

The Nature of Social Reality

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Edited by

Claudia Stancati, Alfredo Givigliano,
Emanuele Fadda and Giuseppe Cosenza

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION*

1. Social ontology: a short history? While the work of Searle is generally considered the starting point for any discussion of social ontology today, yet I would argue that we should approach the issue from another angle, and that we should retrace the origins of such a concept in order to gain a different, and possibly more interesting, perspective. As Paolo Di Lucia has pointed out, “both the expression ‘social ontology’ and the notion of a ‘systematic ontology of social data [eine systematische Ontologie der soziale Gegenwart] appeared in a 1910 manuscript by Reinach’s master, Edmund Husserl, [1859-1938]”¹. Di Lucia highlights Reinach’s three major contributions to social ontology: his theory of social acts, that of juridical objects, and the theory of *a priori* truths which bind social acts to their products, i.e. juridical objects².

If we look further back, we shall see that the debate on the problematic relationship between philosophy and psychology, which took place in the period from Brentano to Frege, helped lay the foundations for a renewed metaphysics and, consequently, for social ontology. It was within such a period and context that Alexius Meinong carried out his philosophical research. Meinong redefined the relationship between ontology and the science of knowledge by integrating his theory of objects with the concept of the nonexistent object and that of the impossible object.

For Meinong, the object derives from experience and is not bound by the law of non-contradiction, nor by that of compossibility. Indifferent to being or beyond being, the thinkable object is knowable through language; language which turns a merely gnoseological relation into an ontological affirmation. Thus, traditional ontology comes to encompass intentional psychic expressions which find their reference within this same dimension. Furthermore, even those objects which are said to be non-existent must

* The first paragraph has been written by C. Stancati, the second by E. Fadda, and the last by A. Givigliano. All the paragraphs, however, have been discussed together, so that this text has to be considered as shared by all of us.

¹ E. Husserl, *Soziale Ontologie und deskriptive Soziologie*, 1910.

² P. Di Lucia, “A objecto actus recipit speciem”, in R. Lafredini (ed.), *A priori materiale. Uno studio fenomenologico*. Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2006, pp. 169-181.

have their own specific properties: “the *Sosein* of an Object is not affected by its *Nichtsein*.”³ Meinong concludes that “the totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the Objects of knowledge.”⁴ Similarly, he argues that neither the science of the real, nor the science of being, no matter how universal, can be considered the science of objects par excellence: “the sciences of being in general, including the one which has to do generally with whatever is actual, are inadequate to the task of the science of Objects.”⁵ In effect, Meinong aims at defining a condition of Objectivity which encompasses both cognition and representation.

Charles Sanders Peirce revises the notion of ontology through his theories of signs. For Peirce, knowledge is the product of signs which are determined by the objects to which they refer and by the interpretation of the sign/object relation our thought produces.

A sign is such, whether it is “of the nature of a significant quality, or something that once uttered is gone forever, or an enduring pattern, like our sole definite article; whether it professes to stand for a possibility, for a single thing or event, or for a type of things or of truths; whether it is connected with the thing, be it truth or fiction, that it represents, by imitating it, or by being an effect of its object, or by a convention or habit; whether it appeals merely to feeling, like a tone of voice, or to action, or to thought; whether it makes its appeal by sympathy, by emphasis, or by familiarity; whether it is a single word, or a sentence, or is Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*; whether it is interrogatory, imperative, or assertory; whether it is of the nature of a jest, or is sealed and attested, or relies upon artistic force”⁶.

Both Meinong’s and Peirce’s positions, also given these two philosophers’ interest in language, evidence how social ontology originates, and is deeply rooted, in the profound transformations which affected metaphysics between the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

2. Some issues under debate. Searle’s theory becomes more and more known worldwide, and it is doubtless the mainstream theory of social ontology (at least in the post-analytical tradition), even if actual research in this domain is engaged in critic confrontation with it, posing at issue some

³ A. Meinong, “On The Theory of Objects” in *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. by R.M. Chisolm, trans. by I. Levi, D.B. Terrel, R.M. Chisolm. Glencoe: Free Press, 1960, p. 82.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁶ C.S. Peirce, “Pragmatism”, MS 318, 1907, in *The Essential Peirce 2 (1893-1913)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 403.

of its main concepts. Searle's approach continues to shape the debate, but his construction is more and more sharply dissected, both in its details and in its general assumptions. Furthermore, new perspectives, not rooted in analytical tradition, are taking place, so that not only alternative answers, but alternative questions are arising. Our volume clearly shows this situation, namely for two basic issues of social ontology: firstly, the relation to Rights and Politics, and then the role of language.

Rights and Politics are another frontier for this kind of study, and scholars are now trying to sketch a general account of power, norms and law, but also to apply social ontology's principles to single case studies, comparing their approach with the traditional ones, but also with, for example, Foucault's idea of power, Lakoff's neuropolitics, etc.

