The reading act, whilst always geared towards the purpose of creating meaning in terms of the textual object, also reflects for Merleau-Ponty the act of remaining in touch with the world of things and people, and moreover developing a profounder understanding of what and who we as readers are. Who and what we are as reading and communicating subjects is continually being questioned and revised as we influence our worlds and are being influenced by the world:

"... that the things have us, and that is not we who have the things...That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:194)

#### 3.4.6 THE READING ACT AS THE FIELD OF INTERSECTIONS.

Despite his strong plea for equivalences within and between the object and subject, Merleau-Ponty appears as though he is not able to escape the prominence sensing, perceiving of the subject since in the ontological interaction with the objective reality the benefits of this inevitably seems to accrue to the subject. The "I am" is dominant in his claims of reversibility when he asserts, " I am part of a world that is experiencing itself. I am the world experiencing itself through his body" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:136) In the "struggle" for meaning construction in reading there is a battle between what is explicit and implicit, between revelation and concealment. This is a different struggle than that of Nietzsche's where more and more perspectives are generated depending whose power (the subject or object) is more. Merleau-Ponty's (1964:216) struggle reveals the depth of the reading:

"...the visible is pregnant with the

invisible, ...to comprehend fully the visible relations one must go unto the relation of the visible with the invisible".

The reading subject is compelled to act upon what is concealed in the text and this action is objectively controlled by what is revealed. Iser (1978:169) says of Merleau-Ponty's struggle for meaning in the *in-between*: "Blanks and negations both control the process ... the blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives - in other words, they induce the reader to perform basic operations *within* the text". We no longer have the view of an outside position of the reader peering into the text and inputs meaning. In Merleau-Ponty's view, the reader already exists within the text as much as the text already exists in the reader:

"There is a body of the mind, and a mind of the body... that which is sensed and that which senses" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:259).

The notion of "alienation" between subjectivity and objectivity is the departing point in reading and is regarded as Merleau-Ponty's "constructivist" phenomenology, i.e. the basis from whence meaning gets constructed. Although Merleau-Ponty (1964:257) follows the imperative "back to things" he applies this primarily to "back to the subject" and treats "back to the text (object)" as another sensing consciousness, which implies that meaning is neither extratextual nor intratextual. This is the difference in Merleau-Ponty (from Nietzsche and Heidegger), that meaning exists "everywhere" but in the act of perception we activate "fields of intersections" in and between ourselves as readers and texts as object to construct meaning. For Merleau-Ponty (1964:227) meaning is constructed only in a contextual

framework of compenetration ("fields of intersections") of both subject and object. The active "construction" of meaning characterizes a reading subject who acts both as an agent of the reading action and of the reaction in the text. This reaching for the "content" of the text beyond the reader's subjective consciousness is a shift Merleau-Ponty hopes will overcome the tendency of nilly willy interpretation or misinterpretation by constantly battle with textual objectivity in the field of intersection. We may argue that Merleau-Ponty thus ushers us into a more critical position of why we ought to reject the naive notion of "pure" objectivity of a world-in-itself on the one hand and faith in an absolute mind of a fickle reader on the other. Merleau-Ponty (1964:1640 reiterates this view:

"The visible can thus fill me and occupy me because I who see it do not see it from the depths of nothingness, *but from the midst of itself*". (own emphasis)

The progress which marks Merleau-Ponty's rethinking is his acute awareness of a form of objective subjectivity that cannot operate without its subjective objective counterpart. In fact he accords the objective text with the same consciousness to respond towards the reading subject and in this way is ahead of Heidegger by postulating a new notion, i.e. of a multiplicity of subjectivities. This is Merleau-Ponty's attempt to close the false gaps between subject and object, people and things. He grappled with this "compromise" when he claims that, "Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage; God, man, creatures..." Merleau-Ponty (1964:274). This is also a powerful statement of his commitment to humanism. However, this seminal view of the phenomenon of multiple subjectivity is derived from a view of subjectivity which is "located" (and constantly renewed) in the in-between of the

traditional problematic subject-object dichotomy as well as the in-between within the subject-object and the object-subject - making doubly sure that it is not an exclusive and authoritative text imposing on a separated reader or a mastermind reader imposing meaning on the text.

This constant process of compenetration (constructivism) gives rise the multi-ple subjectivity which arises from the reading act. Whereas Heidegger assisted our thinking by decentering the subject from its meaning-giving and referential status, Merleau-Ponty goes further in what he believes to be a profound ontology which hinges between subject and object in a mirror-like compenetration. This is the basis of analysis of perception in the reading act: "The field of all fields or the totality wherein all the sensibles are cut out" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:214). This field of intersections prevents any quick acquiescence into a literal meaning which the reader "thinks" the text conveys or which the reader feels to be the "correct" meaning. Every reading act has to be placed within the field of intersection to counter-balance the text and the reader.

In his attempts to create a new and refreshing approach to reading, Merleau-Ponty thus de-subjectivizes the reading subject and de-objectivizes the textual object in order to counter the problems that ensue from the dualism between the subject and the object which also gives rise to possible arbitrary interpretations. In order to do this he seems to have no option but to execute this process from the perspective of the reading subject. In doing so, Merleau-Ponty, renders his "field of intersection" approach to reading with an intersubjective objectivity where the reader and the other in the text are both regarded as "human" (i.e. subjective). Abram (1988:103) comments quite rightly that Merleau-Ponty, by "...shifting the prime focus

of subjectivity from the human intellect to what he called the "body-subject" or the "lived body"...uncovered the radical extent to which all subjectivity, or awareness presupposes our inherence in a corporeal world". This is Merleau-Ponty's radical difference in regard to Heidegger's notion of subjectivity, that he probes a more expansive notion of subjectivity, on the reverse side of our reading experiences, allowing more perspectives to flow from the reading of a text.

Merleau-Ponty sought to de-intellectualize the notions of subjectivity and representation by resuscitating the inextricable human bond between the subject and object, the human and nonhuman. As opposed to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty shifts by dislodging transcendence as a particular attribute of the human body and returning it to the world of which his body is but a single expression. The ensuing epistemological results is a more coherent and in-depth construction of the interactive visible and invisible that the reader experiences. Merleau-Ponty's reincorporation of the "real " and "human" into the perceptions of which the subject is part, in a way, prepares us for Gadamer's emphasis on the historical dynamics which he deems indispensable for meaning construction.

### 3.5 GADAMER'S UNIVERSAL SUBJECTIVISTIC APPROACH TO MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

#### 3.5.1 THE SHIFT IN HERMENEUTIC READING

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have both pointed out that in the reading act language cannot be used as a mere tool for communication but that it rather embodies being and ontological meaning for the reader. Therefore, their return to the pre-dualistic view of subjectivity and objectivity seeks to challenge the autonomy of textual authority and the manipulative or controlling subjectivity of the reader. This view, as we will notice, is also emphasized by Gadamer (1976) in terms of what he regards as the "universality of the hermeneutic" problematic, which is in turn reiterated, although differently, by Ricoeur (1974) in what he calls the "conflict of interpretations". Their concerns are all directed at understanding the status of the reading subject, vis-a-vis the textual object, as it occurs in and through language. They all seek to avert the problematic position of the reader, using language in a manipulative way, to be the master of the meaning construction event. Kristeva's view that our understanding of meaning construction, as it occurs in terms of language, must necessarily be based on our understanding of subjectivity. This trend of thought is pursued in the tradition of Gadamerian hermeneutics as well.

Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty clearly demonstrated a form of reading which is in the first place always being-in-the-world. In their respective ways they argue that as readers we are human subjects only because we are, in a practical way, bound up with others within a material world. The world moreover does not constitute an object "out there" which can be rationally analyzed by a contemplative reading subject, but we emerge as reading subjects from inside a reality which we can never fully objectify

and which of necessity encompasses both *subject* and *object*. Within this reality which remains potentially inexhaustible in its meaning, the subject-object dualism, as separate-functioning conscious-nesses, has been radically dethroned. The world or the text as object is therefore no longer simplistically dissolved into mental images which construct complete and homogeneous meanings for readers to apply in various situations.

To expand our perspective of the reading act and refocus on another dimension of the role of language, subjectivity and representation, we find it extremely insightful to focus on Gadamer's hermeneutics. The meanings which are derived from a hermeneutic reading, however, is not a message that has been decoded in what is regarded as "interpretation", i.e. "put in" by a writer, which has to be "fished out" by the reader/hearer/critic" (Cornis-Pope, 1992: 4-5), but it rather entails "receiving" an interpretation by letting the past question our present concerns and as a result make all our understandings *productive* (Eagleton, 1986:71. See also Newton, 1990; Ray, 1986). The ultimate aim therefore of "... a hermeneutically successful reading is to do away with reading altogether" (de Man in Jauss, 1982(b):xi). Meaning and interpretation becomes the "framework" of hermeneutics, and it is in this context that we need to expand our discourse of subjectivity and representation. If subjectivity "inhabits" discourse, hermeneutics becomes a framework change the dynamics of interpretations. The critical interplay between textual object and reader subjectivity becomes the process in which modifications and reversals of meanings that have been derived from *inside* a text becomes affected by general meanings outside this context. In this way hermeneutics would assist our thinking in rejecting the notion of a divine reader who unilaterally extracts meaning from the text - more particularly that a specific text holds a specific meaning which

has been pre-ordained in its intentions.

This shift in hermeneutic thinking proposes a different understanding of the Cartesian representational thinking. In a sense the "hermeneutic circle", as we will notice, becomes another critical hypothesis for the reading act and parts of that circle are the dynamics which either falsify or verify the hypothesis (Schmidt *in* Bredella, 1989: 27). This hermeneutic structure within which the reading subject's beliefs are rethought and revised, their assumptions shed, inferences developed, etc. becomes the frame of reference in which an expanded notion of subjectivity is actualized. Historically, the intentions of hermeneutics has also not remained static. Gadamer, for example, believes that his critical version of hermeneutics should be placed in a wider or almost different context than mere literary interpretation, since textual meaning on its own does not possess meaning in the ordinary sense, precisely because textual meaning can exist independently of the subject's consciousness (see Newton, 1990; Chen, 1987). But how exactly does Gadamer's critical hermeneutics further our insights with regard to new boundaries of the reading act?

### 3.5.2 GADAMER'S UNIVERSAL PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS

Gadamer's universal philosophical hermeneutics pursues the idea of *understanding* primarily in historical terms and ultimately, like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, in ontological terms. In doing so Gadamer seeks to go back to Heidegger's insistence on historicity and the situatedness or "thrownness" in the world (Heidegger, 1982), which cannot be overcome by any scientific attempts or be further reduced to a transcendental level. In terms of being-in-the-world, Heidegger places historicity at the very foundation of the objective sciences - a view which

Gadamer's subjectivism in the reading act, as we will see, cannot easily embrace. Gadamer depends on Husserl who rejects empiricism, and positivism, but argues that Husserl's critique of objectivism does not go far enough in order to understand the intricacies of meaning construction. (Frank in Hoffman, 1989: 27). For the act of meaning construction, Gadamer emphasizes the notion of being-in-the-world as being closely connected to the reader's human existence and all subject-object relations (Kurzweil, 1980: 87; Hekman, 1983: 208). Gadamer, emphasizes the Husserlian view of different life-worlds as themselves being varieties of what he sees as a more "basic universal structure".

The illuminating background to Gadamer's thinking to reading is the fact that phenomenologists penetrate below the different world-views and different opinions - to a transcendental subjectivity where an original and non-historical meaning resides (Kochelmans, 1967). Gadamer rejects this, since for him this strategy involves nothing more than an alienating process. In terms of being-in-the-world, the Gadamerian act of meaning construction seeks to go beyond reconstruction of the author's intention. The inevitable ever-changing context of the world-text interaction is essential for our understanding of people. The hermeneutic question is therefore inseparable from applying and adapting the "meaning of the text" to the concrete situation of the reader (see Knapp & Michaels, 1987: 52). To shift the boundaries and limitations of the representational theory of literal textual transmission, we need to look at Gadamer's notion of truth since this will clarify his notion of subjectivity and representation in the reading act.

3.5.3 THE NOTION OF TRUTH IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

In Gadamer's critique of reader-text interaction he rejects the foundations of positivism, not necessarily to restore the subjective/ objective dichotomy, but rather to collapse it by grounding the reading act in a keen awareness of historical conditions - a view which is influenced by his concepts of truth. This is a different sense of truth than that of Nietzsche's, where truth is spearheaded by power quanta between subject and object.

Contrary to the reader's desire to attribute "truth" to the text, Gadamer rather wants to focus on sentences, for whether something is true or not does not alter the reading subject's belief that the linguistic description presented in terms of the reading event is accurate as it stands. (see Ingram, 1984). Therefore, in attributing "true" or "false" to any sentence, neither contributes nor subtracts from the description that the sentence offered of the objective reality. Gadamer, however, is clearly not concerned with the semantic status of "truth". The latter emphasizes a split between consciousness and the assertion that embodies the result of its act (Howard, 1982: 123). Truth rather inheres in a "... givenness that is not itself the object of intentional acts" (Gadamer, 1970: 216). This immediately puts the divine reader out of action in believing that he can use language as a tool to extract the meaning from the text. Meaning construction, according to Gadamer, can seldom be proved objectively true or false, for ontologically its truth resides rather in its power to deepen the reading subject's self-understanding which, in turn, opens up a new realm or heightened sense of self-perception (see Hoy, 1982: 49).

While the reading subject generally-speaking seems always bent on trying to "find" the truth in a text, Gadamer believes that truth rather finds us. The notion of "objective" understanding is, according to Gadamer, an illegitimate remnant from Schleiermacherian hermeneutics. Gadamer's "new" hermeneutics diverts from the *truth content* of a text to rather explore the intentions behind it (Gadamer, 1960:87). He therefore diverts from the question of validity to the question of method. This approach averts the temptation of validating quick "interpretations" of a text and rather to find ways to "problematize" our sense-making attempts in reading. In what Gadamer regards as "textual interpretation", the *process* of disclosing or revealing of meaning, is fundamental to the deciphering or hermeneutic process in the reading act - a notion which rests on Gadamer's understanding of what he calls "linguisticity".

#### 3.5.4 THE LINGUISTICALITY OF UNDERSTANDING

In the reading act the subject operates squarely within the framework of language, a view Gadamer shares with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Since language embodies "Being that can be understood" (Chamberlain, 1990:8-9), the ontological significance of linguisticity (Sprachlichkeit) for Gadamerian hermeneutics cannot be overestimated. As all understanding in the reading act for Gadamer is linguistic, he analyzes language in order to clarify "interpretation" or meaning construction. Since all interpretation for him is also linguistic and all understanding interpretation, it would mean that "... all interpretation takes place through the medium of language" (Gadamer, 1976: 350). This appears to be a different notion of Heidegger's view that language is the "house of being" in which meaning is constructed, or in Merleau-Ponty's case where meaning already pre-exists

subject and object interaction.

Gadamer follows the later insights of Heidegger into the linguisticity of understanding and ontology. Gadamer believes that "language constitutes the hermeneutical event proper not as language, whether as grammar or as lexicon, but in the coming into language of that which has been said in the tradition: an event that is at once assimilation and interpretation" (Gadamer *in* Schrift, 1990: 4). Contrary to the earlier representational forms of hermeneutics (for example, those of Schleiermacher and Dilthey) where language is regarded as a tool to "convey" meaning to the reading subject, Gadamer's hermeneutics ushers us into the ontological significance of language - a view which has already been initiated by Heidegger. In his view of the reading act Gadamer, places great emphasis on the "historical placing" or tradition of linguisticity. The very act of "coming into language" in the tradition constitutes what Gadamer calls the "structural moment" of interpretation of a text:

"Linguistic interpretation is the form of all interpretation, even when what is interpreted is not linguistic in nature ... We must not let ourselves be confused by these forms of interpretation which are not linguistic but in fact presuppose language" (Gadamer, 1976: 360).

The implication of the above view is that the reading subject's interpretations are not necessarily his individual interpretations alone but have decided historical roots. This means that they are themselves already the result of interpretations within a tradition. The textual object is handed down to the reading subject in what is regarded as a fusion of previous opinions about it, i.e. a *harmony of voices*, as Gadamer (1976: 245) often puts it, to which we as reading subjects add

our own. The construction of meaning for Gadamer is therefore clearly not a matter of relating parts of the text to the whole (and vice versa) in an objective manner, but rather the process within the "hermeneutic circle" which relates to the thing or textual object itself. It is particularly Emilio Betti and E.D. Hirsch, the major spokespersons for "objective hermeneutics", that criticize Gadamer for what they believe to be a form of subjectivism and relativism in his approach of meaning construction. They criticize Gadamer for inserting the subject into the hermeneutic circle of tradition, constructing a form of hermeneutics which is unable to distinguish between correct and incorrect interpretations - and thus yielding to form of relativism (Bleicher, 1980: 27-47). This is not quite tenable, as we will notice.

Looking back, Gadamer's concept of linguisticity differs from Schleiermacher's distinction between psychological and grammatical interpretation, precisely because the former operates on a different notion of truth. Schleiermacher argues on the basis of a conventional semantic version or representational view of truth and therefore regards psychological interpretation as being higher than grammatical interpretation. According to Schleiermacher, the art of hermeneutics consists in the sovereign reading subject, as sole interpreter, putting himself both objectively and subjectively in the position of the author (Mueller-Vollmer, 1985: 83). For Schleiermacher, therefore, the meaning of each objective text must be determined by the objective text itself, as the product of the author. Schleiermacher focuses on the *individuality* (Gadamer, the *universal*) of an objective text. Schleiermacherian grammatical interpretation complements meaning construction by fixing the

exact meaning of the author's words and eliciting a comprehension of the language used by the author, while psychological interpretation complements grammatical interpretation by exploring the life-context in which the text was produced. Even Schleiermacher's inclusion of psychological divination of meaning construction does not satisfy Gadamer (1976: xiii). Gadamer wants to move beyond the representationalism postulated by Schleiermacher. The latter obviously still operates with language as that "ill-designed instrument" (Chomsky, 1972:10) which wishes to verify an objective reality.

Contrary to the representational mode of viewing the reading act, where language is used as a linguistic tool, Gadamer conceives of a subject who "creates" meaning in terms of Sprachlichkeit i.e. in terms of a process of "mediation" or the translation of past meaning through the present situation. Gadamer thus argues that it is people who use language and people who give or ascribe meaning in terms of a historical consciousness. Instead of having direct access to the meaning of a text, the reading act is mediated via a historical consciousness in terms of language.

Within the ambit of linguisticity, understanding emerges as an event in which neither the reading subject nor the textual object can be thought of as being truly autonomous constituents. It is language which seems to assist the process of mediation of past and present, but language as such, should not be conceived of as purely an objectified notion, i.e. language is not to be used in a tool-kit manner to manipulate, evaluate or infer meaning in the Cartesian sense of logical referentiality. It is language itself that which speaks to us (Gadamer, 1976:274). Language in this sense, becomes a form of universal subjectivity which engages in a critical rapport with the reading subject. Contrary to Schleiermacher's methodological concerns, Gadamer emphasizes that

the textual object is not approached as the author's intention but rather in a way that the object *addresses* itself to the subject and to which the reader responds with his own words. Gadamer "regresses" from Merleau-Ponty's subject-object and object-subject engagement of the reading act, and goes back to Heidegger's circular "passing over" between subject and object, but emphasizes the *historical* aspect in his conception of linguisticity. This form of "circularity" or dialogue constitutes what Gadamer refers to as "the conversation between past, present and future, and seeks patiently to remove obstacles to this endless mutual communication" (Eagleton; 1986: 73). This view corresponds with Heidegger's temporal notion of historicity. Whereas Heidegger's view seems to be now and the future, Gadamer's reading experience is always backward-looking, in the first place.

The subjectivistic reading hermeneutics of Gadamer implies that there cannot be any external objective language, for "... the linguistic nature of the human experience of the world does not include making the world into an object" (Gadamer, 1976: 426). This notion of language which wishes break with the limited assumption of being a stable representation of an intention (either the author's or the reader's), contrasts strongly with that of Dilthey. Dilthey, for example, operates in a very definite external and objective form of language in a logical tool-kit and representational way. This form of language facilitates a sense of empathy and transportation which hopes to complement the subject's experience of the meaning intended by the author.

The historical and social setting which tends to condition the author's language and mood can, according to Dilthey, be captured with greater clarity especially if the reader "possesses

extraordinary talent" (Dilthey in Mueller-Vollmer, 1985: 161). Language for Dilthey is therefore dead, serving nothing more than an instrumental purpose to re-enact the author's intentions in terms of neatly-packaged representational principles.

Gadamer takes note of Dilthey's question of the possibility of historical knowledge which raises the question of how a the reading subject will come to know *objectively* that which has been subjectively created in the reading act. Dilthey falls into the psychologistic trap of seeking to reconstruct the historical course of events in a process of *rediscovery*. He seems however to avoid the problems of psychologism associated with Schleiermacher's hermeneutics by directing understanding towards the reconstruction of the historical product (whether event or object), rather than toward the reconstruction of the state of mind of the author. This one-way representation of meaning still encompasses the reader's projection and gazing upon the literary object. This view is resonated in terms of the early Wittgensteinian picture and referential theory of representation - where the reader is always outside the text, operating in the guise of a strange mix of "subjective-objectivity" (see Rickman, 1976:6).

In trying to reconceptualize a revised and more expansive notion of reading, Gadamer seeks to move to the subjective domain where the language of the textual object is re-enacted *within the reading subject* itself. For Gadamer (1960:273) language, like for Heidegger, therefore acts as an *a priori* horizon, enclosing a mode of being as meaningful understanding. Like with Kristeva, Gadamer thus accords language as "language" in terms of the reader's subjectivity and understanding himself as reading subject. Only being that can be understood is regarded as language (Gadamer, 1976: 450). However, the linguisticity of

understanding is also the concretion of what Gadamer refers to as the "effective historical conscience". Language only operates within the subject *through* history, as opposed to Heidegger where history works through language.

### 3.5.5 THE HISTORICALITY OF UNDERSTANDING IN READING

For the construction of meaning the historicity of understanding, according to Gadamer, relies on the "rehabilitation" of the notions of "prejudice" as well as "tradition" - two Gadamerian notions which cannot be separated. Gadamer's historicity of understanding has been fore-shadowed by Heidegger's concept of fore-structure (Vorgriff) of understanding, i.e. that the understanding of a text is made possible by the prejudices of the reading subject's epoch which discloses and constitutes being (see: Connolly and Keutner, 1988: 19). While the normal use of "prejudice" has been normally deemed anathema to the use of one's logical and reasoning faculties, Gadamer wishes to reinstate the idea of a prejudicial approach to understanding the text which, according to him, has nothing to do with blind obedience but rather with self-knowledge (Gadamer, 1976: 264). The "historical womb" thus facilitates the critical "harmony of voices" (Gadamer, 1976: 245) for the meaning-making process.

The status as well as the critical task of the reading subject, according to Gadamerian universal reading hermeneutics, is to evidence the historic moment in the comprehension of the world via the text. In fact the reader is dependent on and tied to prejudice (Vorurteil), for not only is such knowledge handed down in history but it is moreover part of who the reader is now. There is thus no contradiction for Gadamer because ultimately the reader adds his own voice to this historical reverberation of events. Prejudice acts as anticipatory mechanism for the future

(see especially Bernstein, 1983: 140-141). The reading subject, in a quasi-predetermined way has been "programmed" by the conditions of his tradition. Gadamer's contribution to our insights about reading is that the reader's seeing might be a "subjective" reading, but this seeing has been initiated in the objective domain of tradition. It's not its content that is historically true or false, but the *process* how we add our own voices to the text.

Gadamer claims that since all interpretation is, of necessity, prejudiced it can no longer be possible for subjects to appeal to final guarantees of "objective" understanding such as an author's intentions. Prejudice and prejudgment are connected, for the subject has already placed his meaning in a certain way (Vorgriff). There cannot therefore be any neutral stance in terms of which the "real" meaning of the text emerges. Gadamer (1960: 239) links prejudice (Vorurteil) and judgment (Urteil) in order to avoid any objective understanding in the Cartesian sense. All understanding essentially involves *projections of meaning* that arise from the subject's own situation and in fact goes beyond the observable "facts" - a view which is contrary to the referential theories which are compelled by the facts that the reader sees.

Furthermore, Gadamer argues that the reading subject would generally attempt to understand the textual object by being sensitive to the newness or otherness of textual content but, at the same time, tries "to be aware of one's (reader's) own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to, assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (Gadamer, 1976: 253-4). In fact the reader's subjectivity encounters or engages the text's subjectivity in a domain in which each reveal their individual character. This type of

literary intersubjectivity is reminiscent of Heidegger, except that Gadamer places it in a tradition of creating new and fresh insights. It is evident that the reading subject's being is paramount for Gadamer, for the text's subjectivity can only be realised in terms of the reader's, as the latter relies on the language of the text in order to render himself existential and real. We encounter here, like in the case of Merleau-Ponty, a "sharing" of intentions and of being between subject and object, except that Gadamer's "sharing", while dependent on language, depends completely on the historical conditioning effects thereof.

It is clear that Gadamer seeks to withdraw the subject from the blind cul-de-sac of merely matching ideas with their corresponding objective events or facts. His contribution to the understanding of the reading act is to realize that language, in itself, cannot fulfil the job of *producing* meaning. Language in fact rather becomes a mode of being when the reader *understands* the tradition in which he seeks to understand himself. The question of how subjective such prejudged projections might be, needs to be contextualized in terms of the reading subject's objective being-in-the-world (Heidegger's thrownness), which in turn must be located in the structure of involvements *in history*. Zavarzadeh & Morton (1991: 167) regard Gadamer's "prejudices" as the bedrock founding elements of subjectivity - a mark of the subject's organic unity. Achieving this unity (via tradition) becomes the *mediated* process in which the reader "struggles" and ensures that he does not acquiesce into quick solutions and pat - off answers as to what the text is supposed to mean.

### 3.5.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION AND TIME

Gadamer argues that the historicity of understanding is not

"... so much ...an action of one's understanding but as a placing of oneself within a tradition, in which past and present are constantly fused" (Gadamer, 1976:274). Gadamer believes that it is only in this *continuing chain of time* that the reading subject constructs understanding, because it is only in the filtering out of legitimate prejudices, i.e. the dialectical process between the "otherness" and "familiarity" in the text, that understanding emerges for the reader. Gadamer follows Heidegger by locating the subject within his understanding of historicity. But Gadamer moreover sees this construction of meaning, like Merleau-Ponty, as a continual restructuring of different and oppositional perspectives.

What is at work in the reading act is what Gadamer calls "effective history" (Wirkungsgeschichte) by which he means the operative force of the tradition over those subjects that belong to it, so that even in rejecting or reacting to it, they nevertheless remain conditioned by it. In the reading act, understanding as a form of self-perception, emerges in that temporal distance that exists between the subject and the text as well as the subject and the act of his own *placing* within his tradition of ideas and knowledge. Gadamer points out that this effective-historical consciousness is essentially a state of being rather than a state of consciousness, for "long before we understand ourselves in retrospective reflection we understand ourselves in self-evident ways in the family, society and state we live in" (Bleicher, 1980: 108-109). This is actually not a nilly-willy subjective act but rather a decisive dimension of effective history. Gadamer rejects the idea that the text may contain pre-ordained meaning, for I am not looking at an objective body of information in the text, but part of me (like Merleau-Ponty's view) is already in the text through my tradition. According to Gadamer (1976: 53) the status of

subjectivity becomes almost a "distorting mirror" so that self-reflection is nothing more than a flicker in the "closed circuit" of historical life. "Making sense" of the text thus means struggling to establish ever new meanings of myself as reader by reflecting in the "mirror-text". This is not just *before* or in front of me, but more importantly, *in* me.

In the reading act the Wirkungsgeschichte thus encompasses a significant framework for the constructive and dynamic range of *possibilities* of understanding in which the reading subject places himself in his own concrete situation. Even the reader's faculty of reason, according to Gadamer, is itself grounded in this tradition so that it also constrains the wilfulness of a purely "subjective" reading of a text. It is not that the subject adopts the views of his textual object in understanding it, but rather that an *openness* to the *possible* truth of the object is the condition of understanding. This *openness* is achieved in the reading encounter by constantly "sharing" in this "mirror-text" in which I am trying to understand myself. The subject does not place himself, according to Gadamer, in a restrictive horizon but seeks to widen his own perspectives in terms of the openness the textual object extends to him (Gadamer, 1976: 55).

### 3.5.7 THE FUSION OF HORIZONS IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Like in the case of Heidegger's *Möglichkeit*, the possibilities of being open to the text culminates in what Gadamer refers to as a fusion and contamination of horizons (Horizontverschmelzung) - a condition to construct ever new meaning (see Mueller-Vollmer, 1985: 271). He equates the degree of consensus which derives from the hermeneutic understanding with the notion of the fusion of horizons. This implies a form of dialogic consensus and

sharing which symbolizes the integration of the reader's historically-determined concerns with that of the textual object. This hermeneutic Verständigung may also include disagreement: the subject simply agrees to disagree. Although the reader cannot break out of the tradition, he may still hold substantial power to shift within the tradition and emphasize other elements of the tradition. Despite the seemingly directive power that the subject possesses in the reading dialogue, Gadamer regards the fusion of horizons as geared towards producing what he refers to as equality and active reciprocity between subject and object. Gadamer therefore concurs with Merleau-Ponty in realizing that the reading act is one where there is a battle between what is explicit and what is implicit, within the tradition. This process, according to him, is mediated and maintained in language (Sprachlichkeit) and temporality (Wirkungsgeschichte), in an endless process of mutual conversation. Instead of grasping *immediately* what a text contains, the reader is compelled to act upon what is concealed in text and defer meaning by placing it in the tradition for clarification.

This subject requires the object, not so much for its content but for his own placement and movement in the chain of historical time - a process which Gadamer attempts to divert from the pure representational theories of foundational hermeneutics. Contrary to the latter, Gadamer adds his critical voice to that of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty who effectively argue against the view of a sovereign and controlling subject who has direct access to the "meaning" of a textual object. While his predecessors see this "sharing" of subject and object in the reading act as a form of ontological "struggle", Gadamer rather emphasizes a smoother ontological process of fusion within the nurturing ambience of tradition. This view is clearly reminiscent of Heidegger's "passing over" between subject and

object. Every textual object thus according to Gadamer addresses itself differently to every subject so that the hermeneutic situation in the fusion of horizons, readers will not reconstruct a meaning originally intended by an author, but rather seek to let the present *mediate* the meaning in *the chain of time*. The placement and movement in time, seems to allow the subject the freedom to derive and construct an inexhaustible amount of possibilities for different perspectives. Within the horizons of the present, here-and-now, the subject therefore engages the challenge of the object not so much to construct content but reconstruct ever-new understandings (see Cornis-Pope, 1992: 24).

### 3.5.8 READING AS THE CREATIVE RECOVERY OF MEANING

Gadamer would like us to believe that his notion of the subject does not enjoy absolute centre-stage status since it only fulfils the role of a cog, albeit an important cog, in terms of his own meaning-construction in the historical chain of events. As a cog always engages in a series, Gadamer's obedient dialogical subject operates, like all other subjects and objects, within the multiplicity of pre-established prejudices and effective histories to creatively "recover" the meaning that is appropriate for him. The reading subject becomes the "site of knowledge" and informs, according to Zavarzadeh & Morton (1991: 167), contemporary cognitivism. In a sense we experience in Gadamer a new form of interdependent-subjectivity, with fused horizons, seeking to exploit the possibilities of openness in which each subject can come into his "own". Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty presented very stark *theoretical* notions of multisubjectivity, whereas Gadamer's notion of subjectivity seems to posit is a very real subject, connected to traditional consciousness. The text as object is supposedly encountered very idiosyncratically by different subjects only in that tradition.

This different view of the subject contrasts with the mathematical Cartesian subject that operates in a closed referential context of precision. The "non-referential" nature of the Gadamerian subject is possible in that he cannot seem to operate effectively outside of the language of the tradition. In the reading act the Gadamerian subject seems to struggle only with his own traditions to render himself a critical agent of himself and his life-world. While Gadamer's hermeneutics proposes a subject that is not completely in control of his world and of himself, he does so for the sake of wider historical concerns of humanity, debunking the notion of a self-sufficient, individualistic subject immersed in his own concerns. What we encounter here is the "historical" or "traditional" Gadamerian subject that has been conceptualized to pursue ever-new and deferred meanings of the world and of himself in order not to fall prey to the abuse of the object in a "usable" and superficial way.

Gadamer's enlightening insights have been postulated to assist us in this study in rejecting the view of language as being a "scientific tool" which is susceptible to comprehensive description and coherence. Gadamer's concerns lie more with tradition and history, rather than *language per se*. However, the notion of language serves as an important, albeit critical, medium in which he proposes the ontology of a dependent reading subject, placed in the *chain of time*. In order to prevent any "wild reading" the historically-conditioned Gadamerian subject constructs meaning, in a very "disciplined" manner, under the watchful eye of an equally historically-conditioned object. Gadamer renders the invisible aspects in the text visible by *recovering* the invisible meaning through an ontological "historical filter" - not as an easy deciphering process but rather as a critical process of seeking to creatively harmonize

the voices of the textual object and that of the reading subject. If Gadamer place great emphasis and value on *tradition* to ensure that no quick fixes are involved in meaning construction, Ricoeur initiates a form of "*hermeneutics of distanciation*", to ensure the same purposes in meaning construction - in his own individualistic style of course.

### 3.6. RICOEUR'S METHODIC APPROACH TO MEANING CONSTRUCTION

#### 3.6.1 RICOEUR'S POINT OF DEPARTURE

In contrast to Gadamer's "historical subject", Ricoeur focuses on the status of the subject as a "thinking reflective subject" and in an anti-Cartesian manner attempts to argue that the reading subject does not grasp itself in an immediate intuitive grasp, since the truth of the "I think therefore I am" abstraction is unassailable. This view has critical implications for the status of the reading subject since the notions of being and thinking are both mediated only by actions. For these acts the subject must, according to him, first lose himself in order to find himself (Ricoeur, 1973: 88). This would imply that the reading subject cannot just discover or construct the meaning of the text as something which exists there. It rather unfolds in concrete conditions in which the pursuit of self-understanding becomes patent: "... the relation to the world of the text takes place in the relation to the subjectivity of the author, and at the same time the problem of the subjectivity of the reader is displaced" (Ricoeur, 1990: 328).

Whereas traditional reflexive approach of Descartes views the subject as foundational, Ricoeur seeks to desubjectivize the subject. The subject, in its own right cannot act as the controller and designer of knowledge. It is only in and through language that the subject becomes aware of himself. For Ricoeur there can be no self-understanding which is not mediated by signs and symbols and texts via what he calls the *distanciation* of language (Ricoeur, 1991: 15). Ricoeurian subjectivity thus proves to be a transparent notion, which in an indirect manner,

i.e. via language, ultimately comes to self-understanding. As with Gadamer, language constitutes also for Ricoeur a crucial element for understanding his views on subjectivity and textual interpretation.

### 3.6.2 RICOEUR'S VIEW OF LANGUAGE IN THE READING ACT

It appears that Ricoeurian thinking has been greatly shaped by Husserlian phenomenology where the intentionality of the reader's consciousness coincides with that of the meaning of human existence. Ricoeur, considers the activity of reasoning as embodying a form of hermeneutics, i.e. a reading of the "hidden meaning" in the text that unfolds into a more expansive form of meaning. Ricoeur argues that human existence "... becomes a self-human ... only by appropriating his meaning which first resides "outside" in words ... in which life of the spirit is objectified" (in Reagan & Stewards, 1978: 106). Ricoeur seems keenly aware of the fact that words and sentences cannot simplistically just be used as a scientific tool to produce meanings that have been set up in advance. Ricoeur (1976: 13) challenges the structuralist reductionist approach to language and reminds us: "Language do not speak, people do". He concedes that we need what is regarded as the "language system" in order to speak as well as the literary conventions in order to write but they are only virtual. It is rather people who read and write because they have specific intentions to express. Without rejecting what Kristeva (Oliver, 1993: 5-8) calls the abstract dimension of language (i.e. the rules and structures), Ricoeur (1976) appreciates the significance of the material dimension of language, for it is only in terms of the latter that we will be able to adequately address the subject-object dilemma in the reading act.

For the purposes of meaning construction Ricoeur refers to the "appropriative character" of language which plays an important role in Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Like Heidegger, he regards the ontological dimension of language as being significant for the subject's self-understanding. Ricoeur, at the same time, as noted, appreciates the objective side of language which he believes could assist the process of deciphering the symbols and signs, i.e. that language goes from manifest textual content and meaning to latent or hidden meaning (Ricoeur, 1976: 20-21). The discipline of hermeneutics, in Ricoeur's view, is thus concerned specifically with symbolic texts which have the potential for multiple meanings and this would ultimately mean that there can be no universal canons in the representational fashion for understanding and interpreting texts (see Palmer, 1969: 44). The role of language in what Ricoeur calls "interpretation", is very specific in that "... there [can be] no self-understanding that is not mediated by signs, symbols and texts, in the last resort understanding coincides with the interpretation given to these mediating terms" (Ricoeur, 1981: 15). Language per se, cannot therefore be regarded as a stable and smooth representation of an author or reader's intention. Unlike Gadamer where the appropriation of language itself constructs meaning, Ricoeur believes that language appropriation actualizes meanings already produced but which has to be "freed" by the critical reading subject (Ricoeur, 1973: 83). In the reading act, how exactly is the meaning freed? It would seem as though Ricoeur's subject is endowed with the potential ability to "activate" any forces within the subject-object encounter to construct meaning. Like Merleau-Ponty who argues that meanings that exist in the "field of intersections" as the appropriative dynamic, Ricoeur sees the signs and symbols which mediate meanings which the reader has to

activate.

However, if the reading subject, according to Ricoeur, comes to self-understanding only through the mediation of language, contrary to Heidegger's view, Ricoeur argues that the hermeneutic arch which grounds the subject in the present, precludes any short cuts to immediate self-understanding (Ricoeur, 1976: 32). This is Ricoeur's contribution to the development of our insights of reading, that the meaning-giving process is no quick, direct access to meaning. He believes that the subject can only arrive at any self-understanding through the hermeneutic interpretations of symbols that are able to mediate, i.e. by a process of deciphering hermeneutically the meanings contained in myths, symbols and dreams constructed by the subject's imagination. This critical first step in the process is a dialogical one which has to be succeeded by the hermeneutics of distanciation (Ricoeur, 1976: 32). Like in the case of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur also seeks to delay the possibility of any "direct" mode of seeing on the part of the reading subject. Ricoeur however wishes to take what he believes to be a "more methodic" approach in terms of how readers should view the relationship between the subject and the object in the reading process. Instead of "closing" the gap between subject and object, as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty do, Ricoeur methodologically emphasizes the divide or distance in order to problematize the act of meaning construction more profoundly. Beyond their mere "dialogical" relationship there resides, he believes another gap or phase of distanciation between the subject and the object before any meaning can be arrived at. This is a significant point in reading theory since Ricoeur (1973:88) does not regard this "distance" between reading subject and textual object as a

vacuous void, but rather that it becomes the creative point for ever newer and different shades of meaning.

### 3.6.3 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AS DISTANCIATION

The Ricoeurian key concept of "distanCIation" is significant for the notion of textual interpretation and meaning-construction since it is only in terms of distanCIation that the text and the reader's subjectivity can be expressed within the hermeneutic arch. Ricoeur (1976) prefers the concept textual *discourse* to textual message since the former holds the expansive promise of mediation in the encounter that occurs between speaker as hearer (Lawlor, 1991: 83). He moreover argues that language as discourse is only conceptualized in terms of the hermeneutical "method" of distanCIation, a view which contrasts with Gadamer's emphasis on historical consciousness, for "... it would have been equally possible to begin, not with historical consciousness ... but rather with the interpretation of texts in the experience of reading ..." (Ricoeur, 1981: 301). Ricoeur's view is that of a methodological distanCIation rather than a historical distanCIation. This "distant" subject vis-a-vis the "distant" object marks a reality that neither of them can claim an authoritative voice in which the correct meaning is endowed.

What becomes significant for Ricoeur is the immediacy of the *reading* experience which is strategically followed by a more *delayed* understanding of the textual object, the latter of which requires to be mediated. What essentially emerges is the notion of "being for the text", in that historical consciousness as a form of temporal distanCIation, fulfils nothing but a lingual experience. Ricoeur (1981: 326) concurs with Gadamer, that if the

textual object is to be mediated for being, distanciation of necessity has to include temporal distance. Instead of fervently pursuing the closure of the divide to achieve a greater quality of meaning construction, Ricoeur highlights the distance between subject and object to avoid the controlling influence that they may exercise. This "distance" in the reading act resonates with Gadamer's because the textual object is not merely grasped in an intuitive or introspective way but rather in an indirect way which becomes, the act of meaning construction. The space of the reading act thus becomes therefore a creative terrain in which the reader's subjectivity surfaces, but only in so far as the temporal distanciation of the objective textual grammar surfaces. According to Ricoeur, the textual object assists the subject to reconstruct meaning for himself in his own context. It appears that the self-reflexive subject requires the text in order to problematize the act of meaning construction.

Despite Ricoeur's insistence on the mediative function of signs and symbols, the role of the subject remains prominent. Ricoeur "balances" the act of meaning construction in arguing that the reading discourse can only be realized in a temporal manner, via a complex set of indicators such as pronouns (being self-referential) and this process is always about *something*, i.e. a message which is exchanged (Ricoeur, 1971: 186-7). This self-reflexive act of reading becomes a precondition of successful appropriation of the text. It seems that Ricoeur's contribution to reading is the emphasis on language which is "alive" (reflexive) but this "liveliness" is activated by "remote control" by the reading subject. The dialogical "remote control" relationship between subject and object, according to Ricoeur, marks the beginning of the process of hermeneutics for dialogue.

However, it is not a negative manipulative form of control but only serves as a stepping-stone to give effect to existential subjectivity. Ricoeur puts the challenge: "... the freeing of the written material with respect to the dialogical condition of discourse is the most significant effect of writing" (Ricoeur, 1973: 83-84). Ricoeur, in a sense, almost foreshadows Derrida by giving *writing* a life and will, for writing triggers (over distance) the reading subject into following the traces of ever greater meaning. Ricoeur clearly, initiates readers into the process of methodological distanciation in which reading becomes *more than* dialogue or exchange. In fact the reading act embodies an act of "freeing" or an act of liberating the given, i.e. the subject and the object. What Ricoeur ultimately envisages is something different which has come about as a result of the subject and the object sharing with each other. The subject and object encounter each other with their own baggage of traditions and intentions which, according to Ricoeur, is no guarantee that they will remain in tact. Ricoeur seems to want to escape the Gadamerian bondage of tradition which guides the reading act. In problematizing literal representationalism, Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle wants to escape "sameness" which conditions the reading act and rather welcomes difference (alienness) as the creative ground for reading.

The Ricoeurian hermeneutic circle therefore encompasses a creative process of what is called "appropriation", which is essentially making that which is foreign and alien, one's own. Appropriation for Ricoeur moreover symbolizes the divide of distanciation from the author's intentions and the situation, for "... appropriation is quite the contrary of contemporaneousness and congeniality: it is understanding at and through distance"

(Ricoeur, 1973: 87). It would seem therefore that it is ultimately the subject who "constructs" understanding by allowing the reading act to permeate through temporal distancing, via the appropriation of the object. This "non-referential" or indirect stance excludes a quick and simplistic view of meaning which is typical of literal reading. Ricoeur's thesis that the appropriative character of language, however, resides not only in the realm of understanding as maintained by Heidegger and Gadamer, but also at the level of what he calls "explanation" - a view which clarifies his methodic approach to the reading act.

#### 3.6.4 EXPLANATION AND UNDERSTANDING IN THE READING ACT

In an attempt to expand new insights into the dynamics of the reading act Ricoeur attempts to overcome the Diltheyan dichotomy between explanation and understanding, and as a result relies on Habermas' notion of depth hermeneutics (*reconstruction*). (see Colburn, 1986). Essentially Dilthey's psychologism suffers, according to Ricoeur (1976: 23) from "non-dialogical one-sidedness" which emphasizes the divine sovereign attempts. Ricoeur believes that the reading subject engages both the notion of explanation and understanding as a dialectical couplet, which operates as "... relative moments in a complex process that can be termed interpretation" (Ricoeur, 1981: 126). Ricoeur's view of understanding and explanation moreover attempts to evade the seduction of both prejudice (Vorurteil) and tradition which governs Gadamer's pursuits of meaning construction.

In the reading act this complex dialogical process is expressed at an epistemological as well as ontological level, yielding knowledge about an object or event and a sense of being in the subject. According to Ricoeur, this dialecticism of explanation

and understanding does not represent the Diltheyan "thicket of psychologism", but contrary to Dilthey's view, Ricoeurian understanding of the textual object does not mean understanding the author behind the object, but "... what is being talked about, the thing of the text, namely, the kind of world the text unfolds as it were before the text" (Ricoeur, 1981: 131). Ricoeur therefore emphasizes the pre-established meaning of the reading encounter which unfolds in each reading act through appropriation. The reading subject has the capacity to appropriate meaning, according to Ricoeur, which has already been produced, but this needs to creatively be actualised in his personal situation. It is clear that the reading subject does not use language in a tool-kit fashion for whatever his need at the moment would be, and as a result, automatically usurp the textual meaning, but the meaning makes him what he makes of it. This added ontological dimension of language, as is the case of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, is to be experienced in an indirect manner, in those concrete situations in which the subject finds himself, affected by things while at the same time knowing that he is not at their source.

Ricoeur's "indirect" view of the reading act maintains that the reading subject can only understand himself in the light of the textual object but only to the extent that "... the text is not closed in upon itself but opens onto the world which it redescribes and remakes" (Ricoeur, 1981:131). The text, in a sense, becomes a subject in that it "breathes" as much as the reading subject, yielding a sense of the ontological potential of the textual object. The potential capacity for the constant revision and remaking of the world speaks of a reciprocal ontological bond between textual object and reading subject. Like Gadamer, Ricoeur proposes a reading subject that is not completely in control of his world (text) or of himself. The world and the subject are mediated through signs and symbols. In the reading

act the Ricoeurian linguistic subject engages in the process of both explanation and understanding by actively initiating a process of reconstructing the internal dynamic of the textual object by opening up worlds which express possibilities of being and which allows for meaning construction and ultimately self-understanding. This "opening-up" of meaning "thrives" on the difference and alien positions of object and subject.

### 3.6.5 THE ACT OF INTERPRETATION AS RESOLVING CONFLICT

Crucial to our understanding of the subject-object dualism which usually marks the logical representational theories of meaning construction, is the ontological dimension of self-understanding, which has been underscored particularly since Heidegger. In the hermeneutic tradition Gadamer confers a historical consciousness on his notion of self-understanding of the subject. Ricoeur acknowledges and in fact highlights the non-traditional and non-identical as the creative tension between reader and text. It is this "non-correspondence" between them which prevents the reader from seeking an immediate and literal correspondence between words and meaning. It is in this encounter that conflict has to be "resolved" in order to make meaning.

Ricoeur's notion of self-understanding emerges in the space of textual discourse during which appropriation (Aneignung) reduces the estrangement (Verfremdung) and, as a result, requires from the subject serious internal self-critique. For Ricoeur the language of reference is what he regards as the self-reference of discourse: "Discourse refers back to its speaker at the same time that it refers to the world" (Ricoeur, 1976: 22). Instead of a one-way representationalism from reader to text, there is a "push-pull" dynamic which marks the creative tension between subject and object. In the reading act this "push-pull" process, the subject

needs to distance himself from himself, for at all levels in hermeneutics, the act of distancing and appropriation becomes a condition for understanding (Ricoeur, 1973: 88).

The dynamics of meaning construction for Ricoeur entails more than only coming to terms with the interpretation of symbols, since the text mediates the *relation* to the subject. Like Gadamer's subject, Ricoeur's subject does not "construct" understanding for being, but engages in a *process* that the subject himself experiences. It is not only *what* meaning is constructed but more particularly *how* meaning is constructed. It is only in the interpretation act of conflict that Ricoeur (1973) argues that self-understanding can pass via the *detour of understanding* the cultural signs in which the self documents and shapes itself, for "... interpretation "brings together", "equalizes", "renders contemporary and similar", thus genuinely making one's own that what was initially alien" (Ricoeur, 1971: 119). Like with Heidegger, Ricoeur views the reader as an "engaging agent" to develop the substance of his own subjectivity - a subjectivity which is based on using the alien and foreign to understand and identify itself.

Ricoeur moreover seeks to transcend the "purely subjective" nature of the interpretation act because unlike Dilthey, he methodically incorporates the notion of cultural and historical appropriation into the act of interpretation. Ricoeur's merit resides in the fact that he uses objective (i.e. that which is external to the subject) to define the subjectivity he claims for himself. He moreover attempts to go beyond the purely referential process of regarding interpretation as an act *on* the text to an objective interpretation that would be an act *of* the text - motivated by the "foreign and alien". The foreign and alien of the subject vis-a-vis the object already speaks of separation and fragmentation as the basis upon which new and different perspectives of meaning can

be generated. This non-referential thrust of the action of the text and reader is an important development in Ricoeur's understanding of the act of interpretation. As a result, the creative action of the text with the subject, i.e. the interpretation of the context, lies at the very heart of what Ricoeur calls the "hermeneutic arch", i.e. the final brace of the bridge which anchors the arch in the ground of lived experience. Ricoeur (1976: 30) argues that "The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it". This is Ricoeur's main thrust, that there cannot be any external and stable message for a text, for in every reading, it becomes a unique creation. Ricoeur believes that his view is far from an arbitrary point of view, since "... appropriation loses its arbitrariness ... what the interpreter says is resaying that reactivates what is said in the text" (Ricoeur, 1971: 124). The creative reading subject in the hermeneutic arch creates and discovers according to a very methodic and disciplined way what the active texts presents and, as a result, reconstructs the meanings himself whilst constantly also revising his own meaning for being.

### 3.6.6 THE ACT OF INTERPRETATION AS IMAGINATIVE ENTERPRISE

Another dimension of Ricoeur's insights into the reading act is that the textual object seems only real in as much as it is also *imaginary* since "... the subjectivity of the reader comes to itself only in so far as it is placed in suspense, unrealized, potentialized" (Ricoeur, 1973: 88). This is reminiscent of Heidegger's "not-yet-complete" stance to the reading act. Within the suspended hermeneutical arch of a potentialized text, the reading subject encounters the process of constant remaking of its own being and reality and "... as reader, I find myself only

losing by myself. Reading introduces me into the imaginative variations of the ego" (Ricoeur, 1973: 88). Ricoeur's understanding of the reading act seems to thrive on loss, alienation and separation in order to achieve gain, togetherness and wholeness of understanding and being. Ricoeur thus does not depart, in the first place, on the basis of totality and coherence-seeking of meaning. Ricoeur moreover envisages the "alienated" reading subject in practical rather than logical/theoretical terms and he therefore postulates a subject which is not fixed and stable but can develop and change in and through the creative encounter with the "alienated" text. The subject experiences, according to him, an imaginative variation by playing the role of subject to the text's ideal meaning. These imaginative variations allow for a form of understanding which is to be as much disappropriated as appropriated. The very nature of imagination entails "not immediately within grasp" but has to be gained through hard work.

The metaphors or narratives constructed by imagination in the reading act provide the subject with imaginative variations of the world and, as a result, offers him the freedom to conceive the world in new ways. This opportunity for multiple reading also marks for Ricoeur a site of "struggle": "The right of the reader and the right of the text converge in an important struggle that generates the whole dynamic of interpretation. Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends" (Ricoeur, 1976: 32). In this way Ricoeur's progress seems to go much further than that of Gadamer. The Gadamerian subject has to be brought in line with the dialogic of the tradition of its Wirkungsgeschichte, whereas Ricoeur proposes another level of "struggle" in which the subject would only be "permitted" to have a fuller understanding of the textual object and, as a result, of himself as being human - it is not an act that can be guaranteed.

3.6.7 THE APPROPRIATION AND DISAPPROPRIATION OF READING.

Instead of pursuing coherence of meaning and ultimately being, Ricoeur deems appropriation and disappropriation to be of equal significance for meaning construction. In the reading act these new ways of "seeing" and "interpreting", in Ricoeur's thinking, is part of the continual revision and remaking of the textual object which the reading subject could "inhabit". Ricoeur's intention is not a "disclosing" act of reciprocal "passing over" between subject and object as is the case with Heidegger but rather a struggle in which the "incoherent" and "unfamiliar" is appropriated to make meaning for the subject. This process is never guaranteed despite the attempts of imagination, for the "incoherent" and "unfamiliar" of the object may disappropriate and prevent meaningful understanding of the text. True subjectivity may thus remain unrealized (Ricoeur, 1973: 88). Ricoeur however does not exclude the possibilities of projection when the reader interprets the textual object. In fact he believes that it is "... at the moment when a new meaning emerges out of the ruins of literal prediction that imagination offers its specific mediation" (Ricoeur, 1981: 172). Imagination is thus part of Ricoeur's methodic strategic seeking to appropriate meaning.

In rethinking the act of meaning construction, the appropriation of meaning is therefore the creative challenge to resurrect deeper meanings out of the dead "ruins of literal reading". It is important to note that this sense of imagination constitutes a *mediative method* or strategy rather than content, which coincides with the Kantian notion of schematism. Ricoeur considers the role of imagination as embodying a decidedly ontological paradox of the process of creation-as-discovery since, "... through the recovery of the capacity of language to create and recreate, we discover reality itself in the process of being created..." (Ricoeur, 1976:

215). Out of the ruins of the manipulative words of the text the reader experiences a "conflict of interpretation" in discovering, but at the same time, creating meaning on the basis of the differences between the reading subject and the textual object. (Ricoeur, 1973:4). The "recovery" of meaning in a constructive sense is meaning that already exists, except that the reading subject appropriates it *in his terms*, his world, his being.

In a sense Ricoeur concurs with Heidegger in that the subject engages with the object to project an already-established meaning in his own context. Instead of pursuing a direct and quick route to meaning, Ricoeur infuses the mediative mechanisms of signs and symbols. Despite the differences that have to be overcome the self-reflexive Ricoeurian subject seemingly enjoys centre-stage in the constructive, albeit imaginative, task of creating meaning. The "struggling" subject is confined to the discourse of its counter or alter-ego as embodied in the text. Ricoeur seems to usher us into the notion of the subject deconstructing himself via the text, and as a result averts direct access to the understanding of the author's text. This form of reading, as a result, fosters a constantly renewed critical understanding of the textual object and of self. This critical understanding clearly thrives on difference and alienness, rather than familiarity and sameness as is the case with Gadamer's idea of the reading act.

Ricoeur's contribution for the understanding of the reading act seems to reside in his attempts to avoid the practice of a sovereign and master-mind subject acquiescing into a "quick or simplistic understanding" of the text but rather engaging in a process of fragmentation and difference - a view foreshadowing the post-structuralist view of reading. In their hermeneutical pursuits both Gadamer and Ricoeur seek to dethrone the

authoritative voice of the subject by rendering the "discovery-recovery", a sharing process. However Gadamer's subject becomes an obedient subject operating under the yoke of tradition whereas Ricoeur's subject operates under the yoke of discipline, i.e. a "methodic pursuit" of meaning which operates essentially as a temporally creative divide between subject and object. The Ricoeurian approach, like that of his predecessors in the persons of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer, postulates a reflexive, human subject, who no longer presumes to act as the sole definer and creator of meaning but constantly has to re-engage with the object, in terms of which his own subjectivity is constantly being remade and redefined. Ricoeur's decided contribution to the reading act is what Eco(1976) later refers to as the "structural bias" of both subject and object. This methodic distance between them, rather than pursuing their similarity and complementarity, seeks to overcome the "circularity" which gripped Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer. The Ricoeurian notion of "appropriation and disappropriation", embedded in the "conflict of interpretations", is the bedrock for the reading subject to constantly deconstruct himself, his opinions and biases - in order to make meaning of the text and of himself. Ricoeur therefore introduces a sense of indeterminacy, paradox and instability in the reading process in order to avoid being fooled and trapped by the smooth surface that words and sentences tend to lure the reader with. The Ricoeurian "appropriative function" of the reading act effectively problematizes the reproductive tendency that language may exercise in meaning construction.

### 3.7 THE SHIFT IN NEW PERSPECTIVES OF THE PIONEERS.

It has become clear that while the pioneers of the new perspectives in reading, in the persons of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur, seriously sought to postulate new and other perspectives for the dilemma entailed in the separation of subject and object in the construction of meaning, they remain nevertheless intensely aware of the "opposition stance" of the notions and functions of subject and object. Heidegger introduces a "passing over", Merleau-Ponty a "field of intersection", Gadamer a tradition of sharing and Ricoeur an appropriation of the unfamiliar, between the reading subject and textual object. Nietzsche's seminal critique of casting doubt on the Cartesian - inherited "truths", posing under the neat and tidy guise of correspondence between language and meaning, marks the critical onset of rethinking the subject-object in a very specific context, i.e. the context of *language*. Language enabled all the pioneering thinkers to challenge the validity of "truth" and therefore allowed them to question whether the content of a text, in a logical correspondence manner, can convey meaning.

Their attempts at rethinking the solidly-wedded couplet viz. language and subjectivity, initiates a reconceptualized understanding way of meaning construction and the validity of its epistemology. Contrary to the logical powers of words in the literal representational theory of Descartes and Kant's transcendental subject, which leaves the thinghood of the textual object uncontested, we encounter in this chapter a revised position of where the reading subject and textual object, together, in varying ways, are being held responsible for meaning and knowledge construction. The sovereignty of the transcendental subject and the empirical autobiographical subject are challenged to make way for an active sharing and committed subject who, for

the first time, becomes *human* in and through the joint endeavour with the object in a concrete world. This is evidenced in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's *Dasein* and *In-the-world* notions, Gadamer's tradition and Ricoeur's imagination. This concrete and humane experience (in-this-world) in language, imputes a reading subject into an already existing world of things and meanings and not the other way round. Whether this being-in-the-world is experienced in a process of transcending over to each other (Heidegger), struggling in the in-between (Merleau-Ponty), acquiescing into a tradition (Gadamer), or grasping temporal distance between subject and object (Ricoeur), they all ultimately seem to realize the "struggling" or "conflictual" complexities which are involved in dismantling of the notion of mastery and control of texts and fixed messages. What these pioneers achieve in their respective theories is challenging the simplistic notion of an authoritative reader who assumes an "outside position" (of the text) and putting content and meaning into the text in terms of his personalized intentions and conventions. Nietzsche initiates the pioneering attempts in this study in order to "restart" the problematization of the reading act and all its notions of language, truth and validity, and to reassess all this from a position of doubt.

It has become clear that these respective authors effectively problematize the validity and truthfulness of meanings derived from the reading act by highlighting the notion of *alienation* and *disappropriation* between the reading subject and textual object. The reader, as a result, is only likely to progress to a more valid and expansive understanding of the readings he engages in by "letting language speak", from which the numerous *possibilities* of meaning derive. Instead of contending with a *self-assured* and *definitive* understanding of the text, Heidegger furthers our insights by honing the creative "passing over" of disclosure

between subject and object. Merleau-Ponty argues that his creative "field of intersections" minimizes the false alienation which exists between subject and object. Gadamer embraces the "non-negotiable" fusion of historical horizons of subject and object for greater depth of interpretation, while Ricoeur emphasizes the potential "I am able" status of the reading subject in terms of the constant ebb and flow of appropriation and disappropriation in an imaginative state of recreation.

The pioneers have also initiated the critical process of deconstructing the identity of a monolithic understanding of the reading subject. Their critical contribution to the understanding of meaning construction is that there cannot be any immediate and direct access to "the meaning" of a text which holds for all eternity. Understanding the "mediative dynamic" in the various theories prove illuminating, for it is as a result of these creative mediative mechanisms, which operate in and through language that these theorists not only cast understanding on the meaning production process but also on the notion of subjectivity itself. Contrary to the limited view of the monolithic stability of identity that marks the manipulative reading subject, they effectively challenge a unitary nature of the subject who operates from an outside position vis-a-vis the object. Beyond Descartes and Kant, we experience with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur a multi-subjectivity where the reader (in his many readings of a text) constantly recreates his own subjectivity. They introduce therefore the notion of a multiplicity of subjectivities, experienced by the reader which is constantly being renewed and redefined in terms of their potential and the potential of the textual object. The advancement of this "multiplicity" notion challenges the single smooth reading which the text has in mind. In fact, we have become aware of the multiple perspectives that a single text may

engender - a view which is a far cry of the smooth representationalism of the theoretical and logical subject.

While these philosophers have made tremendous strides since Descartes and Kant in presuming the non-dichotomous presence of subject and object in the process of meaning construction, they seem nevertheless to have got stuck at that level. They essentially develop a circular and reciprocal conditioning process with the assistance of language. However, Ricoeur pushes this circularity mode into a new dimension by emphasizing the dissimilar and unfamiliar of the subject and object. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer have been directed almost exclusively in eliminating the spurious gap that exists between subject and object (searching for similarity and concurrence) and, in the process, established an ontology and meaning which can only occur *with* others in a concrete world. The mediative in-between zone has become the driving force behind their new thinking, conferring on the traditional subject (in the form of the flesh-and-blood reader) a more human status, despite the case that they seem to make out for equivalence or equity between subject and object.

Their reliance on language (as a tool) to invoke tradition or imagination to add value beyond its rule guided status, is patently obvious. The new thinking operates within the boundaries of language-dependence (which is naturally typical of their epoch) is to construct an understanding of subjectivity, and what seems to be its natural extension, objectification. Objecting (like subjecting), despite efforts to demonstrate the contrary, essentially remains the reading subject's prerogative, precisely because language or discourse is still regarded as a human fabrication. The notion of language as being "the house of being" (Heidegger) or language preceding all existence (Merleau-Ponty), remains a hypothetical design to accommodate the reader's

concerns to bring together things that are often not of our human making (objects), together with our own human intentions and wishes *as persons*.

All of the theorists highlight the subjective or subject-side of the textual object which allows the reading act to become an act of sharing, disclosure and dialogue, rather than a one-way process. This "reversibility" (Merleau-Ponty) and "harmony of voices" (Gadamer), and "appropriation" (Ricoeur) of meanings, broadens the scope of interpretation in the reading act tremendously. Every sovereign voice (be it the text or the reader) can be counter-balanced. Knowledge construction and meaning-giving in the reading act, despite the co-determinative attempts of subject and object, takes on a new dimension in that all attempts at understanding a more valid rendering of reading can only be but one valid perspective *in discourse*. This discourse unfolds in a mediative way in historicity (Heidegger), clearings of situations (Merleau-Ponty), tradition (Gadamer) and distanciation (Ricoeur). Because the *gap or divide* (which is very real in the reading act) has been ontologically problematized, these theories have redefined the "nature" of reading subjectivity and language, and the ultimate shades and depths of meanings of texts. Co-determination, sharing and disclosure, despite their dissimilarity, has been the operative mode of these pioneers - a position which will eventually raise the ire of a new group of radical theorists, who seek to push the limits of understanding reading and meaning construction to an increasingly revolutionized state of non-dependence and non-contextuality - in which language or linguistic traces or systems assume a life of their own and, as a result, radically reviews the very necessity of subjectivity (or objectivity) for being responsible for the construction of meaning in the reading act.

In order to do justice to or dilemma in this study, viz.

understanding the intricacies of language and the nature of subjectivity vis-a-vis the text, we need to explore a broader and perhaps more comprehensive view of these issues as embellished by the "new" masters in our next chapter. It may mean that the selection of the initial two theorists dealt with still stand with one leg in the camp of the "pioneering masters", and the other stretching towards the "new masters". Methodologically this may suggest a transitional phase which ultimately ushers us into the more integrative and transformative view - ultimately giving us a more comprehensive picture of the reading act.

CHAPTER 4SUBVERTING THE PIONEERS: THE "NEW" MASTERS.4.1 INTRODUCTION

In radicalizing the boundaries of how we conceptualize the reading act, our point of departure suggests more than the inevitable fact that *many writings prompt conflicting readings*. This concern leads to the further critical question of whether any reading, whatsoever, should be acceptable and valid, or moreover whether each text should allow only one absolutely valid reading. In the previous chapter the authors/theorists variously grappled with the question of whether the reader can match or pair off parts of the text with objects which were before the eyes of the writer. For example, the scientist who seeks to read "realistically" or scientifically may think that unless such matching or pairing is possible, he will not be able to give sense to his claim that science tells us how the world is in itself, apart from our human needs and desires. In this study clearly, we do not wish to make this latter claim, since we accept all "uses" of language - including scientific theory construction - as ways of gratifying such needs and desires. Our concern in this chapter is whether there is a "way the world is in itself" and if so, how does it get constructed, other than by means of precision-seeking representationalism. The authors in the previous chapter had already initiated views of "non-representational" ways of thinking and reading and methodologically emphasize the whole idea of truth as accurate representation is no longer being tenable. In this vein Davidson (1989:165), on the notion of the conflictual nature of

interpretation, states:

"Beliefs are true or false, but they represent nothing. It is good to be rid of representations, and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking there are representations that engenders thoughts of relativism".

Davidson's statement about the origin of thoughts of relativism is elaborated when he suggests that representations are relative to a scheme, eg. a map represents Mexico, but only relative to a mercator, or some other projection. We take this point to be that we should restrict the term "representation" to things like maps and codes - things which we can spell out rules of projection in reading which "match" objects with other objects, and thus embody criteria of accurate representation. Heidegger, Gadamer and others in the previous chapter have extended the notion of representation beyond these ideas, i.e. the picture of language use as a matter of obedience to rules of projection, and semantical theories - as descriptions of those rules. What the reader and the author shares, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so cannot be a language governed by rules or conventions known to the reader and author in advance. This prompts Davidson (1986:445) to conclude that "...there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed... We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language users acquire and then apply to cases". This "giving up" of the traditional conceptions of *language* which influences the structure within which the subject and his representations occur, is precisely the radicalization of meaning construction

that this chapter wishes to address. The reading "experience" may even suggest an attempt of "crashing" the centrality of an authoritative reader who insinuates that the construction of meaning had been the result of an interactive process between itself and the world which the writer by means of language had postulated in the text. The authors in the previous chapter had already, and successfully, argued the point that this reciprocal sharing and exchange between reader and text is far from mere duplicating of signified meaning of content. Their pressing concerns have been the *action* within reading - which already alluded to the fact the *reading act*, as opposed to *interpretation*, the latter of which relies heavily on the *uses of language* (which Davidson denounces) comes about, is the further focus in this chapter. In other words, what other possibilities exist in order to make that which is *invisible* in meaning construction, *visible*. Can this action succeed by still clinging to the usual understandings of language, subjectivity and representation? Or is *reading* perhaps nothing more than what Derrida (1976:159) refers to as an attempt to expose its failure because "... in that search for the signified which we put in question, not to annul it but to understand it within a system to which such a reading is blind?"

This radical way of looking at the reading act implies reviewing in a fundamental way how we deploy our "indispensable" notions of subject, object and language in terms of schemes which either approach the text's meaning as determined by its origins or, that which believes it transcends its origins. While these two views are not reconcilable in a logical sense, they are nevertheless important (in juxtaposition) in order to grasp some understanding of the

theoretical difficulties of attempts at a fusion between the two which risk, as with Wolfgang Iser's (1978) version of reception theory, falling between two stools. Since every text therefore comes into being as a result of a complex interplay of factors and issues, each text appears to pose a major challenge to the reader. Reviewing therefore our assumptions of the subject in of terms new theoretical developments of language, inevitably engenders assumptions of the author and reader vis-a-vis new dimensions given to the virtually irreconcilable assumptions of the traditional assumptions of subject and text. At the same time, in order to subvert the monopoly of literal meaning as displayed in contemporary society, our assumptions of the text becomes radically revised in terms of the generally-accepted consumerist view of the text *as object*. In other words, could meaning also derive from "elsewhere" or "imported from without" rather than within the usual subject-object reading discourses so eloquently postulated by our authors in the previous chapter. Newton (1986:35) clarifies:

In discourses constituted by a limited set of interests generate the constraints or "grammatical structures" essential to the existence of meaning. But if literary discourse is not constituted by any set of interests other than the desire to interpret, "literal" meaning is an incoherent concept. Meaning is not generated from the within the discourse but imported from without.."

Beyond the "limited set of interests" of the human reader *as subject* interacting (whether via history, social conventions,

linguistics structures, etc.) with the text *as object*, we propose to examine the possibilities of reversing or subverting the above position by looking at the author as not necessarily being a singular writer of a text, in as much as regarding the reader as not being simply the subjective giver of meaning vis-a-vis the textual object in which meaning has been imputed and where meaning is defined.

This radical break-away means, on the level of theory, that representation is contrasted with a conception of the text which, emerging as it did within the general framework of eg. structuralism, makes language the dominant and determining factor; the text becomes merely a space of language, a space in which language is produced and transformed rather than *being used* (in a tool-kit fashion) to represent or express anything outside itself. The tricky question of meaning, the relation between signifier and signified, becomes *redefined* as a set of operations which are internal to the text - but also beyond. Our reconceptualized view of the reading act, as envisaged by the new masters, attempts to seek meaning outside of the written text, between words, sentences, pages and even between and among texts. The *intra as well as extra* dimensions of reading, even in scientific reading, imports enormous dimensions into the quality of understandings we would arrive at - generating with *every reading* newer and more dimensions of understanding. Against this extraordinary notion of multiplicity and indeterminacy of reading (in the scope of meaning construction) the new masters in the persons of Eco, Lotman, Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, propose to explore new and yet critical depths of reading, opening their peculiar understanding of the nature of language, of subject and object

- rendering the reading act a richness which remains challenging, as pointed out by Barthes (1986:35):

"There is no structural obligation to close my reading: I can just as well extend the limits of the readable to infinity, decide that everything is finally readable (unreadable as this seems), but also, conversely, I can decide that in the depths of every text, however readable its conception, there is, there remains a certain measure of the unreadable".

The new masters, in engaging with *infinity* and the *unreadable*, set out to challenge and in many instances overthrow the repressive "structural obligations" that determine the construction of meaning in reading, for this involves nothing more than what De Bolla (1989:240) describes as having to deal with "... more than simply readers and texts; at its base it is concerned with the place of the subject, how it is constructed and who or what can be said to own it. When the question being addressed is: should one become the person of the author, thereby relinquishing one's own personality, against the possible personation of the author, appropriating the person of the author to oneself, the stakes that are being played for are very high indeed." The critical challenge of meaning construction posed in this chapter proves to be even more complex when we consider the different "uses" in contemporary society to which the various readings of the text newspapers, reports etc. may be put. How ought people to read them? When the complexity of the notion of the subject and human knowledge is considered, we clearly realize that the reading act cannot

proceed along superficial lines as prescribed by recipes. Having explored the act of reading in the various phenomenological and hermeneutical ways in the previous chapter by the various authors, we realize that the pursuit of a "deeper meaning" of the text has further possibilities to "excavate" and construct meaning along other routes. Despite the numerous points of convergence in emphases and shades of accents of constructing the place and role of subjectivity, and demonstrating the work of language, to produce many (other) readings of a text, this chapter wants to pursue a more comprehensive framework in order to encourage more comprehensive reading that would enrich readers far more substantially.

To what extent is this transformed reading (beyond dialogical reading) achieved in the radicalization of subjectivity and views of language in the projects of Eco, Lotman, Barthes, Lacan and Derrida? Beyond the restrictive literal/reproductive ways of reading (and the more or less sophisticated variations thereof), the new masters seek to unshackle reproductive reading's repressive nature in order to pursue the "uncontrollable multiplicity of ambiguities" (Johnson, 1977:156) which could become a more tenable framework for meaning construction than that of the repressive nature of mere literal reading. By doing this we are able to get beyond what Maurice Blanchot (1982:189) rejects as the interpretive or communicative model of reading. Instead, we hopefully will arrive at what Derrida (1981:63) argues as "reading is transformational". This is the manifest challenge to the pre-established and fixed identities of reader and text in the thinking of the new matters. This is also strangely, the threat

to reading, i.e. knowing how to read, but paradoxically, according to Blanchot (1982:96), "knowing" to read is, precisely, not knowing how to read. In order to explore the opening up of the reading act beyond its dialogical, communicative function, Umberto Eco seems to be an appropriate starting-point, pursuing the "unlimited semiosis" dynamics of reading.

## 4.2 ECO'S STRATEGIC SYSTEMIC CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

### 4.2.1 SEMIOTICS AND THE READING ACT.

The critical discourses of the pioneers in the persons of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur effectively challenged the complexity of the reading act which assumed that "a meaning" exists in the text and that it is the task of the reader to "resuscitate" that meaning. In doing this they brought an entire new dimension to the understanding of reading in redefining the role of language, subjectivity and representation. Following their worthwhile pursuits are the new critics who seek to radicalize their efforts. Umberto Eco, as our first critic, is one of those theorists that have initiated a new conceptualization of the reading subject who operates in terms of radically different understandings of language - at least different from Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer. In seeking to rethink what thinkers since Descartes have done to clarify the reading act in terms of clear *subject* and *object* interactions, Eco ushers us beyond what was generally regarded as dialogical and ultimately "circular" theories. Amidst the plethora of semiotic theories that abound, Eco postulates one which specifically advances our understanding of reading subjectivity and representation, which lays, among others, the foundations for what is later to become known as the post-modernist theories of "textual interpretation".

In critically exploring new horizons for our understanding of the reading act, semiotics, as a form of "... intellectual curiosity about the ways we represent our world to ourselves

and each other" (Sless, 1986: 61) introduces us to an exciting and certainly a valid approach to the act of reading. It is evident to us when we as readers attempt to distance ourselves from our usual means of constructing meaning and understanding and seek to also examine how the semiotic approach to textual understanding and meaning construction opens new pathways for us. The strategic act of "distanciation" from the world signifies a form of "structural bias" (Eco, 1976) in terms of which we survey our world as represented in the text and semiotics, as a result, seeks to clarify what this "structural bias" means to us as reading subjects.

Despite the significant developments that have been made in theoretical and applied semiotics (see Nöth, 1978) it would appear that there is as yet no complete consensus on what is generally understood by semiotics. Also the historical development of semiotics cannot simply be taken as a chronicle of past and present events since a chronicle contains no explanatory comment beyond the mere factual documentation (see Eschbach & Trabandt, 1983). In terms of meaning construction it is generally argued that semiotics, as a specific *science of signification*, wants to clarify our understanding of the complexities of the "systems of communication" in general, and the "procedures" of the reading act specifically (see Sless, 1986; Eco, 1990; Eco, 1992; Calinescu, 1993; Cornis-Pope, 1992).

Notwithstanding the rich and various understandings we have developed about semiotics, there also seems to be an irreducible quality about its nature in that any statements about users, readers, signs or texts in the reading act, can

never be proclaimed in isolation from each other. A claim about the one would of necessity contain implications for or about the other. Therefore central to semiotics is the theory of *processes* as well as *structures* (see Ray, 1986) which inevitably integrate. In this sense semiotics introduces a "new language" of theorizing and different approach to meaning construction as those of the pioneering thinkers in this study.

Since semiotics does not regard the analysis of signs and signification in language and text in a linear and straightforward fashion, we have to grasp the *process* of textual interrogation whereby the textual message is problematised and as a result *transposed* from the readable text which essentially constitutes the written word. Such signs are generally problematised in what is regarded as "discourse" and this process of "transportation", as a result, renders the status of the sign dynamic, i.e. as having movement or life within it. In the reading act this dynamic movement moreover occurs from one level to another, from place to place, from system to system, from text to reader, from reader to text and from text to text - a systemic approach which is different from the thinking of the pioneers' notions of ontology and intersubjectivity in the reading act.

Eco (1990: 32) refers to the unfolding of the reading act as what he regards as the ideal process of "unlimited semiosis" where every content (or object) is an expression (representation) which is interpreted by another expression endowed with its own content, and as a result, potentially reproduces *ad infinitum*. This Peircean notion of "unlimited semiosis" which Eco invokes in his new thinking of reading by

no means implies a form of indeterminacy and vagueness of interpretation. It rather implies a semiotic structure or system in which it produces, with the reading subject, many possible meanings. Eco attacks the notion of *deconstructionism* which "exploits" the notion of unlimited semiosis and hence seems to hold licence in any "arbitrary" interpretations of a text. (Collini *in* Eco, 1992: 13). Eco already introduces to us new notions of "process", "systems" and "structures" to clarify what he regards as being peculiar to the act of meaning construction. These new notions "facilitate" the exchange or endless movement between the reading subject and textual object. This Ecoine approach to reading is an escape from the predominant "circular" approaches of the pioneering masters.

It seems that a form of metamorphosis is effected as a result of this endless movement in semiotic discourse, which inevitably impacts on "the subject's understandings" of a text (see Merrell, 1985; Gillan, 1982; Eco, 1976). The potentially many renditions of understandings which in fact "tells us nothing about the text or about reading" (Rorty *in* Collini, 1992: 19) clearly wishes to escape the grip of from a narrow, monolithic or reproductive stance of meaning construction. Semiotics, as a result, advances a new debate, vis-a-vis the pioneering thinkers within reading discourses, for "If there is no longer temporal linearity ordered in causal links, then the effect may act on its own causes" (Eco, 1992: 33). This is the challenge of the notion of tradition, historicity and other reciprocal or causality factors used by the pioneers of the reading act. According to the "aims" of semiotics, the textual object ultimately embodies a structure of *messages* and what are called "message traces" which seem to have a socially-

determined unity. The many or multiple *messages* have to be read, according to Eco, in *discourse* by the reading subject who is not merely an observer from the outside, but in fact participates on the inside of the text (Sless, 1986). Eco clearly advances to the notion of *discourse* as marking a certain space in which the subject and object "operate", rather than the *language habitat* advanced by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur. Eco's concept of *discourses* however does not suggest any "wild" reading but unfolds in the framework of systems and networks. Here we encounter a new move which seeks to supersede the linearity of relationship or at best the circularity among subject and object in the construction of meaning in reading.

#### 4.2.2 SEMIOTICS, SYSTEMS, NETWORKS AND MEANING

Contrary to what can be considered the limited literal representational view of the referential theories, semiotics does not wish to embrace a process of deciphering or decoding of textual signs but rather one which involves among others a sharing process. In fact, the reading subject has to participate on the inside of the discourse of the text, i.e. it has to be part of the textual dynamics, while the text as the objective structure, "invites" a form of understanding that "solicits" the construction of meaning, and this process can only happen within discourse. Since *discourse* usually tends to embody the social processes in which texts are embedded, and as a result are engaged, semiotics requires that the *system*, in which discourse unfolds, be examined in a *special way*. In contrast to the older pioneers who entertain a sharing or disclosure of a "subject" with and "object", we now deal with

"systems" in discourse. According to semiotics, a system is constantly being reconstructed and reconstituted in the textual object and it is this dialectical process between and within text and system which unfolds in discourse, and which is constituted beyond the literal reading of a text (Hodge & Kress, 1988: 5-6).

As it is evident in those theories of reading that do not wish to proceed in a smooth linear and literal representational fashion, semiotics also encounters the inevitable risk of experiencing what is regarded as "disruption" - a process which is inevitable because "... the sign is everywhere and nowhere. Each utterance on the part of the subject precipitates the relocation of the sign along the axes which in a static sense, defines its relations with other signs in language as a totality" (Gillan, 1982: 6). This unity or totality is not the usual coherence-seeking model as in the literal construction of meaning, but must be grasped as a dialectic network or system within which the reading subject's interpretive consciousness and self-understanding will come to play an important role. The reading subject therefore inevitably pursues an interrupted dialectic in terms of what can be regarded as a *re-reading* which has already been implied in the first reading (see Cornis-Pope, 1992: 22). The so-called first reading which is typical of the representational mode of reading is essentially sequential, often superficial and mimetic. It is only with the so-called second reading that the subject, according to semiotics, engages in the semiotic transformation that leads through the heuristic reading: "A second, reflexive, comparative, retrospective reading makes the subject discover that the sequence must be seen rather as a network or system,

which converts its constitutive components into multiple variants of a single representation" (Cornis-Pope, 1992: 22). The seriality or chain procedure in fact entails the discourse which seeks to subvert simplistic, literal reading of smooth meaning construction.

The newness of Eco's approach is that semiotics seeks to suggest that the existence of a textual object is only given within the *chain* of responses that it elicits. This chain of responses however operates within the confines of the signification of the text. But to signify *within* discourse is to be subject to interpretation or transposition to another level or to another sign. According to the semiotic approach it is ultimately in the nature of the sign to "expose" itself to the interpretative process, i.e. a process which always continually pursues the reinterpretation of other signs within that discourse.

Eco introduces a "new" language viz. that the object *signifies* (rather than *represents*). If *representation* could be construed as implying a literal message in language, *signification* suggests understandings that are not apparent at face value but should rather be "exposed" *in discourse*. In the reading act, *discourse*, for Eco, implies a particular *strategy* on the part of the reading subject and the textual object - and what happens to these two entities.

#### 4.2.3 ECO'S STRATEGIC APPROACH TO READING

Central to Eco's semiotic theory is the notion that any theory of meaning must involve a theory of *processes* as well as one of

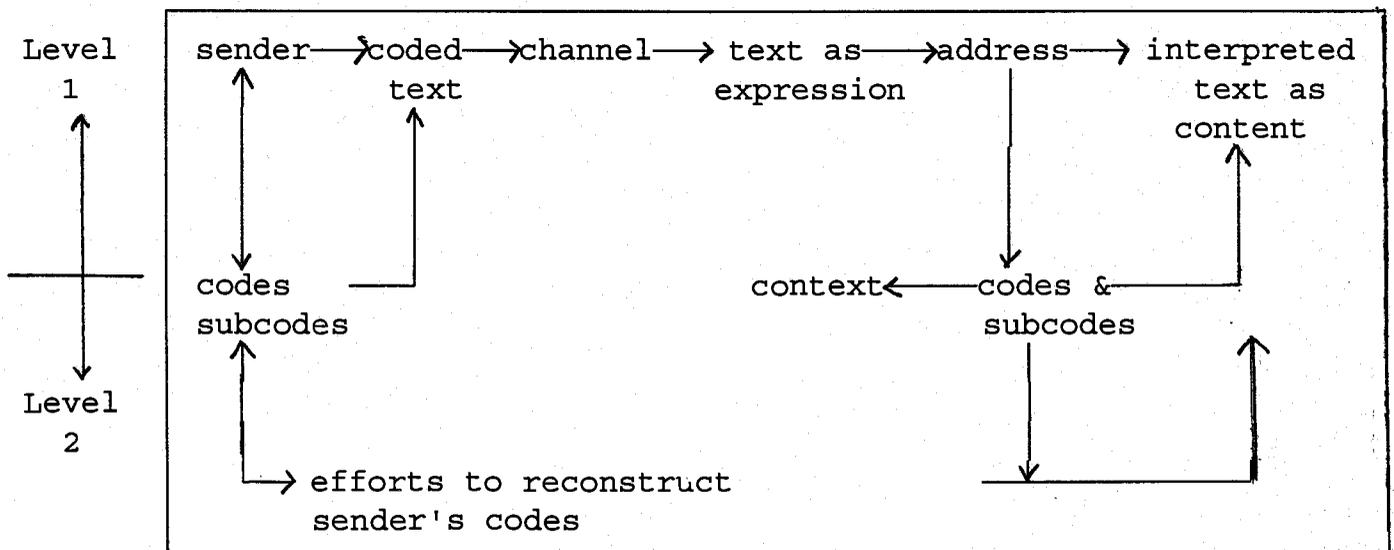
structures - a two-pronged approach which wants to address both signification and communication (Eco, 1976:8). Eco's all-encompassing systemic view considers all human activities as residing within what he calls a "semiotic profile" and as such, semiotics is to be regarded as the critical examination of all cultural *processes* as *processes* of communication. A motor-car, for example, can be a sign which signifies social status, but at a physical or mechanical level it has no communicative function. If, according to Eco, an object has no communicative value it cannot be regarded as being semiotic. Eco (1976: 7) moreover emphasizes that in meaning construction the notion of sign and its referent "... is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else". This "something else" does not necessarily have to exist physically or actually be somewhere physically at the moment in which a sign stands for it.

It has become apparent that Eco's theory of semiotics focuses primarily on understanding the aesthetic text, rather than a reception theory. While the aesthetic coding process seems to be focussed on itself, there nevertheless remains a great deal of ambiguity. As noted, the reading act seems never just to be a smooth and straightforward procedure but will inevitably presuppose disruptive and conflictual rather than simplistic cooperative mechanisms (Parret, 1983: vii). This has become particularly clear with Ricoeur (the "conflict of interpretation"). As such, aesthetic ambiguity in the reading act, for Eco, always necessitates the need to interrogate the systems and subsystems in the reader's discursive practices with the textual object, the action of which nudges the reading subject into a "new awareness of the world" (1976: 269). The

purpose of this new awareness is to transport the reading subject to a sense of what Eco calls "cosmicity", i.e. an endless process of moving beyond the limited interpretation of meanings (see Hawkes, 1977: 141). Although he does not depart from his notion of the ambiguity of the aesthetic text, Eco (1979) later redirects his focus essentially to the significance of the strategic role of the reading subject - an aspect of his semiotic theory which sheds greater light on the question of representation and subjectivity. The notion of subjectivity will be illuminated by examining Eco's notion of the "model reader" who operates in a "semiotic profile".

#### 4.2.4 ECOINE SEMIOTIC READING

Establishing a firmer grip on the phenomenon of reading, Eco's (1979: 5) understanding of the textual messages has to be seen in terms of "communicative intercourse" which comprises a network or system of different messages, depending, of course, on the codes and action encountered at different levels of signification. The model reader encounters the process of follows:



In any semiotic discourse, as it unfolds in the reading act, level 1 in the above scheme depicts the first reading of the text and level 2 the rereading phase in which the model reader "searches for the text" in a pluralistic "construal" of meaning (see Armstrong 1990: 23). Whilst Eco visualizes the first reading in a linear fashion, he also, at the same time develops the reconstruction process of reading in terms of his semiotic consciousness. The model reader's semiotic consciousness of "metalinguistic activity" (Eco, 1990: 54) seeks to interpret the textual object in terms of social, cultural and philological codes and subcodes - a process which, by contrast to the literal representational theories, is not linear but disruptive. The disruptive process inherent in meaning construction has to be seen in the context of the fact that every text designs its own Model reader. We encounter, for the first time, contrary to the "circular discourses" of the pioneering masters, "processes" which are regarded as being disruptive in the reading act. This has implications for meaning, though differently, as for Ricoeur. This disruptive nature of the discourses which results from the subject's encounter with the reading of signs, has far-reaching expansive and multi-perspective consequences for the construction of meaning and epistemology. All of this is very much tied to Eco's view of the model reader.

#### 4.2.5 THE NOTION OF "MODEL READER"

In Eco's systemic approach to reading the notion of the model reader seems to be a purely hypothetical construct which is engaged in a continuous process of building and revising meanings or to use Umberto Eco's terms "... of ceaselessly making forecasts and taking "inferentials walks", or of constructing

provisional frames within which the text acquires motivation, coherence and meaning" (see Calinescu, 1993: xiv). In this context "inferences" imply an act of elaboration which occurs in discourse between the reading subject and the textual object. The potential of "many meanings" is clear.

Eco argues that for every text the author deploys a series of codes to make the text communicative, for he assumes that the codes that are used would be shared by the author's model or possible reader. In fact the author has "... to foresee a model of the possible reader, supposedly able to deal interpretively with expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them" (Eco, 1979: 7). It would appear that contrary to the controlling, master-mind subject, Eco projects a different type of subject in the image of the text. The textual subjectivity - a shift in thinking - "master minds" - the reader in the reading discourse and as a result, postulates a hypothetical construct for subjectivity. This is a form of subjectivity which is "initiated" not from the human side of reading but from the system and network's side of the discourse. It is clear that Eco still has concerns for the "communicative" dimension of reading.

When Eco asserts that every text potentially "designs" its own model reader he implies that many texts seeks to "produce" essentially two model readers, viz. the first level we encounter a *naïve reader* who understands the text semantically and the *critical reader* who is supposed to appreciate the way in which the text says had been intended (Eco, 1990: 55). The "naïve" model reader corresponds with the type of "referential reading" of the narrator or author, whilst the "critical" reader, according to Rorty, "beats the text into shape" in the

reconstruction phase (see Eco, 1990: 56). The reading text, according to Eco, is designed in such a way as to attract the attention of a critical reader. The human reader is required to be a subjectivity of excellence (in terms of being critical) in order to interact with the demands of the textual subjectivity.

In terms of a more qualitative understanding and reading of a text, it would seem that Eco assumes a "like-minded" reader and author who both continually construct more codes and subcodes in the reading act. It moreover seems that Eco circumvents the danger of creating the idea that reader and author construct similar meanings in this process by making his model reader a logical rather than psychological or epistemological construct. This view of Eco does not however detract from the fact that the reading subject potentially can become an "authorial projection". The author of the text, according to Eco, always envisages a possible "ensemble of codes" embodied in the reader that would communicate a mode of signification (Eco, 1979: 7). In the construction of meaning this semiotic view of the model reader is moreover defined in terms of whether the subject engages in an open or closed text - a notion which is prerequisite for the reading act, for the subject reads a text as it is in the sense it was designed to read and this may include the possibility of reading the text in order to yield expansive interpretations (Collini in Eco, 1992: 10).

#### 4.2.6 CLOSED TEXTS

It appears as though Eco endows the average reader with an essentially "receiving status", for often the intended textual codes are not shared by the reader. Eco therefore, envisages

closed texts as those texts which are potentially able to seduce the most naïve reader along a predetermined path, structuring the text, as a result, inflexibly. Contrary to the literal representational theories where the text becomes manipulated by the reader's wishes the Ecoine closed text assume an "active" role. For Eco closed texts have a potentially wide audience since "... they presuppose an average reader resulting from a merely intuitive sociological speculation in the same way in which an advertisement chooses its possible audience" (Eco, 1979: 8). The result is often the development of potentially "ideological" interpretations. Eco, it appears, shares the Barthesian notion, "ideological", to describe personal and idiosyncratic codes of interpretation. It becomes apparent that Eco's closed text has been structured according to a rigid project and fails thus to take the shifting perspectives of the reader into account (Van Zyl, 1982: 72). The closed text elicits an uncritical reading and what can be regarded as a "riverruns" approach (Eco, 1992: 24) which may not yield what can be assumed to be a "reliable" reading.

#### 4.2.7 OPEN TEXTS

In terms of the Ecoine version of "unlimited semiosis" (Eco, 1990: 32) open texts endow the critical reading subject with a paradoxical sense of restrained freedom since the author had predetermined, as it were, its interpretation (Eco, 1979: 9). The reader seems strictly-speaking governed by authorial, lexical and syntactical codes and therefore "... the text is nothing else but the semantic-pragmatic production of its own model reader" (Eco, 1979: 10). Eco seems to confuse the issue by sketching a paradox of open textual reading which is on the one hand precise,

and yet, on the other, flexible. This Ecoine scientific approach towards the reading subject, by implication, establishes the text as the interpretive subject: "... it will be *only the text itself* - such as it is made - that tells us which kind of reader it postulates" (Eco, 1979: 10). On the other hand, Eco emphasizes the "disruptive" essence of the reading act in that every act of reading remains a "difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an *economic way*" (own emphasis) (Eco, 1992: 68). In terms of meaning construction the closed text unambiguously implies "using the text" as opposed to the open text which is "interpreted" in terms of a complex strategy of networking of systems, along with the reader's "social treasury", i.e. cultural conventions (Eco, 1992: 67). Here we encounter a throw-back particularly to Gadamer - except that it is strangely not strictly-speaking a dialogical process. How does what Eco calls the "picnic" unfold where the reader "brings the sense" to the text as the location of the picnic? (Eco, 1992: 24).

#### 4.2.8 ECO'S INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES IN THE READING ACT

In his new insights into the interpretative strategies in the act of reading Eco seems quite "prescriptive" that there will be clear lines of demarcation on the expression plane (the author and textual expression) and the content plane (the actualized intentions and extensions of the reader). Whether a text is read in a naïve or critical way, both these strategies, according to Eco, are already inscribed within Eco's textual strategy. In fact Eco (1984: 50) regards his model reader as an accomplice to the author's game. Eco allows, strategically, the author of the

text to escape, by letting the systems and networks "fend for themselves" in the encounter with the reading subject. The author "dies", according to Eco, but leaves his indisputable legacy in the aesthetic text so that although the author has been pronounced dead, his presence is nevertheless acutely felt in the "textual strategy", the latter of which is regarded as a metaphor in order to interpret the signs in the text. Contrary to the phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches where the subject, despite the argument that it has the equal status of the object, somehow still "calls the tune", Eco wishes to put the text strategically in charge to ensure that as many possible readings are generated. The text generates a type of discourse which one would dare-say, expresses more reliable and quality meaning than that constructed by the manipulative and fallible human subject - although Eco's systemic approach renders both equally responsible for the numerous readings that must be "produced". It appears that Eco's attempts to put the sovereign attempts of divine meanings, imparted of the human subject out of action, out of action, is by creating a backdoor for the author to put signs, systems and networks in charge to deal with the meaning construction, by co-opting the human reading subject.

In his reconceptualized reading act the move from the expression to the content plane of the text, the ideal text, according to Eco, is provided with a system of nodes or joints to establish the first reading at which point, the cooperation of the model reader is expected and or elicited. At each level the reader has to deal with a metalinguistic activity of subcodes which "mirrors" understanding of textual content - a process which co-opts the reader's "social treasury". In fact, mirrors, according to Eco, do not interpret but merely reflect (for the sake of

clarity) in order to enhance the critical reading discourse (Eco, 1984: 207-208). We have come to trust mirrors, according to Eco, since they assist the reader to make "connections in a continuous process of coming and going" (1979: 14). In the construction of meaning our perception in the mirror could potentially also be wrong but if it is a "reliable reading" of the text, Eco believes that misreading can occur, adding to the many potential perspectives a text is able to produce. Despite Eco progress in terms of newer perspectives in meaning, he nevertheless harks back to "reliable readings" - seeking "matching".

This notion of "misreading" forms part of what Eco regards as the re-reading phase of the reading act in which the model reader searches for the text in his attempts to construe valid meanings (see Armstrong, 1990: 23). Eco reiterates that the model reading subject is not the only one who makes "only right" conjectures, for "... a text can foresee (own emphasis) a Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures (Eco, 1990: 58-59).

The role of the reading subject is that of "overcoding" in order to contextualize the text socially but, at the same time, he is able to decode when dissonance and discrepancy is encountered. In an almost mechanistic way the reader suspends his disbelief and waits for more semantic information to emerge at another level. Eco however attempts to soften his behaviouristic slant by arguing that "... no text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts" (1979: 21). This exciting form of intertextual dialogue is also a form of textual overcoding which almost enjoys greater privilege than personal overcoding: "... books always speak of other books and every story tells a story that has already been told" (Eco, 1984: 20). "Meanings" in the various systems and networks used by different

authors in different texts "already exist" but has to be appropriated by the reader. The subject's personal experience also seems to be encapsulated in a textual status, whether of the present reading or any other past reading. What we experience with Eco is a hypothetical "extended" or super subject which extends across the *production system* of the reading act, rather than necessarily being confined to one space, be it reader, system, history, culture, etc. They do seem to have different degrees of weighting for meaning construction.

On the other hand, what also emerges in Eco's theory is a stronger case for a "textual subjectivity" rather than an exclusively "reader subjectivity", for although the author may be "dead", Eco celebrates his presence at the picnic: "There are [also] quotations of which the author is aware but which should remain *ungraspable* (own emphasis) by the consumer" (Eco, 1990: 88). However much Eco values his "reliable" readings and "misreadings", the semiotic or critical reader remains within the horizon or space of textual expectations in the series of interpretations. For example, meaning, according to Eco, is the correlation of an expression unit as well as a content unit, both of which are appreciated only through a further unit, i.e. the cultural unit, which depends on a further unit, and so forth (see Ray, 1986: 125). These infinite dialectical processes unfold in terms of systems which are decidedly different from the circular dialogues of subject and object of the pioneering masters, in which the communicative function of reading is still paramount.

It is also clear that Eco's reading subject is inescapably "designed" by and adheres within the textual network/system. The text as a form of subjectivity, continually transforms its

denotations into new connotations, as "... none of its items stop at their first interpretation, contents are never received for their own sake but rather as the sign-vehicle for something else" (Eco, 1976: 274). This act of permutation embodies what can be regarded as Eco's "non-representational" approach of the reading act, i.e. it recreates a continual deferral of closure, focussing the reader's attention on the semiosis process in the reading act itself. In fact the reading subject fulfils an important *cog* in the semiotic process by keeping the semiotic possibilities alive and if we daresay, "in tact".

What clearly emerges in Eco's contribution to the reading act is that the reader subject becomes an embodiment of the author's projected strategy. This is confirmed by Eco's insistent claim that "... it is correct to let a text *speak by itself* about its semiotic strategy" (1979: 40) (own emphasis). This view clearly renders the reading subject an instrumental "ensemble of codes", for it is only possible to "invent freely", according to Eco, if the reader, paradoxically so, experiences constraints. The "reader" and "author" also seem to emerge as nothing more than generalizable theoretical constructs, focussing more on systems and levels, rather than human readers interacting in a concrete social environment (see Hodge & Kress, 1988). Eco's view of interpretation therefore falls squarely within the ambit of "essentialism" - an approach which seeks to which explain interpretation and reader experiences purely in terms of linguistic and text-structural features.

4.2.9 CONSTRUCTING READING THROUGH STRUCTURAL BIAS AND  
FREEDOM

In trying to postulate a more solid critique of the reading act, Eco, as the "forerunner" of the "new masters" in this study, at the same time, as a transition theorist in this study, paves the way to the post-modernist assumptions of representation and subjectivity. His critical attempts to celebrate the "infinity of the text" as a form of subjectivity, in terms of the *aesthetics of seriality*, rather than the modernist view of aesthetic value is the onset of a form of meaning construction that entails, theoretically-speaking, infinite meanings. Eco's notion of the act as a strategic process of semiosis adheres in a kind of dynamism that is clearly a form of textual subjectivity so that "... it is the "infinity" of the process that gives a new sense to the device of variation. What must be enjoyed ... is that a series of possible variations is potentially infinite" (Eco, 1990: 98).

The human subject in the person of the reader, while still crucial, though not central to meaning construction, becomes anticipated by and "used" by the textual subjectivity. Like in the case of music, the reader merely fulfils the role of the pianist who plays the musical score and yet, every performance (i.e. every reading), proves to be different and therefore, renders different possibilities or reinventions of legatos, staccatos, and so on. It may not be the correct rendition or correct interpretation of that score, but there may be other "variations" which can be "enjoyed" by the reader (Eco, 1990: 98). From the "outside" of the text the reading subject needs to get into the "inside" - which seems to have been already quasi

predetermined. In the reading act it is a matter of how he gives and re-gives expression to that inside i.e. the structural bias of the text. It is not so much a dialogical circular process or an inbetween connection as with phenomenology and hermeneutics but a deliberate strategic projection of what the text may ender readable.