Concerning language, we can say that Searle's theory of social ontology springs from the connection of his former reflections on language with his philosophy of mind (and above all, his idea of intentionality), and the link between intentionality and language is the very core of his approach. The idea of performatives as creating reality, rather than simply stating it, has evolved in a conception of Declarations as imposing status functions. Language has been *deconstructed* and reassembled in its components, in order to trace a path from simple intentionality to social reality. An alternative view, as is well known, has been presented by Maurizio Ferraris⁷, taking its start from Derrida's conceptions about language and writing. But it's not the only one which has the right to existence: what if, for instance, we try to apply to these problems the inheritances of the semiotic thought, both in Saussurean and Peircean traditions? We will find, on one hand, the (Saussurean) issue of the relations between the faculty of language and the different idioms which instantiate it, and on the other hand the necessity (shared by every form of semiotic approach) of viewing all institutions as primarily systems of signs, allowing both communication and cognition and constituting human environment even more than the realm of *brute facts*.

3. Some challenges. Concluding these introductory remarks, are we able to delineate some issues that represent what we think the next development of these really core problems could be? We'd like to propose three possible routes.

Firstly, the necessity to account for but not to relegate the object of Social Ontology only inside an analysis of Language in which Social Objects

⁷ The contemporary debate on the last version of it, *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, is only partially mirrored in this volume, for chronological reasons.

arise and by which they are described and put under debate. The analysis and discussion on language theory, time by time in question (so not necessarily always the same), must be put together within the logical and the epistemological fields from which each single linguistic position comes.

In this way we can account for the *objects* in the social space and in each social field by a complex point of view that doesn't identify Ontology as being distinguished from the process itself of creating and describing *realities*; a process in which the researcher is not a simple observer, and that isn't only a linguistic process, but also an epistemological and logical one.

Secondly and directly connected with the former point, the necessity not to consider Social Sciences (from Law studies to Sociology, from Political Analysis to Historical and widely Philosophical instances) merely as derived products of the reflections about language. These sciences give, and at the same time are, possibilities and constraints to Language Theories according to the instance that *real* subjects live the social spaces that are objectified by Social Ontology: subjects that have to be considered as social relational objects themselves.

Social Sciences and Language Theories are different languages themselves which, working together, let the social emerge when the subjects put it as a problem, giving it the form of a reality.

Thirdly, resuming the first two issues and synthesizing them we can put under debate the number of realities in question and their natures themselves. Is it correct to speak of *reality*, *world* and *nature* as the same thing inside an ontology of any type? If we state a difference among *brute facts*, *social facts*, *x fact*, *etc.*, inside an Ontology that postulates only one world, we make a fragmentation of the Ontology itself into particular different ontologies.

Is it possible that the only reason to assume these different kinds of *objects* as connected among them, is the principle of that division itself (falling into a circularity)? If there is only one world, there also has to be only one ontology, considered as the set of the objects of that world. If it seems so problematic, is it possible to distinguish *nature*, *world* and *reality*?

One proposal to discuss for the present and future is to consider single realities in a sort of tension-relation with the world as a product of the interaction among subjects and nature. In this way it would be possible to describe each discipline as a single language (or linguistic game as we would rather say), as a single real dimension of the world itself, in order to give a complex and dynamic description and analysis of (what we call) the tension among language theories, epistemological moment, logical constraints and social sciences' constructions.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS

OUTLINE FOR A SOCIAL ONTOLOGY: A SKETCH AND AN ANALYSIS

ALFREDO GIVIGLIANO^{*}

The infinite bustle of Nature of a summer's noon,
or her infinite silence of a summer's night,
gives utterance to no dogma.
They do not say to us even with a seer's assurance,
that this or that law is immutable
and so ever and only can the universe exist.
But they are the indifferent occasion
for all things and the annulment of all laws
—H.D. Thoreau, April 19, 1840

there are, besides, real *vagues*,
and especially, real *possibilities*
—C.S. Peirce, 1905

0. Walking toward the wood

In this paper we present a model of *social ontology* through three steps. The first one is a comparison with J.R. Searle's ideas on *social ontology*. The second is a sketch of an outline for *social ontology* according to a *relational processual complex approach*. In the third we present some consequences of the comparison of our approach and Searle's theory.

We can think about what *social* is and how it rises, emerges and/or is made in a plurality of different ways; ways that sometimes overlap each other, sometimes are strictly distinguished, sometimes shade off one another. According to the specific scientific and/or philosophical fields in which we move, we also have many different theoretical and/or heuristic and/or methodological instruments to account for our ideas of social reality. The third consideration is that we can never exclude taking care of a comparison with the dimension of common sense in this thought task.

We can find the *reason* and the *motive*, the *cause* and the *because* of

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this in our (social) position and its (social) trajectory in, through, and according to the (social) space: in the dynamic processuality that lets us see in which way these positions are in tension with the fields that they contribute to, construct, and modify, and by which the positions are also co-constructed and modified.

We consider SocialPosition as the set of SocialMeanings that describes and makes the SocialSubject himself in his being in tension with SocialStructures by, through, and according to SocialRelations: designing a complex and processual tension.

1. A comparison with J.R. Searle

J.R. Searle has an idea of what the *social* is according to a point of view that involves common sense. A common sense not problematized or analysed in a philosophical or sociological way, but a common sense he uses looking what there is around him, when he lives it, and then trying to explain what he lives in the terms of what he has theoretically constructed, as well as a presupposition and as a justification of it. He describes what is the *social reality*, and in which way it is constructed/made, starting from the positions of the philosophers that want to tell us how we have to think and use the concepts: in a way that is the right way¹.