The Ecoine systemic understanding of the interaction of the subject and the text becomes a continuous process of producing and reproducing, via disruptive networks, in the "network continuum" i.e. it is a cyclical, periodical and regular pattern of narrative changes. The creative process of transposition of narrative changes and meaning appears to be executed under the watchful eye of the reader subjectivity to ensure that the "vagueness" (and hence biased interpretations) of textual message does not degenerate into what Eco calls "unreliable reading".

Eco, in a way, seems to be standing with one foot in each world, the new and the old. He still strongly pushes for the structural bias of the systems and networks which direct the reading act, yet this is a process which occurs in the domain of the reader's "ensemble of codes" - in his cultural context. The construct of the open text acts as the pivotal location of many possible interpretations and fulfils the role of a subjectivity which is responsible for the production of the *semiosis of meaning*. This varied and incessantly plural construction of meaning does not reside at the origin or root of the process as in the literal representational theory but must, according to Eco, be seen as a *potential* and ultimately *transitory* end of every reading act. Every reading is therefore a reading that has begun and continues to be reread. Eco's notion of subjectivity and representation

therefore seems to necessarily embody theoretical pivotal constructs operating *continuously*, in a *trans-itory* process of constructs, including the subject and object which marks the beginning of discursive practices prevalent in post-modernist thinking. The absolute pursuit of the final concepts like "subjectivity" and "meaning" is clearly anathema if we wish to expand our horizons and insights into the process of meaning production. Eco starts to argue in his semiotic approach against the notion of a conventionally accepted "stable" and "finite" notions of subject and object. If the "text" is normally regarded as the object, in Eco's thinking it appears that the text could now very well become the subject, albeit a logical theoretical subject. The usual flesh-and-blood subject is also rendered nothing more than a semiotic profile of codes, operating in a system which strips him, as it were, of ontological concerns. Eco's ultimate thrust seems to be primarily one of questioning epistemological reliability. He challenges whether the text produces, in *discourse*, with the theoretical reader and aesthetic text, a reliable, or many reliable meanings. This obsession may prove limiting. Eco advances our thinking of the reading act and proposes a rigidly structured hypothesis of subjectivity and representation which within what he calls the "constrained freedom" of textual interpretation. In making a case for "constrained freedom" which emerges from the structural bias of the reading act, Eco, at the same time reconceptualizes the stability and coherence-seeking function of language (or discourse) as well as that of reading subject and textual object. Beyond Eco's more-or-less mechanistic semiotics which, theoretically, challenges most of our concerns of meaning construction, Lotman proposes another dimension of semiotics which focuses with greater explicitness on the human concerns of

meaning production in a way that also advances our understanding of the reading act. Lotman, like Eco, proves to be transition theorist, from the pioneers to the more radical theorists among the "new masters".

### 4.3 LOTMAN'S CULTURAL SEMIOTICS IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION

#### 4.3.1 POINT OF DEPARTURE

In contrast to Eco's systemic semiotics we may reflect on another variation of strategic challenge to the reading act, viz that of Lotman's cultural semiotics. We encounter with Eco and Lotman the onset of approaches that both seek to move beyond the concerns of the accepted smooth interactions of subject and object *in language*. "Meaning construction" becomes a notion which is more and more reserved for strategic *interpretations* in a particular systemic encounter. We have observed Eco's functional and systemic approach, and how this opens the way to a trend of discourse which becomes structured in a semiotic profile, operating in a social context i.e. in a social treasury. This approach in semiotics is very much accentuated by the Moscow-Tartu group, for they embrace the thesis "... that all human activity [is] in the elaboration, exchange and retention of information by means of signs ..." (Lucid, 1977: 5). Voloshinov, for example, seminally initiates the significance of socio-cultural semiotics by juxtaposing the notion of mind and society with his dictum: without sign, there is no ideology (Matejka, 1978: 162). Since language embodies the mediation of signs in the construction of meaning it would appear that semiotics and subjectivity, inevitably pre-suppose each other - a view which Jurij Lotman, the literary historian, uses as a springboard to revisit the interaction among text, language and culture (see Shukman, 1978: 195) in his cultural semiotics - and hopefully advance our understanding of a more comprehensive "practice of reading."

4.3.2 LOTMAN'S VIEW OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Lotman regards language essentially as a system of communication - a signification system which is inconceivable beyond the domain of real human and cultural action. For him every system in the construction of meaning therefore whose aim it is to establish communication could be regarded as language. This view constitutes a significant view for understanding Lotman's semiotics, since language for him, which is deployed in a semiotic sense (i.e. in an active social system) cannot be similar to its ordinary usage (Lotman, 1977).

Besides the assumptions of natural and artificial languages, Lotman also wishes to highlight secondary languages which he refers to as secondary modelling systems. He regards the latter as implying more than the deployment of natural language, for "... in as much as man's consciousness is a linguistic consciousness, all types of models erected as super-structures on that consciousness, can be identified as secondary modelling systems" (Lotman, 1977: 9-10). This "interiorized" notion of language is no arbitrary disposition when it comes to meaning construction but has decided limits with interiorized cultural values and understandings.

Lotman seeks to argue that secondary modelling systems embody semiotic systems which are expressed in very dynamic, yet critical, interactive discourses between text and reading subject. Eco saw these discourses as also embodying conflictual mechanisms which function in a rather "predetermined" process of clarification. Lotman moreover characterizes the interpretive process as an inevitable act of tension which "... amounts to a

victory in which the sender and the receiver overcome ... "noise" or distortion caused by the difference between their semantics or phenology" (Lucid, 1977: 10). Lotman therefore also rejects the easy and smooth acquiescence of a reader into a particular meaning that a text may have. Overcoming in the reading act what Lotman calls "noise" already implies the second level reading of rereading, beyond the literal reading of words and sentences. In the reading act, which departs from the simplistic and basic encoding-decoding process, Lotman emphasizes the need to explore the balance of what he calls redundancy and uniqueness - two notions which create a form of essential tension in the reading discourse. The reading subject communicates via a "struggle" with the text precisely because the latter represents another (different) subject, whom it speaks of, and this ensuing interactive exchange "... is valuable precisely insofar as it issues from another person and does not duplicate what is already known to me" (Lotman, 1974: 95-96). Lotman's concerns seem still primarily trapped in the communicative domain of reading and meaning construction.

Lotman consequently rejects the simplistic pursuit of "commonality" or "likeness" between object and subject, like in the case of Ricoeur, for it is precisely their dissimilar dispositions and characterization that render them ultimately communicable in discourse. According to Lotman, a condition of complete sameness of reader and author would theoretically make communication in the reading act irrelevant. Like in the case of Eco, we encounter the reading act as inherently bearing a "disruptive capacity", if any reading is to be valid and credible in terms of what understandings can be constructed. Therefore, for the two parties to "communicate", in the dialectic of meaning

construction, they must be *dissimilar* enough to stand in need of a "... conscious semiotic act of decipherment in their signalization" (Lotman, 1974: 96). This view entails Lotman's notion of "oppositional relationships" which forms the basis for creating a "relational structuralist mode of thinking" (Shukman, 1978: 196). Instead of quick-fix or literal grasps of meaning, the delayed process inherent in Lotman's semiotics thrives on opposition and alienation - a view traced back to Nietzsche and Gadamer.

At a social level Lotman seems to operate on the basis of "equivalent but different" which, although it implies opposition, both text and reader can be rendered mutually translatable. This is reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty's view, but Lotman operates in terms of signs and networks in his semiotic approach. Lotman's stance of "mutually translatable" implies that meaning construction could be a matter of degree since the more complex the structure of the message (i.e. cultural complexity) the more individual its interpretation (Lotman, 1974: 97). Lotman concedes that the individualization of interpretation could lead to semiotic catastrophe. Lotman moreover seems to concur with Eco's thinking, i.e. whereas Eco foresees an "unreliable" reading of a subject who strays too far in his "inferential walks" (Eco in Calinescu, 1993: xiv) from the text, Lotman cautions any walk which wanders too far off the historical and cultural codes (Lotman, 1977: 25). Here Lotman is again reminiscent of Heidegger and Gadamer who see the subject as operating under the yoke of tradition.

With regard to the progress of his semiotics towards reading, it appears as though the parameters of the Lotmanian semiotic

network is clearly defined, for despite the complexities of differences between the reading subject and the textual object, Lotman insists on the idea of conserving what he regards as the unity of opposites, for, according to him, each semiotic mechanism is a *coincidentia oppositorum*. This means that it is only in the intersection that opposites establish a whole. It is at the intersection where meaning is composed of contradictory, yet complementary subsystems. Thus, according to Lotman, the I-HE system of external communication, complements the I-I system of internal communication, and vice-versa. Neither of these systems are self-contained, but oscillate historically in the reading discourse (Lotman, 1970a: 100). Lotmanian meaning construction is therefore executed in terms of a conflated socio-cultural subjectivity, "masquerading" via an individual, personal subjectivity. In order to clarify Lotman's view of meaning construction as encapsulated in the reading act, it is necessary to highlight his understanding of the "extra-text".

#### 4.3.3 TEXT AND EXTRA-TEXT

Lotman seems to experience difficulty in defining how he generally understands the concept "text", for it neither represents a work of art nor exactly a mode of reality. However, it seems that he feels more comfortable in conceiving of a text in terms of its bonding with social communication: "... it [the text] has no meaning ... for the man who would like to deal with the text totally apart from all its extra-textual relations" (Lotman, 1977: 50).

On the other hand, his notion of "extra-textual" in the reading act seems somehow easier to define. It is the embodiment of all

historically determined artistic codes which render a text meaningful, and these codes have become inscribed in the subject's linguistic consciousness. It is thus the extra-textual elements which attempt to bond the reading subject and the object in the reading act (Lotman, 1977: 50). Lotman is keenly reminiscent of Eco who tends to "structure" all subcodes and subsystems in that he (i.e. Lotman) regards the codes, i.e. the extra-textual element as necessarily following the cycle. In contrast to Eco, Lotman would want to present a very flexible hierarchy mechanism to facilitate any entry-point in the reading act. Eco envisaged a model reader who is "foreseen" by the text narrator, whereas Lotman "accommodates" the reading subject so that access in various extra-textual relations will depend on which genre, style, age or author the "text" has come to be associated with. The question arises how the extra-textual dynamics in the reading act impact on the representational or meaning-giving stance between textual object and subject?

#### 4.3.4 INTERPRETIVE POSSIBILITIES IN THE READING ACT

Lotman's systemic approach postulates various interpretation possibilities in terms of which a text could be interpreted but does not exclude the possibility that the author can produce certain texts which are oriented towards readers' perspectives. These perspectives, however, do not suggest mere literal reader acquiescence into the projected text, for all "semiotic discourse", according to Lotman, is only established in textual interrogation in the discourse itself. Within the reading discourse the "problem of misunderstanding or misreading" occurs, for according to Lotman, such misreadings inevitably inhabit all comprehension (1977: 12). Textual conflict, misunderstanding

and what Lotman calls "textual dissonance" is the indispensable core around which the relationships in the message are shaped. The reading subject certainly by no means has *immediate* and direct access to the meaning of text. For Lotman, the possibilities of comprehension of textual codes resides in the "intermediate zone", which is responsible for subduing the starkness between comprehension and non-comprehension. Central to this process of meaning construction is the reading subject with his linguistic consciousness who, amidst the problematization of textual discourse, firstly has to establish a "common cue" in terms of their dissimilar foundations. Lotman, like Eco, seems not able to disengage himself from relative "correctness", "clarity" and for sharing of understanding in the act of meaning construction. Lotman argues that, according to the "aesthetics of identity", the reader has to create a "new", and often more personalized interpretation (1977: 24) - leading to a rereading of the text. Contrary to Eco who seems to give great prominence to a textual subjectivity, Lotman foresees an active reader subject who with his linguistic consciousness dialectically proceeds according to opposites and *differ-ence*, in order to construe his own meanings. The Lotmanian "extra-text", like Gadamer's Vorurteil (prejudice), assists to render the meaning more personalized, more unique.

The personalized result of textual-code interrogation in the reading act is in fact a personal-cum-social process of recodification or rereading which the reader creates by imposing his own extra-text within that historical-social context. This is the most pronounced difference between Eco's essentialism and Lotman's more "humane" semiotics. Lotman seeks to postulate an intersectional and cross-sectional systemic process whereby the

author's text enters into a complex systemic network of personalised extra-textual connections. It would seem to be primarily the reading subject's attempts to arrive at a "simpler" text than the one the author in his "authorial tendency" had tried to create - giving greater prominence to what Lotman calls "reader tendencies" (Lotman, 1977: 296). The "unlimited semiosis" (Eco, 1992: 32) results antithetically (as opposed to linearly) in the construction of meaning, but can be limited systemically by the commands of the intersection of reader subjectivity and textual subjectivity.

To grasp the conceptualization of subjectivity and representation we notice, for the possibilities of interpretation to emerge, it becomes evident that Lotman yields to what appears to be a relativistic position in terms of the opposition between text and extra-text. For depending on the creativity or imagination of the reading subject, he may, according to Lotman, "distort and creolize" the text. The human reader, no doubt, will want to grasp the text in terms of familiar canons - which are socially and historically established - mixing his own "personal language" with that of the text: "... this creolization has its own laws of selection ... the theory of the mixing of languages ... is bound to play a major role in a reader's perception" (Lotman, 1977: 25). The textual "struggle" may not always be that difficult, for the reading subject's playfulness will always tie in with the textual object's language. Lotman does temper somehow his socio-historical view when he argues that meaningful interpretation only occurs at the intersection of reader and authorial language, and where any possible non-intersection may occur, this ought to be relegated to the domain of the distorted and creolized. This misreading may not necessarily be wrong

because it is inevitable and necessary in the reading of any literary narrative. It in fact forms the sub-textual messages, which Lotman believes, in turn support the textual messages. Once again we notice Lotman's bent on the communicative function of reading, in which the subject establishes his identity and purpose in life.

What Lotman refers to as sub-textual messages or sub-textual codes constitute the very essence of the extra-text and the extra-text as a result, proves *sine qua non* for the reading subject's interpretative reconstruction of the textual object. The implication of this is that the dynamic interpretation and meaning is ultimately guided by what appears to be extrinsic socio-historical factors rather than exclusively extrinsic-intrinsic relational factors - a view which gives rise to Lotman's notion of *tension*. This creative stance is very much in keeping with his view of oppositional relationships. This is also a deferred process by which meaning is created and is ultimately not as oppositional as Lotman might suggest, for in the final analysis, we are all products of very specific socialized behaviours - and whilst we are all very different and individual - we somehow do concur on many issues as well as the ways we see things. Lotman does, however, concede that the construction of meaning in the reading act the process of interrogation depends very definitely on the degree of creativity and imagination of the reading subject. The result is that the plurality of infinite conjectures in meaning construction, according to Lotman, is limited to the "mixing of languages" (Lotman, 1977: 25), rendering themselves mutually translatable.

The type of reading that occurs in the intersecting and cross-sectioning zone of text and reader, signifies for Lotman what he refers to as the "ontological tight-rope" of obviating the differences between the reading subject and the textual object. This communicative process of dynamic oscillation of seeking to come to grips with the *dissimilar* and the *different* within the reading subject's socio-cultural world, renders a viewpoint which has been generally ruled out by the positivists. Schukman (1978: 201) argues that Lotman's attempt to clarify the act of interpretation is nothing but an attempt to ameliorate cultural and individual opposites. This implies that in the reading act the textual narrative as object becomes encoded at least twice: once into natural language and any number of other times into the codes of the historical epoch, style or genre in which it may be written. The second act of *rereading*, beyond the literal text seems almost pre-determined, for it shall be, in order to be reliable reading, in terms of the socio-historical extra text of the reading subject. The emphasis is still on the controlling subject's pursuit of correctness and reliability. It follows that the text would seem to be at the mercy, as it were, of the reading subject, who in turn, is absolutely inseparable from his cultural codes. Like in the case of Gadamer, the cultural codes embodied in the Lotmanian reading process, act as the *regulating force* (in terms of the many levels of meaning) and constantly pursues a meaningful intersection between a "demanding" reader and text in a way that would enrich the reading subject's own meaning in life.

#### 4.3.5 SOCIO-CULTURAL READING IN OPPOSITION

Whereas Eco proposes a very structured and strategic notion of

subjectivity, leaving little, if any, meaningful recognition to be accorded to explicit personal forces which impact on the reader, Lotman seeks to postulate an emphatic socio-cultural, contextual approach of a less theoretical-mechanistic subject. Like Eco, Lotman acknowledges the creative "oppositional" forces that separate the subject and object - conflictual forces which become the very *discourse* in which meaning gets constructed. This introduction of the idea of *discourse* into their systemic semiotic approaches apparently hopes to disengage us from seeking the prominent and or traditional positioning and functioning of the subject or the object. Lotman, like Eco, still retains the great divide between subject and object - a divide which is rendered communicative in a "new language" of shared discourse. In order to achieve his goal Lotman, like Eco, prescribes very definite parameters in which reading is to be constructed. The parameters of *levels* and *codes* (which also have predetermined cultural, social flavours, etc.) are, at the same time, rendered flexible in that the subject can overcode. The result is the continuous creation of many subsystems (oppositional-cum-complementary subsystems), allowing one meaning to succeed another.

Lotman's contribution to the understanding of the reading act is looking at the way infinite semiosis operates, i.e. to problematize the circularity mode which exists between subject and object, and without necessarily seeking to close the gap between them, rather posits hurdles that have to be overcome. As opposed to strict representationalism which posits meaning ultimately in and through the object, where that meaning is also defined, Lotman defers meaning in terms of which many more meanings can be generated, depending on the creolization that occurs between subject and object. Given this rendition of

subject and object, we encounter a creative ongoing process (typical of semiotics) of deferral from closure or completion. This introduces a new frame of thinking to us to, viz. a notion of a textual-reader engagement that engenders *multiple-readings* of that engagement. However, achieving these multiple readings is only possible under clear instructions, not of *who* fulfills the subject or object role but *how* the discourse between them gets structured. This suggests, if not a radical view at least a view, of the reading act which is beyond the easy decode-encode process, no matter how compelling the facts are. In a way Eco and Lotman are still operating in a clear subject-object polarity structure, each side of the polarity still remaining trapped in clear expectations of themselves and the other, to challenge the meaning-making process entailed in discourse. As a result, they seem not to have gone substantially far enough to rethink the very existence and positioning of subjects and objects, which up till now, have been central and in fact *sine qua non* to the construction of meaning as our stable and secure epistemological base. The act of reading is still firmly trapped in the mode of *re-presentation* of the text itself.

Ultimately the goal or *telos* of reading for Lotman, like for Eco, operates in terms *originary* principles, codes and levels, making the "correctness" and "reliability" of the many new interpretations (as opposed to "readings") somewhat always patent and predictable. These interpretations are "easily" possible *through* language *through* which the subject's discourse is exchanged with that of the textual discourse.

Beyond this view of "reading as an exchange process", i.e. the interpretive attempts the subject, we proceed to a more radical group of thinkers who seek to *unburden* (Blanchot, 1981:93) the reading act of any author, and making the reading act a *dangerous*

experience. The re-evaluation of the author and subject starts to take on new dimensions with Barthes for whom there is no "structural obligation" (Barthes, 1986:35) in reading at all and in which we constantly deal with that certain amount of unreadability which makes our readings possible.

#### 4.4 BARTHES'S LIBERATION OF WRITING AS MEANING CONSTRUCTION

##### 4.4.1 BARTHES'S SUSPICIOUS APPROACH

In understanding the dynamics of the reading act as *exchange* between subject and object, Eco and Lotman emphasized the notion of *multiple* reading which we derive from their respective semiotic approaches. This idea of *multiple readings* seems to be taken even further by Roland Barthes, and in doing so, he postulates a different understanding of subjectivity and representation which is to be grasped beyond the stable categories of subject vs. object, i.e. reader vs. text. Barthes initiates a creative, yet critical mode of thinking (followed by Derrida) which, it seems, is difficult to "classify" (see Culler, 1983; Haar, 1992; Wood, 1992). This would probably be in line with Barthes's own claim that no interpretation can claim absolute authority. For, as seminal writers respectively of post-structuralist and post-modernist thinking, Barthes and Derrida specifically seek not to take any philosophical position. Whether they succeed in achieving this remains to be seen. However, despite Barthes's strong protest of endorsing a particular theory, his work has flourished in a sense without him - a process that would be consistent, as we will notice, with his pursuit of "plurality" and "dissemination" in the reading act. This "escape" into "plurality" is the liberating process to combat the attempts to set *a priori* limits on interpretation: "... what is at stake is not just authorship, but authority" (Moriarty, 1991: 2). Resonant with Nietzschean thought, Barthes too insists on approaching all values, language and communication with the utmost and justified suspicion. Barthes, in debunking

any claim to authority, even doubts whether we should speak of "reading" at all:

"... I do not know if reading is not, constitutively, a plural; field of scattered practices, of irreducible effects, and of, consequently, the reading of reading, meta-reading ..." (Barthes, 1986: 34).

It is precisely this notion of approaching the reading act as nothing but "a reading" of what it could possibly entail, that sets Barthes apart from all the aforementioned thinkers, the "pioneering" and "new" masters in this study. "New" liberating space is to be created, away from the circular frame of inferring from the author's or text's history, beliefs, values (although critically) but seek evidence from outside the text to construct meaning. This is an escape or unburdening from an authorising agent as well. This creative way of rethinking the reading act has very much got to do with the exercise which Barthes (and later Lacan and Derrida) initiates, viz. that of the deconstruction of all the "constitutive parts" of reading. Barthes goes back to Nietzsche to reclaim the notion of fiction. The identity of reading or the reader or the author is nothing but fiction. But, according to Barthes (1976(a): 62) to explore identity as a fiction means staging oneself or the reading act not as a unity - a singular "character" - but in the plural. This critical practise of dis-unity may very well become, according to what Barthes calls a plural, scattered or even chaotic exercise in reading. Within Eco and Lotman's semiotic schemes there appears still a large measure of "order" and "clear practices" of what transpires between the object and subject in *language*. Like Nietzsche, Barthes too regards language and its communicative function as a "dubious enterprise" (in Lavers, 1982: 36) and since it constitutes nothing more than "myth", it

has to be deconstructed and even *displaced*. This notion of displacement as a way creating disunity and disruption, puts Barthes substantially, in another bracket than his predecessors in thought who pursued "reliability" and control. Reading cannot be a smooth practice, even if the route of a "semiotic profile" is followed as in the case of Eco and Lotman in which "reliable" readings are to be ensured and which are to be communicated, or at least articulated.

#### 4.4.2 BARTHES'S POINT OF DEPARTURE TO NON-REFERENCE

Barthes takes his cue from Saussure who conceptualizes the act of writing as a late cultural arrival, a supplement to speech, which embodies an external instrument (in Leith, 1983: 34). The act of writing for him therefore does not inhere in language and can therefore easily be excluded, for if we must have writing, it should be phonetic, i.e. it should mimic and incarnate speech. Barthes (1964: 9) in his quest to "pursue" meaning adopts Saussure as his point of reference but clearly develops his own semiology which he believes includes all signs, "... whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds objects, and the complex associations of all these...". They all constitute, if not language, at least systems of signification. In this sense we notice Barthes's concurrence with Eco and Lotman. However, Barthes ultimately proves to be way ahead of these theorists, for according him, to say "I" is to attach signifieds to oneself, to provide oneself with a biographical duration, subject oneself imaginarily to the intelligible, signify oneself as object of a specific distinction and to endow time with meaning (Barthes, 1975: 68).

In understanding the act of meaning construction, Barthes regards the intelligible systematic character of social

signification as an important mode of "representation" which bourgeois society gives itself (see Coward and Ellis, 1977: 26). This form of social signification has become, over time, part of our language usage and Barthesian semiotics as a result, attempts to unravel what is called the "myths" contained in the dubious nature and use of language to construct meaning. According to Barthes (1980: 125), myths embody nothing more than "frozen speech" which tends to "stiffens reality" and, as a result, makes "itself look neutral and innocent". Barthes's therefore wishes to expose the way how habitual significations in meaning making have attach themselves to everyday objects and practices so that these ideological significations have come to be accepted as natural and common-sense. In relooking our notions of language and subjectivity, he initiates his critical view in terms of what he calls the "disentanglement" of these practices which is important for us in terms of understanding his theory of "interpretation" - a concept, which we will see, he absolutely challenges (see Culler, 1983: 17).

In rethinking the entire act of meaning construction, Barthes wants to engage in a form of writing which prevents the solidification of his discourse on reading, the subject, the author, and the meaning, which coalesces into a central and controlling truth: "my whole little universe in crumbs; at the centre what?" (Barthes, 1978: 96).

Barthes's challenge to literal representationalism in and through language is furthermore illuminated in his distinction between the practice of connotation and denotation. He clarifies the signifying function of language with an example of a black

soldier saluting the French flag, i.e. a denotative sign which generates secondary meanings such as colonialism, nationalism, militarism etc. In contrast to this, Barthes argues that connotations generally serve as an "agency of ideology" or what he calls "myth". Myth, in the reading act, essentially encourages on the part of the reading subject a constant *misrecognition*, both of the world and itself. This "misrecognition process" in reading is valuable in order to interrupt our usual "interpretation" of events. It also challenges the assumptions of subject-object exchange. Barthes moreover believes that connotation, as a secondary operation, constructs a denotation, for "... it is a determination, a relation, ... a feature which has the power to relate itself to anterior, ulterior ... to other sites of the text" (1975: 8). Barthes refers to the "other sites of the text" which may be the seeds for constructing the many "other readings" which characterize the "scattered" (i.e. "incoherent") nature of the reading act - and it is these elements which are not evident in the literal reading of a text, for if the speaker tries to hear himself speak he can only produce "another aural science, another fiction" (Barthes, 1978: 170). The traditional exchange between subject and object is, in itself, a fictitious assumption.

In trying to understand the dynamics of meaning construction Barthes cautions that we should not confuse connotation with the association of ideas, since the association of ideas (i.e. the link between subject and object) refers to the system of a subject, while connotation entails a correlation which is immanent in the text: "... connotation makes possible a (limited) dissemination of meanings spread like gold dust on the

apparent surface of the text" (Barthes 1975: 8-9). Barthes already seeks to displace the sovereignty and centrality of the reading subject, acting in terms of his subjective intentions and conventions vis-a-vis an object. Barthes grapples with a form of writing, as we will see, where subjectivity rather becomes an effect of language, despite his claim that "in the field of the subject, there is no referent" (Barthes, 1978: 56). Like Nietzsche's re-evaluation of all value-judgements, Barthes's evaluation of the reading act may be a process without a subject, yet it presents itself to consciousness as a subjective process.

However, semiologically, Barthes (1975: 9) views each connotation as the "articulation of a voice which is woven into the text" and part of establishing meaning is how the reading subject unmask the myth, for the latter merely entails the meta-language, i.e. a second order language which speaks of the first. The question for meaning construction is how readers "escape" the author's reading of the world as encapsulated in words, and become active in what Barthes refers to as readers writing their own reading? Barthes clarified his liberating procedure of writing vis-a-vis reading in his distinction between readerly and writerly texts. This distinction betrays Barthes's strong semiotic tendency as followed in Eco's systemic reading. This distinction also addresses the subject-object polarity dilemma.

#### 4.4.3 READERLY AND WRITERLY TEXTS.

In terms of establishing personal "meaning" in the reading act there does not seem to be any direct access to and the enjoyment of meaning as is the case in the literal representational

approaches. The Barthesian approach seeks to follow, like the pioneering thinkers, an indirect and even disruptive route of constantly delayed meaning according to a qualitative but also fundamental distinction which is drawn between readerly and writerly texts. Barthes's view of "delayed meaning" proves qualitatively different to that of Gadamer and Ricoeur, for they expound their views in terms of their understanding of language and the functioning of language in terms of history (Gadamer) and method (Ricoeur). They also pose their view in terms a clear subject-object polarity-for-exchange modes. Barthes, by contrast, expounds his notion of "delayed meaning" by distinguishing the writerly text from the readerly text in order to unburden the reading act of author (object) origins.

Barthes regards the readerly text as nothing more than a transcript of reality which pre-exists and succeeds that reality and it therefore seeks to control what Barthes refers to as the "play of signification" by subduing every textual element to its transcendental meaning. Readerly texts in this case appear somewhat reminiscent of Eco's closed texts, for they incarcerate the reader in a purely idle (i.e. uncreative) and usually consumptive status. As readerly texts always seek to attain coherence, unity and homogeneity in the reading act, they are associated with rules which limit the number of oppositions which come to play in the act of interpretation (Barthes, 1986: 31).

Writerly texts, by contrast, embody creative texts, and rather than being pre-established representations of a reality or text. They are texts which are characterized by what Barthes calls the infinite, albeit disruptive, play of signifiers (Barthes, 1975:

5), i.e. a text "created" by the reader: "... the writerly text is ourselves writing before the infinite play of the world" (Barthes, 1975: 5). Such a writerly text liberates the reading act and resides at the very core of the reader's acts of meaning construction. The writerly text does not claim the status of a metalanguage standing outside and above the language of the text. It only removes or unburdens the text from the domain of the true/false opposition and shifts it towards the domain of production, and it blurs the issue of authorship (Moriarty, 1991: 39). This is Barthes's attempt to try and not even attempt to define subject and object, apart from each other. There is no division.

In his pursuit to eliminate authorship of any message, writerly texts prove to be essentially reversible, i.e. they have no beginning and no end in the conventional sense (Barthes, 1986: 58). The emancipatory writing process consequently allows the reader to access the text at several entry points. The notion of "interpretation" becomes therefore an activity of what Barthes refers to as the disentangling the multiple writings of the text. The writerly text is none other than the critical site of disentanglement and unmasking (deconstruction) in meaning construction. At the same time, the site for creation and writing of my text and therefore myself, that is, yields glimpses of myself. This stance proves to be a major shift from Eco and Lotman's reading and ushers us in the beginning of the "autonomy" of writing itself. Beyond what is usually regarded as the "smooth surface" of representational reading where the subject confers meaning on an object, Barthes problematizes his version of the "rereading act" of writing as a "chaotic" procedure, with

neither any beginning, nor any end. The reading subject's only status or function is to be involved in the writing of the text to unearth the "other sites of reading", including himself in the *process of writing* or the process of creation - without "respecting" the text (a la Barthes). The subject who controls and manipulates the text becomes irrecoverable from the "reading-writing" rather than fulfilling the authoritative role of the "reader-writer" who imputs meaning into or extracts meaning from the text. There is thus no need, whatsoever, to *re-present* any idea "contained" or "extracted" in terms of any perception.

The readerly text, we notice, remains however a representational mode of reading, of readers consuming what is regarded as the objective text. On the other hand, the critical challenge of the writerly text, in so far as it avoids representation, has value for Barthes in that it becomes a process of "production" in which the subject becomes the active producer: it is "ourselves writing", and not seeking (vis-a-vis an object) a "reliable" reading. The readerly also seems clearly constrained by considerations of representation: it is irreversible, "natural", decidable, continuous, and totalizable. Barbara Johnson (1986: 441), by contrast, conceives of the disruptive writerly as "... infinitely plural and open to the free play of signifiers and of difference, unconstrained by representative considerations and transgressive of any desire for decidable, unified, totalized meaning. Barthes himself (1975:15) argues that:

"... the affirmation of the plural, cannot work with "respect" to the text; the tutor text will ceaselessly be broken, interrupted ... once it is separated from an ideology of

totality, consists precisely in *manhandling* the text, interrupting it (*lui couper la parole*).

Contrary to the pursuits of the pioneers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer who emphasized the equity or equivalence of subject and object in the construction of meaning, Barthes follows Ricoeur's "conflict of interpretation" by emphasizing the disruptive play of signifiers which *de-totalizes* this balance and correspondence between subject and object in order that new meanings be constantly generated. This "de-totalizing" procedure, in the reading act, is a fundamental move away from equivalences which ensures that no single meaning of a text emerges as the *meaning* of a text, which is so typical of the pursuits of communicative reading endeavours which seek to ensure representations.

In the Barthesian construction of meaning the plurality engendered by writerly texts, forms the basis of abandoning equivalence of the opposition of subject and object. Barthes's view posits a problematization of "the author-function", for the question arises how reading is to be distinguished from other practices (like dreaming, fantasizing, for example) without reference to a previously determined object - whether the latter be construed as a meaningful work or as a signifying text? It seems that the author-subject is replaced with another notion of a subject viz, that of the "scriptor" or that of the reader, for "... the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet this destination cannot any longer be personal ... he (the

reader) is simply someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes, 1979: 75).

Barthes (1986: 131) wants to move beyond the idea of a reading subject in which the "empty" subject of enunciation gradually accumulates a variety of predicates that constitutes him as a person, endowed with a psychology. Barthes clearly wants to denounce the foundational or archaeological orientation for a teleological one, departing from the quest for totalization or closure to the quest of multiplicity - an approach which marks constant shaping and reshaping of the reading act in writing and not in and through an author or reader. The destination of this reading is a process that is constantly re-created and delayed in conflict for deeper meanings and perhaps other meanings.

#### 4.4.4 THE SHAPING OF READING AS WRITING

Barthes's significant claim that we are not able to liberate reading until we have liberated writing is clear "... as for a doctrine of reading, I have none: ... a doctrine of writing [however] is gradually taking shape" (Barthes, 1986: 33). This shaping process as a form of liberation from the values and truths of referencing however is not a linear, harmonious process but rather a conflictual or disruptive process of creation in which the reader writes and rewrites "his own" texts. Readers should be liberated in order to become creative and "write" or produce their various readings before we can really speak of reading - i.e. they should engage in an ongoing process, rather than referring to the reading act which is a once-off event in

which they have discovered the truth. Barthes's view of reading-as-constantly-being-shaped, not by any authority or consenting agent, foreshadows Derrida's post-modernist play of traces which have already been shaped by Nietzsche's approach of *Werden* and power quanta in flux.

Given the fact that "writing" becomes an act of production, reading and interpretation therefore implicitly represents a "non-parasitical activity". This implies that any textual reading has to be "produced", i.e. written by the reader himself. The "I" is empty outside the discourse of the text but becomes full, over and over, each instance it assumes a productive or performative stance in the reading discourse. The further implication is that the "textual message" might not be necessarily synonymous with its intended meaning (Barthes, 1986: 59), for the reader writes and rewrites his own reading: "... I am not hidden within the text, I am simply irrecoverable from it" (Barthes, 1975: 10). In this manner Barthes believes to have overcome the "structural obligation" of subjects *interpreting* objects (texts).

In grappling whether he should still call it "reading", Barthes seems to want to move away from the notion of a psychological and biographical subject in the reading-writing process to embrace a semiotic subject who is situated within the structures of what is regarded as the reading-writing process - rather than be posited as transcendent to them. The Barthesian reading-writing act of meaning construction is to be implicated in the active production of such structures but need not be taken as foundational to that process:

"On the stage of the text, no footlights: there is not, behind the text, someone active (the writer) and out front someone passive (the reader): there is not a subject and an object" (Barthes, 1976(a): 16).

In writing his own reading, Barthes argues, the "absent" authoritative reader assembles a text (as in "message") by involving the use of semiological strategies of switching levels, horizontally and vertically, (Barthes, 1977: 87), - differently to Eco's "present" reader. The result is making the actual "textual form" the terrain of re-writing, which can either result in the readerly or writerly text. This re-writing process is one of switching our level of approaching reading: instead of listening to language for what it communicates, the reader visualizes it as a substance in its own right, opaque rather than transparent (Barthes, 1978: 161). The Barthesian pursuit has clearly been a writerly text which seeks to escape the "closing-off" of a stable and finished text. Therefore, while the Barthesian reading subject is situated in and by language i.e. within the realm of signification, its extension is potentially broader. The speaking subject's pursuit of "wanting to be ..." aims to challenge the Cartesian representational view of a subject which is reduced to a mere puppet emerging from the structural systems. Writing (in this sense the "Text") occurs when a row of signifiers is produced so that the ground of language disappears from under one's feet, and it becomes the insistent play of signifiers that is set up and arranged *ad infinitum* (Barthes, 1976(b): 10-11). Rather than placing the subject under duress of a particular strategy (Eco) or culture (Lotman), Barthes's semiology proposes a following of the "signs"

in the text to constantly create new meaning, i.e. readers who become "deaf" to the use of language (Barthes, 1978: 170). Language is therefore none other than for the purpose to "carry" the playful signifiers, but otherwise is void of meaning and function. For Barthes therefore language facilitates *the writing of meaning* rather than communicating content.

#### 4.4.5 WRITING AS DISRUPTIVE NECESSITY FOR MEANING CONSTRUCTION

Far from rejecting the subject (and subjectivity), Barthes refuses to separate the subject from the social order, and, as a result, rejects the notion of a free or autonomous foundational subject. The subject rather functions, with the other signs, within the writing process. Barthes, (1976(a): 5) argues that the text is always a threat to the reader, to the reader's settled pattern of subjectivity, as the discussion of textual production suggested.

It is however Barthes's view of language that if we unmask ideology and myth as evidenced in the connotations that stable texts inevitably "convey", we in fact celebrate the birth of the reader, but at the cost of the death of the author (1977: 148). Writing, according to Barthes, can no longer designate a coherent master-minded activity of recording, notation, depiction or representation, for the "scriptor" does not exist outside the scene of writing (see Kerby, 1991: 102). The author must "die" and abdicate for the text to begin its own life, a life without final closure, without a final signified content. In the reading

act this implies that the reading subject has to become part of writing his own text, which is not at all a straightforward and smooth process, for readers, according to Barthes, are not one-dimensional but rather constitute what he calls multiple or plural subjects. The text, like the erotic, suspends our sense of ourselves as unified reading subjects: we have no secure identity as receivers of a message, for there is no final message. As readers we cannot relate to a message's discourse but are only confronted with bottomless possibilities, and the multiplicity of voices we hear multiplies our response and divides our subjectivity. In this sense we are no innocent and decontextualized subjects either which are anterior to the text (Barthes, 1975: 10), for the "I" who approaches the text is already, according to Barthes, a plurality of social and other voices and texts. According to Barthes, the notion of "objectivity" and "subjectivity" are therefore nothing but fictitious and imaginary notions, leaving the reader to continue to oscillate and shift within, what Barthes refers to as, a "galaxy of signifying systems" (Barthes, 1975: 5). The "subject" is a dynamic construct of vibrant signifiers.

Barthes moreover argues that the meanings the reader generates are not established by the authoritative will of himself or of others but via their systematic mark, for "... there is no other proof of a reading than the quality and endurance of its systematics ... i.e. its functioning" (1975: 10). Barthes's view of reading discourse ushers us into the beginnings of clear post-modernist mode of reasoning where the reading act becomes a "look, no hands!" approach, and where the conventional understandings of "truth", including the "truth" of our notions

of subjectivity and representation, have no validity in his reading-as-writing- approach. He argues that in meaning construction we do not wish to "rediscover" the truth contained in our reading, but rather to escape the binary dialectic between a value and its opposite and discover a third notion (which is not a synthesis of the first two) but "... a term that returns ... in a different place, not as a truth, but as a Fiction (Barthes, 1978: 92). It is this fiction that has become your own personalized writing, i.e. your own reading instead of the author's.

Barthes's view of "systematics" are "responsible for the fiction generated by textual codes within the paradoxical nature of the writerly text, because the latter thrives on the free and infinite play of signifiers which seem to refuse coherence-seeking and closure of meaning. The dynamics of the reading-as-writing process will only occur when the reading subject engages in the disentangling (not deciphering) (Barthes, 1977: 147) of the plurality of textual codes: "The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal, it is not a question of conceding "some meanings" - it is a question of asserting the very existence of plurality" (Barthes, 1975: 6). The consequence is that the construction of the plural text, read by the plural subject, remains of necessity, incomplete and open. This inevitably would upset the security and conventions in everyday life, for the text violates the symbolic barriers on which our culture, and therefore our place in it, depends. Barthes clearly wants to overcome the barriers or limitations of linearity of causality, i.e. the desire to establish who or what authority is *behind* the meaning construction. Barthes thus

rejects what Miller (1987) accepts as "decoding" which is an ongoing process of seeking explanations, judged on assumptions, conventions and standard maxims by which the intentions of an actual author might be constructed.

Contrary to tradition (Gadamer) or culture (Lotman), nothing *mediates* (like the signs and symbols of Ricoeur) the act of meaning construction. For him it is neither the subject nor the text as such. Barthes fervently seeks to avert the reciprocal process of circularity where the subject and object constantly condition each other in order to construct new meaning. While the dynamics of circularity in the reading act does ensure multiple readings (like in the case of Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur), these still tend to occur under very clear and specific conditions and, as a result, limits the "openness of the reading act. The "look, no hands!" shift in Barthes's new approach, wants the reading discourse to "speak for itself", without closure or finality of a subject or object. While the insecure text, according to Barthes, is without final closure or without a final signified content, its future would seem to rather lie with its readers - linguistically a reading subject as an *instance* in writing. This decentred status of the anti-authoritarian subject marks Barthes's radical contribution to the rethinking of the reading act. "Decentred subjectivity" underscores the challenge of a self-assured Cartesian subject as well as Gadamerian subject operating in a tradition.

The Barthesian emphasis is unequivocally on the rewriting process, executed within the "plural reader" who acts as the space and orientation point, in which the reader *structurates*.

A text does not embody a rigid structure but only a productive stance of structuration, for "... a code is a perspective of quotations, a mirage of structures, we know only its departures and returns" (Barthes, 1975: 20). The reading act, according to Barthes, is therefore always disruptive and discontinuous act, writing and rewriting of a limited number of decorative variables in order to make the familiar, new. The critical task of reading-writing will tend to upset easy resolutions in information and data interpretation, generating a new textual space wherein deeply-entrenched habits of interpretation have been tested, resisted, violated and transformed (see Cornis-Pope, 1992: 29). This is the essence of the Barthesian "non-referential" view which stubbornly refuses closure of intention and completion of meaning, which marked the earlier theories. Barthes, by removing his writing discourse from the authority of truth, insists that his guiding principle is not knowledge but writing (Barthes, 1978: 71). The question of "accurate representation" is therefore a non-issue for Barthes since signifieds have no origins; they are reversible, they are networks which are indeterminable based as they are on the "infinity of language" (Barthes, 1975:6).

Barthes points out that the active writing subject "intersects" the text that had *already begun*, by interweaving and braiding the familiar voices or codes in his own writing. In the Barthesian view of the reading act, there exists therefore no originary "objective" text that would easily or simplistically produce univocal or literal meanings. The implication is also that there exists no notion of intersubjectivity either, for the reader is no longer a consumptive subjective agent, communicating or

responding to the text's "subjective" meaning. In fact the reader is only "free", according to Barthes, to respond to the "play of signifiers" (Barthes, 1975: 4). Moreover, if every "no hands" reading embodies a constant re-reading, it implies that there has been no first reading of the text at all. As a result, Barthes incorporates the notion of "forgetting" into his notion of "textual disentanglement" since forgetting, as an affirmative creative value, evidences the immense liberty he accords the reader subject: "It is precisely because I forget that I read" (Barthes, 1975: 11). The "first" reading is just one of the many valid "readings" that a text could possibly have - defying the notion of any shade of referentiality, i.e. the text and its referent. Sharing "a common subject matter" would be put out of action and has no guarantee in reading.

#### 4.4.6 THE DIVIDED/SPLIT SUBJECT IN THE STRUCTURATION OF WRITING.

Since Barthes challenges the notion of a pre-existing or finished text which shares with the reader, there cannot, according to him, be an action called "interpretation". What is called "interpretation" rather becomes the very "ontological ground" which spawns the birth of the reading subject in the process of writing. This ontological space however marks a multidimensional space of writing, i.e. a space in which a variety of writings, none of which are original. These writings as production of "meaning" may blend and clash as well (Barthes, 1977: 146). Furthermore, this inter-space between disentanglement and creation (writing) is, according to Barthes, not a space for arbitrary "interpretation", because textual codes in fact assist

the reader in disrupting and transforming the text into a writerly text. The interpretation of a text "... in its plurality, is in no way liberal: it is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible (Barthes, 1975:6). Within the structuration of the text a divided or split subject becomes apparent, i.e. the subject of the readerly text is still outside of the text who has to become the subject inside the writerly text, operating among the many other signs/codes in the reading. In this space, marked by disruption and tension, Barthes (1975: 19) identifies the semic, hermeneutic, proairetic, symbolic and cultural codes - all of which fulfill the "off-stage voices" which are the codes in "... their interweaving - the convergence of voices ... writing" (Barthes, 1975: 20). Barthes envisages meanings which invoke other names, other meanings and "... their conglomeration calls out to be named anew; I name, I unname, I rename: thus passes the text: it is a nomination in the becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic project" (Barthes, 1975: 17-18). The metonymic dynamic resides in the writing space in which the subject, assisted the Barthesian codes, writes. Therefore, the pursuit of discovering what the text is really about, is a non-start for Barthes.

As subjects read, the connotations we unearth become, through their duration and repetition within the reading, denotations from which further connotations need to be derived. This oscillating process of discontinuity results in the fact that there cannot be any "construction of a text" (Barthes, 1975: 18) either in a subjective or objective way in the representational manner, but everything *signifies continually* and in multiple times, without any mandate for a final unity. The reading-

writing process, in its unmediated unfolding, interrupts, discontinues, continues and transforms the "text" over and over. In this process the subject too is compelled to continually renew his own identity and meaning in life. Barthes's contribution here is affording readers "a sense of discovery" in which we do not have to conform or emulate the behaviour of others.

In terms of the pleasure of reading as structuration, according to Barthes, the text is "manhandled" and "interrupted" (Barthes, 1975: 15). In a fetishist (rather than sharing) relationship with the text, and in creating a sense of suspense, the subject, in fact "creates" himself - a creation which is marked by plurality, discontinuity and explosion. In a sense it is also "exploding" the myth of what people think we are or "should be", as often conveyed or insinuated in the media, advertising and educational practices. The homogeneous, neatly-packaged coherent sense of identity in Cartesian representational reading, has been replaced by Barthes. The "explosion" or "dissemination" of texts, according to Barthes, characterizes the play of signifiers which reduces and ultimately dispels the quest for final and holistic meaning. For what ultimately remains is a *reading* which resides in what Barthes calls the "pleasure of reading". The pleasure Barthes speaks of does not refer to the psychological-biographical pleasure of the reader, but an expressive capacity that acts as an impetus within a symbolic and cultural sphere (off-stage voices). It is therefore not only the pleasure of consumption but *jouissance* as an intense, even violent, orgasmic form of pleasure. *Jouissance* is essentially an interruption of consciousness, shattering the mirror world of the literal and accurate representational reading between reader and text. The

"framework" in which the divided subject operates, encompasses the past writings (memory) and the freedom of the present within which *écriture* or writing tries to sustain itself. Within the ambit of this "tension of meaning" Barthes (1953: 31) seeks to subvert the literal and accurate reading of a text to achieve a "zero-degree writing" that would be "free of any servitude to a marked order of language". In other words, it is a form of first-hand writing, starting from the attempts of the reader himself, acquiescing into a process of structuration that has already begun. Therefore, "...the pristine simplicity of the idea of mere interpretation... is altogether lost" (Rorty, 1993:130).

According to Barthes, by grasping the significance of *écriture*, the very coinage of the concept "reading subject" therefore becomes patently false. What ultimately holds for Barthes, is *writing*, i.e. the *functioning* or *structuration* of signifiers and not representation. Moreover, what this view seeks to convey is that texts which are read in our writing of them, should occur on their own merit, i.e. in terms of the structure (albeit a disruptive process) of symbolic and cultural codes and not to view them representationally as mirrors of a constituting consciousness. No symbol (as in Ricoeur's view) *mediates* the reading process. If the literal author is left behind, once the text goes public, the writing becomes a confluence of intertextuality rather than intersubjectivity. Once the author has been dethroned as the origin of meaning, he has been freed to allow him to re-enter the experience of reading. Beneath the fallacy of the written words there always appear to be more words - a form of renaming, unnamng and rewriting that can know no

halt. No one, neither author nor reader, can "own" or "control" the content. Language and discourse takes on a peculiar "subjectivity" operating as the "site of production". It is within discourse that meanings are detotalized and decrystallized, where the "subject" constantly creates and recreates itself - a view which suggests that Barthes still operates within the shadow of or reference to the notion of subjectivity - even if its merely a theoretical construct - therefore, theoretically, the text is being written endlessly.

#### 4.4.7 THE ENDLESS TEXT OF READING AS WRITING PROCESS

Barthes's progress beyond the "new" theorists is quite substantial. It has become clear that in rethinking our concerns of the subject and representation, Barthes has pushed his own version of suspicion substantially further than his predecessors. The human subject, who has been "dismissed" out of the equation of validating what is regarded as knowledge and meaning, has been radically questioned and believed to have been replaced by Barthes. We observe however that the human subject, who "reads" becomes a semiotic and theoretical point of a subject that becomes its own author in order to define and redefine himself. Barthes however does not abandon the notion of subject but seeks to separate the subject from discourse so that the subject becomes an implicate of its discourse. The endless text as manifest *reading*, subverts the attempts of representation by foregrounding the *workings* of language as autonomous - disturbing therefore the unity of the reader or writer's subjectivity (Moriarty, 1991: 148). Instead therefore of saying "I have written", Barthes proposes "I am written" (which is not the

equivalent of "someone wrote me" (see Caws, 1988: 239). In this sense the text or the reading, which can only be produced in the present, has profound liberating ontological roots. It is a form of subjectivity which can never be a finished product, for we do not have to contend with "once-and-for-all" complete definitions or views of ourselves - whether views generated by ourselves or views imposed upon us.