We can identify two points to discuss as consequences of this first description.

1.1 The first point regards some considerations about the relation among Philosophy and sciences, in particular Philosophy and Sociology. According to us it is impossible to speak about *social ontology* outside a perspective that is together philosophically and sociologically based; obviously we can do it, but it's not the right way to account for it. Someone who speaks about *social ontology* can't avoid presenting his description inside a framework that declines sociological themes and objects (in a sociological way²) as well as philosophical ones (in its proper style)³. It

¹ Probably this is the *habitus* of every philosopher. What we'd like to underline here in Searle's thought is the absence, according to us, of the tension among *doubt* and *beliefs* following Peirce's analysis of methods. Cfr. Peirce, 1878.

² That is not a pure social statistic way.

³ Here we present a perspective sociologically and philosophically based according to our *social trajectory* in the *field* of Science and Philosophy. Of course it is possible, it is necessary, to do the same thing underlining and presenting the way in which other *Social Sciences* and Philosophy shade off one another, in a different respect to Searle who works only in a Philosophy of language (*his own philosophy*

would be like speaking about the philosophical dimension of Physics without taking care of what physical objects are inside the fields of Physics itself. This separation and fragmentation of scientific disciplines and philosophical perspectives and analysis isn't able to design the dynamic and complex process regarding knowledge and its development about the *social* (and its *ontology*), except if we are in search of a mere interpretation in spite of an account of the process itself. This type of interpretation is the dark side of the semiotic thought. An interpretation completely divided from a process of construction of *real* realities⁴, that isn't able to account of the process of the objectification of the objectified; an interpretation completely imposed by the outside without any tension-relation with the object to interpret: an interpretation that becomes an imposition of sense.

According to this description we can remember the first part of the answer given by P. Bourdieu to L.J.D. Wacquant to a question concerning language:⁵

Yes. I have spent my entire life fighting arbitrary boundaries that are pure products of academic reproduction and have no epistemological foundation whatsoever, between sociology and anthropology, sociology and history, sociology and linguistics, the sociology of art and the sociology of education, the sociology of sport and the sociology of politics etc. Here again is a situation where the transgression of disciplinary boundaries is a prerequisite for scientific advance.⁶

1.1.1 Searle tries to use, construct, and propose a point of view that is, according to him, completely philosophically based. He wants to develop a perspective that is the foundation of the *Philosophy of Society*.⁷ He underlines that the interest for *social ontology* is something recent, but this is true only by his particular language based perspective, according to his core ideas, namely declarations, collective intentionality, and status functions. He should remember that from a sociological point of view⁸ the question on *social ontology* is one of the themes that arose when sociology

of language) perspective. We present a *habit*.

⁴ Cfr. Peirce, 1898, § 6.203.

⁵ A node we'll develop soon.

⁶ Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992, pp. 148-149. We'll see in which way the epistemological consideration advocated by Bourdieu can't be separated by an ontological one as Searle would like it to be.

⁷ Cfr. Searle, 2010.

⁸ A point of view on these arguments really closely connected with philosophical constructions, in a process of mutual influence that takes at the same time distinguished and connected Philosophy and Sociology with wide spaces in common.

was born, and never dismissed during its development. Searle doesn't admit these constructions only because the authors he quotes don't use (some years before Searlean books) what he thinks about language.

In giving an account of language, I will try to overcome the curse of all social (and political) theorizing from Aristotle to Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel to Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault. All of the philosophers of politics and society that I know of take language for granted. They all assume that we are language-speaking animals and then they are off and running with an account of society, social facts, ideal types, political obligation, the social contract, communicative action, validity claims, discursive formations, the habitus, bio-power, and all the rest of it.⁹

We think that this idea is wrong, as well as if we say that Aristotle didn't speak about logic because he didn't use the Zermelo-Fraenkel axiomatic theory. In fact, the remark Searle makes about the missing description of what language is, is false. For example, according to Durkheim's description, language is a social fact and so we know what language is; or concerning Comte, who, for the word *positive* used a declination based on a tension among common sense (in an implicit way), ordinary language (spoken by the *vulgo*) and scientific language (as *positive* itself)¹⁰. The difference consists of the perspective by which the question about *what language is* is answered, and when Searle continues his argumentation we find something worse.

It may seem odd that I claim that Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault take language for granted, because they all have a great deal to say about it and they recognize its importance for their philosophical/sociological research. But the problem with all of them is that they do not tell us what language

⁹ Searle, 2010, p. 62. When he uses the expression "social (and political)" he falls into the same error that he imputes to the *current* courses of *Philosophy of the social sciences*; the contents of these courses presented by Searle (C.G. Hempel, and J. Rawls) are probably the contents developed in the United States universities, but there are many others countries in which *Philosophy of the social sciences* is an etiquette for teaching really different arguments, and *Philosophy of language* is often an etiquette to present many (really different) authors and arguments also in contrast with Searle's theoretical position. Another consideration is that he probably forgets that *taking language for granted* is a specific philosophical position in *Philosophy of language*. It is also interesting that A. Schütz widely uses the notion of *taken for granted* for his account of the world, cfr. Muzzetto, 2006.