In order to escape the dogmatism of representational reading where the human subject is the centre of things and is, as a result, able to contradict itself, the plural text sets out to ensure non-closure of meaning, whether it be a poem, scientific manual or charter of rights. *Text or reading* (which is the shaping, undoing and reshaping of the subject) defers the signified indefinitely, through an endless process of displacement (metonymy) (Barthes, 1986: 58-9). There are no quick fixes. Barthes constantly attempts to avoid the possibility of unity for the subject, for the divided subject helps to resituate and reorientate the dispersion (starring of text) into an infinite network of ever-new signs (Barthes, 1975: 6) and as such problematizes the reading act as established in terms of truth. The radically decentred status of the reading subject would also be crystallized so that its "identity" which tends to become fixed and predictable would replicate itself in every reading of a text. The Barthesian subject, in a way becomes an implied subject of the discourse - expressing the possibility of much richer participation in multiple text production of books, information, our world and, as a result, understanding oneself. Contrary to the "systems" of Eco and Lotman, Barthes (1975: 11-13) prefers to keep the text open, plural (to respect its

difference from other texts and other worlds and from itself) - avoiding freezing a text in order to extract a theme or structure, also to avoid reading people as a "typical" this or "typical" that.

Barthes is clearly qualitatively beyond the systemic approaches of Eco and Lotman, which, despite their acknowledgement of "oppositional forces" between subject-object, still operate in a polarity structure of meaning construction and "messages". Barthes as probably our most critical exponent of the "new" exponents dealt within this study hitherto, seeks to take his assumptions beyond the limitations of subject-object reciprocity and communication. Whereas the author's of "back-to-the-text" approaches of the New Critics, who believe in the objectivity of the text, seem to stand aloof of the reader's subjective prejudices (Seung, 1982: 6) the Barthesian post-structuralist approach attempts to redefine the designation of who or what is "subject" and "object" differently. For Barthes it is not about sharing, communication or certainly not representing. Life rather, is an endless text into which we all, readers as writers, produce our worlds and our identities - and liberate ourselves and our worlds.

Reading or text "resides" in a broader realm of intertextuality, rather than between subject and object. Intertextuality, i.e. the relationship a one reading to other readings or texts is another dimension of the endless citational process which prevents closing on a signified. In fact the "representational structure" between subject and object appears to be completely displaced. It is however not just a matter of the "text" which

now fulfils the role of the traditional human subject. With the Barthesian post-structural approach to the reading act the notion of "an identity" in a unified way (eg. the reader as subject) no longer seem to have any validity, for it is rather the endless *working* or *functioning* of signs and codes that "produces" meaning - even the meaning of who I, the human subject, is. The myopia of circularity or reciprocity which is typical of the pioneering masters, is redefined in terms of the discontinuous and disruptive functioning of codes, continually dispossessing the role of the reading subject as well as his "traditional" and "typical" identity of stability and unity. The capacity of *jouissance* (pleasure) which always belies the reading dynamic, constantly subverts the unified image of the self, the text and our world (Barthes, 1976(a): 25).

Barthes's repudiation of his earlier structuralism (in *S/Z*) corresponds, as we will see in the case with Derrida's deconstructive understanding of the reading act, is clear in that both of them initiate a radical departure from reading to *writing*, arguing that texts are composed of a number of diverse and overlapping voices or codes, which in essence is not itself anti-structuralist, but rather what would seem to be post-structuralist and subjectless. It is this Barthesian sense of *jouissance* (suspense in the pleasure of reading) which is the fragmentation, the loss, of subjectivity. Barthes complicates the ambiguity of *jouissance* (which temporarily eclipses subjectivity) because at another level "subjectivity" as a working hypothesis, surfaces again.

Barthes's anti-interpretive strategy in meaning construction

therefore seeks to show that the text entails a plurality of levels of connotation, with denotation having no separate existence, the reader defies accurate representation and rather dismantles the text's presence and in the process dismantles the ego, cogito and consciousness as well. The "I", as a result, becomes a plurality of voices or codes which reads the Barthesian readerly text. The Barthesian "I" which approaches the text according to him, is already a plurality of other texts, of other worlds. In the reading act the life of the subject, a constituted self is endlessly threatened with, and simultaneously seeks, a temporary annihilation in orgasmic reading bliss. While Barthes has proven to have substantially progressed beyond the communicative polarity structure of his predecessors, his notion of subjectivity (unlike the post-modernists, like Derrida) still has a context in discourse in terms of which meaning is constructed. The Barthesian idea of subjectivity appears to be engaged by and in an already existing human reservoir of contextual codes and texts. However, this "plural subject" which is being written, endlessly, stands outside the text to "clarify" textual logic that the text itself is apparently blind to. In this way the plural human subject continually dismantles all conceptions (including that of *himself*) in order to constantly redefine his world and himself. It is only the irreducible language or discourse within the "*texte de jouissance*" that figures utopia in Barthes's discourse of reading.

In this study Barthes has ushered us into the value and significance of *displacement* in reading - a concept which has come to *disturb* the smooth definition of the location and identity of reading. The question is how can we read that which

is different from itself or, moreover, can we read differently and more profoundly, other than being "true" to a text or to read it "right"? In the opening of *Le Plaisir du texte* Barthes asks us to imagine a bizarre creature who has rid itself of the fear of self-contradiction, who mixes reputedly incompatible languages and patiently endures charges of illogicality. This notion of *illogicality*, and also misrecognition and displacement, becomes a very prominent effect (and is taken further) in Lacan's approach to meaning construction in reading. In his psychoanalytic reading, Lacan challenges what he regards as the dubious assumptions of a coherent and stable identity of the reader. Felman (in Bennett, 1995:11) suggests that analytic reading is "... the reading of a difference that inhabits language, a kind of mapping in the subject's discourse of its points of disagreement with or difference with itself". Therefore, in order to deepen the understanding of reading - away from identity (sameness, symmetry) of understanding towards difference (heterogeneity, ambiguity) we will proceed from Barthes's shift of displacement to Lacan's shift to *emptiness* as a significant component of meaning and understanding in the context of this study.

4.5. LACAN'S PSYCHO-ANALYTIC EVACUATION OF MEANING  
CONSTRUCTION

4.5.1 THE DEPARTURE FROM OBJECTIVITY

As we have noticed with Barthes, the liberating "scene of writing" becomes one intense, ongoing act of reading. Nothing is here subjected in a simple, unproblematic way to a dominant subject, whether identified as author, cogito, archetype, or field of knowledge. Hartman (1981:2) argues that lately "...we have been accustomed to bypass the peculiar entity "self" and say that things are subject to language, or language-determined indetermination. Even the self, that is, has its boundaries fixed or unsettled by language." The centrality of *language vis-a-vis* the analytic assumptions of the unconscious, in the arena of meaning construction, is the manifest, radical contribution of Lacan in this study.

Following Nietzsche and Bataille, Lacan wants to take individuals to the pre-Oedipal *play of desires* so that people can continually create and redefine themselves, through language, without giving themselves through language a fixed unity and therefore a self-assured sense of authority and authorship. As a result, Lacan evidences the most insightful move to interpret Freud's *unconscious* as a language and then interpret language along Saussurian lines, as the free play of signs and signifiers (differences and identities) without end or unity - the latter of which already gained a foothold in the problematization of meaning construction by Barthes and Derrida.

Our attempts at rethinking and deepening our insights into the reading act and the construction of meaning since Descartes, would be lacking if we did not also examine the "never-present past" Lacanian discourse of subjectivity and representation (Lacan, 1977(a); 1977(b)). Lacan returns to language and its intertwining implications with *subjectivity*, but viewed from a completely different vantage-point. He encourages us to read Freud as if "reading" a dream or symptom, that is, according to Freud's own interpretive methods. Consistent with the pioneers in this study and more particularly Barthes and Derrida, Lacan too rejects the notion of a unified reading subject that has virtual direct access to textual meaning and self-identity and like Derrida, subjects them rather to the working (Nietzsche) of playful signifiers.

Like Barthes, Lacan also appears to be indebted to the assumptions of structuralist linguistics, especially his Freudian concerns regarding the subject, i.e. the speaking subject and its role as signifier in the context of meaning-giving. In an attempt to develop his own peculiar theory, Lacan wishes to read Freud and this appears to be the simplest and most important thing about understanding him. In Lacan's writings the challenges of psychoanalysis are moreover repeatedly made to "turn back upon itself" and constantly re-examine their concepts, rituals, etc. from the vantage-point offered by their own discoveries in their original unsystematized state (Bowie, 1987: 100-101). For Lacan (1977(b): 31-32) and his grasp of meaning, it is important to recognize that the *unconscious* is not a submerged consciousness, a rational system that is somehow invisible; it is an entirely other form of reason, logic and

pleasure one not reducible to those available consciousness. This marks Lacan's critical contribution and background to the reading act, that it is just so absolutely *other* than that of all the theorists in this study, which in themselves cannot be taken as definitive.

For Lacanian thinking, the notion of "representation through signification" is seemingly only fully appreciated in the light of his "return to Freud" - a view which encompasses an almost un- or anti-Freudian view. Contrary to the ego-psychologists who argue that the ego contains all the essential elements within itself to develop into an autonomous, conflict-free ego, Lacan rather, pursues a "non-representational view" of interpretation theory which results in what can be regarded as a "re-reading of psycho-analysis itself" (Felman, 1987: 9). He criticizes the apparent over-systematization, and therefore "objectivist" views of all the modes of interpretations of Freud and on the basis of this argument develops his own critical understanding of subjectivity and representation for the reading act (Bowie, 1991). Lacan clearly hopes to demonstrate how the implications of Lacanian psychoanalysis, for the reading act, suggests "different or other" or even ambiguous ways in which psychoanalysis has "transformed" the procedures and strategies that would be available to the reading subject. Felman (1995: 181) suggests that Lacanian analysis, while recognizing that a "difference inhabits language", also asserts that the unconscious is not just that state which is read, but also in fact "*that which reads*". In the framework of this "non-objectivist" and different approach Lacanian recognition of the "unconscious as a reader" produces in this study a further dimension of

understanding the notion of the reading act as being differential (see Williams, 1995: 75; Felman, 1982: 21). For Lacan (1977(a): 295) the unconscious is primarily structured like a language, and to develop his interpretation of the linguisticity of the unconscious, he draws extensively on the work of Levi-Strauss (1967: 203):

"The unconscious ... is always empty - or more accurately, it is as alien to mental images as is the stomach to the foods that pass through it. As the organ of a specific function, the unconscious merely imposes structural laws upon inarticulated elements that originate elsewhere - impulses, emotions, representations and memories."

Contrary to Barthes's abandonment of a totalizing binary view of social codes, Lacan seeks to approach the reading act primarily in terms of Hegel's master-slave dialectic - a parable in which the slave can work for the master only by repressing his own desires, founded in emptiness, and as a result transcend himself. In this context Lacan also refers to Sartre's dialectic of the self, its lack or loss and the other vis-a-vis the act of seeing and being seen (Hollinger, 1994: 91). The Freudian notion of libido, is significant for meaning construction and according to Lacan, can explore the world through nothing else but what he calls the "scopic drive" (Sarup, 1992: 35). But that drive does not only "represent" pleasure-seeking, as with Freud, but is inescapably entangled in a signifying system. This productive process implicates all forms of "looking", for as the object can be looked at, it in turn can look at me - a notion we will later examine more closely in terms of how the "empty" subject

constructs meaning.

Contrary to Heidegger's notion of language being the "house of Being", Lacan (1977(a): 1) argues that there is no pre-discursive reality since every reality is already founded in and defined by discourse. Lacan (in Critchley & Dews, 1996: 149) remarks that no linguist or philosopher can maintain "... a theory of language as a system of signs doubling a system of realities". He argues therefore in an "anti-representational" manner that no system of signification can be sustained other than by reference to a process of endless, playful signification. Dews (1996: 150) clarifies that for Lacan "... there are no privileged points where language abuts directly onto the real: reference is rather inherent in the functioning of a language - however minimal - as a whole". Lacan clearly joins the ranks of the new masters of grasping the reading act, as a *deferred* process, whose purpose resides not in its use as a logical communicative tool but rather in its desubstantialization *functioning*. This discourse, for Lacan, happens among people, as signifiers - which determines the space of the subject.

It is significant for Lacan that the notion of "people" essentially is nothing more than signifiers operating as a function of speech. This he uses in his re-conceptualized view of the subject and therefore favours psycho-analysis precisely because of its emphasis on the "lack of being". According to Lacan (1977(a): 292) the "lack of being" proves essential for the conceptualization of language and its "representations". While Hegel argues that language harbors an absence that is the result of the negation of the sensual immediacy of the "here and now",

Lacan (1977(a):276) effectively reformulates Hegel's insight when he identifies "the word" as "a presence made of absence":

"Through the word - already a presence made of absence - absence itself gives itself a name in the moment of origin whose perpetual recreation Freud's genius detected in the play of the child."

The absence of the word discloses the nothingness of the thing. To clarify their thinking, both Heidegger and Lacan underscore the etymological link between "thing" and "nothing" or "no thing". For reading the trace is always the trace of a nothing (Lacan, (1977(a): 320). He peculiarly argues that man was born prematurely since language existed prior to humankind. The implication therefore is not what the reading subject "is able" to perceive but that *seeing* has already been determined by images. Bannet (in Bracher, 1994,: 25) clarifies that "... as the conscious subject is little more than a mechanism which repeats the signifiers and significations already in language, so the unconscious is a mechanism which repeats what has been repressed". In meaning construction therefore to understand the Lacanian notion of "representation" or rather signification means exploring the endless, yet playful process that would yield no fixed or stable meaning but only to conceal a "deeper gap", i.e. a gap of an unconscious system of repressed meaning, rooted in Desire. Unravelling the complexities of the psycho-analytic processes of the unconscious and signification would be significant by illuminating Lacan's "revolutionized interpretive stance ... a revolutionized theory of reading: a theory of reading that opens up into a rereading of the world as well ..." (Felman, 1987: 9).

To arrive at a more comprehensive notion of reading, Lacan's rethinking of subjectivity in the act of meaning construction proposes a deconstructive path in a different way as suggested by Barthes and Derrida. His "difference" of approaching the usual communicative nature of language and subjectivity resides in the recognition of the notions of of gap, absence and loss. In a critical stance, as that of Barthes, Lacan which seeks to avert or subvert the notion of equivalence and moreover the simplistic acquiescence into a substantial centre-stage subject manipulating and mastering the textual object. For Lacan the notion of the reading subject rather becomes implicated in language, acting as a signifier who constantly engages "out of his lack of being" to repeat the signifiers already existing in language. In this sense Lacan's notion of subjectivity, in contrast to that of Derrida, as we will notice, seems to "re-engage" the human element in his discourse.

#### 4.5.2 THE LACANIAN RETHINKING OF SUBJECTIVITY IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

It is not unusual in some "reading theories" that the traditional notion of Freudian psycho-analysis deals essentially with the wishes and desires that are unknown to the subject because they only appear in the unconscious. Lacan's argument, however, defies the notion of a unified collection of thoughts and feelings which essentially results into an essential split. The result of this shift is a decentered and empty subject, away from the conception of traditional representationalism. Lacan (1977(a): 292) also insists that the rift between the universal (the unconscious) and the particular (consciousness) forever

splits the subject, thereby rendering transparent self-consciousness unattainable. As a result of its inescapable alterity (the proximity of "difference" and "otherness"), the unconscious remains "excentric" to consciousness. In the reading act the significance of the "excentricity/eccentricity" of the subject calls into question the principles governing our Western verifying and totalizing theories, even in those bent on a "correct" reading:

"But Freud's discovery was to demonstrate that this verifying process authentically attains the subject only by decentering it (*a le decentrer*) from the consciousness-of-self" (Lacan, 1977(a): 79-80).

Lacan's excentric subjectivity cannot operate in terms of coherent verification but is to be structured by and upon the notion of *self-division*, which would mean that the absent subject can never purely be one substantial thing. The subject is never equivalent in any coherent way to a particular organisation of knowledge either but rather a system or structure which is operated by many internal agencies and structured in terms of various sub-levels of unconscious organisation (see Alcorn, 1994: 40-41). What this means is that because knowledge (within the text, the world) can be conceptualized in different ways and in different "layers" within the human subject, it may potentially produce conflict. Conflict as such, is nothing new to the new masters, for its presence in the reading discourse has significance for the status of subjectivity and knowledge production in an expansive way. The discourse in which the "position" of the subject develops, is for Lacan however complex - "starting" with the in(famous) mirror stage, when it engages

in the reading act.

For Lacan the mirror stage as the "foundational phase" in meaning construction, refers to how infants learn to perceive themselves in a mirror (Lacan, 1977(a): 1). The helpless infant who is not yet objectively in control of its own movements, perceives in the mirror, on an imaginary level, the mastery of its bodily unity which it objectively still lacks (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986). The mirror stage is not a mere epoch in the history of the individual but an alienating stage in which the ongoing battle of the reading subject is being waged. It is significant, according to Lacan "human subjectivity" can only be developed at the level of language, i.e. the Symbolic Order which can be reached via the mirror stage and through relationships which are experienced as the "castration complex" (O'Neill, 1989), i.e. being subject to the Other and going over into what Lacan calls the Symbolic Order. Clearly Lacan is beyond the mere communicative interests of language in reading.

According to Lacan (1977(a): 2) the mirror stage is experienced *all the time* because the reading subject projects before him, as his own ideal, the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood in which he was his own ideal. Beyond his difficult theorizing of meaning making, Lacan maintains that the ego is developed not so much in terms of Freud's "adaptive role" of the ego but rather its misrecognition (*meconnaissance*), i.e. the refusal to acknowledge thoughts and feelings (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986). This condition already foreshadows the division or the split, i.e. the beginning of the inevitable plurality of subjectivity, as opposed to a single, totalized subjectivity as

evidenced in the more representational views of reading. Despite Lacan's wish to pursue a different, albeit critical view of the reading subject, he does this very much in the context of language, for the Lacanian assumptions about language implies thoroughly different assumptions of his notion of subjectivity - assumptions which thrive on the notion of emptiness and of *difference*.

#### 4.5.3 THE PURSUIT OF DIFFERENCE AND OTHERNESS IN READING.

In his re-evaluation of reading act the displacement of the subject requires of Lacan to place great emphasis on perception or seeing. The subject seems to find it easier, according to him, to perceive the unity of an image than it is to produce this unity in its own body. The sight of another human being, be it its mother, or its own mirror-image, becomes the matrix of a sense of unity, identity and continuity (Lacan, 1977(a): 2). In the reading process this textual Gestalt is, however, held together in the mirror in an *imaginary* way and this reflected image increases its fascination power for the reader. It becomes clear that such fascination leads to a state of fictionality and self-deception which will ultimately result in an alienating effect. The child within the reader is propelled into "identification" relations only by acknowledging its lack or loss. Only at this moment of alienation does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the "outside" world and locating itself in the world. Only when the child recognizes the concept absence, does it see that it is not "one", complete-in-itself, merged with the world as a whole and the other (Lacan, 1977(a): 4-5). In stark contrast to the "smoothness" of words and

sentences in literal-reading, Lacan envisages "struggle" moments for deeper reading.

This state of alienation becomes problematic because self-identity, according to Lacan, derives from the internalization of a relationship that is based on *heterogeneity* and *difference*. The child's recognition of its own image means that it has adopted the perspective of exteriority on itself (Lacan, 1977(a): 4). The Lacanian subject emerges through a process of *differentiation* in which it struggles to construct its identity by separating itself from otherness (Lacan, 1977(b): 160). It is on the basis of this state of difference and alienation that the individual becomes a "person" or "human". In contrast to Derrida, for example, Lacanian human subjectivity is only developed through subjecting oneself to the "Otherness" as represented by what he refers to as the Symbolic Order. For Lacan, a preliminary form of subjectivity comes into being in the "mirror stage", when the child, not yet capable of speech, encounters and identifies the (illusory) image of itself as a unity, thus entering the domain of the Imaginary (Lacan, 1977(a): 19). But subjectivity is fully attained only through language. Language thus does not provide a transcription of reality but rather assists with the inscription of subjectivity.

By advancing into the Symbolic Order, the child confronts Otherness in a number of ways (lack, castration, desire), to the extent that he recognizes his *difference* from a world (and a linguistic order) which he had not created, and which imposes on him the laws of the social order. Williams (1995: 59) maintains "... so his developing subjectivity comes into being through an

experience of power (of the Other ...)". By modelling himself on the Other (through the mirror) the child assumes to be the other, and by engaging with the "Other" in the unconscious, the process of interpretation has been initiated. In other words, access to narrative is contemporaneous with entry into the Symbolic Order. In an "anti-representational" mode where the reader is not in control, the child can only give up its alienation by accepting that the other is not within its control, being a separate object. The "fullness" and the completeness that the child experiences through the maternal supplementation of its needs, is interrupted by lack. Away from the self-assured status of the reader, from this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being:

"Since consciousness and the unconsciousness forever stand in tension, there is always an unconscious "Other" within the conscious subject" (Lacan, 1977(b): 31-32).

In the construction of meaning and sense the misrecognition, i.e. the refusal to acknowledge thoughts and feelings, constitutes for Lacan the cornerstone of the mirror stage. The ego embodies nothing but a narcissistic process whereby he can bolster a fictitious sense of unified selfhood by finding something in the world he can identify with (see De Beer, 1987: 12). This is actually no unconscious - it is the "structure" in terms of which the reading subject *projects outside of himself*. This Other (which is always in tension with the unconscious) is, according to Lacan (1977(b): 29-30) pre-ontological, for "it is neither being nor non-being". Like Heidegger's presencing that is never present, the unconscious presents the self-conscious subject but does not exist as such. As Taylor (1987: 91) says of the

unconscious: "Never standing out, the unconscious is always out-standing", therefore always deferring meaning and complete understanding.

It is this out-standing or absence, its seeking (of the Other) that never ends. In the reading act every object of desire puts into place a quest or desire which moves relentlessly in a process of displacement - which Lacan compares to the metonymic play of signifiers. Desire (unlike a pleasurable pursuit like that of Barthes's *jouissance*) is rather a movement or energy that is always transpersonal to others:

"... the subject has to find the constituting structure of his desire in the same gap opened up by the effects of the signifiers in those who come to represent the Other for him, in so far as his demand is subjected to them (Lacan, 1977(a): 264).

Desire thus the very embodiment of differential readings, for desire "threatens" to subvert the unity and certainty of conscious demand. Desire thrives only in terms of its own processes and internal logic - the logic of the signifier.

The identification process is not directed to an object in the representational sense, but is precipitated by a new visual and mental experience because an *internal organized form* of the subject is seen *projected outside of himself* - precipitating the split - a split which is totally different from that of Derrida, for example, who proclaims: there is nothing outside the text. Derrida, as we will see, does not entertain the idea of "projection", as Lacan does, at all. But this Lacanian form of

projection which happens *all the time* occurs as a result of the "absent subject", who, in the process becomes split. The subject who *reads* only becomes a *subject* by continually, everytime, "keeping himself" split (to the inside and the outside), being *absent*, i.e. avoiding closure, *all the time*.

#### 4.5.4 THE SPLIT FOR DISPLACEMENT.

According to Lacan, this inside/outside projection (circle) gives rise, to the illusion of autonomy. For the construction of meaning he argues that such an inevitable circle effectively means that neither social conditions nor subjective interaction, alone, determine perceptions and sense but rather that, "... its roots are to be *intrasubjective*, deriving from a relationship of misrecognition" (Weber, 1991: 14). The empty or absent Lacanian subject is therefore trapped in a state of future anterior - it will have been the image whose place it occupies. For Lacan the self exists in, and consists of a state of absence and alienation, not from itself, but from the Other. In this delayed condition this "alienation" of the subject leads to the "displaced" and the "split" subjectivity which Barthes also subscribes to in order to ensure *deferred* meaning construction.

For Lacan such an "alienated existence" in the reading act is moreover supported by the constancy of Desire. The "I" emanates from Desire of the "Other", which is at the same time the cause of being and which marks a split. The *Spaltung* (Spalte = split) occurs, according to Lacan, when the child enters into the Symbolic Order of language and culture. Language as unconscious structure, exists before everything, which would mean that the

emerging speaking subject can only be interpreted through language in the Symbolic Order. The *Spaltung* marks a split, lending to it a form of discontinuity, which implies that language, instead of easy "representing" a constituted, harmonious order or representation. It is the repetition of the mother's departure as cause of a *Spaltung* in the subject which is a here or there (alternating game) (Lacan, 1977(b): 62-63). Because of this discontinuity and alternating of existence through language, the conventional views of a sovereign and meaning-giving subjectivity do not seem to hold any validity, for they have failed to understand that language is inseparable from the meaning of existence precisely because *language is inseparable from the meaning of existence* (Lamaire, 1970: xviii). The deployment of language in such discourse thus marks for Lacan the opening up for the alienated subjectivity - allowing the reader to constantly catch glimpses of himself. This discontinuous, albeit playful, functioning of signifiers enables the reading subject to develop a sense of who and what he is. Like Derridean "traces", Lacan argues for the incessant and constant inscription of signifiers, the reader who is constantly inscribing and re-inscribing himself in the challenges of the reading act.

#### 4.5.5 LANGUAGE AND THE INSCRIPTION OF SUBJECTIVITY IN READING.

For a more profound conceptualization of the reading act Lacan advances in a radical way, ahead of his predecessors in this study. He argues that the unconscious which is composed of signifiers, which in turn is structured into distinctive, yet

summable sub-sets and categories. In fact, the structure of the unconscious is regarded by Lacan as being identical with that of language in its synchronic dimension - a dimension in which it is layered within a single class of elements.

As noticed, the inception or birth of Lacanian reader subjectivity is already prevalent in the mirror stage in terms of the reader's narcissism, i.e. between the stage of auto-eroticism and object-love, while itself being taken as a love-object. In the reading act, this imaginary stage embodies the centre of all pre-verbal structures which evolves through a process of *la Fading* into the Symbolic Order. The Symbolic Order is comprised of an interwoven network in which signifiers assume identity through their *differential play* (Lacan, 1977(a): 118). It is interesting that this fabric of signifiers is not constructed by creative subjects, on the contrary, the fabric of signifiers is antecedent to and constitutive of very individual subject:

"... a play of the signifier, the unconscious has already in its formations - dreams, slips of the tongue or pen or symptoms - *proceeded by interpretation*. The Other is already there in the very opening, however evanescent, of the unconscious (Lacan, 1977(a): 118).

Subjectivity, therefore, is a function of inscription in the textured Symbolic Order.

In terms of the indirect operating structure of the unconscious and its state of desire the signifier acts separately from its signification. It is here where Lacan regards the signified as

the meaning of an experience that is related in discourse. The signified becomes externalized in a universal sense by virtue of successive signifiers and is not specifically located anywhere in the signifier of the sentence (Lamaire, 1970: 38). Bowie (1991: 28) argues that the signified moves beyond society towards "... a vision of universal Discord". In this state of discord the subject "... is the locus of this want, or lack. That which is given to the Other to fill, and which is strictly that which it does not have, since it too lacks being" (Lacan, 1977(a): 263). Lacan sheds light on the "death of the subject" notion highlighted by the absence or necessity of a subject by Barthes, i.e. the "eclipse" of the reading subject in front of the object (text). Reading is therefore not in pursuit of truth - claims, the rules or conventions which are known to the substantial reader in advance. What post-structuralists and post-modernists allude to in their (mis)perception of the controlling subject's death, is nothing less than its emergence, i.e. the subject is precisely the void which remains after the entire substantial content is taken away. Žižek (1992: 136) argues that "... it is this very desubstantialization which opens up the empty space (the "blank surface") onto which fantasies are projected ...". Whereas Hegel radicalized Kant by conceiving the void of the Thing (its inaccessibility) as the very negativity that defines the subject, Lacan argues for the very opposite. In the reading act nothing has been set up in advance, no subject, no content.

Within language (the unconscious) the Lacanian subject is \$, a barred and barren, crossed-out subject. If the subject is a hindrance which has failed status, the same can be said of the object, which hinders the subject's full realization. Object is

correlative to subject *qua* barred - hence Lacan renounced the idea of intersubjectivity. No "correspondence" or sharing prevails as may be the case of representational theories or variations thereof.

Whereas the Saussurean view holds that it is the signifier (reader/hearer), combined in the sign, that composes the act of signifying, Lacan goes further and regards the unconscious as "structured like a language", for language effectively combines and recombines itself apart from the speaking subject. The unconscious, in its mediated-form-language, opens the space as it were where the I and the Other can meet. In Lacanian reading therefore, instead of a signifier signifying, the signifier rather *slides*. In his radicalization Lacan (1977(a): 149) reverses the Saussurean algorithm and produces a S/s (Signifier over signified), where the bar(/) separating the two symbols emphasizes the cleavage where the signified is below the signifier. Essentially this means that the signified "slips beneath" the signifier and as a result, resists the subject's attempts to locate and delimit it. (see Sarup, 1992). In language use, in the reading act the bar (/) symbolizes moreover the mind's detours in "search of meaning". It symbolizes the repression of the signified which remains inaccessible without the help of analytic techniques, as well as the "private nature" of the signifier. Conflict and struggle must be addressed to prevent easily-arrived at meanings. The unconscious consists in signifiers which have fallen below the bar/barrier, i.e. submitted to a repression, preventing them from traversing the bar and gaining access to consciousness (Lacan, 1977(a): 126). The bar (/) moreover spawns what is called a *differential* reading

process which inhabits the very nature of language (Felman, 1995: 181). It is in those "feelings of emptiness" that the subject desires the Other. The subject as "emptiness" relentlessly pursues the other(s) - differently, all the time. This emptiness relentlessly prompts more/other readings, resulting in a continual displacement of meaning *within* a signifying chain.

#### 4.5.5.1. THE LACANIAN SIGNIFYING CHAIN.

We cannot hope to achieve anything significant through accurate representation, so since it would be futile, according to Lacan, to search for the signified as subject, we should rather explore the relation between signifiers, for it is only in the signifying chain that we can catch a glimpse of the human subject. In his revised psycho-analytical and "non-representational" manner Lacan attempts to repudiate the notion of the signifier as the carrier of meaning - it would rather be a case of the differentiation of meaning without any signified or significance (De Beer, 1987: 14). In this regard Lacan corresponds with Barthes "writing" project in the reading act - in which the subject is able to "catch a glimpse" of himself. A reading subject does not represent an idea by means of a signifier for another subject (as held by the sovereign subject who conveys expert or subjective opinions to others); rather a signifier represents a subject for another signifier. The opposite of representationalism happens in that it subjects the subject to its dominion:

"A signifier is that which represents a subject: for whom? - not for another subject, but for another signifier ... The subject is born insofar as the signifier

emerges in the field of the Other. But by that very fact, this subject - which was previously nothing if not a subject coming onto being - solidifies into a signifier" (Lacan, 1977(b): 198-9).

Instead of a very coherent, ordered pattern in literal reading, we find that within this "unlocatable centre" in the chain, Lacan demonstrates that there will always remain an irreducible otherness which would never be fully placed - because "... the letter signifier, can itself not be placed or decided, because the letter as a signifier is not a substance but a function - and it functions as difference" (Johnson, 1987: 226). The letter therefore dictates the indetermination and therefore non-closure of any theoretical discourse involved in a reading of a text. No subject, no content can ever be definitive.

In understanding the reading act, this is however no arbitrary act because the chain also limits the speaker's freedom, for when the signified appears to be within reach, it dissolves into yet further signifiers. The differentiation process in reading which occurs within the chain remains essentially fluid and dynamic so that any one of its links is able to provide a point of attachment to other chains in a missed or lacking reality - a reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself indefinitely (Lacan, 1977(b): 58). Barbara Johnson (1987: 227) clarifies:

"The signifier is an articulation in a chain, not as an identifiable unit. It cannot be known in itself because it is capable of sustaining itself only in a

displacement".

The articulation of this repeated nature of displacement becomes the very "basis" of what can be regarded as Lacanian differential reading. In his critical vision of differential reading, this deferred process of "rings of a necklace", (Sarup, 1992: 47) is the self-perpetuating imperative that propels the meaning making signifying chain - yielding ever-new plural meanings. Contrary to the Saussurean pursuit of equality or equivalence of signifier and signified, Lacan attempts to give prominence to the signifier (i.e. the unconscious) since it possesses for him the active "controlling power" over the signified. This position also restrains the arbitrariness of self-evident transition from signifier to signified, i.e. from language to meaning as is typical of readers claiming that they have succeeded in representing what the text itself *really* represents. The differential reading dynamics perpetuates in the chain under the watchful eye of the law of the father.

#### 4.5.5.2 THE SUPREMACY OF THE LAW OF THE FATHER IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

Along with the use of the Name-of-the-Father, the theme of the primacy of the phallus is undoubtedly the most popular theme of Lacanian theory. The phallus is not only a signifier but "the signifier of signifiers". It governs essentially what is meant to designate, as a whole, the effect of there being a signified, inasmuch as the signifier *conditions* any such effect by its presence as signifier (Lacan, 1977(a): 690, 692, 693).

In the construction of meaning the "colonising powers" of the

signifier (i.e. the unconscious) over the signified must be grasped in terms of Lacan's notion of the Symbolic Order. The reading subject's "place" within the cultural context is accorded by the "Law of the Father" - i.e. the "Father" signifying the symbolic law of culture. In the act of interpretation the emergence of the "Father" (in psychoanalytic terms) essentially separates the child from the mother's body and drives its Desire underground into the unconscious. Lacan claims that the Symbolic Order is the Law and the Law is always "the Law-of-the-Father". The antecedent linguistic structure within which the reading subject is caught, includes all the codes by which a culture regulates the system of exchange (eg. psychological, sociological, political, religious, economic) necessary for its own survival. As a result, the cut left by the Name-of-the-Father secures culture by continuing wresting the subject from the bosom of "mother" nature. This cut, in the reading act, thus becomes the "springwell" of delayed understanding and meaning.

The future is only present by virtue of his law (i.e. speech), and if this speech is recognised by the (m)other, it takes on the value of the law. The cultural connection in Lacanian "representation" has to be seen as a symbolic act of castration which the Father performs on the child - a "debt" that is paid if the subject becomes itself and has gained access to the Symbolic Order of culture and civilization. In the reading act, language (which is the unconscious), directs the subject into a pre-existing cultural order so that the status of the human subject becomes constituted only in language, and *subject* to language. But in order to achieve this *being*, the subject must

operate in terms of the ongoing dialectical network of a narrative of desires, expectations, obligations and values. Such an endless plural process of signification, in the signifying chain, is regarded by Lacan what he refers to as the point of convergence (*point de capiton*). Sarup (1992: 53) illuminates this view:

"Just as an upholstery stud or button is the centre for the converging lines or creases on the surface of a taut fabric, so the linguistic *point de capiton* provides a vantage point from which everything that happens in a given discourse can be situated/both retro-actively and perspectively".

If a signified emerges, it can only be a product of the effects of the signifier. In fact, Lacan wants to destroy the concept of signs that "represent" something for somebody, in favour of the signifier (and all its anchoring points, i.e. *points de capiton*) whose pure combinatory structures the unconscious (Lacan, 1977(a): 840). As a result, Lacanian theory of the unconscious is grounded in an approach to which "the symbol" is "the murder of the thing" (Lacan, 1977(a): 104). The "symbol" symbolizes, rather than accurately representing a thing, an object. This symbolizing or signifying can only really occur at the level of the unconscious, i.e. *in and through* language.

#### 4.5.5.3 THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING.

It is clear that for Lacan all language functions on the basis of loss or a sense of deprivation and absence, for to engage in any form of meaning construction it is to become a victim, as it were, of Desire. There is no "easy" route. We have already

become aware that language cannot express or represent what "it really means" or what I, the subject, mean since we all, as subjects, suffer alienation and deprivation. Moreover, the de-alienation process begins in the reading act in every inch the infant *emerges into language*, and marks the start of Desire which becomes human. Lacan thus re-personalizes language (as against Saussure de-personalizing it) but he continues to regard language the master of the subject. Dews (1996: 151) echoes Lacan:

"... the object is not without reference to speech. It is from the very beginning partially given in the objectal, or objective, system, in which must be included the sum of prejudices which constitute a cultural community".

The human subject is thus "produced" and "unified" in and by language, so that language ultimately structures all human personality and human meaning in a cultural context. This is important for deferred meaning construction, for in terms of the split subject (the split being between the conscious life of the I and the unconscious or repressed desire) the child (the dynamics in the reading subject) cannot have direct access to reality and its meaning. Language, being the signifier, is essentially "empty" and fulfils nothing more than an endless process of difference and absence. According to Lacan, instead of having accurate and complete understanding and meaning, the reading subject will simply move from one signifier to another, along a potentially infinite linguistic or signifying chain. This is however no "flighty" expedition. The emerging plurality of signifiers under the eye of the law of the father can only refer to other signifiers, for the subject does not speak any language

but is *spoken by language* - a view in which the Lacanian decentered subject remains dispossessed and alienated. Readers cannot assume to "have" the ability to confer meaning. As these empty signifiers move to what Lacan calls "full speech", the subject also gradually moves away from the imaginary stage (*emerging into language*) in order to take up his position or strategy in discourse. Never identical with itself, the "faulty", "empty", subject is haunted by an unknowable other. This is what makes the challenge of reading exciting. An "outside" that is "inside", this Other hollows out the "place" of desire. In the reading act this symbolic register is never directly accessible or immediately penetrable to the reading subject but becomes *mediated* through desire in the hollow presence of language. Since something is missing, the structure (unconscious) of the drive remains open-ended. The drive oscillates or alter-nates in an "outward-and-back movement" (Lacan, 1977(b): 178, 162). It becomes a discourse in a potentially infinite signifying chain, yielding *ad infinitum* to the metonymic world of language. There is thus no representing, no decoding, no interpretations; only misreadings, to challenge another reading in the unending links of the signifying chain.

The construction of meaning emerges in terms of the hermeneutics applied to the reading text when the unending links inside the signifying chain operate, according to Lacan, through processes of metaphor and metonymy without the subject himself being aware of them. Lacan, in a radical way, conceives of the autonomy of the signifying chain from the signified as "... the incessant sliding of the signifying chain over the waves of the signified" (Lamaire, 1970: 45). What becomes evident is that ultimately it is language and the unconscious that *means* and not readers or

hearers. The drive in this process becomes the erogeneous zones, characterized their margin or rim-like structure and the object of desire, which is the presence of a hollow, a void (Lacan, 1977(b): 164, 168). This is an altogether different approach to reading as proposed by Barthes's decentred subject who writes his reading.

For Lacan the decentered self-conscious subject, in terms of the reading act, can thus never be identical with itself but seems only to embody a sense of plurality in the chain of discourses, kept active and activated by the Other (desire). Desire moves relentlessly in a process of *displacement* that Lacan compares to the metonymic play signifiers - a displacement that never comes to rest. In the reading act the subject is thus inevitably made and remade in this constant encounter with the Other so that what is at stake is nothing other than *what can be read*, i.e. what can be read beyond what the subject is supposed to read, because of the open-ended prospect of interminable desire of the Other (Lacan, 1977(b): 235). Reading appears to involve "conflict" between content and dis-content, temporary fulfilment and emptiness.

#### 4.5.6 THE EVACUATION OF MEANING AS INTERPRETATION.

The ceaseless emptiness or evacuation of meaning for Lacan signals a decisive and constitutive lack at the very root of language. The absence of a fixed grounding core of language or originary locus implies that the sliding of the signifier over the signified is only momentarily arrested in specific contexts. The "indefinite sliding of meaning" (Lacan, 1977(a): 126) means that if each term is founded on pure *difference*, and therefore

already requires another term to be understood, all terms can only be understood relative to language as a whole. It is therefore not only the originary locus of language, but also the primacy of the text (object) and the reading subject that remains, always, uncertain.

Lacan accords language with supreme power because of its constant proximity to what he regards as an unconscious discourse. What emerges is that instead of readers reading, Lacan rather reinterprets and reaffirms texts reading and re-reading. This will be Derrida's thrust as well. The act of "representation" or signification as the act of interpretation, would seem to belong essentially to the text. While the reader as "interpreter" merely reports, textual "interpretation" requires the reader's unconscious which not only *must be read* but in fact *which reads*. It is when the unconscious becomes the locus of the Other that the subject ultimately comes to understand himself. Language can never have an originary locus. Felman (1995: 184) is very clear with regard to the Lacanian act of interpretation:

"Unconscious desire proceeds by interpretation; interpretation proceeds by unconscious desire. The unconscious is a reader. The reader is therefore, on some level, always an analysand - an analysand who "knows what he means" but whose interpretation can be given *another reading* than what it means. This is what analytic discourse is all about".

The sense of multiplicity implied in Felman's phrase of "another reading" (i.e. rereading) underscores Lacan's almost self-contradictory assertion that "One gets nowhere with language"

(Alcorn, 1994: 23). Lacan's apparent repudiation of "language" ties up with the multiplicity and therefore differential reading approach which essentially seeks to challenge the basis of mere myopic referentiality or always pursuing certitude in fixed origins. Reality is thoroughly heterogeneous and plural and reading is part of that:

"The real is not only unknown but is unknowable, not only unsaid but "unpronounceable" (Lacan, 1977(a): 316).

Language therefore, like for Nietzsche, is incapable to grasp the essence and heterogeneity of life and therefore has no place in the Real. Since it neither corresponds to nor represents to the Real it only entails a structural system in as far as it "refers" to its own dynamic terms and multiplicity of working through metonymy and metaphor. Lacan has the psycho-analyst in mind (rather than the literary critic) when he urges the former to address the fluid ambiguity and multiple meanings of terms, the duplicity of language that allows itself to be used in indeterminate, open-ended contexts with several meanings at once. The indeterminate context in which the unconscious operates as linguistic structure thrives on not reality but on *desire*, i.e. a chain of substitution whereby the first (lost) object of desire generates a potentially infinite chain of (only partially satisfactory) substitutes. Therefore there can be *object-ive* meanings but only *desirous* meanings, i.e. more of the *Other* meanings.

In fact, Lacan's return to Freud is a conceptualization of an explicit non-referential or indirect view in which textuality is to become the plural production of Desire (the Gaze). For Lacan the subject does not "possess" the Gaze, but is in fact primarily

constituted by it: "This supremely paranoid concept is an important element of the child's growing experience of the world as Other, its entry into the Symbolic" (Williams, 1995: 73). Whilst "reading" the text "... we are not masterful subjects; we - as readers- become the object of the Gaze" (Davis *in* De Beer, 1987: 19). Being the object of the Gaze implies potential *differential* (i.e. Other) relationships where the lacking reading subject is compelled to constantly return to the Other. By the same token the text has no identity or message, since language in itself, proves empty:

"Not that the letter's meaning is subjective rather than objective, but that the letter is precisely that which subverts the polarity subjective/objective, that which makes subjectivity into something whose position is a structure is situated by the passage through it of an object" (Johnson, 1987:241).

The displacement of the subject (its never "our" readings) and its representations of reality, operates inescapably in what Lacan calls the S/s relationship where the signified slips beneath the signifier and as a result resists being located and delineated. The displacement of the sovereign and constituted position of the subject moreover means coming to terms with the ambiguities of the unconscious so that a psycho-analytic reading of a text would also involve "reading" the "unreadable" and "nonsense". The notions of the "unreadable" and "nonsense" entail the lack or absence upon which Desire thrives. This advancement of Lacanian meaning construction consequently renders the psycho-analytic mode of reading no easy task, for either the sense of discontinuity or lack of meaning in conscious

understanding can and should be interpreted "... without necessarily being transformed into meaning" (De Beer, 1987: 21). Johnson (1987: 240) believes that, "Psychoanalysis is not itself the interpretation of repetition; it is the repetition of a trauma of interpretation ... It is the traumatic *deferred interpretation* not of an event, but as an event that never took place as such". The depth of this statement implies that psychoanalytic reading could have content (and *more content*) only in so far as it repeats the *dis-content*. It is the repetitive conflict of what never took place that always *defers* more meaning, Other meaning. There is a continuous evacuation of meaning as soon as the signifier moves out its concrete relations - back into the signifying chain. This signals a *constitutive lack* at the core of language, a lack which marks the absence of a fixed anchoring point, the absence of a solid core of meaning for any term (Lacan, 1977(a): 276).

The radicalization of the reading act, according to Lacan, should thus be grasped in terms of the plurality of meanings, seeking ever new meanings away from origins and coherent sense - an approach which constantly presents new challenges to the type of reality correspondence mode of representational reading. Beyond the pursuit of having a "fixed" constitutive text, what is at stake is nothing other than "what can be read". The signified or letter's destination is thus wherever it is read, for the absence of the word discloses the nothingness of the thing (text). As a result, the Lacanian dispossessed subject is potentially able and willing to take different "positions" in respect to its reception of discourse of the Other - a discourse which is present in memory as a free-floating and inconsequential thing. This form of reading however, to reiterate, is no

arbitrary or chaotic position but rather seeks to escape the limited notion that the subject is a sovereign and self-assured entity composed, contained, derived from, and imprisoned by language. Lacanian differential reading entails an endless quest to signify the annulment of what it signifies - the repressed in fact *returns* in the *symptom*. Unconscious desire, once repressed, survives in displaced ways - repetitive displacements and replacements (Lacan, 1972), making for creative repetition rather than habitual representations.

#### 4.5.7 DIFFERENTIAL REPETITION IN THE VOID

As one of the most original theorists among the structuralists of subjectivity and representation, in this study, Lacan believes to have subverted and annulled in many ways the representational theory of a psycho-realist subject in which an original constitutive subjectivity is presupposed in which meanings are made to "belong" to the text.

It would seem that Lacan's theory of the subject moreover seeks to propose a radical solution to the impasse of Freudians and poststructuralists, for the Lacanian subject clearly operates upon discourse, and discourse operates upon the dispossessed subject. Lacan would like us to think that he had effectively "dissolved" the centred notion of a subject, producing as a result a self-division in order to problematize the *singularity* of agency in interpreting the world and texts. It is evident that the Lacanian subject possesses immense capacity for repetition, resulting in differentiation which resists the ideologized practices of totalization and closure as is often subscribed by literal reading. By keeping open the time of space

and the space of time, "repetition demands the new" (Lacan, 1977(b): 59), for the past that is never finished, approaches as a future that is never closed. Repetition, in Lacanian meaning-construction, ruptures the closed circle, beginning and end are one. For Lacan "repetition of signifiers" in the unconscious, suggests that the past is never present but becomes reversed and appears as the future that is always deferred. Alcorn (1994: 37) clarifies, that it is a notion of subjectivity which is neither mechanical nor sterile, for "... the Lacanian subject contains unique subject-driven mechanisms that both produce and feed upon social discourse in quite unique and particular ways", without "... doubling a system of realities" (Critchley & Dews, 1996: 149). It becomes a matter of another reading, and another reading will continue when the reading subject interprets out of his unconscious (this unconscious being a reader). The differential repetition, out of its need or void, involves thus a form of reading propelled by otherness or alterity.

Lacan's vision is that of the reconstruction of meanings and understandings, by the subject, according to modes of "transindividual discourse", i.e. the modes of an intersubjectivity that would ultimately be broader than that of the analytical situation and which corresponds or conforms to laws of that society (Marini, 1992: 48). Lacan believes it is an entrance into the "Symbolic Order" that cannot be separated from the established discourses and dominant institutions, at the time of reading or meaning construction within that historical and geographic context. We witness that to escape the ideology and consensus-seeking of thinking and knowledge, Lacan unexpectedly dissolves his institution of the French Society of Psychoanalysis in 1980 to prevent it being consolidated, so he

said, with "a new church". Repetition of newer, profounder meaning is spawned by Desire, without ideologizing the latter.

For Lacan interpretive practice proceeds necessarily by unconscious desire - so that reading takes place on *both sides* in order to avert the simplistic literal theory of correspondence and reproduction of the words and the thoughts of another. Contrary to Derrida's "reading as writing" approach of almost mechanical *grammata* as we will notice, Lacan initiates the almost human Gaze, gazing upon the reading subject. The "otherness" of the Lacanian contribution to our understanding of the reading act, knowledge construction and self-identity, is the "conversion" of the human subject in to an "object", being gazed upon or read. Without *depersonalising* the absent character of the reading subject, Lacan conceives of the subject that constantly returns to there Other in order to be constituted. This position does not pursue the typical polarity-cum-circularity mode of Eco and Lotman, but rather that the human subject fulfills a "structure", albeit human-social structure, of being constantly subject and object. This attempt on the part of Lacan seeks to ensure that the reader does not assume a constitutive, central position of a masterful manipulator of texts. In an altogether different way to the Derridean post-modernist displacement of the subject in terms of the "ideology of the sign", Lacan ushers us into a refreshingly different theory in which he co-opts in a future anterior sense the *unconscious* of the subject that is still to be constantly "born". The reading text is not an object "out there" but embodies the pursuits after the Other which evolves in terms of the linguisticity of the *unconscious*. This will bring about what is understood by subjectivity and ultimately a *sense of being* -

as human. Lacan's most critical contribution to the radical subversion of the self-assured representational subjectivity, is that he retains the human element via the Law-of-the-Father. In his post-structuralist approach he believes that he has gone substantially (literally and figuratively) beyond all other efforts to demonstrate that language, as the structure of the unconscious, remains empty, relying only on its "productive" functioning to constantly search for new meanings of our world and of ourselves as humans. Instead of imputing and pursuing meaning, Lacan's aim is the desperate evacuation (*dis-content*) of all meanings (including the in(finite) meanings of myself as subject), defying any anchoring point and continually allowing the sliding of the signifier over the signified which momentarily arrested in specific contexts.

Following theoretically on Lacan, this study focuses on the thinking of Derrida, who critically engages our thinking in the realm of non-originary of meaning construction. From Lacanian psycho-analytic reading of emptiness which emphasizes otherness or alterity, based on alienation, Derrida "systematically" carves another interesting, yet radicalized notion of reading, showing critical concerns with the deletions, blanks and disguises in writing. Texts cannot ever represent anything, neither can readers ever decipher anything. In a society that is increasingly written, prompts the dilemma of the inertia of consumption to demand rather the efficiency of production. If today the text is society itself our rejection of the practice of consumption (commercial, televised and scientific readings) inevitably necessitates the reader's ability to write his "understandings", including that of the world and of himself. Derrida's quasi - ideologization of the text (not for content)

prompts a "following of the traces" of production in which we will not fall captive to consumptive myopia which is anathema to the transformation of our worlds and ourselves. Our understanding of the reading act in its broadest sense will be substantially enriched and modified in wrestling with the thinking of Derrida, as our final theorist in this study - pursuing hopefully a more comprehensive view of reading in our post-information society which emphasizes the use or application of our readings. Does writing precedes reading, or reading, writing - is there conceptually any significant difference? This is what Derrida, in the context of reading, seeks to address.

4.6 DERRIDA'S GRAMMATOLOGICAL READING4.6.1 FROM LANGUAGE TO WRITING

As starting-point we may reflect on Michel de Certeau who contrasts *writing* with *readings* in believing that a text does not exist except for a reader who gives it signification, for "... text has a meaning only through its readers, it changes along with them; it is ordered in accordance with codes and .. Ruses two sorts of "expectation"... the expectation that organizes a readable space (a literality), and one that organizes a procedure necessary for the actualization of the work (a reading)" (in Bennett, 1995:133). It is precisely this kind of approach of the de Certeau which Derrida conceives of as establishing a "violent hierarchy" of terms which he believes must be reversed. Reading and writing (in the traditional sense) do not, according to Derrida, peacefully co-exist, which requires therefore that deconstruction must "...through a double gesture, double science, a double writing, put into practice a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system" (Derrida, 1982:392).

Taking Nietzsche and Heidegger, particularly, as his precursors in thought, Derrida emerges as a strong critic of the bankrupt thinking established in the Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian traditions. Even the thinking of the pioneering thinkers on subjectivity and representation in this study is vitiated by its systems of binary thinking, its logocentrism, and its privileging of speech over writing. This is Derrida's starting-point for the displacement of the old system:

"For Derrida ... the binary metaphysical system ensnared its victims in hopeless

metaphysical traps requiring a thoroughgoing deconstruction of philosophy and radically new philosophical practice" (Kellner, 1988: 240).

As part of the new masters' attempts of rethinking and in fact displacing the notions of subjectivity and representation in the reading act, Derrida, like Barthes, has evolved a radically new thrust of thinking whose concerns, according to Sellers, are "... no longer that of the writer and the work but that of the writing and reading" (in Culler, 1975: 237). For both Barthes and Derrida the concepts of *écriture* and *lecture* have been postulated as a revolutionary means of rethinking the role of the authority and authorship as a source and origin of meaning vis-a-vis the text as object. Derrida's understanding therefore of the reading act which encapsulates clear dimensions of post-modernist discourse in meaning construction, is reconceptualized in terms of what he calls inexhaustible networks: writing as an institution and reading as an activity. The influence of Derrida's reference to *écriture* on the other hand should, however, not be overstated, for he himself recognizes that it is as much a symptom as it is a cause.

Derrida writes his own peculiar discourse which, like Nietzsche, displays a systematic mistrust and abandonment of all forms of metaphysical thought. As a result, he postulates a notion of reading in which he challenges the validity of human language which he believes to be the carrier and manifestation of bankrupt and spurious philosophical assumptions. Like Barthes, Derrida consequently engages in a peculiar deconstructive process of what they call "disentangling" the subject's desire for absolute guarantees of certainty and an ultimate, indubitable and assured

epistemological foundation for meaning (Derrida, 1976). Lyotard points out that our age can no longer talk about a totalizing idea of reason, for there is no reason - but events are evidence of rather complex incommensurable teleologies of heterogeneity (Featherstone, 1988: 209). Derrida's idea of "grammatology" therefore seeks to depart from the basic assumption of teleology and heterogeneity that the sign is without any single definable truth, foundation, beginning or end. It is this deconstructive assumption of starting with "nothing", including no "subject" or "object" which already puts Derrida quite apart from the critical discourse of the act of interpretation proposed by the new masters. It is evident though that he does stand on the shoulders of his predecessors, especially Nietzsche. Heidegger's influence too features decisively, for Derrida is a "... Heidegger re-read and retrieved from the narrowly existentialist and humanist gloss ..." (Johnson, 1993: 1).

While it seems feasible to classify Derrida "philosophically", closer with Barthes, the former's impact as theorist lies in his own critical resuscitation of Nietzsche, who on his part also challenges the notion that certainty and precision of meaning occurs in all meaning construction. (see Ryan, 1982; Behler, 1991; Haar, 1992). In the context of our overall intention to examine the role of the sovereign subject in interpretation, Nietzsche as precursor to the Derridean assumption of "there is nothing outside the text", foreshadows the *decentring* process or "noncentering" of the human subject as the determining centre in meaning construction. The "unprotective manner" (Kristeva *in* Nealon, 1993: 84) of everything that fit into the representational mode of interpretation, constitutes the point of departure of Derrida's outright rejection of the validity and trustworthiness of "naturalized" representation and equivalence of the subject vis-a-vis the object. These concepts Derrida

regards "... as in principal open to question, or as not enjoying the status of absolute, transcendent, self-validating truths" (Norris, 1992: 35). Derrida thus continues to argue in terms of the Nietzschean deconstruction of causality, viz that causality asserts the logical and temporal priority of cause to effect.

Derrida (1976: 158) proposes that THERE IS NO OUTSIDE THE TEXT (il n'y a pas de hors-texte). As a result, Derridean discourse, like in the Barthesian mode proposes a process of writing which emerges not as the causation or representation of something that exists outside it, but as an "inside" ceaseless dynamic which is at work as the unending and limitless "play". Derrida agrees with Nietzsche and Heidegger that Western culture oscillates between polar opposites that produce optimism and pessimism, ideology and utopia, in never-ending variations or play (Hollinger, 1994: 107). This "play" has been set in motion precisely because of the lack of any secured grounding authority, the absence of the "transcendental signified" which "at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (Derrida, 1976: 49). Therefore any account of language and its signifying tentacles, which seeks solid foundations, is a stillborn attempt.

In our attempts to grasp the "other dimensions" of meaning construction it becomes clear that, Derrida's understanding of the role of the subject vis-a-vis textual writing essentially presupposes the reading of exclusive nature of textual signs. Derrida, like Heidegger, urges us to use the surface of language in terms of what he calls a "trace-structure" and he therefore tends to give preference to the concept trace to sign (Spivak, 1976: xvii), the former of which he believes points at an

inarticulate presence. Derrida's critical reading of a "trace" conveys the mark of the absence of a presence (as Lacan's "emptiness" of language), the already existing absent presence and therefore a lack of an origin (Derrida, 1976: 89). By using Heidegger as critical departing-point, Derrida argues that the sign is *all* that is present, presiding in the text and not *before* the text (Derrida *in* Mortley, 1991: 98). Sign as a *reading of events* therefore cannot be trapped in a pre-established readable language - a view Derrida asserts to doubt whether there can be any sustainable or coherent reading, crystalized into a manageable package of understanding and acceptance.

In order to grasp how the elusive, effervescent interplay of traces/signs operate in Derrida's grammatology, requires according to him, a critical re-start, i.e. an attempt to destroy or deconstruct the logocentric metaphysics of right/wrong, good/bad, pretty/ugly which has become so important shaping forces for the traditional representational construction of meaning (see Behler, 1991: 6).

#### 4.6.2 RE-STARTING VIA THE DECONSTRUCTION OF ALL ORIGINARITY.

Derrida, like Lacan, rejects what can be called the totalizing attempts of centred signification which has been legitimized by the referential assumptions of the relationship between language and reality. The problems of seeking reliability and accuracy in representation, according to Derrida, must be read in terms of his radical critique of the logocentric application to the dynamics of the reading act. Derrida's critique of the logocentric paradigm (from Plato to Levi-Strauss) is not only to rehabilitate the long-repressed status of writing, but to move beyond the everyday understanding of writing - one which is more

fundamental to signifying practices. Deconstruction has "... foregrounded the scandalous coexistence of incongruous figural pulls within language, but has also tried to render their "errancy" and "disjunction" more tolerable by inscribing them within the limits of the literary text" (in Cornis-Pope, 1992: 39). Derrida asserts the potential of deconstruction as a critique - a powerful and radical critique - of entrenched and unquestioned habits of thought - specifically with regard to the general articulations of the theory of writing.

In "meaning-making" the deconstruction process essentially consists of a metaphysics which presents all first causes such as material substance, subjective identity or conscious intuition as *presence* (see Norris, 1992; Ryan, 1989). This presence generally operates as binary oppositions, like normal/abnormal, literal/non-literal or meaningful/meaningless, and the critique contained in the deconstruction aims at "... upending the metaphysical system of oppositions and priorities by showing how what metaphysics excludes as secondary and derivative in relation to an *originary* concept ..." (Ryan, 1989: 10) (own emphasis). This absence of an origin in Derrida's rethinking of the reading act, resonates with Nietzsche's "Alles ist falsch, alles ist erlaubt!" proclamation. The deconstruction process would appear to ensure that, by rejecting the validity and legitimacy of foundational constructs (like subject, object, etc.), we are permitted to create freely (i.e. Derridean writing) in terms of the *presence*. This however is not a type of phenomenological, perceptual *presence* but merely suggests that there cannot be a fixed body of pre-existing meaning which is determined *before* the text is read. In fact Derrida dislodges the spurious effects of the idea of "dualism/polarity" (eg. absence/presence) as

Heidegger, for example, suggests when he proposes his deconstruction version in the notion of *Abbau*. The demand which inheres the deconstruction of reading (rather than to "make sense"), is to stop making sense.

Derrida critiques logocentrism, since, like Heidegger, he believes that Western thought is dominated by the metaphysics of presence. This has led to sense-making attempts of logocentrism resting on certain dualisms (eg. identity is privileged over difference, being over negation, presence over absence, male over female, etc.). Difference, absence, madness, the female, etc., in logocentrism becomes devalued - hence the promulgation of ideas of racism, sexism, colonialism and so forth are all, in this view, the result of what Derrida calls entrenched logocentrism. The attempt is none other than to give "the picture" or "the standpoint" or to have "mastered" the understanding of how the Western world works. If Derrida's thinking is to be regarded as postmodern, he would be a positive view because "... it is a triumph of heterogeneity over consensus" (Brown, 1995: 3). Derrida thus "joins" the ranks of postmodernists who hold that the consumption of information has replaced the production of things, for the media, which used to report (or distort) reality, have become reality. How do we beat the inertia of consumption and develop an efficiency of production of our words and ourselves?

Although Derridean deconstruction might appear to denote a negative operation, it in actual fact embodies an approach which aims at the unmasking of phenomenological naivete (see Descombes, 1980: 79) and Derrida's focus is to deploy it strategically to demonstrate how philosophical discourse have come to be constructed. Derrida does not just collapse truth-seeking and

fictive discourse as fallaciously believed to be his notion of deconstruction:

"Not that I assimilate the different regimes of fiction, not that I consider laws, constitutions, the declaration of the rights of man, grammar, or the penal code to be the same as novels. I only want to recall that they are not "natural realities" (Derrida in Norris, 1992: 37).

Derrida wants to unmask the distortions and, as a result, applies the deconstruction process in the Heideggerian sense of *Destruktion* or *Abbau* (although differently) as a means "... of gaining access to the mode in which a system or structure, or ensemble, is constructed ... historically speaking" (in Mortley, 1991: 97). The portrayal of reports, images and advertisements in the media assumes that that is often a natural part of our reality, a natural part of personal identities and social relations. Understanding how these discourses have come to be constructed will assist us as "readers of the world" to deconstruct them as well.

As meaning, according to Derrida, cannot be enclosed in a sign, deconstruction enables the critical possibilities of meaning construction to surface *within* and not *before* the text. The pursuit is not the *content* which we hope to find in the text but a deconstruction of that content, i.e. the *dis-content* of *pat-off assumptions* and all socially or historically validated information and messages which we consume. Strictly-speaking, deconstruction is not a process of dismantling of the structure of a text, but rather its *dis-content*, i.e. a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself. Derrida's restart, like that of Lacan, is from "nothing" - without origin, for it is only by

de-totalizing and evacuating our thinking that we can begin to write.

We notice that Derrida's vocabulary is primarily one of *excess*, and he refers in this regard to Descartes's *cogito* which is the zero-point (nothingness) from which both sense and non-sense are derived, it *exceeds* any actual worldly totality, it is:

"... precomprehension of the infinite and undetermined totality ... this margin of the possible, the principled, and the meaningful, which exceeds all that is real ... a singular and unprecedented excess - an excess in the direction of the nondetermined. Nothingness or Infinity, an excess which overflows the totality of that which can be thought" (Derrida, 1978: 56-7).

For Derrida the "undetermined totality" becomes the "ground" for possibility and ultimately infinity. The Derrida's notion of *presence* has been wedded to the infinite process of deconstruction, for Derrida's complaint is that objects, systems, words and signs are usually fallaciously connected with *presence*. He opposes in fact the distinction between absence and presence, and this is in fact the "new" dimension in Derridean thought. He moreover argues that Western thinking has become fixated by the smoothness and deceptive infallibility the word, as something that represents truth and accuracy. This is clearly demonstrated in the opposition that we conceive between writing and speech, for writing is usually assumed to be the representation of speech (Derrida, 1973: 77) - a view Derrida radically challenges.

According to Derrida, in order to avert the assumed unquestioned

placeholder status of representational fallacies of the logocentric tradition, deconstruction ushers his "new" thinking into an erasure process in the form of a slow "reading" of the text which verily subjects the text to a rigorous analysis, that is to say, it deconstructs it. For Derrida this form of critique hopes to demonstrate the immanent contradictions of how the text has come to depend on claims that have come to be regarded as true and foundational. In a strange way Derrida argues that the indeterminate and *infinity* in writing, while it exceeds any given totality, is also "finite" in that it "inhabits" that very totality. Put another way, the system, totality or structure is neither finite nor infinite:

"A structural totality escapes this alternative in its functioning. It escapes the archeological and the eschatological and inscribes them in itself (Derrida, 1978: 123).

In any reading therefore, while the deconstructive reader cannot inscribe from the "outside", of the text, reading on the "inside" of the text does not prove safe either - a view that requires clarification with regard to the notions of polysemy and dissemination, especially since there are no archeological grounds, neither any eschatological vision in Derridean writing. In reading this writing demonstrates Derrida's rejection of subject/object, text/reader, presence/absence dualisms. These dualisms have clearly impacted on the entrenched social issues of racism, sexism, colonialism and cultural oppression, as we will notice. Friedman (in Featherstone, 1988: 23) points out:

"... cultural pluralism may be the western experience of the real postmodernization of the world, the ethnic and cultural pluralization of a dehegemonizing world

incapable of its former enforced politics of assimilation".

In our attempts of understanding our world and to develop "truer dialogue" beyond the hegemonizing and homogenizing pursuit of seeking "the truth" in a totalizing understanding of a message or text, requires to engage in Derrida's embrace of the notions of polysemy and dissemination and avoid *control* by socially or politically determined meanings.

#### 4.6.3 POLYSEMY AND DISSEMINATION OF MEANING CONSTRUCTION

To pursue meanings which do not "belong" to the text and to break out of the hegemony of socially constructed and controlled knowledge, Derridean deconstruction proceeds by means of what he refers to as displacement (decentring), i.e. reversing the entrenched structure of domination and displacing or dislodging the system in which and through which reading occurs. Deconstruction moreover seems to also impacts on the notion of dissemination, for Derrida distinguishes the latter from polysemy in that polysemy problematizes all divine origins and rather emphasizes a multiplicity of meanings which derive as a result of the deconstruction process - a form of multiplicity of meaning which is embedded "... within the horizon of ... grouping, gathering together" (Derrida in Mortley, 1991: 97).

Contrary to polysemy, dissemination in reading seems to exceed the multiplicity of meaning and meaning itself, for like the Barthesian concept, Derridean dissemination "... disrupts the circulation that transforms into an origin what is actually an after-effect of meaning" (Derrida, 1981: 21). Johnson (1993: 138) clarifies Derrida's position:

"The inscription of the code, be it linguistic, genetic or otherwise, is never

simply present as static script, but is perpetually affected by an element of indeterminacy, so that the code is in a state of continual transformation".

There cannot be any "divine author", as an originator of the text, neither a "sovereign reader" who decodes the text. It is rather a process of manhandling and transforming the text, for it is "starred" (Barthes) in the same way as the text, according to Derrida, is "scattered". Rather than pursuing a coherent, closed reading Derrida (as also demonstrated by Barthes and Lacan) sees interruption, disturbance and dissolution as making the reading act far more richer and comprehensive.

This transformation act of dispersion in the dissemination process embodies a type of power which is synonymous to the deconstruction of the writing, causing disruption and discontinuity and often resistance. For Derrida dissemination adheres and operates *within* his notion of textuality (there is nothing outside the text) giving particular impetus to an endless "opening up" of a "... a snag in writing that can no longer be mended, a spot where neither meaning, however plural, nor any form of presence can pin/pen down ... the trace" (Derrida, 1981: 26). Even the subject becomes implicated as a trace in its own writing, which constantly transforms itself among the movement (like Lacan's signifying chain) of other traces (Deleuze and Guattari (1984). Lash (1988: 323) comments in this regard:

"This mobile positioning of the subjectivity is in itself political in that it leaves space for alternative forms of identity construction as well as the toleration of "difference" in identity construction".

The "resistance" of socially/politically constructed roles can thus be challenged in the process of deconstruction. The "different" and plural effects of the mobility of the dissemination process yield immense scope for heterogeneity and multiplicity of textual "interpretations" only because it is in this dispersion and ceaseless process of incompleteness that the writing of one's own text (i.e. it's "interpretation") can occur. Viewing the writing of the text in this way, Derrida, like Barthes, challenges the act of "interpretation" and seems rather keen on the effects that the interplay of traces induces, clearly focussing on the Nietzschean forces or powers which assist in what Derrida calls the disentanglement of signs. Imagine bill boards, slogans, advertisements etc. being "disentangled" for the "messages" they carry. The process of disentanglement implies a critical disavowal and eschewing of established patterns and content of thought, institutionalized interests and ideologies of entrenched ends. Derrida would share in the deconstruction and dissemination of these truths which are, ultimately, only fictions or myths:

"The real political task today ... is to carry forward the resistance that writing offers to established thought, to what has already been done, to what everyone thinks, to what is well known, to what is widely recognized, to what is "readable" to everything which changes its form and make itself acceptable to opinion in general ... The name most often given to this is postmodernism" (Lyotard, 1988: 302).

In reading life as text, implies reading *against* the established thoughts of life's institutions in order to arrive at other meanings as well. Over and above the de-institutionalizing

attempts of deconstruction and dissemination, Derrida also emphasizes his rendering of *differance* - an act in which the text deconstructs itself and the reader becomes the witness (experiencer). According to Derrida, the de-establishing bent of deconstruction proposes that instead of having a relation of reference and equivalence, the relationship of signifier and signified becomes unequivocally marked by excess and incessant difference: The signifier always exceeds the limits of meaning set by the signified and enters a chain of "difference" in signification, which proves to remain "unmasterable". (Derrida, 1976: 23). Difference, or the repetition by difference, is the *condition* of the system, but it requires a support, it must be written (violently, in Derrida's estimation) into some structure:

"... the scriptural "metaphor" thus [comes into play], every time difference and relation are irreducible, every time otherness introduces determination and puts a system in circulation" (Derrida, 1981: 163).

Derrida's attempts to avert the smooth logicality of literal representationalism with its ensuing results of masterable and self-assured meaning which is to be unlocked, or the truth that is to be extracted from the text. The chain of "difference" in signification rather leaves the reader with a sense of "nothingness", "helplessness", in which he cannot seek to control, manipulate, master, and replicate the ultimate meaning of any text - a view which is far from that of Eco and Lotman who operates "with" an indispensable systemic subject to construct meaning. Meaning is never "immediately" within grasp and immediately mastered. A deferred process would be necessary, as experienced in Derrida's notion of *differance*.

4.6.4 DIFFERENCE AND DIFFERENTIAL READING

According to Derrida the absolute "mastery" and "control" of meaning as in the quest of literal and referential reading, we need to challenge it as is an illusion of our traditional logocentric metaphysics. Rather than being self-present and proving to be mathematically determinable, meaning posits a constant drift of *differance*, the construction of *differing* and therefore *deferring* - an unresting referral of one sign to other signs in an infinite process of deferment which deflects the pursuits of "masterability" of the ultimate and final meaning. *Differance*, "which is neither a word nor a concept", is, according to Derrida (1982: 7), the "non-original origin" of all differences and every self-assured form of identity. Readers cannot assume to "have" the divine ability to confer meaning. *Differance* is intended to underscore two contrasting dimensions of *differer*: temporization and spacing - time and space interweave, *differance* is the "matrix" of all presence and absence:

"It is because of *differance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called "present" element ... is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element ... And it is this constitution of the present, as an "originary" and irreducibly non-simple ... synthesis of marks, or traces, ... that I propose to call *archi-writing* or *arche-trace*. Which (is) (simultaneously) spacing

(and) temporization" (Derrida, 1982: 13-14).

Derrida resists being dogmatic, even when writing about the discontent in reading which always seeks deferment. According to Derrida, differance is conceived as being neither active nor passive but rather "productive" and like a hinge, differance provides a re-attachment between things and, as a result, veers towards *sameness* (Derrida in Mortley, 1991: 99). In a paradoxical way this sameness also speaks of *otherness* for the sake of heterogeneity. Essentially the concept differance, as it is employed in the *now* of the writing process, embodies in itself what is referred to as the "system" of writing in whose heart the origin is inscribed as the locus : "Differance represents nothing other than the infinite repetition of meaning which does not consist in its duplication or in a way of always distancing itself ... Differance is bidding, appeal, request, seduction, imploring, supplication. Difference is passion" (Nancy, 1992: 39). This means denouncing duplication and displacing the "smooth reading" of a text for easy meaning construction with a great measure of "struggle". No quick access to any form of meaning is possible, but like Ricoeur's "conflict of interpretation" Derrida's "subject-less" writing of the reading is an endless process, never ever full completed. Like with Lacan, Derridean writing is forever spawned by the Other (the Writing) - ensuring newer and more profound understandings.

In the reading act Derrida argues that language must therefore be seen as a system of signs acquiring its signification neither by the authority of a human subject, nor by the reference of a reality located "in a text", but only by virtue of its differential properties. These qualities are what Saussure calls semiotic values that produce meanings that are essentially "differential" rather than "referential". Derrida is way beyond

linearity, for there is no "subject" and no "object", no opposites but only interactions of disparate traces or grammata of which the subject is part of. Differance enables the reading subject to realise his "place" or "places" in the grand text of life itself - without having to acquiesce into practices against his will.

In a way the Derridean notion of differance represents the Barthesian *jouissance* which embodies the pleasure which forms the off-stage voices in the Derridean grammatology. In the reading act, if the *delay* tactics of deferment that differance inspires, creates a sense of expectancy in the reader, Derrida emphasizes that this *delay* would be a necessary temporizing factor: "Temporizing is spacing, a way of making an interval, and here again the idea of differance the ideas of spacing and temporization are inextricably linked" (Derrida *in* Mortley, 1991: 100). In Derridean writing the metaphor of *inscription* points and makes evident the necessity of the localization of difference or determination, its *passage through* (but not its presence in) the space of this world. It is the element of play or non-finalization in the system that is the condition of its survival towards the unanticipated and incalculable possibilities of reading (compare Heidegger's "Higher than actuality stands possibility").

In keeping with what appears to be Derrida's "shifting" style and differential practice of constant "erasure" (including the redefinition of the subject) to construct anew, he seeks to move beyond differance to the concepts of "trace" and "dissemination" which are inalienable from the Derridean concept of *writing* as the most viable practice of reading.

4.6.5 INTERPRETATION AS WRITING WITH ERASURE

Writing a text operates in a totally different framework of validating assumptions - a process, according to Derrida, which is different from *comparing* our beliefs with the facts, these latter conceived as existing "out there" or as belonging to a realm of pre-given objective truths against which to test our various propositions, world-hypothesis, ontological commitments, structures of linguistic representation or whatever. Therefore, Derrida's notion of *interpretation* is very firm when he attacks the notion of so-called strategic thinking - people who pronounce viewpoints that seek "... to monopolize this discourse from a standpoint of accredited expertise" (Derrida *in* Norris, 1992:39). To clarify his view of the reading act beyond the idea of validating an informed and assured subject operating vis-a-vis an object, Derrida (1979:264) points out that there are two interpretations of the notion of interpretation: "The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of a sign, ... The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms free-play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism". Humanism holds vested interests of controlling distorted facts and statistics, and influencing socially-constructed meanings and identities of people.

Without entrenching the traditional master-mind centre of a human subject "understanding" the text, the Derridean challenging notion of "freeplay" drives or generates the "sense-making" procedures in the reading act in which ever changing constellations emerge. Hollinger (1994: 107) in observing Derrida's Nietzschean view of the noncenter, argues that the "... centre (and the subject) as metaphysical, as the centre of being

and presence, is rejected without nostalgia and regret, but is kept as a "function", as a formal placeholder of some sort". This displacement of the human subject by Derrida has been consistent as with Barthes and Lacan.

It is rather the notion of *écriture*, writing, that fulfils the most crucial, "productive" dynamic in Derrida's interpretive strategy. For him there exists only one form of writing in the reading act which is essentially the embodiment of a single transcendental experience of writing which can never be equated to the object of any experience (see Nancy, 1992: 37). This form of *writing* occurs through *differance* and which is the condition of the possibility of presence and absence, as well as being and nonbeing; it is neither present nor absent:

"Never present without being absent,  
*differance* is an unrepresentable before"

(Derrida, 1982: 21).

This Derridean notion of "unrepresentable before" contains within it the element of constant *erasure* in order to avoid meanings from crystallizing in ideologies, monopolies and entrenched worldviews. Every ideology, every short-sighted attempt of a monopoly of ideas, every worldview has to be tested, re-evaluated and even displaced in order to ensure non-finalization of "accredited expertise" (Derrida *in* Norris, 1992: 39). If reading "succeeds", it in fact fails, for reading is excess, and there is always a "double writing" (Derrida, 1982:392) which never ends.

Derrida has succeeded in regarding reading beyond the notion of a "text representing" an unproblematic, transparent instance of writing in which reality stands behind its truthfulness. He in fact shifts our perspective to engage in the text as a narrative

of its own textuality (diffe-rance). Life, as text itself, claims its materiality as a network of signifiers:

"In this sense ... the materiality of language is only the flipside about their claims about life being a "text" (Lash, 1988: 332).

For this purpose the creative process of *writing* ensures that the text becomes an extended commentary upon its own textuality, for "... there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, 1976: 158). In Barthes' case, we noticed, there is still the recognition of a semiotic subject that is the result of a writing discourse that unfolds, but in Derrida's case "... there is no constituting subjectivity. For this reason the privileged ego [is] ... to be submitted to a process of dismantling and dispossession" (see De Beer, 1982: 12). Dispossession of authority, authorship or reader status (which is erasure) is equally congruent with the deconstructive dis-content of text-writing for greater and more expansive reading.

In this radical process of dismantling, Derrida (1976: 46) also seeks to deconstruct the subjectivity of the reader as the absolute foundation or origin of "writing for meaning". According to him a new grammatological knowledge emerges when the written text is elevated as the pre-eminent locus of textual interpretation, for "... language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique" (Derrida, 1978: 254). It is clear that Derrida is compelled to preserve the self-sufficient notions of "text", "sign" and "presence" while, at the same time, attempting to challenge them. He nevertheless remains adamant that no matter what the context, it cannot rule text, i.e. a place of interiority cannot be maintained in an exterior field precisely because context is not really "outside" the text at

all. In this context Derrida is far ahead of the circular and conditioning effects of subject-object of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur. Derrida seems to preserve the space of interiority of the text by *writing* so that no historical or other personal or social notions of context can reign in the significations of the text. Here too, Derrida is substantially ahead of Eco and Lotman, and certainly too in terms of Barthes's "no hands" approach. Clearly Derrida seems to not only theorize far beyond the semiotic strategies to reading proposed by Eco, Lotman and Barthes - but in fact he theorizes *differently*. Like Lacan, Derrida does not attempt to establish identities for readers or for reading - these are barriers to reading.

The pre-eminence of Derrida's *writing* in the interpretive strategy, as a result, off-centres the role of the reading subject as well as the act of reading, which means that Derrida has no option but to confront writing with writing, and the only way around this is the deletion of a traditional concept to propose a radical conception of the concept, *writing* in erasure. (Derrida, 1976: 18-19). The process of *writing* occurs in no other way than in terms of constant, albeit playful, erasure and substitution. Playful erasure constantly ensures the disruption of reading.

#### 4.6.6 PLAY AND DISCONTINUITY IN WRITING.

In keeping with Barthes's pursuits to overcome ideology, Derrida argues that for the writing of the text "to occur", means letting the traces enter the infinite play of traces and this happens as dissemination allows signs to explode, i.e. to interact with other traces. *Play* is an attempt to "escape" the totalization

(which for Derrida is nothing but a *useless* and *impossible* endeavour) of a reading:

"... non-totalization can ... be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of *play* ... in a field of infinite substitutions" (Derrida, 1978: 289).

In reading play becomes the "inexhaustible field" - a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. Having circumvented the circularity theories of "passing over" (Heidegger), "field of intersections" (Merleau-Ponty), "tradition" (Gadamer), "the mediation of signs and symbols via appropriation" (Ricoeur) and even the "cultural codes" (Eco) and "extra-code" (Lotman), Derrida abolishes all polarities or binaries and opts for an "inexhaustible field" of infinite substitutions to playfully write the text. The reader has no direct jurisdiction over meaning, for only traces can refer to other traces (Derrida, 1976: 232).

While there are visibly differing degrees or levels of linguistic play between and indeed within different texts, this does not mean that the obviously "playful" texts are less "rigorous" than their more soberly scientific or classical counterparts. In the reading act, traces as signifiers, can only be defined by their relation to other signifiers so that the "structure of writing" can be described, according to Derrida, as the sign under erasure. In this way Derrida ensures the condition of the discontinuity and fragmentariness of a "broken text" (Barthes, 1975: 15) in order to yield a manifold or plural text. It is in writing, according to Derrida, that the plural text will be broken, interrupted or erased - yielding a multi-dimensional form

of reading which is free from referential bias, whether the bias of the regime of the subject or that of the object. These constructs, according to Derrida, have been put out of play from the very outset.

This pioneering use of erasure proposed by Derrida occurs in play, for within the dynamic structures of the traces/signs, the reading subject has "lost" himself. The reader can now only speak in so far as he is willing to follow the grammata of writing, patently mooting the idea of an autonomous, creative subject as the origin of the text. For Derrida, it is only within and among the *relations* of traces to other traces (through temporization) that plural meanings are likely to occur. This plurivocity is likely to be present in every act of reading, whether the reader wants to assume it or not, "... it dictates your discourse irrespective of your wishes" (Derrida *in* Mortley, 1991: 105). Having witnessed the development of the mathematical logical subject or Cartesian ego, we now witness in Derrida the "fall" of all the subsequent variations of representational thinking. Even within his generation of postmodernism Derrida seeks to break further ground. It would appear to be different thinking/writing that Derridean postmodernism calls for - a discourse which focuses on both inside and outside the problematics of representation.

The traces writing should be thought of as manifest differential vibration (which are without support and unbearable), and can only come from the outside. Texts that inscribe the altarity (difference) of this outside serve as "a kind of cabal or cabala in which the blanks will never be anything but provisionally filled in, one surface or square always remaining empty, open to the play of permutations, blanks barely glimpsed as blanks

(almost) pure spacing, going of forever and not in the expectation of any Messianic fulfilment" (Derrida, 1981: 383).

It is clear that the act of "interpretation" as the play of continuous permutations, according to Derrida, cannot occur from the sovereign reader's point of view, for the reader as a sense-making and centred concept no longer exists. In fact there cannot be a human centre in the first place but rather a textual starting-point where the repeated reading of the discontinuous working of grammata enables readers to catch what Derrida believes are pluri-glimpses of the textual meanings. In this decentred reading act it is through deconstruction and dissemination that readers follow the numerous entry-points into the text. The text "comes" and "departs", depending on the quality and sustenance of the deconstruction process. As a result, this "non-linear" pursuit of meaning marks an important feature of Derrida's approach. It is by following the endless play and interplay of signs through blanks even that the reader's own selfhood becomes as vulnerable to textuality as the text itself (see De Beer, 1982: 13). For no longer does a self-assured reading subject, despite the oppositional forces or "traces" he has to conquer, define himself in terms of coming to terms with the textual meaning.

For Derrida the "making" of textual meaning is irrecoverable in the textual *functioning*, for the author resides *in* the text and not *before* the text: "The names of authors or doctrines have ... no substantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes" (Derrida *in* Burke, 1993: 121). With no identities or causes, always suspended *between* and *within* the conflicting play or forces, the crypt remains utterly paradoxical. It is "the exterior in the interior" - the interiority of the exteriority

that turns everything outside in and inside out (Derrida, 1986: 214). The "Crypt" metaphor is what Derrida explains as what "one would say of the transcendental or of the repressed, the unthought, or the excluded - which organizes the ground to which it does not belong" (Derrida, 1986: 187). Here Derrida concurs with Lacan - the conflict between the self-conscious and the unconscious which marks the "site" of meaning production. The production of meanings only occurs in re-reading conflicting textual traces, which means a text is no longer a finished corpus of writing as an "exterior" or some content "contained" in a book, but an "exterior-interior-exterior-interior" "differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to the differential traces" (Derrida *in* Bloom, 1979: 83). This is, after Barthes and Lacan the most radical shift in thinking regarding "representationalism" encountered in the development of various discourses in this study. The switch in thinking is one away from the accuracy of representation, to the infinite play of traces.

#### 4.6.7 THE INFINITIZATION OF TEXT IN DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida demonstrates to have progressed substantially beyond the assumptions of those theorists who equally and justifiably seek to challenge the idea of "a divine message" which is extracted from the text by a sovereign reading subject. Even when they have proposed their own critical and revised notions of subjectivity which is at work in the exterior-interior network of the text, producing manifold or plural meaning, Derrida, along with Lacan, believes he had pushed the most critical limits in that he has gotten rid of basically everything foundational, referential or contextual in the reading act, including that of subjectivity.

While Barthes is clear on what he conceives of as his version of the plurality of texts written by the "subject" and who is defined in and by the writing, Derrida quite differently would have little to tell us about language but certainly a great deal about writing. This is precisely what Derrida hopes to "expose", viz. the grand hopes of modernity and the impossibility of continuing with the myopia of their *totalizing* theories (Lyotard, 1988). He therefore argues that writing about writing helps to deconstruct the grand hopes of the Kantian way of looking at things - an approach which is substantially different to Barthes's "de-binary thinking". Derrida believes that he has established a new thinking order, i.e. a new form of infinite writing and this, by implication, would change the way we conceive of ourselves as subjects and acquiesce into a new mode of meaning construction which is void of the compelling social labels which debilitate life conditions for many people in contemporary society. Derrida seeks to reject the totalizing notion that texts portray in any form of binary subject-object representation, i.e. that it points to a signifier outside the text, but argues that a text, as a galaxy of signifiers, does not entail a structure of signifiers, i.e. the reading act does not operate in terms of "respecting" the text but of ceaselessly breaking it up, maltreating it and ultimately preventing it from speaking. While Habermas (1987) attacks this revolutionary theorising as masquerading neo-conservative ideology, Derrida's intention, like that of Barthes and Lacan, is to debunk all ideology, and therefore to present a radical critique of the previous (modernist) social order.

Derrida's infinite writing as reading, it appears, is performed by the subject-less written traces themselves which results in grammatological reading of systematic "mind-less", as it were,

crossing out of the arche and the radical transformation of general semiology. This apocalyptic, if not revolutionary, stance of Derrida is intended to disrupt and displace the dominant frozen conceptualities of our day. Derrida speaks of a "radical trembling" which is "played out in the violent relationship of the West to its other, whether a "linguistic relationship" ... or ethnological, economic, political, military relationship etc." (Derrida, 1982: 134-135). This seemingly "no hands" process, according to him, starts with a persistently infinite deconstructing operation of "life as text", which leaves the text bare and unburdened by the need to represent at all. The literary, military, economic, etc., aspects of life portray the "wider" text and therefore how we deal with the literary text, is no different to how we deal with the broader socio-political issues - this notion of the "text" marks Derrida's major contribution to meaning construction. This maverick "non-representational" view must, of necessity, radically open the text again and again, ad infinitum, to multiple interpretations, which at the same time, inevitably leads to a considerably vulnerable position. In the tradition of Nietzsche, Derrida only sets out to castigate dominant foundationalisms, not just in the aesthetic and literary realm, but similarly refuses to accede to the consensus-seeking certainties of notions of unconditional ethics and realist "mirror-of-nature epistemologies" (Lash, 1988: 311). Writing thus appears infinitely inalienable from the text itself, which means that the text quasi anticipates the subject's reading of it by incorporating that reading within the play of its already ongoing textuality (see Newton, 1990: 78).

For Derrida action or production, as embodied in the play of signifiers, has sought to destroy all essentialist thought, and

as a result, leaves nothing to flourish but infinite free play, i.e. language has to learn to revel in the dispersive free play the suspended multiplicity of signifiers affords - without an obsessive unified centre or expectation of any "Messianic fulfilment" (Derrida, 1981: 383). Although Derrida warns against the habitual temptation to "divinize" the textual code, he may seem to succumb to the lure of philosophical system-building himself, specifically of constructing yet another transcendental idealism. The trace which reads the text comes across as an apparently soul-less subject among many subjects, including the human subject. The deployment of "subject" or "codes", however remain nothing but empty blanks which provisionally (and infinitely) fill in the blank spaces - for writing - only to be deconstructed again and again. It could be argued that Derrida is not particularly into system-building but he appears not able to discard the implications of referential logic which he wishes to deconstruct, for thinking in reality is not a separate activity from the structuring process, since it usually supposes a thinking subject. In an interview with Kristeva Derrida (1981: 24) emphatically declares:

"Deconstruction, then, cannot aim to rid us, once and for all, of the concepts fundamental to Western rationalism, but only, again and again, to transform [them], to displace them, to turn them against their presuppositions, to reinscribe them in other chains, and little by little modify the terrain of our work and thereby to produce configurations".

Derrida's infinitization of traces continue to play i.e. to ensure that crystallized ideologies of thinking become transformative in constantly displacing what has become natural,

true and accepted in the media, institutions and social conventions.

#### 4.6.8 THE "PURPOSE" AND "CONTEXT" OF READING.

While Derrida appears to have shifted radically, compared to his equally critical predecessors, he relies, like them, on the "tools" and "constructs" to deconstruct those limiting representational structures in which the reading act has come to be incarcerated. Essentially, Derrida's transformative "anti-interpretive" strategy (via displacement) has set out to endlessly break up the text in order to prevent its "naturalization" by what has been so vigorously pursued by the representational modes of reading. The Derridean text, where the reader's only recourse is to the marks on the paper, or in our social world, these marks are ironically "demarcated" into blanks, spaces, margins, i.e. a grapho-centric model - suggesting what appears as an almost depersonalized and acontextualized act of reading. This however proves not to be the case, as we have seen, because he has consistently insisted on the political (and not neutral) character of transformative deconstructionist practice. In fact, "no politics without language", he claims:

"His politically "codable" stands - on neocolonialism, women's liberation, and apartheid, for instance - have shown him to be ... on the "progressive side" (McCarthy, 1991: 146).

The radical decentring of the "Derridean" subject is therefore always in pursuit of a political function of largely unconscious differential relations, unfolding in social spaces and historical times, never being completely master of what he says or claims:

"The subject, and first of all the conscious

and speaking subject, depends upon the system of differences and the movement of *differance* (Derrida, 1981: 29).

Derrida's deconstructionist view of "there is nothing out-side the text" will thus not find a secure meta-position of foundationalism beyond the text itself, to stabilise itself (see Newton, 1990: 78). This view puts out of play before the game even begins every source, norm, control or indicator in the logocentric and binary notions of subjective or objective use and experience of language. The text, paradoxically, appears to have an extraordinarily "controlled" space or context to structure signs and codes so that texts are not arbitrarily read. All such agencies like cogito, ego or subject are relegated to the status of fictions, because they are generated in the name of infallible language, and are therefore constantly being dissolved by deconstructive analysis. It is clear that while Barthes's view of subjectivity still operates within a cultural-coding "context", Derrida's operates without a Cartesian-Kantian foundational context - including without the context of the master subjectivity itself. Taylor (1987: 302) brings a clearer perspective in arguing that the "... empty *tombe* does not represent the presence of renewed life but "is" the sign of the impossibility of presence - an impossibility that "is" the infinite proximity of the nonabsent absence of death. This impossibility is the strange apocalypse itself. The Impossible draws near with a "Come", which, paradoxically, never comes". According to Derrida, this "Come" cannot come from the voice of a signifying, "I" but is only derivable, i.e. it drifts (Taylor, 1987: 302-303). The only "context" for Derrida therefore is "the infinite proximity" of a void or absence, in order to transform our readings into a constantly new presence.

The radical post-modernist departure of Derrida's thinking from his precursors, leads to a "split" in how he perceives the reading act and its "derivable drifts", as suggested by Taylor, in the construction of meaning. This "split" in Derrida's case exists in the text (there is nothing outside) and there appears therefore to be a double text, the first text contains fissures or traces, which render indications of the second one, and between the two texts there is no synthesis, no fusing into one at all. The second text is also not "opposite" to the other but rather that which appears to be its counterpart. Derrida's "non-representational" assumptions plays therefore a double game, i.e. they feign obedience to the tyrannical system of rules while simultaneously laying traps for it in the form of problems which it is at a loss to settle. The heterogeneity and infinitization of meanings is however possible because of the signifying possibilities which are attendant upon the inscription of "... a kind of autonomous (super-compossibility) of meanings" (Derrida, 1978: 18). In other words, it is an infinite play and simultaneous substitution of traces which, according to Derrida, is *always already* determined.

#### 4.6.9 THE SIMULTANEITY OF NON-ORIGINARITY AND REPETITION.

While Derrida (like Barthes) regards the intentions of phenomenology as being imprisoned within the "closure of representation", he patently rejects the notion of a self-assured subject who writes the textual representations according to his own and many other codes in the grammata. Whilst Barthes retains the foundation of subjectivity, albeit in its plural foundation, and Lacan insists on the pursuit of the Other in terms of the Law of the Father, the Derridean reading subject is not surpassed but is manifestly absent from the very start. It appears that the

"absence" of a dominant biographical subject is, at the same time, equivalent to the "presence" of an impersonal "trace" subject. This implication of a "new subjectivity" of Derrida, if you wish, announces the "play of differences" within the blanks and spaces over the pursuit of a foundational, originary and centred subject who controls meaning. These traces weave and interlace in the infinite writing process, so that Derrida writes of "weaving and interlacing";

"... two tactics: the first does not change terrain but turns what is implicit in the founding concepts and the original problematic against those very concepts ...; the second involves continuous change of terrain, placing oneself outside of, and affirming an absolute break with those concepts and problematic" (McCarthy, 1991:149).

The repetitive significations or inscriptions, according to Derrida that difference has activated in a signifier in the past, remain active as traces in the present as they will in the future - except that this "history" does not exist outside the grammata as a context for interpretation of new meanings. Derrida's "non-referential" view therefore embodies a process which in its own way, seems no less dependent on an origin, ground and end, than the metaphysical system he deconstructs. Abrams (1979, 431) argues that "... the closed chamber of texts for which he invites us to abandon our ordinary realm of experience in speaking, hearing and understanding language", represents nothing else but a "sealed echo-chamber". However, Derrida sees his notion of inscription as being a *crisis*, not as a simple or single "grounded" moment at all, but rather that it is both instance and insistence, for "This crisis has always

(already) begun and it is indeterminable" (Derrida, 1978: 62). This crisis or inscription is not "sealed in" or "locked up" but in fact is free in its own "eccentric circulation" in terms of what Derrida refers to as non-originaryity and repetition:

"Death is at the dawn because everything has begun by repeating themselves, by doubling themselves ... There was immediately a double origin plus its repetition" (Derrida, 1978: 299).

Unlike the views of Eco, Lotman and Barthes, Derrida's non-originary excessive system embraces and dis-embraces on a continual basis paradoxes, contradictions and incoherencies that may impact on the text since his re-evaluation of metaphysics already excluded the stable, totalized and coherent subject. Here Derrida may concur with Lacan who speaks of an "unlocatable centre" in the chain so that there will always be an irreducible otherness to prompt newer and newer meaning. The implied Barthesian subject who "constructs" the reading text is contrasted with Derrida's *writing* where "... one risks ceaselessly, confirming, consolidating, relifting, at an always more certain depth, that which one allegedly deconstructs" (Derrida, 1978: 135). All origins have already been in a process of deconstruction, including the subject trace - a process which marks its already ongoing textuality.

The writing of a reading almost takes on an anthropomorphic tendency of a "human" subject to *dismantle* and at the same time assemble, produce, construct and write a plurality text which disorganises "... the entire inherited order and invading the entire field." (Derrida, 1981: 42). The Derridean reader, it would appear, is merely invited to gaze at the Nietzschean affirmation (*Bejahung*) of the play of the world, i.e. the process

of becoming. This "eccentric circulation" of endless play of textual traces, including the subject trace, however is without security, just chance - a referral and deferral system of signification which remains "unmasterable" (Derrida, 1975: 23). Derrida's significant contribution to "reading theory" is his brand of writing of "recurrences without representation" as Scott (1987: 97) calls it:

"Meanings perish and repeat on the meaningless surface contacts among things. Meanings do not penetrate to a centre. They do not represent something beyond their reach and in whose standing likeness they occur. They refer to themselves only".

The unmasterable character of Derrida's assumptions of the reading act, radicalizes all hitherto critiques in this study, for Derrida believes not only that he has "withdrawn language from the world" (Blanchot, 1982: 26) but that he has withdrawn and displaced subjectivity, which is the corollary of language, as well. Derrida's dictum "there is nothing outside the text", as has been pointed out, does not necessarily refer to books or documents, but to "con-texts", to the entire real-history-of-the-world. However, he does not suspend reference to history, to the world, to reality, to being at all (Derrida, 1988: 136). Derrida's remarkable progress beyond even the views of the new critics of subjectivity in this study therefore "inscribes" traces which operate as a "deconstruction from within" (Fairlamb, 1994: 82), i.e. his insistence on deconstruction's relentless questioning of the authority of perception and thought discovers the heterogeneous conditions of significance, the conditions of both theoretical coherence and deconstructive play. Moreover, Derrida's profound insights of the understanding of meaning construction is that his *writing* also relentlessly seeks also to

destabilize the distinction between theory (of deconstruction) and deconstructive practice; reflexively questioning deconstructive authority in the same way that he questions theory, the latter of which may pursue "clarity", "coherence" and "guidelines" in everyday life. For Derrida, ultimately, the end of analysis is (the) impossible, for the repressed always returns to render hollow the magisterial claims of a self-conscious subject. In the same way Lacan pursues the desperate evacuation and dis-content of all meanings, including the infinite meanings of myself as subject.

#### 4.6.10 CONCLUSION

By concluding with Derrida's unmasterable, yet exciting and excessive prospect of "reading", we have incorporated into this study a considerably comprehensive view of the reading act which increasingly places (and replaces) every locus of centrality, origin and causality into constant radical question. Beyond all neat theorising that remains bent on *representing* and so doing affords the "natural" basis for mastery and control (whether by the language), Derrida excessively unburdens all presuppositions that seek to centralize and totalize our thinking, but, as its inevitable corollary, to trace the traces for constant renewal and transformation of reading itself and how we trace the act of reading. For as much as we as readers become aware the assumed oppositional stance in thinking and socializing, Derrida's insistence on the "double nature" of all things, edges us to not only reverse those practices but also to displace them, all the time, to actualize *readings* of ourselves and our taken-for-granted practices posing as "natural realities". Things-are-the-way-they -are need not be that way, for new and deconstructed ways of looking at them burst those "totalities" and

"coherencies" in order to open up another way of thinking and reading (in excess), for this is the way it always has been, "which exceeds all that is real" (Derrida, 1978:56-7). This excess however cannot be done from the outside of the text-of-the-world, in an authoritative way, and neither can we assume that it is safe to read our text from the inside, for nothing is static or either -or. The reality of the events of life and the events of ourselves "...disrupts the circulation that transforms..." (own emphasis) (Derrida, 1981:21). We are all transforming codes in the entire reading of life, irreducible to finite origins, destinations - always unrepresentable, "...always remaining empty, open to the play of permutation..." (Derrida, 1981:383). Derrida's critical contribution to reading is none other than to push us to reconceptualize our potential to subvert all precision -seeking representationalism and naturalized assumptions, despite all conflict, and make us realize how we can view them differently, in challenging and fulfilling ways.