¹⁰ We have presented our ideas about language and Sociology, discussing these and many others sociologists' constructions inside, through and by a Peircean analysis in terms of an articulation of the hypoicons in Givigliano, 2006.

is. They take it for granted that we already know what language is and go on from there.¹¹

This is clearly false. In fact in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (that we have formerly quoted)¹² to a question asked by Wacquant “Your analysis of language, then is not an accidental “incursion” into the domain of linguistics but, rather, the extension, into a new empirical realm, language and speech or discursive practices more generally (including those of linguists), of the method of analysis you have applied to other cultural products”,¹³ Bourdieu answered:

I think that one cannot fully understand language without placing linguistic practices within the full universe of compossible practices: eating and drinking habits, cultural consumptions, taste in matter of arts, sports, dress, furniture, politics, etc. For it is the whole class habitus, that is, the synchronic and diachronic position occupied in the social structure, that express itself through the linguistic habitus which is but one of its dimensions. *Language is a technique of the body*, and linguistic (and especially phonological) competency is a dimension of body *hexis* in which the whole relation to the social world expresses itself.¹⁴

And if that isn’t enough, Bourdieu said:

I now come to the concepts, the words, and the methods that the “profession” employs to speak about, and to think, the social world. Language poses a particularly dramatic problem for the sociologist: it is in effect an immense repository of naturalized preconstructions, and thus of preconstructions that are ignored as such and which can function as unconscious instruments of construction.¹⁵

1.1.1.1 When Bourdieu uses the word *preconstructions* to contextualize what he is saying, he writes a footnote with a double quotation that

¹¹ Searle, 2010, p. 62.

¹² Published in English 3 years before *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), 11 years before the International Conference to remember Bourdieu organized by the Collège de France (2003) where Searle participated with a contribution, and 18 years before *Making the Social World* (2010).

¹³ Bourdieu, Wacquant, 1992, p. 148.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, p. 149. This is the continuation of the quotation we have formerly presented concerning the impossibility and inconsistency of boundaries. Bourdieu also underlines in a footnote that the term *technique of the body* is used according with M. Mauss’ description.

¹⁵ *Ivi*, p. 241.

presents *in practice* his rejection of rigid boundaries: the first is by L. Wittgenstein and the second by N. Elias:

Or, in Wittgenstein's (1977:18) words, "Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings." This view is shared by Elias (1978a: 111) who counts "inherited structures of speech and thought" among the most serious obstacles to a science of society: "The means of speaking and thinking available to sociologists at present are for the most part unequal to the task we ask them to perform." He points out a particular, following Benjamin Lee Whorf, that Western languages tend to foreground substantives and objects at the expense of relations and to reduce processes to static conditions.¹⁶

1.2 The second point regards what Searle says when he writes "We are just talking about one reality, and we have to explain how the human reality fits into that one reality" (Searle 2010, pp. ix-x). According to us, there are two points that are really problematic in this description. The first point is about the presumed *one reality*. The second point concerns what Searle means when, starting from the former point, he infers that *human reality fits into that one reality*. If he says *how*, he assumes that it happens in some way. It seems that there is a problem with the number of realities, if *one reality* (human reality) has to be fitted into another *one* (the *one* he assumes), and at the same time we are speaking about only *one reality*. We now present an answer to these problems through our description of *SocialReality*.

2. A sketch of an outline for *social ontology*: the *relational complex* approach

We speak about *SocialReality* in the light of a description and analysis of the *SocialObjects* by a perspective that we describe as a *relational processual complex* approach. We introduce the terminology *SocialReality*, *SocialObjects*, *SocialSubjects*, *SocialRelations*, *SocialStructures* etc. not for an instance of a presumed originality for originality sake, but as these terms themselves work as a *relational processual complex* dynamic between form and content¹⁷.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*. The references presented by Bourdieu are in our final bibliography Wittgenstein, 1977 and Elias, 1970. Wittgenstein and Elias are, under some respects each, two authors whose constructions contribute to our approach.

¹⁷ Cfr. Peirce, 1903.

2.1 We think that using the terms *social reality*, *social objects*, *social subjects*, *social relations*, *social structures* etc. let us fall in to an abyss of a form of dichotomic thought, given by a precise logic framework from which it is impossible to escape¹⁸; an abyss given by the relations of a bivalent logic framework with the theoretical constructions, the methodological assumptions, and the heuristic declinations regarding the objects in focus¹⁹. Searle's position is:

All human social institutions are brought into existence and continue in their existence by a single logico-linguistic operation that can be applied over and over again. I will explain in this chapter and in the next one in what sense language is constitutive of institutional reality, and consequently in what sense all human institutions are essentially linguistic.²⁰

On the contrary, we agree with Bourdieu, when he says:

Those who are surprised by the paradoxes that ordinary logic and language engender when they apply their divisions to continuous magnitudes forget the paradoxes inherent in treating language as a purely logical instrument and also forget the social situation in which such a relationship to language is possible.²¹

2.2 According to our approach, there is only one nature. The tension among one, two, three realities²² is resolved, or better, isn't at any case a problem, because there is a distinction among *reality*, *world*, and *nature*²³. These are not synonymous with each other, but they describe, present, and represent the different ways by which each theoretical posi-

¹⁸ Instead of what Searle thinks, there is a form of knowledge and thinking that tries to describe and analyse what we call *SocialReality* differently from the *philosophy tout court* and the *philosophy of social sciences* he presents. And we don't agree either with M. Ferraris when calls Searle's theory the *standard theory*, cfr. Ferraris, 2008, p. 479.