#### 4.7 THE RADICALIZATION OF THE NEW MASTERS :SUMMARY

The fundamental transition from the pioneering masters towards the new masters gains gradual, albeit qualitative, momentum with Eco and Lotman whom, as we have noticed, continue to operate in very clear subject-object polarity modes of meaning construction. Their merit however resides greatly in the fact that their approach of displacement seeks to disengage our reading discourse from the prominent and/or traditional positioning of the subject and object. It is a structural or systemic impasse, entrenched in truth claims, which demonstrates to be varied in a rich ambience of cultural, social and historical codes. The new masters do rely heavily on the productive working of disruptive networks (Eco) and creolization (Lotman) in order to void direct representationalism. While credit is given to the "other side" of reading (contained in the text), the reader's "ensemble of codes" tends to filter delayed and indirect meanings. Eco and Lotman evidence still a restraint form of reading occurring in a continuous, circular process of semiosis - the precursor for traces and signifiers which we encounter in Barthes, Lacan and Derrida. Whereas as the pioneering masters' "pure", "circular" positions of subject-object attempted to concretize these constructs in-this-world, Eco and Lotman introduce a flexible mode of *playfulness*, appreciating particularly dissimilarity and difference in order to critically contribute to *misreading* as being a natural part of all reading. Eco and Lotman, however beyond the pioneering masters they may have advanced in terms of reading codes as *discourse*, still seem to veer to the level of the "intersection" of a subject and object which are constitutive forces of substance, content and definition. Being products of their times, their logocentric attempts obviously rely on their predecessors but ultimately prove nevertheless seminal in

appreciating the increased value of "multiple readings" which seek to problematize the circularity mode of subject-object, constantly seeking deferral from closure. They are able to inscribe *multiple readings* precisely because they have started to unburden the text from its author and authority, and therefore liberating the writerly text for more expansive meanings. The substantiality and content pursuits of their theories, on the other hand, still incarcerate their thinking in the quest for system-building and totalizing of personal and social knowledge - thereby limiting the *unmasterable character* of the reading act.

Our understanding of the reading act or of reading as such, vis-a-vis the role of subjectivity becomes substantially radicalized with the introduction of Barthes and Derrida's notions of writing as well as Lacan's emphasis of the unconscious as a writer. This is a first, emphatic attempt to break with the problematic logocentric approaches of their predecessors. In seeking not only to rethink and re-evaluate the proximity of the notions of subjectivity and language, but in fact radically displacing them - they effectively demonstrate that there is no need for the polarity structure of subject-object, or even the need for any intersection between them. This abandonment of the intersection between subject and object is of major significance in terms of the new masters because this, methodologically, declares the death of representation. Because there cannot be any representation, it means the demise of the colonising powers of the signifier as well. Language, without denouncing its validity and role, cannot act as a transcription of reality for Barthes, Lacan and Derrida. Subject and "object" are equally useful in terms of the workings and shifting of traces and signifiers but cannot be "traced" or "signified" anywhere. They have no substance and consistent value, other than being inscribed into

the working dynamics of language. The advances made by Barthes and Derrida is by replacing/substituting the "one or two way", or "linear" or "circular" structures inherent in the meaning construction procedures of the pioneering masters, for *discursive practices*. Strictly-speaking neither the reader, nor the text "has" the ability to confer meaning - therefore there cannot be any *representing*, any *decoding* or any *interpreting*. Trusting therefore the playfulness of traces, grammata and signifiers, leads us to forgetting or amnesia of *who are in charge*. Amnesia becomes the "grounding force" for production. Language which represents or tends to *mean* anything has no grounding or originary locus. Meaning, for the new masters always remains absent or, at best, uncertain. The pursuits of play and production impact in a critical way on the differentiability of how they conceive of *language*, its infinite functioning and ultimately its non-solidifying effects in reading, meaning construction and self-definition always patent.

Rather than being preoccupied with the "distance" or the "in-between" of subject-object in meaning construction, Barthes, Derrida and Lacan seek to usher the creative notion of *absence* and nothingness into their excentric/eccentric discourse which becomes the radicalized point of departure for overcoming any frozen, ideological reading in which the subject has seemed to master the textual subject. All that remains are *blanks* and *spaces*, but no positions, polarity and beacons. "Less is more" seems to be the thrust of these structuralist, so that what propels the transformation of meanings is Desire and Pleasure. These notions are the "mechanisms" to prevent closing off of meaning which direct consumptive readings. Because of the castigation of the notion of equity or equivalence of subject and object, the reading act becomes a disruptive or discontinuous

procedure - learning "to live" with emptiness, the void and non-originary of meaning construction. How this "discontinuity" differs from the previous notions of the pioneers, including Eco and Lotman, is not *differences* between author and reader but rather the dispossessed nature of the discourse itself. The alienation and emptiness of discourse is taken to its ultimate consequence in Lacan's notion of the "faulty" subjectivity which has never been born. This *absence* is precisely the embryonic space of meaning, in contrast to the *presence* advocated by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and other thinkers in this study.

The ensuing readings of "a reading" had become the de-totalizing procedure upon which discourse thrives. Their discourses refuse to acquiesce in practices that will lead to consensus-seeking certainties of unconditional realism and ethics. A text cannot be "mastered" by anyone, i.e. a process which would entrench or monopolize ideas and ideologies. Subjectivity, as a result, is no longer a controlling "outside agency", but is constantly being recreated as a "site of production" (Barthes), or becomes woven into the grammata (Derrida) or even becomes a signifier in the chain of signifiers (Lacan). As a result of the subversion of subjectivity, which is no longer an agency but rather a site of production in language, Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, in their respective ways, decentre the notion of a reading subject which, of necessity, becomes a split or divided entity and which has to cope with the inside and outside of the "text". There is however no longer an "objective text" either, but it is rather a matter of the subject that is being written (Barthes), the "subject" is regarded as being part of the galaxy of signifiers following other grammata (Derrida) and the subject which entails a structure in which the reader still has to be born (Lacan). This uncertain and vulnerable position would therefore mean that any

"reading" has to cope with the "unreadable" and possibly also with "nonsense" in producing the manifold, differential readings that a text could entail. What the radical theorists awake in their readers is not unconditional "re-presenting" of presence but bringing the reader in closer proximity of an infinite state of nonabsent absence. This vulnerable, risky and luring prospect of dispossession of content and personal authorial power displaces the hegemonic sense of certainty, not that values and beliefs have no certainty or validity, but making its reader aware of what they have, what can be achieved (alterity) and making, as a result, more desirable decisions in a world that has become increasingly multifaceted and complex.

The critical shift in perspectives of post-structuralism and post-modernism suggests a decentred subject (that is if we are still to speak of "a subject") which constantly, in a dispossessed and alienated position, almost renders them depersonalized precisely because they have been deconstructed. Contrary to the earlier pioneering thinking, "deconstructive" thinking as a deliberate strategy, has never been problematized other than to speak of the "conflict of interpretations". The transformative value of deconstruction does not only deconstruct content but also dis-content, i.e. enhancing the ability of looking at the multiple ways of writing our reading. For ultimately they believe there cannot, strictly-speaking, be any "interpretation of a text" but rather a discourse in which many *differ-ent possible readings* are infinitely generated - including *different readings* of ourselves as "readers". It is precisely because we have *discourse*, rather than substantive agencies (subject and object) that writing can deconstruct itself to achieve endless difference, without entrenching duplication. This "letting discourse deconstruct itself" is the *gap or opening*

for discourse to destabilize all thinking, ideas and expertise which seek totalization, finalization and validation of beliefs and practices in an otherwise utterly diversified world society.

Because of the new masters' contemptuous suspicion and consequent suspension of a separate or outside position of the reader vis-a-vis the object, they have effectively subverted the quest of sense-making meaning which seeks to penetrate to a centre to seek coherence, objectivity and accuracy of knowledge construction and of the finite identities of readers. What the new masters have moreover demonstrated is to critically re-site the reading act in which a playful (albeit serious) reading constantly "awakens other voices" (Levinas in Greisch, 1991: 68). Because meaning is always absent, no meaning can "belong" to a text. Since the new masters have argued in favour of displacing the epistemic boundaries which hinge on the limited subject-object dichotomy, they have opened the production of their "text" by radical disjunction to achieve a "wider" and even another reading than the one constructed in terms of the sovereign centred reader's volatile and idiosyncratic intentions. This discursive disjunction has been particularly achieved by Barthes, Lacan and Derrida, because of their displaced notions of subjectivity which persistently attempted to refer to the shifting reality of discourse - where subjectivity is seen as purely a discursive effect of reading.

The new masters, moreover, in problematizing the level at which we perceive the "proliferation" of interpretations (Ormiston & Schrift, 1990: 4), force the boundaries of reading beyond *originaryity* or *closure* so that every reading becomes purely a pre-reading, to be followed by a re-reading, and so on. This golden thread of infinitization of the new masters has led to a

broader and more critical interpretive strategy which allows readers to appreciate "the remainder" of language (Lecerle, 1990) which focuses on another side of language. Precisely because *readings* (rather than interpretation) has been made unmasterable, readers have been forced to read the "other sides" of reading, in the margins and the blanks. There is patently "no recipe", no blueprint for reading, for it is when we creatively have stopped trying to make sense that we start reading. Unreadable as this other side may be, they engage every reading experience to dehomogenize all conformist logical content to be continually re-read and transformed. Critical readers will therefore be enabled to develop the risk-taking capacity to push the limits of how they could possibly succeed in constructing meaningful knowledge that would advance their insight into the quality of their personal and social interactions.

CHAPTER 5UNSHACKLING THE CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING IN READING.5.1 RETHINKING READING: INTRODUCTION.

Chapters 3 & 4 of this study have steadily examined how "theory" sets out to not only describe, but ultimately to "control" our reading practice. From the legislative presence of an object and a subject embroiled in various shades of representation and interpretation in Chapter 3, to the steady removal of all things dynamic to the extent that the very idea of excess "legislates" our reading practice in Chapter 4, it has become clear how the attempts of a "real" and "valid" (or even integrative) reading which is represented by and in the theory, has changed with alarming rapidity, but also with fundamental depth of insight.

From the obsessive text orientation which must always be represented and mastered, to the summoning up of all counter forces which "destroy" and as a result produce at the scene of reading, we observe a remarkable array and intensity of theory construction. The common investment of all the respective theorists in this study, is their tendency to "theorize" their own peculiar contextualizing discourses, and a further distinguishing feature of all their respective theoretical discourses is that they seem continually placed in tension with their primary purpose, i.e. of delimiting a space of reading which it sets out to construct purpose of meaning. Therefore, whether we in fact have a "reading theory" is a concern which poses many counter questions. In fact the new masters postulate increasingly an unambiguous disavowal of any "theory" pertaining what they encapsulate in the volatile notion of "reading". We

are mindful in this study, however, that the pursuit of whatever "reading theory" cannot merely be a description of the rules for good or valid reading but rather that it becomes *implicated* in the larger theoretical, social and ideological discourses which shape the "space of the subject".

From Decartes to Derrida, in this study, the implications of a "reading theory" merely describe particular facets of the reading act and its corresponding (or absence of) rules or theory. These have always been attempts of theorizing a particular set of assumptions and practices surrounding primarily the subject, but by implication, also the status and validity of representation vis-a-vis the object. These attempts have led to particular illuminating perspectives of the subject, language and therefore reading. Our concerns have been validated in that theorists grappled with whether the reading subject mimics the thoughts of someone else in the text, expressing as a result their theories of the distinction that is being made between the reading subject who reads, the subject being read and the person who writes. This is crucial, in differing degrees, for the theorists since the reading act articulates the boundaries between subject and text in both the process of writing and of reading. The result of these concerns informs their respective views of how the subject, and its place in the reading act is constructed. This proves a highly charged operation, given ultimately *how* they conceive of the nature of *language*, i.e. when they consider the "different uses" to which the reading of a text may be put.

The elements of *reflexivity* and *production* which undergird the "reading theories" of the pioneering and new masters respectively, serve as significant unfreezing mechanisms for addressing the rigidity of strict representationalism which seeks

accuracy and monolithic meaning. *Reflexivity* imports a *frame of reference* which exceeds the boundaries of reproductive reading and therefore opening up new possibilities in the areas of knowledge, information and reading. In terms of reflexivity, the meaning which ensues from the reader will not be the final and complete meaning, for the gravity of reading may also reside beyond the "abilities" and potential of the text. On the other hand, *reproduction* imports a *frame of reference* which challenges reciprocity in favour of the irreducibility of meaning. This frame of reference had reinforced a modified orientation to meaning in which *space* is constantly created where the reader may move beyond the fixed boundaries of the text. This creative orientation certainly reaches a point where the reading subject is no longer the consumer of texts but rather a producer of texts. The apparent opposition between reflexivity and production, while dealt with methodologically as "separate" in this study, is a fallacy. To characterize reading solely in terms of textual production is also to overlook the important question of elements of representation. What this study illustrates is that the text also, at certain moments, produces the fallacy of an origin outside itself, i.e. an assumed reality which it is representing.

As a way forward, and to facilitate the understanding of the theoretical implications of an integrative and certainly a more comprehensive "theory" or reading, it would be clarifying to grasp the schematic analysis and orientation of both the pioneering and the new masters. This orienting schema enables us to have insight into the *reflexive* and *productive* dynamics which provide the space of *how we read*, beyond the celebratory reverence for and power of the written word which usually tend to enclose pre-dated meaning of textual content.

5.2 THE ORIENTATION OF THE PIONEERING MASTERS TOWARDS  
READING.

Chapter 3 initiates Nietzsche's seminal injunction of doubt for rethinking the status of the subject in its *separated* status from the textual object. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur's concerns with the human subject (as opposed to a theoretical subject) in this world has, at the same time, brought about a critique of the role of language in terms of which meaning is constructed. The discourse that emerges is a form of meaning construction in which the present reading subject is no longer in absolute control of a passive textual object from which meaning is extracted. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricoeur usher into their thinking the significance of the notion *reflexivity*, i.e. the exciting prospect of the textual object which becomes "self-conscious" of itself and "designates" itself an active and "come-alive" role in the text. This distinctive form of reflexivity or self-awareness and reciprocity occurs in terms of the thinkers' understanding of *language*. Their strategic abandonment of pure representation precipitates the toppling of the sovereignty of the subject and, in the process, they attempt to eliminate what they regard as the fallacious gap or opposition of the subject and object. It is also evident that their respective critiques have been clearly as a result of their concerns with ontology, language and meaning. Even within a specific tradition eg. phenomenological reading, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty creatively proceed and arrive at "different" ends. Similarly, in hermeneutic reading, Gadamer and Ricoeur prove different. In order to assist our summarizing and therefore facilitate a creative schematic way of unpacking their rethinking of the earlier Cartesian and Kantian tradition we may look at their different positions in terms of their:

- point of departure
- mode of consciousness
- mediative function and meaning
- reflexive mode
- production of meaning/interpretation

5.2.1. READING BASED ON REFLEXIVITY, TOWARDS PLURALITY OF MEANING.

5.2.1.1 PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING.

	HEIDEGGER'S HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY	MERLEAU-PONTY'S CONSTRUCTIVIST PHENOMENOLOGY
1. <u>Phenomenological point of departure.</u>	1. Dasein is the departure point. Dasein is linked to language in temporality.	1. Situation is the departure point. Situation is linked to the immediate primitive perception that is effected through the body.
2. <u>Mode of consciousness.</u>	2. Language is the "house of being" which exists before being. "Seeing" becomes paramount to complete ontology.	2. The body as phenomenal body is the primary mode of consciousness, striving for transcendence.

<p>3. <u>Mediative function and meaning.</u></p>	<p>3. Language is the mediative function, for language releases the possibilities for disclosure of meaning.</p> <p>Meaning occurs when reader engages <u>with</u> text in Dasein.</p>	<p>3. The body is a mode which becomes the mediative function with the world, reflecting on prereflective experiences. There is an already larger reality of meaning before the textual engagement. Meaning occurs in the <u>in between</u> of reader and text.</p>
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<p>4. <u>Reflexivity Mode.</u></p>	<p>4. The reader and text remain incomplete until they together engage in the circle of reflection. However the not-yet-complete circle resides in a greater totality of past, present, future constantly invoking a reciprocal reinterpretation of the world.</p> <p>The reflexivity of understanding (<u>Verstehen</u>) and feeling (<u>Befindlichkeit</u>) leads to interpretation (<u>Auslegung</u>).</p> <p>Reflexivity occurs in language which in fact predates the subjectivity of reader/author.</p>	<p>4. The focus is on temporality and reflecting on prereflective experiences. The perceptual circular determination is when the reader as perceiving perceptible engages in a mutual compenetration with the world.</p> <p>This reflexivity constantly restructures the reader and text's consciousness.</p> <p>The visible and "invisible" is necessary for constructing new meaning.</p>
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<p>5. <u>Production of meaning/interpretation.</u></p>	<p>5. Production of meaning is possible in terms of historicity (in the circle, and illumination of showing (<u>Zeige</u>)</p> <p>Interpretation starts with seeing (phenomenology) but takes a hermeneutic turn and the hermeneutic holism becomes ontology where the reader constantly engages in a reciprocal reinterpretation of the world. (<u>Auslegung</u>).</p>	<p>5. Production of meaning is a constant struggle, producing meaning on the reverse side of what the text actually depicts.</p> <p>Continual restructuring and readjustment towards interpretation.</p> <p>The multiplicity of relationships within the circular reflexivity (chiasm) facilitates a seeing of all sides. This new ontology of reversibility hinges in the in-between of subject/object, consciousness/being.</p>
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5.2.1.2 HERMENEUTIC READING

	GADAMER'S UNIVERSAL PHILOSOPHICAL HERMENEUTICS	RICOEUR'S METHODIC HERMENEUTICS
1. <u>Hermeneutic point of departure.</u>	1. Being in-this-world is in pursuit of truth; a truth which is bent on gaining deeper self-understanding. All understanding is linguistic and all language is interpretation, mediated by the past, present and future.	1. The subject is a thinking, reflective subject grounded in temporality, who first has to lose himself in order to find himself. Self-understanding is not found but should be discovered via language as an appropriate and mediative force
2. <u>Mode of consciousness</u>	2. Language is all consciousness. Language is subjectivity. It is not objectified but rather speaks to us; it is a priori and as such is a mode of being qua meaningful understanding.	2. It is in language that the subject experiences being. This immediate experience in language has another (further) dimension, viz that of the mediation for self-understanding. Through distanciation and the reconstruction of the text the reader discovers himself.

<p>3. <u>Mediative function and meaning.</u></p>	<p>3. Mediation occurs where the subject places himself in a tradition (circle) where past, present and future fuse. Effective-history (<u>Wirkungsgeschichte</u>) is the dialectic between openness and tradition.</p> <p>Language operates through history and by resuscitation prejudice (<u>Vorurteil</u>) we mediate an awareness of self and others.</p> <p>Language assists the mediation process in terms of past and present, giving expression to meaning.</p>	<p>3. Mediation occurs in terms of two dimension of language. The subject discovers himself indirectly via signs and symbols; but language is also ontological through appropriation. Language is distanciation (indirect) and through appropriation the reader renders the alien and unfamiliar, familiar and understandable. Language appropriates meaning which already exists.</p> <p>The reader also creates meaning through imaginative variations of the world. The latter offers him new ways of seeing. Imagination offers mediation rather than content.</p>
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<p>4. <u>Reflexivity Mode.</u></p>	<p>4. The subject realizes its essence in language by placing itself in a tradition where past, present and future fuse. This reflexive mode is historical when my prejudice (<u>Vorurteil</u>) i.e. who I am is reciprocated with the newness of otherness in the text.</p> <p>The continuing chain of time is effected in language when the self comes into contact with the other (fusion of horizons).</p> <p>The fusion is for self-understanding.</p> <p>The hermeneutic circle is historical, i.e. placing myself in a tradition of dialecticism between openness and tradition.</p>	<p>4. Distanciation, as a hermeneutic method is effected in language when the reading is followed by delayed or mediated action for a meaning that already exists.</p> <p>Language deploys indicators such as pronouns (self-referential) to enhance the process of appropriation, i.e. making what is foreign /alien, one's own.</p> <p>The hermeneutic arch is temporal, i.e. grounding an already existing meaning of my own experience.</p>
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<p>5. <u>Production of meaning/interpretation.</u></p>	<p>5. The <u>Wirkungsgeschichte</u> (effective-history) becomes the productive framework of new possibilities for understanding.</p> <p>Language becomes the breeding ground for a dialogue between past and present for interpretation which is also self-understanding.</p>	<p>5. The reader does not "produce" any meaning but rather undergoes a process himself by "bringing together" in the hermeneutic arch the text and his lived experience.</p> <p>Through imagination and appropriation he renders contemporary that which is alien and effects self-understanding.</p>
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### 5.3 THE ORIENTATION OF THE NEW MASTERS TOWARDS READING.

Chapter 4 marks the attempts of the new masters who seek to critically subvert the assumptions of the old pioneers, who despite their major progress since Descartes and Kant, still operate in very definite categories of "subject" and "object". The pioneers seem to be trapped in the dilemma of a clear circular position of subject and object which is manifestly concretized in-this-world. The new masters cast radical suspicion on their predecessors by going back to Nietzsche and usher us into perspectives of post-structuralism and even post-modernism where the very reference to the notions of "subject" and "object" are radically questioned. Whereas the pioneers had been successful in highlighting the *reflexivity* of the textual object, Eco, Lotman, Barthes, Derrida and Lacan emphasize the

notion of *plural texts* in order to subvert a single monolithic or continuous meaning. The emergence of "plural text" occur differently for the respective authors. Essentially it has to do with questioning and negating the notions of "subject" and "object", and the legitimacy of language, particularly with Barthes, Derrida and Lacan. The plurality of meaning implies that a text is not read as "a" representation of reality but rather as productive discourse which results in meaning which is irreducible to any object or event. It is only Eco and Lotman, who seem to be the "transitional thinkers" to the new masters because their endless semiosis pursues a systemic reading within the signs of cultural and historical codes, but ultimately these are mediated via "intertextual power" (Eco) and the dynamic process of "creolizing" (Lotman) the text.

In their respective ways Barthes, Derrida and Lacan pursue an approach to the reading act as a rather vulnerable enterprise in which meanings are produced, subverted, validated but also displaced. Lacan, in a dramatic way, evacuates meaning from the external "void" of the unconscious. The notion of "chaos" seems to gain greater momentum with the new masters. The idea of *plural texts* assumes therefore a different nuance in Eco and Lotman's semiotics, than is the case in Barthes and Derrida's writing as deconstruction and displacement, and as is ultimately in Lacan's "emptiness" in psycho-analytical reading. In terms of a schematic way of unpacking their subversion of the old masters, we may look at their assumptions in terms of:

- point of departure
- mode of consciousness
- mediative function and meaning
- plural textuality
- production of meaning/interpretation.

5.3.1 READING BASED ON PLURAL TEXTS, TOWARDS IRREDUCIBLE MEANING.

5.3.1.1 SEMIOTIC READING

	ECO'S STRATEGIC SEMIOTICS	LOTMAN'S CULTURAL SEMIOTICS
1. <u>Semiotic point of departure</u>	1. All human activity resides in a "semiotic profile" which is entrenched in cultural processes of communication. These processes are important for their communicative value.	1. Semiotics and humankind presuppose each other, emphasizing the interaction between text, language and culture. Every system whose aim it is to communicate is regarded as language.
2. <u>Mode of consciousness</u>	2. Semiotic consciousness is characterised by the interplay of disruptive social, cultural and philological codes/subcodes which lead to either closed or open readings of a text.	2. Man's consciousness is a linguistic consciousness upon which all secondary modeling systems are constructed. Semiotic systems are part of these constructions. Conflict and disruption occur when the "noise" between semantics and phenology is eliminated.

<p>3. <u>Mediative function/meaning</u></p>	<p>3. Open texts, which are governed by lexical and syntactical codes act as nodes or joints to mediate ("mirror") to the model reader how he should construct meaning. Textual mirrors (not in representational manner) assist readers to make connections in a continuous process of coming and going.</p> <p>The author is dead but his traces are there in the form of modes and signs to mediate new meanings.</p>	<p>3. The actual text is a framework of codes and subcodes. What really facilitates mediation is the "Extra-text", i.e. the embodiment of historically determined codes which are enshrined in the reader's linguistic consciousness.</p> <p>Flexibility exists in coding/sub-coding to render access to extra-textual relations easier.</p> <p>The reader's extra text and the authors codes have to be dissimilar in order to facilitate the decipherment of their signalizations.</p>
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<p>4. <u>Plural textuality</u></p>	<p>4. The critical reader creates new open texts by overcoding his own personal codes, for books always speak of other books and every story that has already been told.</p> <p>The plurality of texts is embedded in inter-texts based on what the text that is read speaks of.</p>	<p>4. The reader has to deal with a complex systematic network of extra-textual connections. Many texts may be "creolized" creating many individual texts.</p> <p>The greater the dissonance the more individual a text. The reader constantly recodifies in that he imposes his own extra text in a creative way.</p>
<p>5. <u>Production of meaning/interpretation</u></p>	<p>5. The model reader (a logical rather than psychological construct) produces meaning when he lets the text speak about its own semiotic strategy. This dialectical "exchanged" (interpreted) process for the meaning occurs in terms of the reader's own internal "ensemble of codes". This is the only way the reader creates freely for his own being.</p>	<p>5. Oppositional relationships between the reader and author are responsible for creating meaning. Beyond conflictual relationship the intersection between the author and reader's differences meaning is produced. This intersection is the ontological tight rope for the reader.</p>

5.3.1.2 LACAN'S PSYCHO-ANALYTIC READING.

<p>1. <u>Point of departure.</u></p>	<p>1. There is no pre-discursive reality. The Lacanian libido ("scopic drive") entails Desire which is not a pleasure-seeking drive but one that is linked to a signifying system.</p> <p>All reality is founded in discourse - based on reciprocal signification, i.e. the person can look at an object or text and the object/text can look at/grasp the person. The ensuing subject of the "look" (Gaze) is nothing more than a function of speech.</p>
<p>2. <u>Mode of consciousness</u></p>	<p>2. It is a consciousness of the unconscious. As it is only language which exists, there is a lack of being. All seeing has already been determined by images.</p> <p>All consciousness is rooted in Desire. In the mirror stage the reader perceives his image - an image which is still lacking. The consciousness of the mirror stage, which is experienced all the time, holds together a picture that the reader projects and desires.</p> <p>This leads to difference and alienation. By modelling himself in terms of the Other, the alienated self consciously experiences a fictitious sense of a unified selfhood, seeking something he can identify with.</p>

<p>3. <u>Mediative Function/ Meaning.</u></p>	<p>3. Meaning resides in the gap and in Desire. In the mirror stage of narcissism, language becomes the very basis of mediation. However language operates indirectly, for direct access to reality is not possible. Language is empty and only functions in terms of a potentiality endless process of searching for meanings. The signifier does not embody the carrier of meaning. The signified slides beneath the signifier and resists the subject's attempts to locate/delimit meaning.</p>
<p>4. <u>Plural textuality.</u></p>	<p>4. There is no fixed text, for meaning evolves to conceal a gap - the gap of the unconsciousness where repressed meanings dwell in Desire. Plural texts are produced in the endless process of signification in the signifying chain. Texts are produced as vantage-points, likened to upholstery studs on the taut canvas of life.</p>

5. Production of  
Meaning/  
Interpretation

5. The production of meaning adheres in the unconscious signifying chain. The reader constructs/produces mental experiences inside himself in terms of his unconscious. This is achieved by way of pictures he projects outside himself. This circular process is the "anti-representational" basis where neither social conditions nor internal feelings dominate. This intra-subjective production is achieved in the unconscious.

Assisted by the Law of the Father (the cultural context), the subject is ushered into the symbolic order. This achievement of being and therefore subjectivity occurs in the dialectical network of narrative desire - producing an ongoing process of plural significations.

The signifying chain is likened to rings in a necklace, a self-perpetuating imperative that propels the endless interpretative practice. The latter signifies true being in the Symbolic Order of language and culture where being succeeds language in the converging point where all lines of discourse cross.

5.3.1.3 WRITING AND DISPLACEMENT IN BARTHES AND DERRIDA.

	BARTHES'S STRUCTURATION OF WRITING.	DERRIDA'S GRAMMATOLOGY.
1. <u>Point of departure.</u>	1. Barthes challenges languages. All language signs are myths which freeze speech and make things look natural and innocent. Pursuing any understanding means unmasking these myths.	1. Derrida challenges language. Language signs are without truth, foundation, beginning or end. This means a restart to destroy or deconstruct conventional metaphysics, including the notion of text, language, author and reader.

<p>2. <u>Mode of consciousness.</u></p>	<p>2. Consciousness and subjectivity are imaginary concepts. Authors and readers are plural "subjectivities" so that both entities embody nothing else by a plurality of codes approaching the text is already a plurality of codes and other texts.</p> <p>Everything is plurality and flux which has already begun before the reader reads. The reader merely enters this process by interweaving and braiding familiar voices/ codes into his writing.</p>	<p>2. Consciousness and subjectivity are fallacious concepts. There is nothing outside the texts. All that exists are textual signs or traces which maintain an inarticulate presence.</p> <p>In fact, traces have their own subjectivity in relation to other traces, in the text and not before the text.</p>
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<p>3. <u>Mediative function/meaning.</u></p>	<p>3. Writing is our only form of mediation, not in a harmonious way but in a disruptive way.</p> <p>The text in itself has no meaning but by unmasking the myths in the text the reader rewrites his own text. There is no pre-existing text but by personally re-creating the text the reader creates his own ontological space during writing.</p> <p>The function of signifiers is not that of subjectivity but the result of the constant flow of <i>writing</i>. This "interpretation" of textual codes is mediated by the use of hermeneutic, symbolic, cultural, proairetic and semic codes - a convergence of voices <u>in</u> writing.</p>	<p>3. The sign is all that is - <u>in</u> the text, in circulation and transforming the text where no meaning can be pinned down.</p> <p>There is no real "mediative" process but rather a displacement process. Displacement embodies a dislodging of the system through the process of deconstruction - a process which is neither present nor absent.</p> <p>Deconstruction therefore does not mediate, it obviates the process of <i>différance</i> which is not an active or passive process but a productive temporization or spacing of textual traces. Writing is only confronted with writing and no cultural or any other intuitive enterprise.</p>
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<p>4. <u>Plural textuality.</u></p>	<p>4. Every step is from the outset already a plurality of codes and other texts. As <u>writing</u> is primary, the decentered subject acquiesces into the play of signifiers where off-stage codes (cultural, symbolic, etc.) "star" the text into multiple writings and understandings.</p>	<p>4. The displacement process is disseminationary in that it interrupts and "scatters" the text.</p> <p>This discontinuity and fragmentariness of the broken text is a plural text which also potentially becomes an erased text. The multiplicity of "meaning" is embedded within the horizon of grouping/gathering of textual traces.</p>
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<p>5. <u>Production of Meaning/Interpretation.</u></p>	<p>5. Writerly texts are produced as a result of the infinite play of signifiers. The texts, written by the reader are reversible (no beginning nor end).</p> <p>"Interpretation" is not an act on the subject's part but a means of multiple writings being unravelled.</p> <p>As a plural subject the birth of the reader/writer acquiesces into the functioning of signifiers. The <i>plaisir</i>/pleasure of reading helps to interrupt the plural production of the text</p>	<p>5. Since there is nothing outside the text, writing produces its own writing. Dissemination obviates heterogeneity and multiplicity through the interplay of traces.</p> <p><i>Differance</i> assists with the productive process of "opening up" the text in an indirect way. This "production" is only a disentanglement through, erasure and creation. The reader merely follows the grammata of writing - a shifting process which eludes certainty and stability.</p>
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Having gleaned the analysis of the orientations of the pioneering as well as the new masters, above, in terms of the modes of *reflexivity* and *production*, we have become aware of reoriented frames of reference which hope to transcend the notion of reading as a mere conventional modality for communication. The postulation of the reflexivity and production analysis expresses an extension of the relation between theory and practice of

discourses which seek to create other and more meaning. This concern of theory and practice, in this study, wants to highlight the determining (as well as non- or undetermining) effects of the subject's entry into the realm of meaning construction. The interdependence of language and subjectivity, in terms of an integrative approach of all the theorists in this study, takes on an almost universal equivalence in which subjectivity is linguistic. The epistemological and ontological implications of this hold significant developments and conclusions in terms of what we may draw from Chapters 3 and 4, for they deal, albeit differently, with the uncertainty of the assumed authority of reading, the implications of the "other side" of reading, the written and unwritten text, and what will be the effects of restructuring reading.

#### 5.4 THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE AUTHORITY OF READING.

In the context of this study it may be said that every object modifies its reader in as much as every reading modifies its object, but what emerges from our previous chapters on reading is that the entire act of meaning construction entails certainly much more than that. It has become evident that the reader can take neither the position of the author, nor solely its own position, for what gets "invented" or "produced" in our reading engagements with texts is more often than not something *different* from what had been "*intended*". Ultimately there cannot be any "common concerns" shared by reader, author and text.

The major battles between alternative readings of texts, vis-a-vis representational/literal readings, seem like battles of what is regarded as important and *how* such readings subsequently occur. The question of what is *really* important in reading will only come to prominence when it is suggested that one reader has been "successful" in a task at which other readers have "failed" - the task of "authoritatively" representing the text more accurately than other readers have represented it, according to some agreed-upon scheme of projection. In particular it suggests that, that reader has succeeded in representing what the text *really is about*.

The problematization then of this uncertainty of meaning construction has been evidenced in the notions of "representation of" and "interpretation as". At various stages and levels, this study moves increasingly away from the assumptions of pristine simplicity and naivety of the idea of pure representation in reading - a sense of reading which is not only altogether lost

in our complex social interactions but in fact becomes dangerous, insensitive, short-sighted and in many cases quite ludicrous. Even the dubious notion that a "fair" or "faithful" interpretation may be found wanting and fraught with endless difficulties of how meaning is produced. Literacy and competence of language use, is but one example. From the young pre-school child to the most advanced scientist or astute politician, for example, reading is preceded, and in complex ways facilitated by, oral and visual communication, which constitute the multifarious "authority" that texts invariably never cite. Manguel (1995:6-7) states:

"The astronomer reading a map of stars that no longer exist; the Japanese architect reading the land on which a house is to be built so as to guard it from evil forces; the zoologist reading the spoor of animals in the forest; the card player reading her partner's gestures before playing the winning card; the dancer reading the choreographer's notations..the Hawaiian fisherman reading the ocean currents by plunging a hand into the water; the farmer reading the weather in the sky - all these share with book-readers the craft of deciphering and translating signs... And yet, in every case, it is the reader who reads the sense...We all read ourselves and the world around us in order to glimpse what and where we are. We read to understand, or to begin to understand. We cannot do but read."

If we read in order to begin to understand, an essential function of such reading would challenge another essential question of how we read, for no matter how well we claim to read on the level of following the rules of language, we ultimately remain "at sea" in terms of what meaning is given or derived from texts (of all sorts). Given all the risk involved, what we as readers, do know is that we have invested (time, energy, focus, pleasure, moods, intelligence) in a text, but what we do not know is what else has been invested (by whomever or whatever), along that path of meaning construction. Our study evidences that all constructing of meaning has also brought about various dimensions of restructuring by way of various modes of production. In the complex processes of all significant (and not so significant) interactions, we certainly do not just remain docile consumers. Reading restructuring, as we assume it to occur in the reading act, implies changes, reorganization and transformation. It is this uncertainty which pervades our reading and which necessitates the constant restructuring of reading.

Most texts in contemporary society attempt to facilitate communication flows, images, messages, networks and the like - all being potentially interactive. With regard to the technological revolutions and information flow (and explosion) in our day and age, Castells (1989:1) poses the challenge:

"The unfolding promise of information technology opens up unlimited horizons of creativity and communication, inviting us to the exploration of new domains of experience, from our inner selves to the outer universe, challenging our societies to engage in a process of structural change".

Therefore, the "new domains of experience" that are inevitably precipitated by how we read, locationally, cannot reside in the investment of accurate representationalism and the mere readable space (literality) - hence the uneasy and uncertain disposition of reading. This study has clearly demonstrated the various kinds of theoretical assistance offered in the thinking of significant theorists, of *liberating reading* from its crisis of its representational inertia.

The challenge is liberating reading from pure representationalism and to transform the limiting, sterile implications of the objectification and direct "sentential reading" (Meyer, 1983) of a text, in which the reader is likely to construct and ultimately consume meaning contained a text. The niggling question is whether information and meaning are crystallized in books, data banks, files and documents - or whether they float elsewhere. This "elsewhere" of meaning construction seems to become the bedrock of "unfreezing" the text from the totalizing and hegemonic attempts of readers, whether for personal, social or political gain. Complex transformations occur in the process - the origins of which we cannot often fathom.

Any adequate understanding of "where else meaning resides" and is being constantly defined, and moreover how such meaning gets constructed, tends to inform our views of a "theory" of reading. This "technical" postulation of a theory also entails an entire ever-expanding spectrum of other assumptions, eg. which habitual assumptions compound our understanding of language, subjectivity and representation. Against the bleak background of viewing the otherwise rich texture of the reading act in a productive informational society, as a one-way process of meaning-

construction, would seem to be rooted in the fickle endeavours of the reader to solidify a sense of coherence, objectivity and accuracy. This is a position this study wishes to dethrone. This daring task of the restructuring of reading has very much to do with whether *reading* (as opposed to decoding or interpretation) is not perhaps, inherently, confusing, and therefore allowed its status and "domain" to blossom without reading itself. To begin with, there transpires a need to engage in the restructuring of reading which seems to occur beyond only "using" certain elements of representation, to integrate other productive elements too in order to achieve a more comprehensive reading. This process starts with reflecting on the indispensable "other side" of reading, as has been increasingly and ultimately radically "propagated" by the new masters.

#### 5.5. THE "OTHER SIDE" OF READING.

The "labyrinth of interrogation" in reading (Freund, 1987:6) has become critical in order to challenge the limited and sterile tendency of objectification which adheres in the direct or sentential reading (Meyer, 1983) of a text. Information ultimately seems not just to exist in texts but rather inhabits the "experience" whereby the symbols in the text, document or file are transformed into experience and action in and amongst people (see Bunch, 1990). On the one hand, information potentially seems to have either an informing or reinforcing effect on what is generally known, or believed to be known by the reader, or on the other, it may transform and alter (McGarry, 1981).

It is clear that the persistence of specialization of information

in different fields is inevitably always exchanged with, or transformed by the outer world, and is not merely received by a consuming subject as typified in the decodification act. The "ability" or potential of information to be read transformationally and in a programmed way, lies at the very heart of understanding blanks, spaces, margins, i.e. enabling the "other side" of reading to speak. It is by acknowledging this emptiness and absence in reading which leads to creative modification and change in the material basis of things and the development of the entire social organization of our age.

The significance of the reading act in terms of reading the "other side", is best illustrated with the example of whether the reading of fairy-tales, which is supposedly regarded to be open to the interpretive delights or fears of the reader, is at all tenable. It would appear that the productive dynamics of the reading act, or whatever type of document or writing, be they policy documents, minutes of meetings, advertisements, poetry, laws, sermons or detective stories, potentially precipitate what can be regarded as conflicting readings - eluding the idea of a placidly totalized, complete and homogeneous view of "interpretation" and "meaning". Even if the meaning of "meaning" in these documents "naturally" elude readers, to what extent do such readers fall back upon their own attitudes, experience and language or their disagreements about *language* which may reflect deeper disagreements in world-views (Thurley, 1983). This has become evident in the different shades of accents of reading with regard to phenomenology, hermeneutics, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, in this study.

The outcomes of the critical restructuring dynamics of reading

have proven to be theoretically inconclusive and ongoing. The validity of the homogenising effects of literal reading discourse is recognized but given its logical, rule-guided nature, we need to beckon "another side of language" which could possibly deal with the uncontrollable or the unknown dimension of reading which seeks to eschew pre-selected meaning in the text. This theoretically inconclusive "other side" of meaning in the reading act is what usually escapes or eludes the literal consumptive passage of information between subject and object. This moreover has meant that there is possibly "more" to the reading act than is involved in the decodification or decipherment of a text and that this "more" or "other" dimension of reading is not necessarily predictable, obvious and patent in its content, and therefore readily accessible - which confirms our suspicion that the reading act requires that we engage our discourses with that which is either under the surface of words or does not exist in the text at all.

The fundamental significance of reshaping our organizations, policies, governance etc. has also deeply modified our new ways of thinking, even if no precedent existed. This vulnerable, yet exciting challenge of constantly setting new precedents implies critically addressing the written (objective) as well as the unwritten (absent) text. The written text as "hard content" is normally taken to be the literal dimension of the text which is usually controllable by the reader in terms of the recognition of words, their use and their social meanings. The unwritten or absent textual content tends usually to be uncontrollable and therefore problematic to the reader in so far as there are no actual content, object or word which guides the reader's attempts in meaning construction.

The "other side" of reading is not usually complementary to the visible, readable text either. This uncontrollable, "unreadable" variant text (Felman, 1977:143) is that other side which the reading act has to "produce" (as opposed to consume) in order to develop a more comprehensive or even alternative or variant meaning of the text. It is the creative significance of this "other side" which thinkers in Chapters 3 & 4 attempted to demonstrate in order to escape the constricting impasse of unilateral extraction of content from text into the head of the reader. In the reading act the structurally determined capacity of letting the text be "processed" (whether by itself, myself or ourselves), generates innovative knowledge, productivity, economic, social and personal development. This process is however dependent upon, and superseded by, the constant luring by and convergence of the unwritten text in meaning construction. It is not the intersection or the hierarchization of the two texts but rather the lure of the difference in orientation towards continuous, different readings - which precipitates the "uncontrollable multiplicity of ambiguities" (Johnson, 1987:156).

#### 5.5.1 THE ORIENTATION OF THE WRITTEN AND UNWRITTEN TEXT IN MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

It has become sufficiently clear in this study that *reading* a text and a *reading* of a text need not be equivalent: the latter may consist in a selection in whichever way or a restructuring of the readings obtained from the text. Therefore, in terms of the competitiveness of meanings or the plurality of different *readings* that a text structures, i.e. a single text generates, there seems to emerge at least two texts present in any reading of a text, i.e. the written ("contained" in language, in the

text) and the unwritten text (the reader's inference and interpretation). The niggling question is whether the separation of the written and unwritten text isn't an unnecessary distinction, and therefore making the barriers between them superfluous so that the reader essentially resides inside the text in as much as the text insides the reader? (Poulet, 1980: 42) - a position that subverts the deeply-rooted oppositional stance of text as object and reader as subject.

Although all textual reading occurs through language, it does not imply that the robotization of language adheres in some sterile conceptual realm. Language, besides facilitating a medium for meaning construction, action and purpose, undeniably also shapes that social and personal action and purpose. We are radically challenged by the unreadable space of the unwritten text which inscribes a "labour of production" according to Barthes and, which essentially demands that the reader must start to "write" himself, i.e. ... add something to the text in order to read it" (Scholes, 1989: 5). The emerging deregularized nature of "other side" of the text must be "produced" or written either by the subject, or by the object which reads. We moreover realise that texts, which are usually written in a *particular way*, invariably influence the detour process of production and de-territorializes the outcome of that reading. We may, for example, consider a reading which is related to some industrial and labour or environmental and a scientific conflict.

The question is what conceals or constitutes the unwritten text and how is it concealed or shaped? If an environmental group distributes pamphlets, the essence of which protests against the mining of kaolin in an environmentally sensitive area, are they

merely protesting or are they informing and educating at the same time? If a trade union disseminates information about an unfair dismissal of workers, are they not at the same time making an economic and political statement? While it seems that the notion of the "text" is caught up in the dilemma of the "reading" and the "writing" act, we come to realize that the "text" in fact merely becomes a textual space or methodological hypothesis, ("Knot of discourses") (De Bolla, 1989: 322) i.e. a de-totalizing and de-territorializing strategy which cuts across the crude traditional distinction of reading and writing, for:

"The problem is not to move from the notion of writing to that of reading, nor from a theory of literature to a theory of reading. The problem consists in changing the level at which the "literary object" is perceived, in other words, in changing the level of perception so that writing and reading are conceived and defined together" (Harari, 1979:39).

This articulation of "changing perspectives or levels of seeing", underscores the need to restructure the opposition between "subject" and "object", as demonstrated in Chapters 2 & 3. The redistributive space between the written and unwritten text inevitably falls within the "multiple determination" framework of meaning construction (Ricoeur, 1974), which suggests that meaning must be emancipated in the act of synthesis, interaction and deletion, i.e. unmooring it from the scriptural place.

The sovereign subject therefore would appear to no longer be the sole controller or designer of meaning, but rather that the text articulates its own practice as a reader. It is however the case

that the usual notion of texts as objects and humans as subjects may be different in their restructured orientation or how they are perceived, and this reading inevitably precipitates chaos or conflict in the reading act. Despite the insistence of hermeneutics that there should be meaning, Kristeva (1990) argues that there need not be any meaning at all. The fervent need for or pursuit of meaning appears merely the subject's need to reassure the self. But any wider and transformational reading which occurs between, among and beyond subject and object in a chaotic or a "non-linear" fashion, creatively exacerbates inevitable conflict in terms of what Lecerle (1990: 5) refers to as the "proliferation of chaos" - i.e a discursive space that is necessary for multiple perspectives in meaning construction.

#### 5.6 THE CELEBRATION OF CONFLICTUAL READING FOR INFINITIZATION OF MEANING.

In this study our reconceptualization of the mutually transformative and conditioning effects of subject and object in the construction of meaning, could imply that interpretation can potentially never be brought to an end. This emerging infinitization of interpretation may moreover impact on another interpretation and another interpretation "... within the system of discourse" (Ormiston + Schrift, 1990: 17). This appeal to reading, which is more than comprehension, would prove to hold the inevitable possibility of conflict between the subject and the object or one reading and another reading in *discourse*. The violent rupture of the "smooth surface" of the literal or reciprocal reading, is creatively reading beyond the debilitating constraints of decodification which would entail a struggle

between the written and unwritten text. This requires the reshaping action of both subject and object as illustrated in Chapter 3 particularly, or a destratified dynamic which resides beyond the monopoly of polarity structures of subject-object, as illustrated in Chapter 4.

It has become clear that it will not only be the crude efforts of a sovereign and stable subject who is "... in a profound struggle with the author" (Blanchot, 1982: 193) but also the assumptions that authors could potentially have direct access to their meaning, which speaks of an "illusion of freedom" (Spivak, 1981: 673). These illusory assumptions could inevitably and quite rightly give rise to the conflict in reading. Malpas (1992: 137) argues that interpretation is not just a single representational, coherent dialogue involving a stable speaker and interpreter; it is a space of strange freedom, disguised by its obviousness in , "... a process which in a sense comprises a number of dialogues: between speaker and interpreter; between the interpretive theory and other theories, between one's interpretation of her surroundings." These disguised and obscured discursive possibilities, all constitute infinite "oppositional narratives" (Chambers, 1991: 3) to unburden and unfreeze the rigidity of habitual relations and associations in the reading act, and produce an unpredictable plurality of meaning (Belsey, 1980: 52). A wider depth of variety or different intensity of meanings and nuances is always likely to ensue by reading the written text or readable text also in terms of the interminable variant of the unwritten text or unreadable text. This means risking the accomplished controlling power of the subject and the divine, albeit violent, power of the word and search for affirmative spaces within and beyond other discursive

practices that may be implicated in reading discourse.

The rupturous and critical assumptions of "conflictual interpretation" do not engage a negative or an unusual position as it would seem. For it is in the reconstructive act of interpretation that the endless transposition of meanings would be made clear, for "... there is nothing surprising in this: interpretation begins with the multiple determination of symbols" (Ricoeur, 1974: 14). The excessive multiplicity of meanings, moreover, as irreducible rereading, does not propose an arbitrary or wild construction of meaning either, but could only be reread within the "structure" or "traces" within which different readings may be possible. This dispersive, de-totalizing pursuit of multiple reading (which is the result of conflictual reading) could at the same time prove challenging in view of the fact that the reading act "... opens the work by means of radical disjunction to the freedom of its communication" (Blanchot, 1982: 197). This has been evidenced in the semiotic, post-structural and post-modernist reading discourses. It is this slit or disjunction of the reading subject and textual object, as well as a disjunction in each of them, which we risk "losing" if we revolutionize our reading practice.

This disjunction in discourse, moreover, has meant the radical loss or dispossession of both subjectivity and representation as grounding features in knowledge-construction. The epistemological as well as ontological issues in reading have remained important but they seem to be read within *another* context, even if that context is a vacuum or a space of emptiness as Lacan suggested. The infinitization of meaning has ensured that "knowledge" does not itself summarily get authorized in "frozen" and "debilitating" reading and thus reinforcing the

hegemony of logical representationalism.

The challenge of dispossessing the crude practice of the rational individuality of the subject who "uses" the text as some blueprint or recipe to construct meaning - a position which is perhaps nothing less than a reductive, naive and simplistic reading of a text. Escaping the "natural privileged slant" and "programming" bent of literal reading, we have examined why we have generally come to grossly underestimate (or perhaps overestimate) the status and abilities of the reading subject on the one hand, and the distorted servility of the textual object on the other. What has also become clear, in this study is that we cannot continue to enjoy the deceptive pleasure of considering texts as complete, final, usable or even replicable objects - manipulated by sovereign subjects (De Beer, 1992; 1993; Iser, 1978) This would be extremely foolish on the part of an all resourceful subject on the one hand, and obscuring and disguising the liberating potency of the text on the other. The creative orientations and outcomes of the restructuring of the reading act had opened up all conditions of influence, rather than myopically consolidating the austerity of the text or the subject.

The extent of the discursive effects the reading act is "evident" by assessing to what degree the readable text of the resourceful reader becomes integrated, modified and transformed by the indispensable resourcefulness of the textual discourse. Ormiston and Schrift (1990: 4) speak of the overall "circulation" and "proliferation" of interpretations which ensue as a result of the subject and object encounter in modes of production and modes of rereading. The only sense of "stability" is constant change, resulting in the constantly restructured affirmation of layers and layers of interpretations. Both subject and object

"represent" a fiction, i.e. if we believed they were substantive and at the root of things. All that we can hope to have is to invoke a dispossessed "subject" or "object" which is ceaselessly modified and always tentative - allowing it to constantly change and transform perspectives of production. A particular perspective is but another perspective of another perspective..., de-institutionalizing any monopoly of knowledge and meaning. We are to "smash language in order to touch life" (Lash, 1988:322).

Therefore the decommodification and ultimate expropriation of language, subjectivity and representation has set us on a burgeoning course to celebrate reading as essentially rereading. At this critical juncture in the history of our society, the pseudo-fabric of "stable significations" in policy documents, new drafts/laws, the constitution, ministerial reports, intergovernmental treatises etc, need not necessarily depend on anything stable and as already present and cast in iron. Before any document or report is read by anyone, it has in fact already been read by everyone and it this present, preliminary reading which effectively only guarantees many more creative readings. The loss and dispossession of "final readings" attains its presence as merely a reading in a constantly restructured space, opened by this unique reading. Each time this reading manifests a first reading, and paradoxically, a rereading. This expansive framework of reading therefore assumes a refocused, and in fact, a restructured view of what reading had always become to be assumed - a discourse constantly in transformation of itself.

#### 5.7 REFOCUSING THE RESTRUCTURING OF READING.

The rethinking of the act of reading (and the integration of other elements) and its inevitable concerns of language ,

subjectivity and representation, becomes part of what we believe can be the "imaginative project of reading" which this study had wished to pursue. We have sought to question whether the neatly-packaged ingredients that we consider as "constituting" the reading act, is simply the only way or the most appropriate way to grasp and appreciate the potentially dynamic (reactionary) capacity of the reading act. Such an orientating exercise of questioning clearly starts with the very "nature" of the notion of "reading" itself. Barthes (1986: 34) in his usual astute approach admits his own confusion with regard to the nature of reading:

"... as for a doctrine of reading, I have none; on the other hand, a doctrine of writing is gradually taking shape. This confusion sometimes goes so far as to become a doubt: I do not even know if one must have a doctrine of reading; I do not know if reading is not, constitutively, a plural field of scattered practices, of irreducible effects, and of, consequently, the reading of reading, meta-reading, is not itself merely a burst of ideas, of fears, of desires, of delights, of oppressions about which we should speak in fits and starts, blow by blow ..."

In terms of the envisaged restructuring process, one way out of the cul-de-sac of an accepted or pre-ordained doctrine of reading is to become aware that there may be other critical and creative pathways of reconceptualizing and exploring it, as illustrated in Chapters 3 & 4. These alternative and yet cumulative pathways have proven to be plural, scattered or even "chaotic", according to Barthes. This implies that reading may not be such an

unproblematic straightforward and harmonious exercise but rather one which requires altering through innovative application and productive energy to problematize the conflictual or chaotic assumptions.

Botha (1992: 20) considers the possible interrelated or conflictual discourses in the reading act of restructuring which have come to "wage war over the word". This view of Botha seeks to invoke dis-content and to de-axiomatize the "naturalized" and neatly-packaged assumptions of language, functioning as a technical tool for precision to construct meaning, and even more so, challenging the failed attempts of the established, sovereign subject who acts as the sole knower who has dominion over the object (text). This manifestly dangerous one-way representation of subject to object is inevitably in "warfare" (Botha) and which has resulted in nothing but disconfirming "hysteria" (Barthes) - all powerful metaphors deployed to problematize easy acquiescence into meaning and grounded understanding. Readers no longer seem to be able to control or design the common-sense or scientific meaning of that which they read, for the destabilizing "violence" that may disrupt their efforts in terms of what the written or readable word (literality) carries, has serious consequences for the identity of the subject and his actions and reactions in the processes of production, consumption and management (of technology, science, industry etc).

Part of the refocusing and restructuring project of the reading act therefore entails consciously seeking to inject the "proliferation of chaos" (Lecerle, 1990: 5) which constantly "awakens other voices" (Levinas in Greisch, 1991: 68) in any "normal" reading act. This problem-oriented challenge, viz.,

that the other voices may be unreadable and non-transparent, is consistent with the realities of our social world. Our critical stance has been to problematize not solely the readable text but more particularly the unreadable text and its effects (Felman, 1987: 45). In the dynamism of the reading act it may very well be that the competing realism of the readable and graspable language needs to be grasped in other terms than its "tool-kit" status (plugged gaps) which tends to communicate messages which are "based on information".

The representational practice of subject relating to object in the usual referential manner, needs to be disrupted in order to become more expansive and deregularized than just that which is read in the linguistic signs. This process of deregularization (from representation pursuits) would ensure a more realistic and integrated framework which "matches" the dynamism of reading.

The status of reading subjects as controllers, definers, shapers or as "poachers and consumers" (De Certeau, 1995) had been reconsidered to "prevent" them from pouring meaning into cast iron. In vibrant, progressive societies, economies, government, business, places of learning and production workers stubbornly resist being moulded by the bland application of the letter. Risking, in the context of deskilling the reading act from its axiomatic assumptions, subjectivity and representation had been problematized in Chapters 3 & 4 to avoid sterilising and ultimately totalizing meanings, and therefore regarding reading as a mindless "consumptive" act (De Certeau, 1995). This has been our aim, to prevent readers from hypothesizing themselves that they have "established" theories and veritable bodies of knowledge for control of personal, social, economic and political ascendancy. Our restructured framework of reading holds out the

promise, rather, of healthy theoretical "anarchy" wherein reading frameworks (of Chapter 3 and 4) are encouraged, and as a result innovative and synthetic forms of "theory" and research strategies in knowledge and meaning are produced.

If Blanchot (1982: 194), in his radical way, asserts that the dynamism of reading does not produce anything and does not add anything, Levinas (in Greisch, 1991:68) goes even further in calling reading a "hypocritical enterprise" insofar as it only constitutes "... the voice of a determinate text [which] awakens other voices." Blanchot and Levinas' views, with that of Felman (1987), seem challenging for this study in view of the innovative potential of knowledge production and research which we will be able to derive from the cross-fertilization of ideas from the different frameworks that have been postulated by the old and the new masters. The naive view that language potentially always privileges its representational aspect (however indirect it may happen) for mechanical replication, or hierarchization of knowledge, suggests the uncritical and often disempowering pattern of how ordinary people in our society today tend to operate, as pointed out by De Certeau (1995: 153):

"Today, the text is society itself. It takes urbanistic, industrial, commercial or televised forms. But the mutation that caused the transition from educational archeology to the technocracy of the media did not touch the assumption that *consumption is essentially passive* - an assumption that is precisely what should be examined" (own emphasis).

The centralizing act of objectification of the text or the "poaching" and "consumptive" status of reading (De Certeau,

1995), is the dominant paradigm of what Bakhtin (in Volosinov, 1973) calls "... a sort of perversion entailed by the logic of an objectivist kind of thought". This form of perversion is a disposition in reading which is indicative of those who have been initiated into the ideologized practice of some "master" framework or perspective. Bourdieu (1987: 94) moreover problematizes this "perversion or illusion" by questioning whether anyone can "read anything at all" without wondering what it is that, that particular reading means, for "The precondition for every construction of an object is a tight control over your relationship, which is frequently an unconscious and obscure one, with the object that you are supposed to be constructing (many discourses) on the object being, in fact, merely projections of the objective relation from subject to object".

The vibrant matrix of interactions in the reading act falls outside the scope and agenda of referential logic and its expansionary variations. Therefore, these expansionary variations, in Chapter 3 and 4 come into being in our restructured approach to reading, suggesting revolutionary displacements which have not yet been filled in, or "resolved" in some way which marks closure of meaning.

The inevitable effects of this problem-posing of revolutionary displacement extend well beyond the credibility of "methodologies", for the widespread "identity crises" of readers, authors and effects of knowledge construction in our present-day society, affect everybody in many (and idiosyncratic) ways, and had called for a radical questioning and restructuring of our views of the almost crippling desire for identity, unity and totality, by insisting on the representational status of language to describe and define this. Bachelard (in Weber, 1987: x)

argues that objects and the dynamics of modern science are irreducible to any single grounded or unified set of suppositions and hence incompatible to any single one, self-identical reality, for the "complexity of the manifold reality of contemporary science renders the idea of autonomy inoperative". This restructured reading approach wants to break with this sense of domesticity which is bent on reproductive conventions.

Autonomy may presuppose a sense of self-assurance and perhaps "infallibility" of meaning construction. What should be challenged seems to be the problematic relation of identity to non-identity, of inclusion to exclusion, and possibly making constructs "relational" rather than "substantial" or "constitutive", and making it as a result irreducibly heterogeneous in its "composition". This complex heterogeneity may possibly be the end of the "peace time routine" of reading which henceforth precipitates the onset of a variety of meanings with a variety of nuances to enrich our communication practices and, moreover, the quality of personal and social identities.

Restructuring which involves constant surveillance of life and resistance to life's usual practices, brings about conflict, argument, debate, uncertainty, crisis and often periods of "muddling through". The latter becomes a daily experience in the world of high technology as well as ordinary routine practices of engaging in documents. This calls for an awareness of the limitations of a monolithic approach into the content of the document which is believed to be the "constitutive" text as object, and which is to be identified by reference to some intrinsic quality, i.e. its *form*. Its irreducible character is achieved rather in terms of its vibrant working and capacity to be *deformed* and *transformed*. Weber (1987: xiv) consequently

argues that: "It is the tension arising from these two indispensable, inseparable, and yet mutually disruptive exclusions [i.e. subjective/ objective] that results in the "strange ambivalence" that contemporary science imposes on the idea of reality". This creative-destructive "tension" would always be the propelling force for other and more meaning because the sovereign subject's entrenched disposition (from an outside position) to pour over the objective text (in its receiving status) to confer meaning, has been radically challenged. The question remains, to what extent is the subject conditioned by the objects in his world, rather than always being consensus-seeking and *imposing stability* on the effects of meaning construction? Personal orientation or interests notwithstanding, reading certainly cannot be a one-way referencing game of either consumption or control.

The difficulty of the consensus-seeking representational dimension in the stultifying causal matrix of the reading act, had become a distinguishing challenge of all theoretical discourse which places "reading" in perpetual "... tension with its primary purpose, that of delimiting an area of practice which it had set out to legislate. Thus, a good case could be made for claiming that "reading theory" is really a "misnomer" (De Bolla, 1989: 233). This misnomer status of reading had been served as the very impetus of our theorists to pursue a new or even different approach for an integrated and ultimately more enriched framework to the reading act and knowledge construction. Such a proposed framework would be commensurate with the events and experiences of all contemporary local and global communities - which all are indisputably marked by diversity, multiplicity and constant change. If *reading* is to be "in keeping" with our rapidly changing South Africa, in particular, our reading theory

ought to accommodate *all possibilities* of all social, political and personal readings of persons and institutions striving towards democracy. For ultimately our envisaged *differential reading* framework (in Chapter 6) is to become a facilitative, albeit expansive, means towards the transformation of our people in all its diversity, as well as the optimum democratization of our society.

CHAPTER 6THE TRANSFORMED NATURE OF READING6.1 FROM LITERAL TO DEFERRED MEANING CONSTRUCTION.

The sustainable competitive advantage of the act of "struggle" for meaning construction in the reading act, encapsulates the critical notion of continuously avoiding any form of reading which performs a short-sighted act of direct perception and therefore affording easy and de-risking access to the assumed meaning of a text. Among the creative "struggle" components to establish a reading which is not a literal reading, we encounter the dynamics referred to as "deferred reading", i.e. the strategic competitive edge in meaning construction where we reconcile opposites instead of trying to choose between them.

Beyond the unifying, coherence-seeking discourse of representation, which pursues a logic of secured and coherent identity, i.e. rendering all the contradictions of subjectivity a sense of unity of personhood (as in *reader* or *author*), in this study the "non-referential" mode (as illustrated by reflexivity and plurality of text, respectively) "locates" the site of subjectivity in language and discourse where it could be both differential and integrated. The "subjectification" of being becomes solely the effect of language and discourse. Whereas the shorthand correspondence-seeking view of language privileges an objectivist (or perhaps also a subjectivist) representational dimension, i.e. a form of signification which leads to "faithful" objectification and therefore sensible totality, the supplementary and ultimately alternative views proposed in Chapters 3 & 4, pursued a innovative "mental model" in this

study, which regard language as being inextricably part of subjectivity, in discourse. The perpetual motion of the subject-in-language does not seek to produce a conceptual shorthand of causal and linear (as in direct perception, mirroring and continuity) replication but rather negotiates a discontinuous, disruptive and indirect, yet innovative structuring of meaning. The heightened awareness of an "indirect" approach to capture the "other-side" of reading initially features Heidegger's "not-yet-complete circle", Merleau-Ponty's "circular determination of meaning", Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" in terms of historical prejudice (Vorurteil), Ricoeur's "distanciation", Eco's "semiotic codes", Lotman's "extra-text", Barthes's "codes or voices" in writing, Derrida's "deconstruction and differance" in writing, and Lacan's "mirror and symbolic stages" in the signifying chain. Their respective new-style theorising becomes a strikingly refreshing reminder of the insufficiency of language as symbol. They believe to have decentred and decentralized, and ultimately subverted the pretentious universal ground of epistemic certainty which constructs our world. The strategic mediative "distance" or perspective proposed by our new thinkers is necessary to dehomogenize our socio-politically, habitual conceptions of identity, consciousness, the subject and social "laws".

It has been usually assumed that the act of mediation seeks to facilitate, enrich, consolidate or even change the assumed, expressed or potential wishes, ideas or state of being within the interaction between two or more engaging parties. This open-ended mediative process ameliorates and ultimately transforms the proximity of the readable and unreadable text, when complexity and confusion gel into some kind of new order. Pure referential or reproductive reading of the Cartesian kind has been characterized by its categorical pursuit of a more literal or

direct form of mediation via the signified-signifier route, often based on behaviouristic principles of stimulus-response. If these approaches have proven to have feet of clay, we are then to pursue a productive discourse, as embedded in the proposed new mode of meaning construction. It is ultimately finding a new "purpose" in reading that pursues mediated reading in which signs and symbols (Ricoeur), mirrors acting as nodes (Eco), cultural codes (Lotman), the perceptible phenomenal body (Merleau-Ponty), textual traces (Derrida), etc., all through delayed and decentred means, interpose in a creative way to appropriate and disappropriate meaning construction. The latter suggests the re-alignment of high-risking reading where the readable text is read as a variant of the unreadable text, in as much as the latter may listen to some of the "trade-offs" of the readable text.

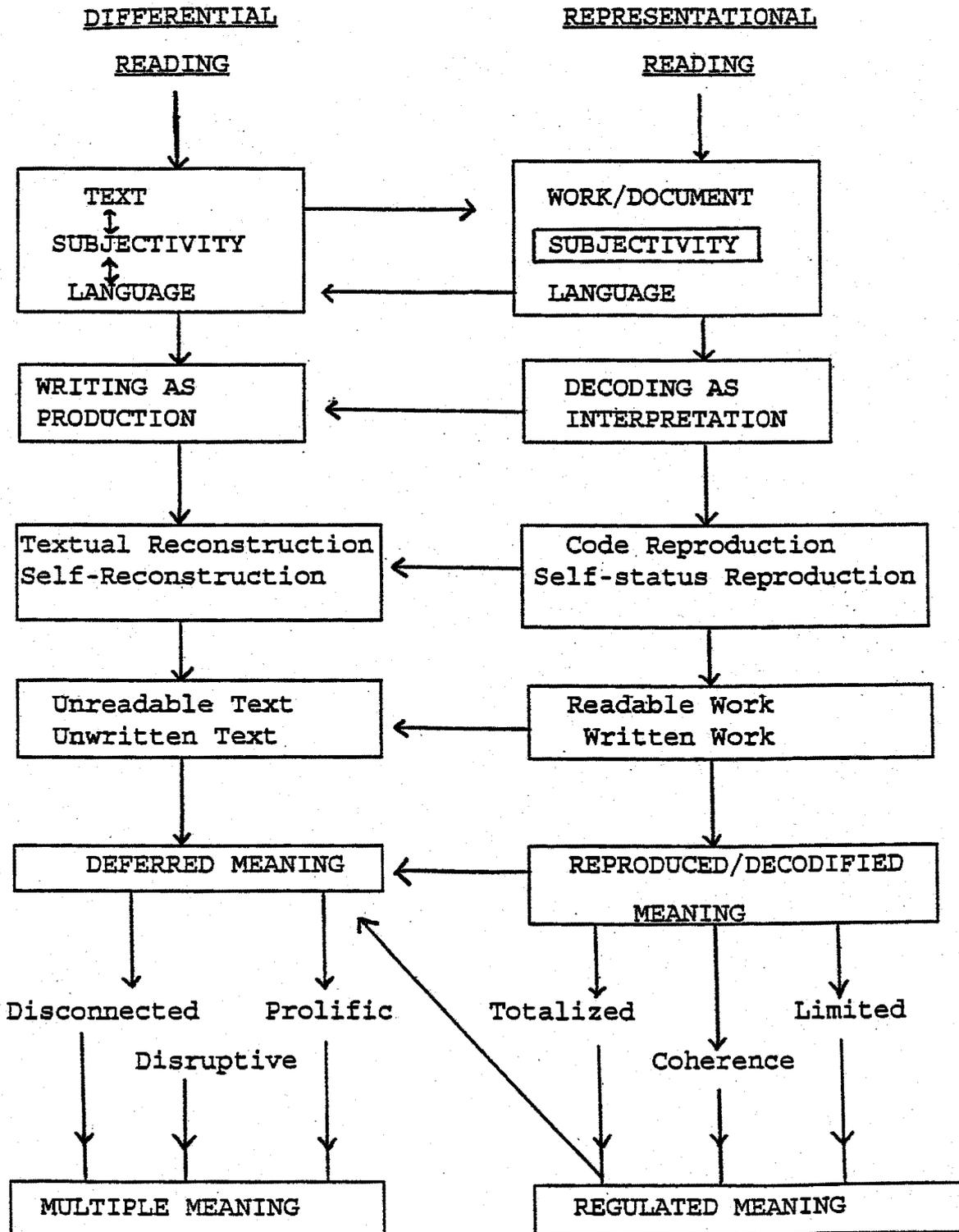
Furthermore, the competitiveness of deferred production of meaning leads to the constant reconfiguration of the ontologization of subjectivity in the construction of meaning. The latter is assisted by the reader's strategic intent of "deferment" of meaning in the dialectic between intra- and inter-subjective processes of reciprocity (eg. Gadamer's effective-history, Lotman's extratextual cultural codes, Lacan's castration process to partake in the Symbol Order, etc.). These variants mentioned, tend to be rooted in the reflexivity-centredness or strategic self-reconstruction of the textual object. On the other hand the expansive Barthesian continuous play of signifiers and the Derridean incessant free play of traces, facilitate a "writing-subjectivity" which can only be "mediated" by play, creating as a result, evermore networks of signs and relationships of traces. The signified for Lacan is related in discourse to the empty, yet productive unconscious, "mediated" by Desire. The redesigning and reinventing effects of the

mediation process of deferment of meaning is not an accomplice but a catalyst for the productive stance in discourse and always subject to the reinventing bent of reading discourse.

Whilst the seen/spoken/readable/written text is physically "there" and, as such acknowledged, the theorists in Chapters 3 & 4, have invoked other foci to redirect and, as a result, defer the reader's thinking to other dimensions of representation and subjectivity. What emerges is a critical awareness of elements or messages that are constructed or evoked in and around the text to dialectically include elements of the unseen/unspoken/unreadable/unwritten text. This expanded and perspectival view of deferment of final meaning "produces" the other ever-increasing, different textual voices involved in what can be regarded as multiple alternative readings. Instead of pursuing a homogenising and inhibiting literal reading of the text, the old and new masters articulate a critical deferred stance which implies that something greater is a stake. The inevitable effects are innovative and even titillating multiple readings, based on the other side of the "text" and therefore establishing an empowering new discourse referred to as differential reading.

In Derrida's words, we cannot escape logocentrism until we invent other forms of writing. The wisdom of constantly deferring the readable and present text, introduces us to the highly charged multiplicity of different perspectives that the unreadable text inevitably engenders. Differential reading is suffused with the otherness, i.e. reading beyond the "mastered" attempts, i.e. reading in the margins, gaps and blanks in order to avert the hegemony of obsessive sameness of thinking and blandness of being. Our transition from literal, representational reading to

differential reading is facilitated in the following schematic view. This schematic view evidences that we do not "abandon" the validity of representational elements in reading, but rather that our reading ought not to stop right there. The differential dimension gives our reading a so much more flexible, expansive and richer orientation.



The above schematic visualization of the reading act evidences a radical move of *dislocating* reality from an exclusive mode of representational reading where all meanings are routinely, albeit fallaciously, regularized in and through the letter. Our study has demonstrated a far broader and encompassing mode of an alternative reading theory which includes some basis in representational reading as a significant variant of the extensive other possibilities which the unwritten texts hold for the multiple processes in meaning construction. In exploring the dynamics of what is "not written" and its implications for social organization, social reform and authentic living, a framework of differential reading has emerged which would afford a strategy for a multiple mode of reading instead of only pursuing the narrow content-based approach of literal-representational reading. This proposed framework entails a visualization that will hopefully facilitate a creative process, in which texts will be able to be read substantially differently than that of the rigid programme of literal and unimaginable reading engenders.

## 6.2 TOWARDS A DIFFERENTIAL READING DISCOURSE

### 6.2.1 DIFFERENTIAL READING AS ALTERNATIVE READING THEORY.

This study has strategically set out to demonstrate the sheer unfettered possibilities of alternative (and ultimately integrative) modes of reading a text, including reading the world and people, other than a purely presumptuous literal representational mode of direct and myopic subject-object exchange which is bent on mirroring, imitating and referencing. Since we acknowledge the indisputable side of language in which we have come to accept the role of language as a logical instrument which favours the barrenness and limitations of representation in everyday life, we at the same time, realize its provocative potential to confuse and mislead.

In the expanded and deferred sense of the reading act, this difference articulates and precipitates an imaginative sense of healthy confusion, especially in view of the reality that language cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be taken to impose order and stability on one's experiences. In contrast to the stability of rule-guided language, the "hysterical" nature of language (Barthes, 1986: 43) or "waging war over the word" (Botha, 1992: 20) or the "proliferation of chaos" in language (Lecerle, 1990: 5) engenders a process whereby readers are potentially always able to proceed beyond the inward-looking desire for "correctness" and realise "... the sheer absurdity of the use of verifiability as a meaning criterion ..." (Popper, 1976: 80), for an exclusively representational view of life exposes a pretentious ideal which is empty or merely an unattainable sham.

What the theorists in Chapters 3 & 4 argue for is that the word or sentence cannot be trapped within a mere decodification process where it is safe, analysed and judged. Beyond the indefensible coherence-seeking tendency of "... referring back to the synthesis of the unifying fiction of a subject ..." (Foucault, 1972: 54 - 55) the reader has to "make peace" with the multiplicity and even self-discontinuity that is the presumed activation or stimulation in differential reading, in order to strip the reading from ideology-building. The exciting challenge is finding or creating other spaces for meaning-making.

The act of reading the text, as a result, becomes the "existential" space where language becomes actively produced and transformed, rather than seeking to represent or express anything outside itself. This conscious shift to a different view of meaning construction proves to have major consequences for the notion of interpretation vs. reading, discovery vs. production of meaning. In differential reading readers are constantly compelled to become participatory stakeholders when they deal with the multiple readings or plurality of texts that a single text may have. This way of reading "occurs" in a new porous and permeable framework in order to exploit the *possibilities* inherent in an essentially exciting differential reading - the space of fruitful tension which exists between the readable and unreadable text, the written and unwritten text.

In contrast to the legitimising inclination and inward focus of the reproductive reading pattern in literal representational reading, the "antirepresentational mode" implies a form of reading-in-tension that is compellingly *dialectical*. As there is no "licensed" and automatic transition from signifier to signified, from construing an unwritten or unreadable text purely

on the basis of a validated written or readable text, the notion of "multiple reading" presents an alternative and therefore *different* mode of reading which is curiously different and even qualitatively *other* than merely re-establishing a dialogue which seeks to construe more meanings in terms of a single document or text in front of us. Multiple reading in this study thus essentially entails a vigorous metaphor for:

1. distancing oneself, methodologically, from the inhibiting pursuits of final, totalizing and institutionalized notions concerning the origins and causes of persons (readers), structures (texts) and intentions.
2. living with constant rupture with regard to standardizing formulas that monopolistically equate written words with spoken words, spoken words with mental experiences, and voice with mind.
3. demonstrating the constant reconstructing of the indeterminacy of meaning.
4. demonstrating reading as a visionary system of structuring differences and continually questioning mimesis, i.e. the ability of a work to represent experience *per se*.
5. conceiving the reading act as an incubating process of reflection back and forth, within and beyond, imposed and disclosed, conferred and deferred.
6. constantly searching for contradiction and repositioning meaning construction.
7. understanding the notion of productive tension and violation of views in textual reflection.
8. increased perspective building in terms of part and whole, knowledge and action, process and product, subject and object, being and becoming, rhetoric and reality, structure and functions.

The ensuing critical and *differ-ential* reading conceptualizations of multiple reading render the above dimensions of reading an at-risk voyage of discovery beyond the mainstream tendency, as well as an act of creation. At least we become active and reflective consumers of the world around us, rather than being blind and passive consumers. For example, in a political organization which aspires to give decision-making power to all, but actually *functions* to deprive some access to information with which they could influence crucial decisions about their lives, needs to be recognized as such. This scenario necessitates therefore that readers develop an almost polymorphous desire and awareness of reading in the *gaps* and *spaces* of ordinary expressions and statements which appear neutral or innocent in its usual social and political setting, and of necessity will have to be revealed or unmasked to bolster new pathways of thinking, and therefore new constructions of knowledge. While it is important to unmask common-sense discursive practices, ultimately it is also important that we seek ways of responsibly *managing* the inevitable integration of power/knowledge within those discourses that give life direction, whether in the election of politicians, our shopping experiences, research activities, social entertainment, teaching practices in schools, etc.

In the context of consumption vs. investment of social activities we, moreover believe that the plurality and dispersive disposition of differential reading is particularly valuable in order to recognize, understand and combat ideology which is essentially reproductive and dogmatic at its very roots. The very notion of Ideology is "representative" in essence because it refers to a reproduction of a sense and meaning of certain beliefs, ways of living, etc. as being natural and common sense (see Balibar & Macherey, 1987).

Differential reading as an alternative theory has become our ideal precisely because the dangerous and exclusive reliance on literal representation which has reinforced social norms by grounding them in a determinate reality or social order. With regard to the latter, the critique of representation inevitably entails a *political* edge, as we will notice later, for differential reading resists mastery and the ideologizing of legitimized social institutions, by constantly placing them in other perspectives or other realities that are *outside* of representation altogether. Differential reading therefore inevitably expropriates and disperses vested interests and impacts on the perpetuation of the viability of meaning and power in a context that radically desires or warrants renewal and transformation at all levels.

Whilst the positive sides of ideology consists in providing us with concepts, images and ideas in terms of how we can make sense of our social and political world, the debilitating part of it is that it inevitably remains *selective* in that it refers to "this" or "that" sense of the meaning. The various combinatory, rather than *selected* readings about interest groups and social and political engineering agencies, therefore ought to reflect a counter-ideological reading that recognizes distortions and errors of points of view that are out to control certain knowledge. In fact, differential reading seeks to demonstrate the viability of cross-territorialism of the literal and metaphoric, the metaphysical and ironic, which are reciprocally defining and mutually transforming each other (Hassan, 1982: 264). Brown (1995: 13) argues that "... the very effectiveness of such a practice as ironic depends on its constituting at least part of the world as literally true in order to unmask false

versions".

Plurality of reading/writing moreover effects the process of counteraction in unmasking the dominating and legitimizing codes or signs in any reading and, at the same time, challenges the standardization of grammar and their ensuing centred meanings. Our strategic pursuit of differential reading in this study is that it generally disperses or deconstructs the obsessive desire to secure a fully-integrated and central human subject comfortably situated in a world of clear roles, statuses, norms, values and systems. Instead of the "creation and totalization" of meaning, Hassan (1982:265) argues for the "decreation and deconstruction" of meaning. Denzin (1994: 187) points out the "antitotalizing" stance of Lyotard's claim "... that terrorism resides in all attempts to conceptualize societies as coherent, integrated entities". Lyotard argues clearly that individuals and societies have paid a high price for the nostalgia of the "whole" and the "one".

The regulated language of "standardization", because it pursues the "one" in mastered and reproductive reading, becomes ideological, for it assumes that meanings naturally insinuate themselves within a determinate reality as their fundamental constituents, and in order to remain in force, its validity is required to replicate itself.

This "new" or "terrorist" (Lyotard) stance of differential reading immediately places all "reading components", the signifier and signified, in a vulnerable, questionable (?) and risky position. A certain text can potentially be read conjunctively (in a closed manner) to sustain, legitimize and reproduce dominant meanings and, as a result, produce docile

readers, but it can also be read disjunctively and dialectically, which means that readers can be open and become aware of the *many sides* of the issue by exploring other "non-representational" approaches. Kroker & Cook (*in* Kellner, 1988: 240-241) describe contemporary society as a "panic" scene which constantly seeks to elude the categories and social theories of the past and, as a result, requires a new form of theorizing and abandonment of previous social theory. What would therefore constantly now have to be problematized is not representation but *the character* of reality itself.

This challenge of our alternative theory of reading, encapsulated in the differential approach as a "non-representational" approach, furthermore assumes having to perpetually live with a strange mix of plurality, multiplicity, resemblance, difference, assent and dissent, expectations confirmed and subverted, truths that have been validated and displaced, incompleteness of meaning and living "quasi-dangerously" with truths that are in constant circulation, contending with new or other insights for new or other readings for a better vision of a better world. Such an explosive measure of plurality of meaning and, given its potential effects on the vulnerability and challenges of our social system, would not simply imply that a text has several fragmented "arbitrary meanings" but rather that the restructuring scope of productive (as in Derridean writing) discourse or differential reading facilitates those change-inducing processes of plurality of meaning which remains irreducible. Hassan (1982:13-14) speaks of the "unmaking" of the text in which each reading becomes "the dialectic of transgression which moves towards infinity".

Differential reading therefore rejects any insinuation and criticism of it being merely avant-garde, but rather embraces the "affirmation" and decolonisation of impoverished representations which tend to superficialize the shaping of personal identity on the one hand, and the consequences of social organization on the other. There would also be the criticism that the *different* view of looking at reading shows no respect for the integrity of the past, proves to be ambiguous and that its quest inevitably leads to plurality, looseness, deviation, etc. (see Lash, 1988: 334-335). This, too, is not solid and visionary criticism, for our intentionally visionary focus in this study had been on affirmative attempts to illuminate a transformational retheorization which pursues the myriad of creative, alternative possibilities of understanding the dis-affirming effects of permanent ends, the bankrupt systems and the stultifying essences of social life (the power-knowledge base), but also to understand the powerful complexities of language vis-a-vis the limitations and bias of human knowledge.

Differential reading as an affirmative discourse out of our social and political inertia, can occur neither in terms of the illusion of an absolute foundation, nor in the bleak dissolving imperium of language but rather in the space between the two. Differential as moreover an affirmative and expansionary discursive practice is not only nilly-willy open-ended, dialectical, and for some ironic, but "... it acknowledges the contradictions between the reflection of reality in language and the constitution of reality by language. It recognises that the very debate about whether language makes or fakes is itself foundationalist" (Fish in Brown, 1995: 13). The reader or viewer thus risks being turned into a pathetic clone or a replicated sign whose meanings have been given and become ordained in the

media and its cultural texts.

Conner (1989:234), in his discussion of Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said's critique of cultural politics, emphasizes a "new reading" of the world in which the absence and or marginalization of women, blacks and other misrepresented human groups, are no longer the "silent other" but forms part of a new orientation (reading, if you wish) which "legitimizes":

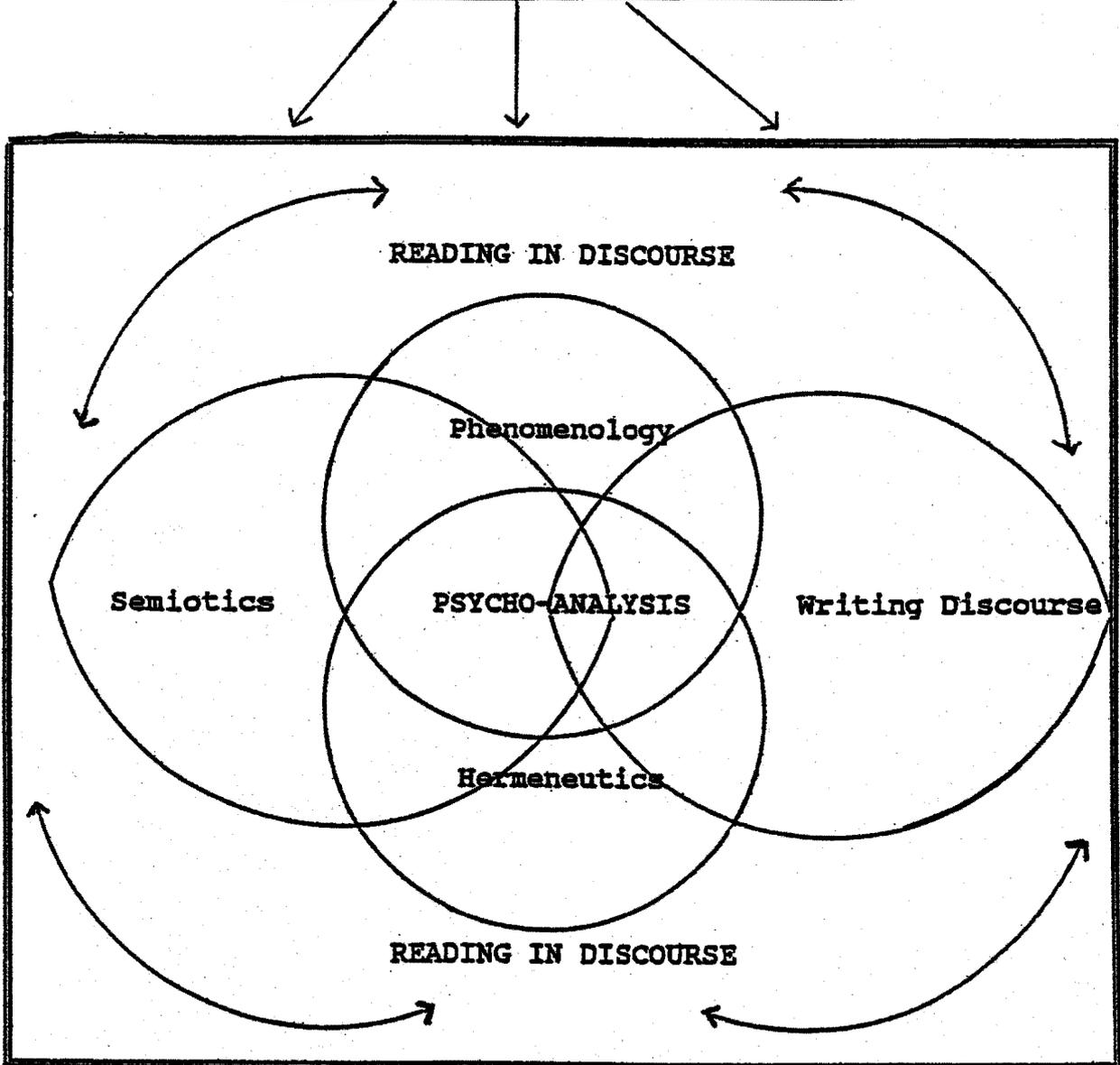
"...the evacuation of the centre or the idea of the centre (or centred), splintering it into "dissident micro-territories", "constellations of voices" and "plurality, of meanings", allowing and promoting specificity and regionalism, social minorities and political projects which are local in scope, or surviving traditions and suppressed forms of knowledge."

The "restless", "playful" and deconstructive articulation of differential reading is essentially a "process of change" orientation which also seeks to critique our "imperialistic" technological and media-dominated world, where symbols and meanings freely (purposefully?) circulate within a taken-for-granted or natural (questionable ?) system that has no apparent anchoring in the "real", for the "real" has become the "unreal" or "hyper real" and, as readers and viewers, we are judged by our ability to match up against these media representations. This reactionary (and designed) view demonstrates the power of how information technology and media have come to have a fundamental, oddly authoritative, grip on our passive consumerist society.

The various differential theories, by problematizing reflexivity and the plurality of texts, cast a form of disruptive suspicion

on the restricted assumption that one can "master" a text in its totality. They challenge the gripping interests of *totalization* and *centralization* of thought as often encountered in apparently inherited values, handed-down practices and socially expected lifestyles. In its multitude of representations (including the subject itself), differential theorists, in posing their alternative vision for meaning construction, moreover seek to risk concurrence-seeking and allow readers to transcend that in order to become creative, "alternative" readers who are comfortable with engaging in a disconnecting and even disruptive reading modality. Educated, active and enlightened readers do not only read semiotically since they need to expound all signs hermeneutically as well. Hermeneutically-derived meanings are applied to linguistic signs in terms of phenomenological perceptions, including apperceptions of the psycho-analytic kind. It is an interlaced, ongoing process of combination, metonymy, play, dispersal, misreading and indeterminacy.

Therefore, any integrative, meaningful differential reading of whatever form of textual understanding, necessarily presupposes an interdependent mode of thoroughly circulating modes of engagement as schematically postulated in the accompanying textual approach which follows. In the visualization of differential reading no one single discourse dominates another.

DIFFERENTIAL READING IN DISCOURSE

What we have in the above vibrant framework of differential reading where no single approach can be self-sustaining, but rather that they operate in an *integrated*, almost heterogeneous way, in which all approaches (those of the old and new masters, in Chapter 3 & 4), are approaches that constantly *circulate* and *complement* one another. In the construction of meaning, as it unravels in the differential reading act, each approach critically *conditions* the other, so that no single approach becomes the origin of fixed and authoritative procedure in order to ultimately excavate and create meaning. The phenomenological

approach of seeing is very much linked to hermeneutic understandings, as signifiers of writerly texts are linked to all semiotic signified of readerly texts - and in the process, the psycho-analytic evacuation of meaning renders, in terms of all the other interrelated approaches, a sense of indeterminacy in the construction of meaning.

Such an emerging integrated and flexible textual discourse as illustrated in the above diagram of differential reading, aims to ensure that:

- \* a text cannot simplistically be reduced to a single meaning, masquerading as a form of completeness and finality.
- \* one textual orientation towards reading engenders a critical and dialectical awareness of another orientation, so that no one single approach becomes a ready-to-take-home approach to construct meaning.
- \* the inherent limitation of each theory potentially sensitizes the reader to the gaps in the other theory.
- \* the ideal of tentative, albeit delayed or deferred meanings is communicated, instead of pursuing epistemic certainty.
- \* the complementary and reciprocal nature of all theories remains dynamic, all functioning in a kind of productive and constructive tension rather than in a state of confrontation, hierarchization or even annihilation.
- \* no single approach to reading should be ideologized and subsumed but each is to be read as a variant text of the other, i.e. the one challenges the other's conjunctive or closed assumption base.
- \* to efface the boundaries between the past and the present, the private and the public, and map out a transformed social and political order with greater perspective of and space or human potential, for ultimately we are living in

an increasingly boundaryless intertextual world.

- \* we become susceptible to an infinite discourse of virtually polymorphous meaning (personal and public) which constantly anticipates, intersects, conflicts with, and challenges one another.

Instead of pursuing the self-sustaining, centralizing and standardizing hegemony of meaning construction, the affirmation of the deregularizing benefits of the differential mode assumes an "organizing" or catalytical role which remains curiously "hesitant" and is particularly characterized by critical distance, alienation and reflexive rationality (Gadamer, Lacan, Heidegger, Ricoeur) and by decentredness, diffusion and fragmentariness (Barthes, Derrida). Differential theories tend to erode the questionable monopoly of thought and, as a result, unsettle and defy grand referents and finalities, and therefore, tend to "terrorize" and destabilize our entire uncritical reading orientation in so far as we interpret, infer, liberate, mimeticize or read texts.

As the reading act is multi-dimensional, at times the text has to be mimeticized or inferred, following the traces and gaps, but at times we need to receive messages as only being nothing more than tentative meanings, or we have to emancipate ideological distortions. Therefore instead of reproducing what is always already reproduced and as a result consumed, the reader creatively exploits new pathways, not as grand interpretive schemes of master codes, but rather to render a form of reading of "chatting across the network" which will prove novel, inventive and challenging, ever mindful as Brown (1995: 14) reminds us that our realities are merely "... held to be a kind of shorthand for all the processes of construction that produce it".

Our realities regarding our "status" of who and what we are as reading or viewing persons, are equally mis-construed in terms of the shorthand attempts of our social and political institutions and media. People's general awareness that most of what is achieved in society is pervasively marked by impermanence, has very much to do with their general sense of restlessness with the social and political status quo. This status quo (state, church, business, education) has also got to do with that nagging desire for the establishment of their identities. People seem to experience constant doubt, insecurity, suspicion, feelings of failure, inadequacy, unfulfillment - leading often to them frantically exclaiming (not necessarily pathologically): "I am tired, confused... I often do not know who or what I am". What emerges in these significant statements are feelings and dispositions which question the notion of the "pluralization of identity". It is as though I (in my identity construction) ought to have the absolute guarantee of a controlled and totalized, unified conception of my personal identity all of the time. The unquestionable challenge is to re-evaluate the crucial role of subjectivity very much in terms of the differential concept which takes these differential experiences of self and life into account.

By reconceptualizing reading as being inextricably concerned with identity-production, grounded in language - we inevitably arrive at a more expansive view of ourselves and our world. The reader and his "position" becomes a reflection upon which language constantly modifies its experience in writing and production. The self, as a result, becomes interchangeable with the text (which is constantly being written and not which already has been written), and taking on a heterogeneous or plural identity. In this regard Kristeva (1984) refers to such an "identity" as an *intertext*, for the network character of *intertext* (as chatting

across the fence) replaces the solidified or fixed subjective interpretation of the self. Moreover the "essence" of the reader becomes constantly re-interpreted or redefined as an act of interplay and ultimately transformation and incessant dialogue with other texts. This shopping around for identity in the "in-betweenity" is not only a reflexive process but rather a pluralizing effect of rewriting as well. Barthes, for example, dissolves the conventional dualism of writing/reading to produce a text where "...everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure" (Barthes, 1975:12). In a way the anxious statement of confusion, "I do not know who I am", is therefore no contradiction, per se, for our ceaseless challenge is to constantly embrace attempts that remain vigilant, daring, innovative, critical, challenging and constantly "revealing" ourselves to "another side" or "another me", "a better me". This is the inevitable paradox of being in touch with oneself and one's world, and this seems to be the suspended, albeit challenging conditions of reality, the constant positioning of the "nomadic subject" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984).

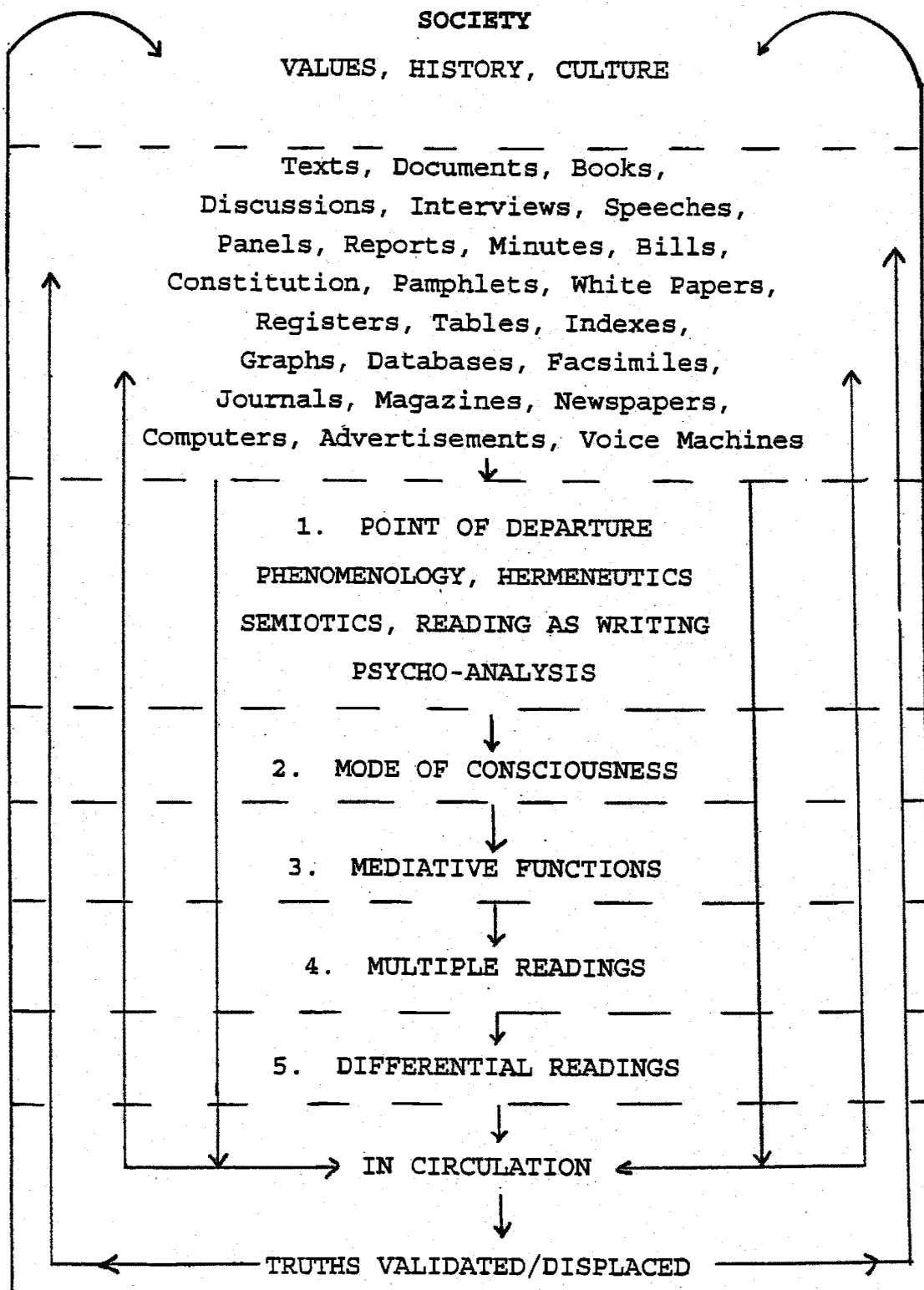
Whatever reading effects ensue in the reading of newspapers, TV viewing, film or leisure reading, they ultimately have to proceed on the often difficult, yet challenging basis of readers writing their own text. Even the confusing complexities of our socially-constructed identities will become a constantly restructured and delayed process, for while we may be "in touch" with ourselves in a healthy way, we all constantly develop on a personal level and change in the course of life, and therefore cannot be "fixed" and "labelled" in a "typical" and unchallenged way. Deleuze & Guattari (1984) reiterate the critical notion of the "nomadic subject" in differential reading:

This mobile positioning of subjectivity is

in itself political in that it leaves space for alternative forms of identity construction as well as the toleration of "difference" in identity construction"

(Lash,1988:323)

We will notice the unquestionable impact of the political significance of differential reading, not just on how the personal and social identity of people gets constructed but how our entire social fabric becomes mobilized in terms of how people give meaning to their world. In this real world things are not either just "black" or "white", but apparent opposites collapse into each other, as Baudrillard says, they "implode", producing "a floating causality where positivity and negativity engender and overlap with one another" (Conner, 1989:57).



In reality every act of reading is consciously or unconsciously initiated as a result of our pursuit of knowledge, and this practice often starts with the doubtful, enigmatic, often cryptical and unknown. Our limited judgements of things, however careful and responsible, cannot seem to be derived solely on the basis of the text in front of me. This compels me as the reader to withdraw from the dispensing domain of using recipes when reading and acquiesce into the domain of the venturesome or even devil-may-care audacity where uncertainty, risk, but also renewal prevail. The above schematic visualization of our passage to and through differential reading summarizes how, in an alternative reading framework, readers and viewers, in developing a new pattern of reading and thinking, proceed in order to audaciously engage with the multiplicity of interfacing information conduits or channels. Moreover, readers may start to understand the fields of force of discourse which seek to be increasingly inventive and ingenious. Therefore, instead of vindicating a controlling economic and socially-politically problematic order, we as readers would be better served to critically respond to the frailties, power positions, ideologies and legitimized practices in terms of a refreshingly different perspective in our meaning construction practices.

If multiple, differential reading proposes a reading process of reflecting back and forth, it means that the venturesome reader has to contend with those inevitable variables within and beyond, imposed and disclosed, conferred and deferred, in the integrated theories seeking ever newer perspectives. The emerging theoretical frameworks postulated in Chapter 3 & 4, afford us the invaluable space to excavate and search between and beyond the gaps and deficiencies among them, to suggest a complementary modality of reading in the differential mode.