¹⁹ According to us, one of the more relevant examples of this dynamic among logic, theory, methodology and heuristic declination is given by Bourdieu. We don't think that Bourdieu's thought is dichotomic and bivalent, and we use in our analysis a lecture of Bourdieu's work starting from this consideration.

²⁰ Searle, 2010, pp. 62-63.

²¹ Bourdieu, 1979, p. 476.

²² The tension advocated by Searle.

²³ A distinction not present in Searle's thought. It is impossible to take together a realist instance about one reality and a constructivistic instance about the *mechanism* of production of *social objects*, as we think Searle wants to do, without a change in the logic and in the epistemological framework.

tion has declined the ontological instance regarding its specific *field of pertinence*; doing this in a way that time by time has been presented as the core of the discourse alternatively: the nature, the world, the reality. We think that there is a way to describe these *objects* together and distinguished at the same. We underline now three moments of this dynamical process that allow us to describe the *SocialReality*: a *real ontological dimension* constructed by and made of *SocialSubjects*, *SocialStructures*, *SocialRelations* which are, at the same time, made by the *SocialReality*.

2.2.1 *The knowledge question.* We adopt the perspective of the researcher who wants to answer the question about *social reality*; a question that is a knowledge-related one, according to the fact that, if we ask ourselves what something is, we want to know because it is relevant for us in some respect. Our starting point is always a knowledge question inside an ontological perspective. These two moments are not divisible; if we want we can underline the first or the second moment, time by time, concerning the point of view that we assume each time, but this is a reduction of the complexity that makes things easier and/or different at the same time. In living everyday life affairs, we never ask ourselves what a single object is, or if it is a social object or a physical one, if it belongs to one reality or two, etc. The knowledge question is due to our positions in the *Social-Spaces* and in the specific *fields* we are taking care of; it results from our tension between *doubt* and *beliefs*²⁴.

2.2.1.1 It is interesting noting that “The logic of research is an intermeshing of major or minor problems which force us to ask ourselves at every moment what we are doing and permit us gradually to understand more fully what we are seeking, by providing the beginnings of an answer, which will suggest new, more fundamental and more explicit questions”²⁵.

2.2.2 *The objectification of the objectified.* Focusing on the knowledge question, we have the necessity to go beyond the dichotomy, the false dichotomy, between objectivity and phenomenology. These are two faces²⁶ of the complex dynamic process we are discussing: the *construction* moment produces a *real* moment from which begins another *constructing* step, and so on. We have to place under debate this process itself each time. We have an example of this construction of something real when Bourdieu says:

²⁴ Cfr. Peirce, 1878.

²⁵ Bourdieu, 1984, p. 7.

²⁶ It is impossible to separate them from each other.

One cannot avoid having to objectify the objectifying subject. It is by turning to study the historical conditions of his own productions, rather than by some form or other of transcendental reflection, that the scientific subject can gain a theoretical control over his own structures and inclinations as well as over the determinants whose products they are, and can thereby gain the concrete means of reinforcing his capacity for objectification.²⁷

2.2.3 *The tension among nature, world and reality.* When a knowledge question rises, it is a co-construction of a single ontological dimension, due to the tension-relation between the *SocialSubject*, who formulates the question, and the world in which he lives; a world that is, at the same time, the everyday life world and his own scientific field. In the everyday life world the researcher is someone who lives ordinary affairs and someone who wants to know things in a scientific way, he is a member of the everyday life world, but he is also a member of his scientific field. Through these relations with the *world* the researcher co-constructs *ontological dimensions* made of *real objects*²⁸. This is done *also* by, in function of, and through, the language (the constructions and uses of each scientific language): we can say that any scientific discipline is, at the same time, a real *ontological dimension* and a *language*. So we can speak of *SocialObjects*, *PhysicalObjects*, etc. that are *real objects*, and at the same time are different from the *objects* in the world. Regarding the *objects* in the world, we can say only that we are in tension with them to co-construct these *ontological dimensions*, but we don't analyse or speak about them in our scientific fields. Another difference between our approach and Searle's is that the language is not and does not give a mechanistic procedure to take care of what social objects are.

3. Some consequences comparing *relational processual complex* approach and Searle's theory

In the first pages of *Making the Social World*, when he presents the purpose of the book, Searle describes his own conceptual apparatus. This apparatus is the last step (at this moment) of his theoretical journey through Philosophy. He presents it both as the core of his argument and as the necessary presupposition and guideline to his declination of the problems concerning the construction of the social reality; declination based on

²⁷ Bourdieu, 1984, p. xii.

²⁸ As well as introducing the term *physical* we co-construct in tension with the world an *ontological dimension* that is the *real PhysicalReality*. Constructivism and realism are simultaneously present in the *process* of construction of realities.

the assumed distinction among different types of sciences that have to take care of reality as a unique object. In his words:

This work proceeds on the basis of a certain methodological assumption: at the very beginning we have to assume that human society, a society that is importantly different from all other animal societies known to me, is based on certain rather simple principles. Indeed, I will argue that its institutional structures are based on exactly one principle. The enormous complexities of human society are different surface manifestations of an underlying commonality. It is typical of domains where we have a secure understanding of the ontology that there is a single unifying principle of that ontology. In physics it is the atom, in chemistry it is the chemical bond, in biology it is the cell, in genetics it is the DNA molecule, and in geology it is the tectonic plate.²⁹

We can identify, under different respects³⁰, 6 problematic nodes in these words:

- i. this work proceeds on the basis of a certain methodological assumption;
- ii. at the very beginning we have to assume that human society, a society that is importantly different from all other animal societies known to me, is based on certain rather simple principles;
- iii. I will argue that its institutional structures are based on exactly one principle;
- iv. the enormous complexities of human society are different surface manifestations of an underlying commonality;
- v. it is typical of domains where we have a secure understanding of

²⁹ Searle, 2010, pp. 6-7.

³⁰ Some examples of these respects are: Searle's description involves a tension among Cartesian and Peircean points of view on science, methodology and certainty; the distinction between human subjects and animals, and whether it is right to speak about *animal society* when *society* as *object* belongs completely to human ontological dimension; a problematic discussion of the term manifestations: it is a form of representations, presentations, constructions, etc. or something different from all of these; the close connection of the former respect with the tension among our approach, Searle's position and for example *structural realism* (cfr. Landry, Rickles (eds.), 2012), *critical realism* (cfr. Bhaskar, 1979; Bhaskar (2002) 2012; Archer, 1995), and *relational sociology* (Donati, 2011a, 2011b); we can't forget to underline that, when he speaks about physics, chemistry, biology, genetics, or geology, he is also speaking (according to our approach) of *languages*, and when he speaks about an atom, chemical bond, cell, DNA molecule or tectonic plate, he is speaking of (theoretical) constructions in these *languages*.

- the ontology that there is a single unifying principle of that ontology;
- vi. in physics it is the atom, in chemistry it is the chemical bond, in biology it is the cell, in genetics it is the DNA molecule, and in geology it is the tectonic plate.

Here we want to discuss the fifth node.

3.1 *It is typical of domains where we have a secure understanding of the ontology.* Firstly there is no science about which we have a *secure* understanding of its own ontology. Secondly, there is a contradiction here in Searle's thought. He speaks of *domains* so it should be more than one *domain*, but he has affirmed also: "How can we account for our social and mental existence in a realm of brute physical facts? In answering that question, we have to avoid postulating different ontological realms, a mental and a physical, or worse yet, a mental, a physical, and a social"³¹. The problem is whether *domains* and *realms* are the same constructions or different theoretical *objects*³². It sounds strange that before, we have to avoid postulating different realms, and after, we assume different domains. Searle's contradiction is due to his will to keep together, as the same thing³³, the *SocialReality* (instead according to us a *real constructed ontological dimension*, not postulated, but emerged in the *Sociological field*), the *PhysicalReality* (instead according to us a *real constructed ontological dimension*, not postulated but emerged in the *Physic field*) and the *world*³⁴. The Searlean necessity to fit one reality into another returns here.

3.2 This is a consequence of the answer Searle gives to what he calls the *fundamental question in contemporary philosophy*: "How, if at all, can we reconcile a certain conception of the world as described by physics, chemistry, and the other basic sciences with what we know, or think we know, about ourselves as human beings?"³⁵. If we have to reconcile these conceptions it means that they are in some way epistemologi-

³¹ Searle, 2010, p. ix.

³² Searle doesn't give a description of the terms *realm* and *domain* or of the relation between them.

³³ That are based on the same *basic facts*.

³⁴ Paradoxically it seems that Searle tries to follow Comte's classification of sciences with its own relation among the data of each science with the assertions of the upper one.

³⁵ Searle, 2010, p. 3. These of Searle's words sound a little bit strange also if we remember "And hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule", Wittgenstein 1953, § 202.

cally distinguished, in fact it is done starting from physics and chemistry according to their own knowledge assumptions. But Searle refuses to inscribe his analysis in an epistemological context, and he gives two conditions of adequacy to be able to answer this question according to his perspective.

3.2.1 *First condition of adequacy.* “we must not allow ourselves to postulate two worlds or three worlds or anything of the sort. Our task is to give an account of how we live in exactly one world, and how all of these different phenomena, from quarks and gravitational attraction to cocktail parties and governments, are part of that world”³⁶. Again there is the problem of postulating, but the *construction* of the *SocialReality* as we have seen is not a *postulating* practice, to the contrary of Searle’s assumptions. There is also another problem. In contemporary Physics, *in the ontological dimension of Physics*, there is a problem of taking *quarks* and *gravitational attraction* together. In quantum physics, there is a problem accounting for gravity attraction, a problem not yet solved: in this regard physics uses the expression *problem of dimension of observational level*³⁷. Quarks and gravitational attraction are constructs in a theory. Is it the certainty Searle speaks about?