### 6.3 DIFFERENTIAL READING AS POLITICAL PRACTICE.

Differential reading cannot be viewed simply as either a counter-suggestive or a progressive framework of reading; it must be seen as a fundamentally political act. No reading is absolutely neutral, for it affects (and can be affected by) every dimension of our social or interpersonal lives. Our view in this study, however, is that differential reading cannot rest on any prior ideological commitment; in fact it continuously seeks to transcend ideology and is therefore capable of also considering pursuing the worth and effects of alternative ideologies, and new points of view.

We would hasten to point out that the philosophical difficulties (and insights) afforded by the notion "ideology" are legion. Suffice to say, in the context of this study that Simon (1984:382) points out that this practice is in "semantic disarray", for it essentially refers to no specific entity or phenomenon. Rather, writers of very different orientations tend to use the terms in a variety of loosely connected ways. In our context in this study we may glean the view of Bowers (1977:35) who understood ideology to designate "...an interlocking set of beliefs and assumptions that make up the background or horizon against which the members of society make sense of their daily experience". As a result, Bowers argues that ideology ultimately denotes a socially constructed socially and maintained belief system that provides people with overarching rules and assumptions for symbolizing their reality.

While this may be the reality, as it is in our society, it becomes problematic for our reading practice if people have tended to become stuck at the level where an ideology betokens a fixed consciousness; i.e. the reader had become fixated in the grip of an ideology which suffers from the conceptions of

reality which are necessarily misrepresentative of the world at large and the individual's relation to it. In terms of this pejorative sense of ideology, an ideology proves limiting, skewed and undesirable in order to "soar above" its effects to a more expansive view of reading of our world, and which will assist us to reform that world.

Most, if not all, South Africans have come through an ideologized and therefore crippling process of socialization (including a schooling system), which operated along a class structure that had been linked to a *legalized system of oppression* whereby people have been categorized along racial lines. We all know that schools and the media serve particularly as important *ideological* conceptions (Apple, 1979) postulated and maintained by the formal political authority. In the schooling context, for example, the curriculum and styles of teaching reflected not only an ideologized, and prescriptive content but also a *process* that was designed for either empowerment for some and disempowerment for others (Meerkotter & Van den Berg, 1994:4). Either way, the *system of Apartheid* induced in *all citizens* a certain disempowering view (and fragmented and one-sided view) of the world, where the supposedly "natural" and "commonsense" understandings which transmit and reinforce ideologies that reflect the prevailing values and ethos of an essentially male-dominated, hierarchical and racially-divided social structure (McLaren, 1989:216). In the domain of teaching methodology, the catalytic impact of *critical theory*, for example, hopes to sensitize educators and learners to adopt all critical means to unmask or reveal the inward-looking approach of the inequality of self-interest, the exploitation and disempowerment of transmission teaching styles that reproduce subservience on the one hand, and the dominance of the political status quo on the

other.

On another level, we envisage the alternative and renewing value of differential reading as being essentially counter-ideological in that it seeks to assist the reader in engaging our diverse Apartheid texts in terms of a *desocializing discourse* of unmasking the limitations and bias which characterize our social practices in South African society. It is only in this way that readers will gain insight into their skewed, internalized and "naturalized" mediations and hopefully gain more control over their lives and social knowledge -construction.

We remain mindful that readers from different social and ethnic contexts, and also of different ideological persuasions, tend to read their social and political scenarios differently and since it is difficult to escape from the hold of ideological restrictions on thought. However, the strategic inclusion of alternative beliefs and viewpoints, to a large measure, depends on the critical view- point from which the individual operates when reading. As Mannheim (1936:125) articulates the point with reference to political thought:

"The significant element in the conception of ideology, in our opinion, is the discovery that political thought is integrally bound up with social life. This is the essential meaning of the oft-quoted sentence, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but, on the contrary, their social existence which determines their consciousness".

Attempting to read the somewhat enigmatic "script" of other people's consciousnesses will in all likelihood bring the reader

into conflict with his own socialized "script", confronting him constantly with rival ideas which may not be compatible with his own. Similarly, the myopia of reading within one's usual, limited framework of thinking and socialization may be compellingly justificatory and, as a result, preclude any expansive reading of other and new reading points of view. For many a reader, in the widest sense, the space for "shopping" for the development of new meanings and new personal identities prove to be difficult, or at best, puzzling. However, in terms of our proposed notion of differential reading, there is an emerging "other" reality which would prompt us to continuously question all "naturalized" and taken-for-granted certainties, resulting in readers experiencing a sense of fragmentation and a lack of coherence of meaning and self.

The new, emerging social order for equality in this country should constantly be read as a challenging variant of my entrenched reader consciousness. This variant may perhaps be at odds with my previously "tranquil" scenario (like the present unemployment or violence, for example). We experience that individuals and government continuously bluster, threaten, cajole, bluff, froth and announce new plan after new plan, without often appearing to grasp the nettle. The past, the future and the present will always prevail as competing forces, for all have to be read together in order to arrive at a "desirable outcome" which will be our vision for a better, if not, an "ideal society". This new vision has to be engaged in again and again, without seeking a short term kind of ready-to-take-home package, specifiable in advance.

#### 6.4 DIFFERENTIAL READING AS EDUCATIONAL-TRANSFORMATIONAL PRACTICE.

The prospect that differential reading could essentially be educational and therefore *transformational* of the individual, is rooted in the fundamental assumption that learning (in whatever setting) which contributes to the individual's ability to *think critically*, can be regarded as being a manifest contribution to their education. It is our abiding view that most educational institutions (notably schools) with which we have become accustomed, seem to have traditionally done precious little, or nothing, to contribute to the abilities of their learners to think critically. In the context of differential reading: education and critical thinking are correlative; if you do not appreciate what critical thinking is, then you would not know the value of education.

In South Africa we have charged our schooling system and child-rearing practices (including our consumer consciousness when shopping or viewing TV) that they, generally-speaking, prevent people from thinking more critically about their lives in the social and political world which are their elements. Such learning has been characterized as being mainly rote-learning, the reproduction of the voice of authority (the newspaper or broadcasting journalist, the teacher etc), the fervour of reliable recall of the words of others, the reproduction of dominant social structures, and acquiescing into the status quo. If critical thinking, as encapsulated in differential reading, is to "conscientize" readers to incorporate all sides and all alternatives into their reading of the world, this will lead to a new reality, which is beyond the claim that it is "mere reaction" or "counter-suggestibility".

In our new mind-testing social structure, change is a polemical issue which appears to occupy the centre-stage of the social and economic arena of South African society and which has entered a dramatic phase of fundamental social, political transformation and renewal. This too has major implications for readers in the framework of differential reading. The proposed policy framework, for example, which underpins the *renewal* for a sustainable development and transformative programme for all people seeks to enhance the ability of the workforce to manage change, capacity building, assertiveness, decision-making, human resource development in the public service and in civil society so as to enhance the quality of people in terms of efficient and effective delivery. What readers effectively have to deal with is a *change process* of contending with an optimum level of both the controllable and the uncontrollable elements. One often overhears people complaining that things are not the way they were, or alternatively, they have no idea where things are going to.

Conditions have been laid down by government in order that individuals would be free to transform their environment and themselves. Perhaps part of the reasons for resistance on the part of many people to engage in change is that there are *conditions* which have been legislated, and which citizens have to follow in a quasi-politically correct way. Perhaps also too little is done in "educating" people into democratic participation - in order to become politically literate and aware, and willingly engage in alternative points of view to develop their own "writing" (Derrida), in conjunction with that of the government and other institutions in civil society.

Our theorists, particularly in Chapter 4, portray reading, and

particularly differential reading as being *sin-qua-non* for a sense of liberation and empowerment, and which can, potentially be revolutionary. The excess of differential reading, applied to the revolutionary process has long ago been spelled out by Dewey (1922:222):

"...if we once start thinking no one can guarantee where we shall come out, except that many objects, ends and institutions are surely doomed. Every thinker puts some portion of an apparently stable world in peril and no one can wholly predict what will emerge in its place".

In the face of this uncertainty, the propensity of revolutionary differential reading puts every reading "in peril", dooming every finality of object and purpose. Here is the significance and cutting edge of the differential frame of reading: that it always threatens to expose and deconstruct representational reading in all its vacuous referencing (via linguistic conventions) as essentially a nonstart. For when the potential or actual effects of indoctrination of literal reading is read, it in fact becomes anti-differential. Consequently, if indoctrination of the signified is inevitable, then differential reading - at least as thorough-going differential thinking - becomes impossible.

Vis-a-vis the precision-seeking tendencies of referential or literal reading, differential reading, to a great extent, defies paradigmatic reading. Paradigms usually guide ordinary scientific practice which Kuhn (1962:viii) conceives of as "normal science", which is "research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for further practice". Differential

reading seeks to transcend "achievements" and "foundations" and as such, being categorized as a *paradigm for change*. In fact Derrida wants to go beyond "transcendent reading" to do a non-transcendent reading, to focus on the resistance of reading to itself. In differential reading readers do not just read the knowable, readable text, neither do they just read the unknowable, unreadable text. Readers in effect bring the two "together" in a "transposed" way of other or differential reading.

In this regard Derrida (1981:62) emphatically states that reading is essentially transformational. We can capture reading in this sense as the "trance of reading" - *trance*, as in *transition* or *transit*, *transposition*, *transformation*, *transgression* and finally, *entrancement*. In its extreme form, the *trance*, of reading would involve forgetting one's surroundings, being "lost in the production of your text" and what Derrida refers to, in a portmanteau, as *delireium* (in Bloom, 1979:94).

In the integrative framework of differential reading *delireium* suggests an anti-paradigmatic framework with no originarity or end. Coping with all social and political transformation in South Africa implies clear attempts to hold "in suspense" the possibility of a coherent and stable identity (eg. your gender, class, sexuality, age, scholarly standing etc.). One way in which reader identities might then be multiplied and dissolved is by the construction of a "typology" of readers, such as that by Barthes (1976:63) when he describes a psycho-analytic typology which links "the reading neurosis to the hallucinated from the text". What Barthes effectively suggests for our concerns of *change* is that the unending multiple reading process cannot only be written in terms of that which we have in front of us. For political transformation and consequently people development we

need not throw the baby out with the bathwater. We need to engage the existing pockets of excellence in all spheres of economics, administration, diplomacy, trade, research etc. and read those also as variants of the as yet unwritten text to produce creative, new and homegrown scenarios for the benefit of all South Africans and ultimately ourselves as individuals.

In reading the entire text of our "new society" we have to constantly question old behaviours and practices in order to overcome stereotyping, thinking that always appeals to tradition, being trapped in either-or reasoning patterns, practising disguised, prejudiced and sterile tunnel vision which is usually exclusive and perhaps unjust. Reconstructing and re-creating our institutions, both public and private, can only emerge if we embark on, and acquiesce into an integrative reading of empowerment, development and understanding individuals. The trance (*transformational* effects) of reading, as suggested in Derridean *delireium*, may also be grasped in terms of the value of the "recognition of reading", i.e. the possibility of "seeing or entering the mind" of the other. The "schizophrenic" tendency of the reader implies that every reading is split or doubled, i.e. our thoughts as well as not our thoughts. The transformational character of differential reading therefore involves almost always the inclusion of a necessary *otherness* in which the reader recognizes himself in certain possibilities of existence in the other but , at the same time, is transformed. The reader thus yields and listens to the other, whether different or totally alien, in which we both, reciprocally condition and build each other.

#### 6.5 DIFFERENTIAL READING AS CONGRUENT WITH A NEW REALITY.

This study is moreover mindful that besides the fact that we all have moved into a new political dispensation, we are also in fact ( or perhaps as a result thereof) living in very confused times because many of the things that gave logical and coherent structure to our lives are disappearing. Institutions which we relied on, particularly the workplace, are no longer so clear or so certain. If we observe institutions like the law, political structure, new technology, the media etc., we are constantly called upon to question or reassess them. In order therefore to give people a sense of "comfort" or even a sense of "cohesion" of things and the belief in their abilities, we have to constantly negotiate what the future is going to be like.

In coming to terms with an eternally present "new reality", a differential reading of the shifting scenarios will persuade people that there is, after all, sense in what appears to be all this apparent chaos or nonsense around us. Differential reading accommodates a broad reading of what seems apparently chaotic, but chaos isn't chaos in the negative sense, but merely the flipside of underlying patterns in things, or spaces so that the reader can actually make a creative difference to the way things will turn out. As in the creative nature of differential reading where there is no pre-ordained meaning, our emerging reality decrees that the future is also not completely preordained; even science or just ordinary social relationships are not preordained. We have to constantly "shop around" for new meaning in relationships and new meaning for understanding our attempts of constantly shaping and reshaping new political and economic reality in South Africa.

Judie Lannon (in Sunter, 1996:81), in a scenario workshop entitled "Reality isn't what it used to be", offers us invaluable assistance in grasping how our post-industrial and post information society had evolved from the earlier industrial society in the areas of economics, social organization and business. This is helpful too in understanding our new reality in South Africa:

<b>INDUSTRIAL (MODERN) SOCIETY</b>	→	<b>POSTINDUSTRIAL (POSTMODERN) SOCIETY</b>
<p>1. <b>Economic Organization</b> →            Wealth creation:            manufacturing            Restricted capital &amp;            people movements.</p>	→	<p>Wealth creation: information            services.            Unrestricted capital &amp;            people movements.</p>
<p>2. <b>Social Organization</b> →            Authority vested in            stable institutions.             Hierarchical, defe-            rential social order            Handed-down, Inherited            values            Status reflected by            things/externals            National lifestyles             Controlled/closed media            Passive consumers</p>	→	<p>Institutional authority            questioned.            Transference to media power            Egalitarian social order            tibes.            Discovered Individual values             Status reflected by expe-            riences/internals            Mixtures of global            lifestyles/bazaars            Open/free-access media            Active/educated/moral            consumers</p>
<p>3. <b>Business activities</b> →            Business activities            backstage (covert)            Mass media            National markets            Mass marketing</p>	→	<p>Business activities front-            stage and transparent (overt)            Fragmented specialist media            Global markets            Mass customisation/            relationship marketing</p>

With the shift to information and services from manufacturing, we

have encountered a great sense of disruption in society, which has actually precipitated and intensified the disaggregation of society. Institutional authority (whether it's the church, school or workplace) is constantly being challenged in the increasing discovery by people of their individual values. In a new political reality in South Africa more and more people are becoming less restricted in their movement (job-wise and otherwise), allegiance and their opinions so that pre-determined handed-down behaviours (men-women; black-white; Christian - Muslim-Jewish; rich-poor) and their accompanying "stable" values, are constantly being reassessed and often replaced.

Differential reading, as the ideal alternative framework of reading our personal, social and political texts, wherever we may be, is highly "suited" to dealing with the controllable and uncontrollable forces, of crossing borders, of developing varieties of global lifestyles and becoming comfortable with competing ideologies.

What undergirds and assists our understanding of our emerging new society tremendously, is the emerging and almost already fully-functioning potential of new technologies. With the emergence of global cultures (which we have not necessarily been aware of), we encounter increasingly a legion of competing religions, value systems and lifestyles. It has been particularly clear with the advent of the Internet and other communication technologies that we have moved to a more individualized culture. People can stay at home, and yet be both open to an entire world of images, sounds, communication flows - which are potentially interactive. Castells (1989:1) argues:

"...that telecommunications allow work at home in "electronic cottages", while firms become entirely footloose in their location,

freed in their operations by the flexibility of information systems and by the density and speed of the transportation network".

Castell's comments are significant in this study, for any analysis of a post-apartheid South Africa requires considerable creative speculation or consideration of social and economic policies to strengthen democracy and this can only lead to making meaningful choices in the global context. We have to concede that regional strategy is inevitably constrained by the effects of global political and economic changes.

The use of the enormous advances in information technology and production systems will be inevitable and therefore decisive in assisting us in cutting down on time and on information flows which will lead, according to Padayachee & Motala (1994: 76), to dramatic changes in production and work processes, industrial relations, industrial design and managerial prerogatives. As a result of the facilitation of information technology, differential reading, as a strategy, will assist us to get a more coherent picture of the emerging Southern African region of economic and social activity, whose performance we can read in a more integrated way. Our richly textured text of our region is that of the new possibilities of technologies and the social and other global issues - read in an intertwined way. Our new reality can moreover be read and understood in a much wider and multi-perspective manner, as Padayachee and Motala (1994:76) point out:

"It is clear that no regional strategy for growth can ignore the imperatives of global economic developments and the restructuring of world politics. National economies cannot hope to survive unless they develop capacities to participate in the world

market as equals or on the basis of some special advantage".

The very idea that differential reading is essentially transformational implies that all people can develop capacities to participate in the restructuring in this country. This is not just our usual stance of continuing to reproduce old practices and values, but rather of exercising critical thinking to extend our views to other and different views as well. The challenge of differential reading in this context reminds us how difficult it in fact is to make purposeful choices or to read this text as a variant of other (different) texts.

Policymakers in South Africa will not be able to escape this challenge either. Quite aside from the difficulties of managing multilateral relations across our borders, in times of structural change, the emergence of our new democracy, as a fully-fledged player in regional and global issues, has complicated the range or regional and global options. In our reading of our aspirations of the new reality, South Africa cannot ignore the history of the breakdown of countries which have shown how fragile the nation-state is as a vehicle for human aspirations. The rise of virulent nationalism demonstrates that ancient ethnic impulses are certainly not a spent force in politics. Reading all perspectives, despite looming ethnic and other conflictual interests, goes a long way to demonstrate the efficacy of differential reading. How will South Africans nourish themselves and uphold the value of democratic living? Finding answers to these and other questions demand that people constantly change the way they think and feel about the world and, as a result, constantly reassess the way in which they can conduct their affairs - both internally as well as abroad.

The end of the Cold War has brought about more, new and even different political options (Evans & Newnham, 1992:127) - and so has the exigencies of our post-Apartheid era. International politics had started pushing economic questions. However, things obviously are not just monolithic and simplistically clear cut. These interdependent developments did not go unnoticed in Southern Africa, which in turn had led to the steady process of political and social integration (Schoeman, 1990:377). The unfolding of the unwritten text of democracy in differential reading is markedly demonstrated in the decision to open South Africa's political process. This significant public policy decision signifies a reading of world affairs which brought us into step with global priorities, despite the debilitating conflictual feelings at the time that the only alternative was that of negotiation, of opening up the closed South African text to other shades of thinking, other priorities and a new vision. This altered understanding of South Africa's political process is significant in this study, as Peter Vale (1991:688) lends his understanding:

"The moment produces a critical (this word is not carelessly chosen) paradox for policymakers in South Africa. At the very moment that Southern African states, in the face of global and domestic pressures, were seeking to deepen their co-operation, the region's dominant state was destined to be preoccupied with a complex - and often violent - process of reconstruction."

Reading in terms of the multiplicity of transformative processes that are at work, inevitably opens the space to chaos and violence of thinking, words and interactions. What would ultimately be encountered is an "altered", different conceptualization of our

political and other identities, and an increased capacity to live up to the ideal of democracy.

#### 6.6 DIFFERENTIAL READING AND DEMOCRATIC LIVING.

Finally, we consider the relation between differential reading and democracy in this study to be crucial. It is usually claimed that a properly functioning democracy is dependent on a balanced and educated citizenry. This begs the question of what sort of education does such a citizenry require. The answer is: not one-dimensional. The latter embodies the *multiple quality* which is prerequisite for an expansive perspective on the part of readers when they read their social and personal script to strengthen democracy.

On the meaning of "democracy" itself, Benn & Peters (1966:332) point out that nowadays virtually everyone is in favour of democracy:

"...it is a propaganda asset which no party can afford to surrender to its opponents...virtually everyone uses "democracy" with the same prescriptive force."

Ben & Peters argue that there is enormous variation in what people mean when they use the word "democracy", and conclude that general agreement on the prescriptive force of the word has to be paid for, however, by ambiguity or vagueness in its descriptive meaning. Our descriptive sense of "democracy" in this study is in an extended sense, beyond its merely referring to a political system or a form of government.

In the context of differential reading, democracy rests on the idea of a community (of readers) - as rational beings -

organising their social life in the light of their best collective judgement of things. Our social construction of knowledge counts on "mature" and informationally competent readers. The powerful multiplicity of the processes inherent in the differential nature of reading, "safeguards" readers from being subject to manipulation (by others), becoming closed-up in one's own disinterest, remaining ill-informed about other perspectives and views, and finally falling prey to one's own arbitrariness of subjective preferences and fickleness. A crucial condition for democratic participation appears to be the ability to distinguish and choose between *alternatives* that would hopefully speed up our social reforms. J.S. Mill (1972:208) reminds us:

"... the rights and interests of every or any person are only secure from being disregarded when the person interested is himself able, and habitually disposed, to stand up for them."

By "standing up" for himself in fact compels the reader to grasp fully the nature of democratic institutions and to embrace fully their responsibilities. In reading wider than the written text, the reader needs to read also the unwritten sides of public policy concerns, judge and read intelligently the many sides of issues facing society, challenge and seek alternative reasons for proposed changes (and continuations) of policy, to put self-interest aside when it is appropriate to do so, and so on.

If the democratic citizen is not a critical reader of the broad socio-political scenario, he is significantly hampered in his ability to contribute in any way to public life. Insofar as we are committed to democratic living, then, that commitment affords yet another reason for regarding differential reading as a fundamental alternative framework for reading in the gaps,

margins, spaces and alterations of all our social deliberations. Differential reading seeks to mobilize the reader's intellectual diversion and radical action, which constantly unsettles all fixed thinking and complicity into sameness of ideology and one-dimensionality of opinions. In short, our insistence on differential reading for democratic participation should develop readers with a kind of flexible "reading disposition" which will enable and dispose them to become more vigilant in choosing between mere consensus and seeking creative alternatives.

As part of the broader scope of the democratization of Post-Apartheid South Africa, we witness significant national attempts in the arena of labour, which seek to read a broader and more inclusive script so that *all points of view* and *all sectors* can participate in the country's productivity. Special mention in this context is the government's GEAR (Growth, Equity And Redistribution) and AA (Affirmative Action) policies - both of which attempt to affirm previously disadvantaged groups in the labour market, and redistribute resources to all sectors so that the job market and the economy will allow everyone to benefit and hopefully grow. Certain groupings with vested interest perhaps do not agree on all aspects surrounding either GEAR or AA, but it appears to be a struggle or conflict they have to regard as constituting a necessary and ongoing component in their readings in order to bring about a more differential reading of our new society.

Another challenge to the differential reading is that of information and its freedom of being accessed and articulated. The second half of the 1980's represented the nadir of press freedom in South Africa, but during the 1990's we have moved tremendously far and fast to ensure real press freedom. By lifting the old restrictive press laws, all citizens in this new democracy will be able to make available as well as have access

to all perspectives and therefore acquiesce into a more differential reading of local and global events and trends. John Patten (1998:6), ombudsman for one of South Africa's newspapers, poses the challenge of press freedom for a more comprehensive and unrestrictive reading, as advocated by differential reading:

(i) that the press remains independent from government, (2) that the press attunes itself to minorities' needs while also reflecting the views of the majority, (3) that the past legislative restrictions are removed, and (4) that the press constantly persuades the authorities of the media's rights to public information. These challenges for the freedom of the press remains the constant pursuit in the differential reading attempts of newspapers as they face a balancing act in a still greatly divided society.

#### 6.7 THE IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION OF THE DIFFERENTIAL READING FRAMEWORK.

The application of an integrated, differential reading framework has become necessary in the context of the accelerating changes our post-information society is undergoing during a period of political and technological transition. This is further exacerbated by the volatile multiliterate character of our society, having to deal with *managing* and using the complexity of information channels via books, lists, periodicals, advertisements, CD Rom, Internet etc. "Reading" via these mechanisms takes on a whole new vision of meaning so that *process* becomes more important than *product*. In this regard Castells (1989:14) points out:

"The fundamental trend overall seems to deepen not so much on the somewhat obsolete idea of the growing dominance of software over hardware, as on the ability of new

information technologies to generate new information, thus emphasizing the specific nature of their output vis-a-vis former technological paradigms".

#### 6.7.1 THE DEMANDS OF OUR POST-INFORMATION SOCIETY.

Within recent years, particularly, we have experienced dramatic social and other crises which seem to be reflective of the kind of social change which ceaselessly impacts upon our society. There has been moreover a considerable increase in the number, size and sophistication of information documentation and services proliferating at all levels of our society. Within the ever expanding information-producing industry, the areas and various peculiar ways of use of information is also constantly changing in order to adapt to, or keep abreast with an ever advancing and competitive socio-political environment, using such information. In this regard it seems that society itself, frames and influences technological innovation in a dialectical relationship.

Closely related to these rapidly occurring changes have been certain clear concomitant social and economic phenomena and certain accompanying socio-political patterns which have become sometimes the result of social change and sometimes the cause of change. The nett result is that the interface between documents, texts and information on the one hand, and people, users, readers and viewers on the other, seem to have posed intensifying demands to ensure that breakdowns in communication will not result in administrative bottlenecks, misrepresentation, misinformation, inefficiency, hurt and ultimately waste in terms of time and money. "Preventing" such failed or limited attempts of understanding information, calls for an integrated approach

towards all the different messages that emanate from different quarters.

While we realize that any organization or person will be limited by its or his capacity to "process": (i.e. read and interpret) information, messages and images, we remain committed to pursuing a kind of quality interface that would enhance quality messages, quality decisions, quality lifestyles and greater personal happiness and existential purpose. Ultimately it is not only about also having access to education but also having access to knowledge and information, amidst the often exacting reality of our information-driven society - a view that inevitably impacts on the complexities of subjectivity and representation as problematized in Chapter 2. These challenging complexities have been elucidated in terms of the complementary or interdependent textual discourse framework of meaning construction as elaborated in the context of differential reading. The various differential theories have effectively sought to challenge the tendency of totalization and centralization of thought in an information-driven society - an attempt to enhance the value of understanding message exchange, the management of information flow and developing dialogue in a broader and more profound way.

#### 6.7.2 OUR GROWING MULTILITERATE SOCIETY

As language using subjects who operate in an increasingly multi-literate society, ranging from the most advanced techno-literacy systems to the most basic oral-literacy systems of communication, we all seem to grapple essentially with a dual problem. On the one hand the compelling demands of contemporary technocratization, computerized and over-informationalization in terms of the availability, access, selection, choice and use of available information, have their own critical demands whilst, on

the other hand, ordinary people seem to struggle with their different personal understandings of what they hear, see, read and interpret.

As with our proposed differential reading in the context of a wide spectrum of information-sharing, information-seeking, and information consuming, individuals which include economists, politicians, educators, scientists, workers, children - all have to network, liaise, exchange and interface with these realities. They all have to strive to effect a maximum measure of precision, clarity, criticalness, fairness, communicative competence, personal interpretations and personal satisfaction in information reception and information clarity. While these concepts of "clarity", "fairness", "competence" etc. seem to be at odds with our proposed differential reading mode, we believe that these notions inspire us to look at all sides and perspectives of our readings, in an expansive way. To have an integrated and comprehensive view of "programming", we need only to look at the complexity of information networks (i.e. systems and subsystems of information in movement) that exists in our society. As in our differential reading framework (see paragraph 6.2.1), all readings in the dynamic network of differential readings circulate and complement one another. Each approach *conditions* the other, to avoid a conjunctive or closed reading of the text.

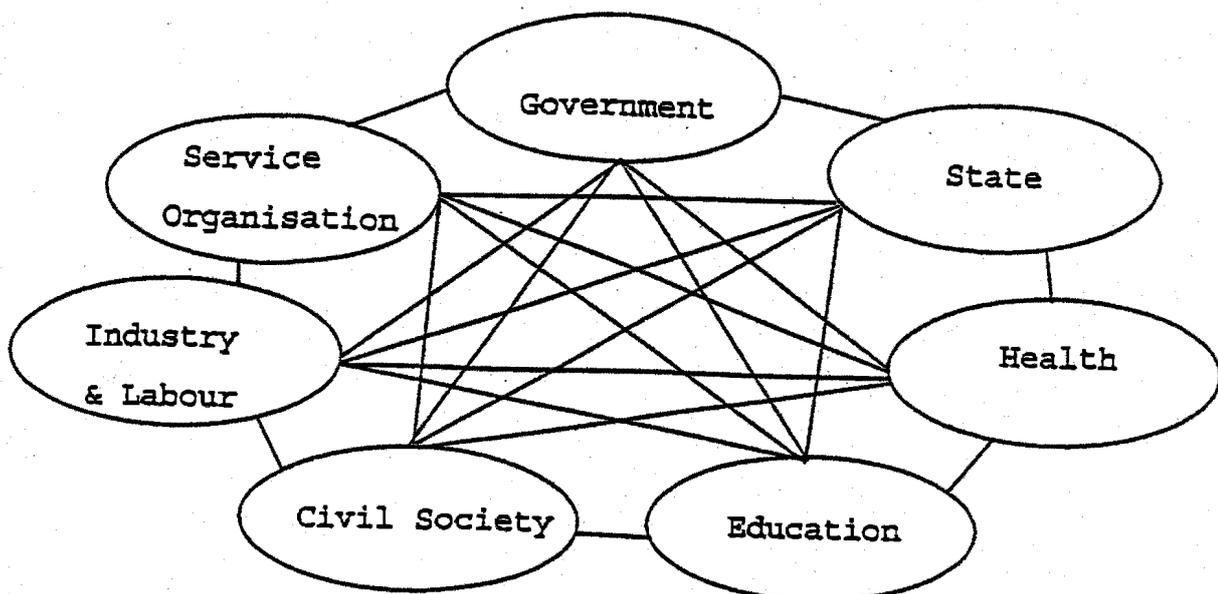
### 6.7.3 THE COMPLEXITY OF INFORMATION NETWORKS IN OUR SOCIETY

At a macro-level there exists a formidable information network which shapes, structures and organizes our complex society. The information trends, their flow and knowledge generation inevitably "contribute to the change both in the structure of the production process and in the organization of society" (Castells,

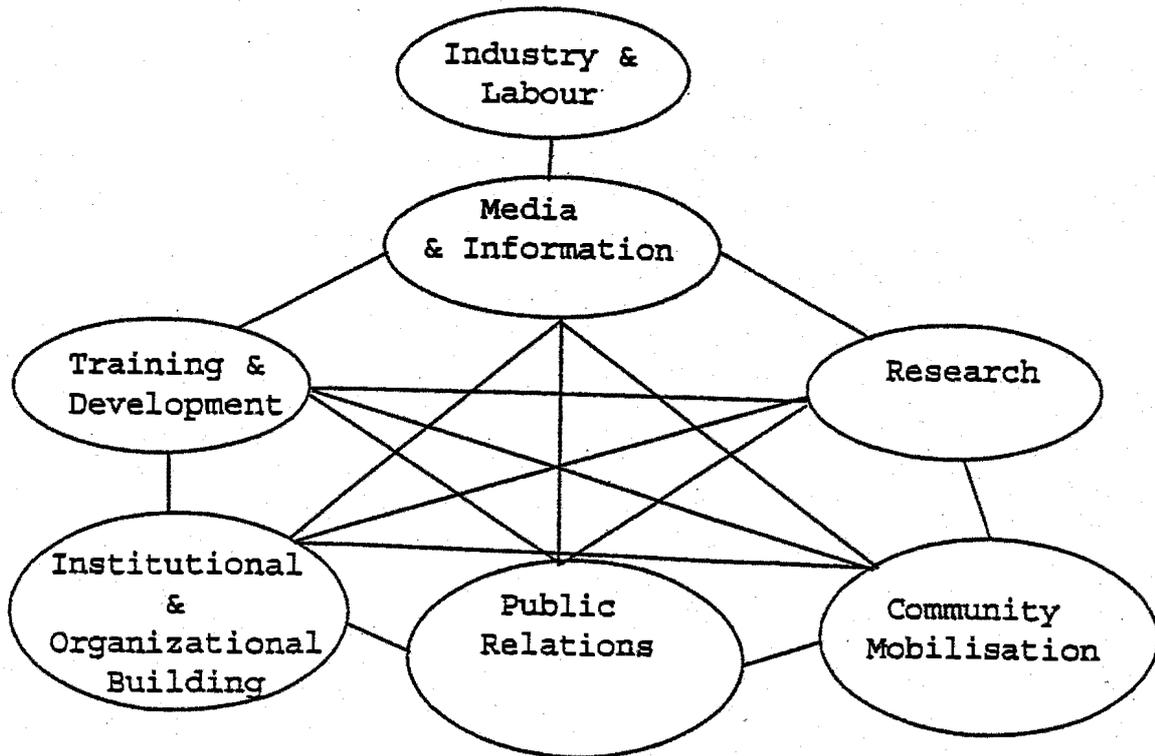
1989:15). The "production process" we envisage, is that of a differential reading framework, for instead of "making sense" of the huge information network, and always pursue epistemic certainty, our reading rather thrives on tentative and deferred meanings. Without the expansive reading framework for meaning construction via the complex information-cum-communication structure in society, we will have little hope of achieving efficiency and development of understanding of our society. The structure below demonstrates a schematic overview of a possible social structure of information network in terms of which we seem to have to construct meaning for our daily purposes (see 6.7.3.1).

The reading of this "typical" information network, elevates areas of operation with seemingly clear boundaries or even assumed elements of hierarchization. However, within the differential reading framework we deal increasingly with a boundaryless, intertextual reading of meanings that becomes dispersed, the one reading is read as a variant of the other. No single area of "demarcation" in the network dominates.

6.7.3.1 A POSSIBLE INFORMATION NETWORK STRUCTURE IN OUR SOCIETY.



This macro structure or network can be analysed into further information subsystems and networks. For this purpose we may use the area of Industry and Labour as an example to examine further subsystems. The various subsystems, as in the macro system, constantly anticipate, intersect and even conflict with one another, to produce new meanings.



What we encounter in the dynamic flow of information in the above network could also be understood as an integrated look at how differential discourse continues to propel itself towards ever new meanings. Meanings become "deterritorialized". Ulmer (1985:83) sees this deterritorialization as a subversive activity, severing meanings constantly from the original contexts (like severing pieces of paper to form a collage), and attempting an assemblage of fragments in a new arrangement. Ulmer (1985:84-7) stresses the fact of severance and discontinuity rather than the fact of renewed unity.

What becomes important in our proposed differential reading framework is to constantly read the network of information flow in terms of new compositions, recreated from the known and given units or elements in the network. Ulmer refers to Derrida's work

intertextual weavings of texts with one another. In the schematic network of systems and subsystems in our society, the one text (system) is transformed, deformed and contaminated by the others' content. At times they reject each other; they may pass elliptically into one another and ultimately become regenerated in the playful repetition of meaning construction. Derrida (1981:355) ultimately concludes that:

"...each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of removal, transforming that, too, as it affects the new territory".

The space or framework of differential reading between the different and various units in the network of life events itself, is a clear model for the inventive reading production. In this network of various disciplines (eg. research, public relations, training and development, media, community mobilisation) we encounter a field of force around and among documents in which deconstruction assists us to excavate meaning and, coupled with all our inventive reading energies, we as responsible readers can become creative, and even pioneering, in terms of the quality and variety of meanings we are able to produce. It is precisely as a result of this new modality of approaching our complex reading of our world and ourselves, that we are able to liberate ourselves from the defects and limitations of conventional reading modalities.

## 6.8 CONCLUSION

### 6.8.1 DIFFERENTIAL READING AS FRAMEWORK BEYOND INTERPRETATION.

The inventive character of the differential reading discourses in this study clearly seek to "consolidate" their bias toward an *alternative reading* of a text where there is manifestly no pre-given meaning but only a here-and-now productive moment of meaning construction. A *reading* refers essentially to a discursive space where our level of perception and conception of the multiple variations and mutations we actively produce in reading. Our orientation and challenge is essentially that no reading can be pre-regulated or pre-controlled for whatever ideological reasons. The challenge of the practice of *reading*, as opposed to the practice of *interpretation* of our personal and social texts spawns an irreducible plurality of meaning which holds major consequences for our interactive behaviours, values and views in our global information society.

Our overall theoretical framework detaches itself from the constraints of *interpretation* (of texts) and opens itself to a "space of flows" (Castells, 1989:6), which generates the complete lack of boundaries, i.e. "... not to represent the representable..." (Conner, 1989:220-21). It is one thing to oppose the tyrannical totalization and representation (Bové, 1986:22) of a text, but *reading* in the differential framework, assumes that readers and texts "...become active agents in themselves, creating new substances, new social forms, new ways of acting and thinking, new attitudes, reshuffling the cards or "fate" and "nature" and social "reality" (Ryan, 1988:560-1).

Instead of merely *interpreting* our social world and our views of ourselves, *reading*, as it unfolds in the differential modality embodies a fundamental *restructuring* and *transformative* process which forges new relationships in our emerging socio-economic system, *as well as*, the use of new information technologies. In fact, these innovations reciprocally condition each other. Our new orientation of subjectivity and representation refocuses on the non-finality of our reading experiences, i.e. a *reading* or *readings* that operate beyond the representable:

1. All *reading*, unlike interpretive practices, is a manifest decentering of the notions of the centrality of subjectivity and representation. This subject (author, reader) and the sign (word, message) cannot enjoy the unequivocal right of authority or a centre-stage position.
2. All *reading* is ultimately destined for *logos*, i.e. for "I think" or "It thinks". Thinking is the vehicle *par excellence* for critical activity in which all views are questioned, analysed, synthesized and dispersed in a spirit of fairmindedness, non-judgmentalism, openness and creativity.
3. All *reading* is essentially both a mind-testing act of plurality and often a chaotic sharing of voices. It is however a process which inevitably unfolds in a non-straightforward manner, i.e. it also engages the unreadable and unwritten text which resides beyond the borders of the written document. Democracy and negotiation, among others, are required to render a plurality discourse possible, although always in a tentative manner.

4. All *reading* is an almost polymorphous mutation process of grasping the readable text as a significant variant of the unreadable, i.e. not relying on the literal, often ideologized representation of documented content or "reliable" or "proven" knowledge. There is no past, present or future text, except the text created on the basis of the document, *now*, in an *inventive* manner.
5. All *reading* essentially spawns excessive heterogeneity (of entrenched beliefs, expert messages), displacement (of conventional views) and fragmentation (of eternal truths).
6. All *reading* leads to perspective seeing, perspective thinking, and perspective knowledge:

<u>PERSPECTIVE SEEING</u>	<u>PERSPECTIVE THINKING</u>	<u>PERSPECTIVE KNOWLEDGE</u>
<p>Subjectivity is re-orientated and re-contextualized. It is not <u>me</u> but also <u>other</u>. It means seeing what is included or excluded; emphasized or diminished. To be able to see through the eyes of academia, officialdom, gender, science, race, history, political parties, futurism, religion, etc.</p>	<p>Subjectivity can be decentered. Thinking should be guided by the discourse. Follow the signs, the gaps, omissions, etc. This leads to thinking differently, alternatively, laterally, creatively, critically and innovatively.</p>	<p>Knowledge can be displaced. No knowledge is absolute in that it cannot be questioned and challenged. Statistics may blur the real events. Traditions may anaesthetize the faculties. Expertise often inspires awe. Beliefs on race, gender, power, expertise can be constructed and reconstructed.</p>

7. All *reading* explores/excavates universalities. Behind the written and readable texts the universal driving forces for

excavation include: cultivating expansive critical dispositions, consultative attitudes, facilitative approaches, dialoguing and negotiating preferences, inquiring minds, open-mindedness, risk-taking, valuing failure, success and potential.

8. All *reading* hold challenges for uncontrollable mechanisms, and as a result prompt self-examination and challenges entrenched and mastered assumptions. It is not only examining one's own personal script, as expounded in Transactional Analysis, but also establishing the locus of control (power bases for tradition/beliefs) and the omissions and gaps in ideological discourse.
9. All *reading* is not primarily bent on giving or deriving meaning from a document/work. *Reading* playfully facilitates access to dispositions of curiosity, desire, imagination, escape, day-dreaming - leading to perpetual interpretive forces in circulation. *Reading* facilitates unmasking processes of access to the exposure of dogmatism, laying bare falsification, etc. *Reading* is essentially writing or producing one's own text often again and again.
10. All *reading* seeks to prevent closure, determinacy, and completeness. Closure implies finality and completeness, but also compartmentalized or tunnel thinking, expert or authoritative thinking, totality-seeking thinking. Completeness also implies self-sufficiency and social sufficiency. Determinacy spawns the debilitating effects of totalization, stability, standardization and centralization.
11. All *reading* is essentially liberatory and innovative. No

*reading* operates only under the yoke of the sign, the letter, the author or any pre-given meaning - except in discourse - now. It's liberating the boundaries of *reading* for the global context.

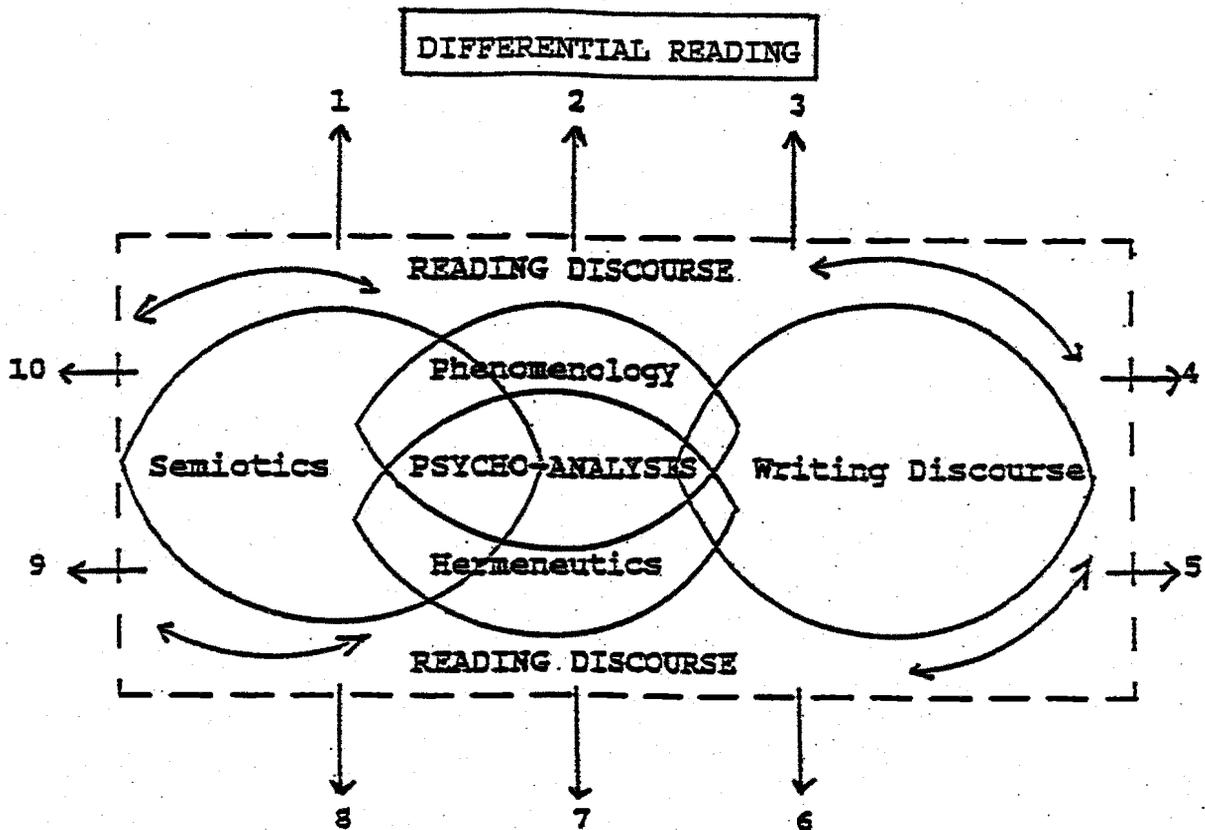
12. All *reading* is essentially transformative. Transformation of any context (political, institutional, technological, personal) is a multifaceted, complex issue and the non-restrictive and liberatory nature of differential reading facilitates an alternative process ideally suited to the multiplicity of conceptualizations that abound in social, political, scientific, institutional and cultural matters.

Ultimately all *reading* transforms our notions of subjectivity and representation. Every act of reading, being itself the intertext of another reading, belongs to and is interwoven into the *intertextual*. This *inter-text* is not to be equated with "origins", "the source of", and "the influence upon" which. The obsession with origin, source and influence is based on fixations and a desire for mastery, rather than flexibility. Our ultimate challenge in this study has been to view subjectivity and representation as working or functional constructs, here-and-now, *in discourse*. To give these dynamic discourses perspective, liberated from unified and totality-seeking schemes of reference, means viewing all of them in an integrative, complementary manner, and in a differential manner.

6.8.2 THE OVERALL CHALLENGES OF DIFFERENTIAL READING DISCOURSES FOR READING TOWARDS TRANSFORMATION.

It has become evident that our new theory of differential reading eschews the fallacious notion that reading (by the subject) can impose a sense of stability on texts (be these literary texts or the larger society as text). In the same vein, any reading cannot fulfil the shortsighted act of one-way consumption of or control by our society. The unfolding promise of differential reading opens up unlimited horizons communication, as well as creativity, inviting readers to the exploration of new domains of experiences - from our inner selves as individuals to the outer reality in society.

Scientific discovery and technological innovation are both an integral part, and a consequential effect of our larger societal change. How we read these relationships, spaces and opportunities will help us as readers to address and grasp the overall transformation of science, research, state, education, labour, etc, of which new technologies are a fundamental instrument. Our "judgements" of all the afore-mentioned areas are determined by an inevitable combination and integrative mix of approaches suggested in this study. They are not merely reproduced in a literal way. As the schematic representation below shows that our perception of things (phenomenology) is affected by a hermeneutic reading for deeper meaning of a text. At the same time, all semiotic signs are deconstructed and unmasked from ideological distortions. Each approach entails moments or dimensions of the other, elucidating textuality in a way that the other approach is not able to do. The Lacanian psycho-analytic reading entails dimensions of deconstruction, but at the same time, is not without hermeneutic overtones.



The arrows within the accompanying scheme provide a visual image of those proposed discourses which reciprocally condition one another to furnish an extraordinarily rich reading experience. While these approaches may be critical of each other, it is precisely their differences, antitheses and metonymic play of intertextual voices that lead to the writerly (scriptible) text which the reader *constantly* rewrites *ad infinitum*. The irony of the "radical decomposition of all central principles" (Hassan, 1982:262), gives us the depth and "authenticity" of our reading experiences.

It is in these moments of convergence between theories, that we

have access to a differential reading, i.e. where we not only identify the canonic meaning, but at the same time encounter the *space* to revise, subvert and transform views and meanings. The differential reading framework above renders a valuable model for understanding the complex socio-economic-technical matrix that is *transforming* our present society. The current transformation of institutions and communication processes is a manifestation of the constant interaction between the informational model of development and the restructuring of all institutions and persons in our present-day society. Therefore, by adopting a comprehensive reading perspective that embraces *all* views, present and absent, we have the means of developing more profound insights into *how* the restructuring process or transformation is occurring.

In the proposed "breathing" porous differential reading framework we propose an alternative theory of reading where variables 1 - 10 continually (in no particular chronological order) ensure that every reading is a rereading which will in fact be reread beyond the secured canon of entrenched views. The circulating discourses proposed in the above visualization of differential reading remain effervescent in order:

1. To be able to create a commitment to interdependent, critical and creative information networks and thinking at all levels of personal, social and organizational life, as well as knowledge-construction.
2. To be able to cultivate and pursue meaningful avenues of information for democratic participation and exchange in, and have influence on decision-making processes for creative meanings.
3. To be able to render responsible, albeit creative, choices

in information regarding conscience, politics (elections), transactions (legal business), science, careers, leisure, which will result in greater understanding.

4. To deepen our understanding for and sustain quality freedom of expression which will be self-edifying but also socially beneficial.
5. To be able to articulate expressions of personal views and grievances in a non-conflictual manner which searches for creative, alternative meanings.
6. To be able to recognize, understand and appreciate cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial diversity as being part of our social text - i.e. reading our social text in a complementary and inclusive manner.
7. To be able to insist on the value of expressing meanings and information for democratic participation and accountability for long-term cost-effectiveness, and efficiency for continual renewal of self and society.
8. To be able to understand and have access to information to implement constitutional rights, also the right to have access to information for personal, local and national development - and also to put it in an increasing global context.
9. To be able to recognize opportunities to challenge self-interest, bigotry and ignorance, which may distort information and meanings.
10. To be able to advocate and mobilize meaningfully in defense of the understandings of common civil interest for all in order that everyone will have access to opportunities to develop confidence, self-esteem and goodwill - which will at the same time be in step with understandings of global priorities.

they emanate as salient effects of the differential reading framework, and could emancipate readers from socio-economic-informational inertia. Restructuring our society cannot occur independently of the political process, but the significance of differential reading does ultimately go beyond political orientation or even personal interest or bias.

This study proposed an inquiry into our reading practices which could have a dramatic effect on two macro processes, i.e. our personal and social transformation, and its reciprocal influences on information flow. The usefulness of this theoretical model of differential reading is in providing an infinitely integrative, conceptual basis for a holistic platform for meaning construction so that we are not always dictated to by technology but that we too have significant input and abilities to influence the way society relates to technology, to produce greater space for inventive reading behaviour. This inevitably should enhance greater personal contentment and social responsibility, for the subject does not only read the text but in fact writes his own, rendering the subject "...a system of relations between strata: the mystic pad, the psyche, society, the world" (Derrida. 1978:226). There is only discourse which circulates our infinite views of subjectivity and representation, so that all reading, in order to be profound and yet integrative, thrives on what is not there in the text: "I can decide that in the depths of every text, however readable its conception is, there remains a certain measure of the unreadable" (Barthes, 1986:35). This is the dizzying experience of reading, which promises to be enriching.

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