3.2.2 *Second condition of adequacy.* According with the first condition it is really hard now to understand how we have to “respect the basic facts of the structure of the universe. These basic facts are given by physics and chemistry, by evolutionary biology and the other natural sciences”³⁸. What are the *basic facts* if we neither know if the structure of the *universe* is *quantum* based or *string* based?

3.2.3 According to Searle, it is possible to answer the fundamental question in the following way: “We need to show how all the other parts of reality are dependent on, and in various ways derive from, the basic facts. For our purposes the two most fundamental sets of basic facts are atomic theory of matter and the evolutionary theory of biology”³⁹. His perspective is really clear if we compare this answer with the assumption that “We have to show how everything we say is not only consistent with but in various ways derived from and dependent on the basic facts”⁴⁰. Firstly,

³⁶ Searle, 2010, p. 3.

³⁷ Cfr. Lindley, 2007; Woit, 2006.

³⁸ Searle, 2010, p. 4.

³⁹ Searle, 2010, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Searle, 2010, p. 4.

the *basic facts* are epistemological objects, they are *inside* a theory. Secondly, we can make a comparison between these propositions of Searle's, and the result is that *all the other parts of reality are everything we say*. The single principle advocated by Searle rises inside the contradictions we have seen.

3.2.3.1 The idea of a single principle that we can put under debate, also through a consideration that changes the role and the function of language described by Searle, exactly in his starting point, given by the basic facts of Physics:

When one speaks today of modern physics, the first thought is of atomic weapons. Everybody realizes the enormous influence of these weapons on the political structure of our present world and is willing to admit that the influence of physics on the general situation is greater than it ever has been before. But is the political aspect of modern physics really the most important one? When the world has adjusted itself in its political structure to the new technical possibilities, what then will remain of the influence of modern physics?⁴¹

3.3 The last consideration with regards to what Searle calls *brute facts* is: "Some facts exist independently of any human institution. I call these brute facts. But some facts require human institutions in order to exist at all. An example of a brute fact is that Earth is 93 million miles from the sun, and an example of institutional fact is that Barack Obama is president of the United States"⁴². The number 93 million is not a *brute fact* but an *object of the MathematicalReality* as an *ontological dimension*; the mile is not a *brute fact* but an *object of the PhysicalReality* as an *ontological dimension*. They are epistemological and ontological constructs not present in the *world* as Searle would like; they are constructed human institutions, *real* in their *ontological dimensions*.

4. Inside the wood

We can find something interesting in the words of J. Ive to compare with Searle's constructions and ours. Ive is perhaps one of the few men really inside, understanding, and sharing the *reality distortion field* of S. Jobs.

⁴¹ Heisenberg, 1958, 32.

⁴² Searle, 2010, p. 10.

Why do we assume that simple is good? Because with physical products, we have to feel we can dominate them. As you bring order to complexity, you find a way to make the product defer to you. Simplicity isn't just a visual style. It's not just minimalism or the absence of clutter. It involves digging through the depth of the complexity. To be truly simple, you have to go really deep. For example, to have no screws on something, you can end up having a product that is so convoluted and so complex. The better way is to go deeper with the simplicity, to understand everything about it and how it's manufactured. You have to deeply understand the essence of a product in order to be able to get rid of the parts that are not essential⁴³

At first glance it seems that these words are an example of what Searle says; simplicity against complexity, the necessity to base our constructions physically, the mechanistic point of view according to a thing's function. But, if we look closer, we note certain words: "It's not just minimalism or the absence of clutter" and "It involves digging through the depth of the complexity". We can't reduce the complexity of the process of co-construction of the *ontological dimension* of *SocialReality* to a process causally based, as in Searle's *Status Functions Declarations*. There's no simplest way to co-construct things, other than showing plainly the complexity of what is complex. The *real* simplicity *in practice* is the complexity of what is complex. Otherwise, we will fall in to Thoreau's prophecy:

The universe will not wait to be explained. Whoever seriously attempts a theory of it is already behind his age. His yea has reserved no nay for the morrow.

The wisest solution is no better than dissolution. Already the seer whispers his convictions to bare walls; no audience in the land can attend to them.⁴⁴

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⁴³ Isaacson, 2011, p. 199.

⁴⁴ Thoreau, 1906, pp. 133-134.

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DOCUMENTALITÀ AND INTERSUBJECTIVITY: SEARLE VS. FERRARIS?

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Abstract The present paper questions the validity of Maurizio Ferraris' critique of Searle's development of social ontology. The article compares both Searle's and Ferraris' positions in the attempt to stress the critical and problematic issues informing the latter's views. The paper finally seeks to offer a better interpretation of Ferraris' thought.

The present article explicitly questions the validity of Maurizio Ferraris' critique of Searle's 'construction' of social ontology. Ferraris has principally developed such a critique in his two books *Documentalità* (2009) and *Anima e Ipad* (2011). In both works, Ferraris attempts to correct what he considers a series of misinterpretations which have so far prevented theorists from developing a true social ontology. The Italian philosopher critically engages the works in which Searle attempts to elaborate and elucidate the tenets of social ontology: *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), and *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization* (2010).

The third chapter of the volume *Documentalità. Perché è necessario lasciar tracce* is dedicated to social objects. Here, after clarifying the distinction between ontology and epistemology, Ferraris seeks to provide a definitive formulation of his views concerning the ontological value of social objects. He then moves on to illustrate the reality these objects determine (in relation to different speculative positions which Ferraris defines according to a series of peculiar properties which I will soon examine). As the title suggests, my paper aims to discuss the main arguments that constitute Ferraris' critique of Searle and, in particular, of Searle's description of the structural dynamics that give rise to social reality. Subsequently, I will illustrate, albeit in passing, the links existing between the issue of 'social

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reality' and that of intersubjectivity in order to stimulate a more accurate and thorough reflection on such issues.

In order to highlight the value of his theoretical approach called "weak textualism", Ferraris focuses on a critique of strong realism, weak realism, and strong textualism.¹ I am particularly concerned with Ferraris' criticism of Searle's position, defined as "weak realism", insofar as such a form of realism cannot arguably be dismissed in the same fashion as the others. In effect, both "strong realism" (which claims that social objects are not socially constructed) and "strong textualism" (affirming that every object is socially constructed), have been mistakenly developed (as both Searle and Ferris acknowledge) in the absence of any distinction between ontology and social ontology.²

Indeed, for both thinkers, social ontology is subordinated to epistemology. As Searle affirms in relation to this issue: "For our present discussion two senses are crucial, an *epistemic sense* of the objective-subjective distinction and an *ontological sense*."³ Similarly, Ferrari argues that:

In effetti, una volta che si sia distinta l'ontologia dall'epistemologia, si ottengono due risultati importanti. Primo, si mostra quali sfere d'essere risultino intrinsecamente dipendenti dall'epistemologia – e si tratta degli oggetti sociali, non degli oggetti naturali, sebbene qui l'epistemologia non riguarda le credenze giustificate che nascono in ambito scientifico, bensì quelle appunto che si generano nell'ambito delle interazioni sociali e delle istituzioni. Negli oggetti sociali l'ontologia risulta sistematicamente subordinata a una epistemologia.⁴

Weak textualism and strong realism are rooted in the same logic. Why, then, the disagreement between Ferraris and Searle? The reason for Ferraris' critique lies in his description of social objects.

According to the Italian thinker, social objects possess four principal characteristics: 1) they belong to a social sphere clearly distinct from the

¹ Cfr. Ferraris, 2009, p. 153.

² Cfr. Ferraris, 2009, pp. 134-152; Searle, 2006, pp. 12-15.

³ Searle (1995), p. 8.

⁴ "In effect, once we have separated ontology from epistemology, we achieve two significant results. First, we are able to show which dimensions of being are intrinsically dependent on epistemology – that is social objects, not natural objects, although within such a context epistemology does not concern the affirmation of justified beliefs within science. Rather, epistemology concerns those convictions and beliefs arising from social interactions and institutions. Ontology is systematically subordinated to epistemology when it comes to social objects." Ferraris, 2009, p. 134.

natural one (Vico); 2) they are located within an intersubjective sphere (Reid); 3) they are the product of a performative act; 4) they are determined not simply by a linguistic act, but by an inscribed act.⁵ With the exception of the third point (the one concerning performative acts), Ferraris' specific critique of Searle's theory focuses on the remaining characteristics of social objects. I will start by looking at the first and fourth points as they are strictly interconnected. Both Searle and Ferraris agree on the fact that social objects belong to a social sphere distinct from the natural sphere. Yet, Ferraris criticises the fact that, according to Searle's formula ("X counts as Y in C")⁶, social objects are always and exclusively founded on physical objects⁷.

Therefore, to say that a physical object "counts as", i.e. by investing it with a *status* function, would entail that only physical objects functioning as social objects exist. Ferraris uses "the debt" as one of the most significant examples to support this view. The debt has a social function, yet its genesis shouldn't be read through Searle's formula, as it lacks any reference to a physical object.⁸ Hence, weak textualism proposes a new formula "Object=Inscribed Act". This new formula, which is premised on the principle (inspired by Derrida) that "no social thing exists outside a text" would validate the existence of social objects even as they lack any reference to physical objects. Moreover, it would confirm that social objects exist not simply within language, but within memory: "gli oggetti sociali sono il risultato di atti sociali registrati, anchesemplicemente nella testa delle persone."⁹

I find Ferraris' argumentation rather unconvincing and believe that his criticism does not succeed in fully overthrowing Searle's theory. In my view, as far as the relation between social and physical objects is concerned, the example of the debt does not suffice to demonstrate the possi-

⁵ Ferraris, 2009, p. 141.

⁶ Searle (1995), p. 28; Searle (2008), p. 452; Searle (2010), p. 19. In his subsequent replies to the objections moved to his theory, Searle seems to preserve the validity of this formula even in his most recent elaborations of the construction of social reality, cfr. Searle (2010), pp. 19-24.

⁷ Ferraris, 2009, p. 161.

⁸ I would argue that the criticism informing *Anima e iPad*, which was meant to correct the 'misinterpretations' in Searle 2010, should be read within the same purview as Ferraris 2009. In effect, Ferraris' latest work also bases its criticism of Searle's theory on the question of collective intentionality: cft. Ferraris (2011), pp. 96-100.

⁹ "Social objects result from social acts that are inscribed, even if only in people's minds." Ferraris, 2009, p. 181.