THE OUTSIDER: MAKING THE EXISTENTIAL TRADITION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY COME ALIVE

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ABSTRACT

Albert Camus (1913-1960), recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, was one of France's greatest post-war writers. He published his first novel, The Outsider *(*L'Etranger*), in 1942. Given that* The Outsider *is widely regarded as a classic existentialist work, the following research question is posed in this article: How, and to what extent, does the existential tradition of communication theory feature in the mentioned work? The Penguin edition of the novel (translated from the French by Joseph Laredo and published in 1983) is used in the study. With regard to the methodology used, the study necessitated in the main research of literature on* The Outsider*, existentialism and existential communication. The methods employed were analytical in order to determine the relationship between* The Outsider*, existentialism and existential communication; and critical, for purposes of highlighting aspects of the existential tradition of communication theory that can be read in the novel. A brief summation of the storyline is provided with particular focus on the communication of the protagonist, Meursault, followed by Camus's short interpretation of the novel which he wrote as a preface to the American university edition in 1955. Thereafter the gist of an existential perspective on communication and some recurring themes in existentialism are provided to facilitate and contextualise the ensuing analysis of* The Outsider. *The article concludes that* The Outsider *persuasively captures fundamental traits of the existential tradition of communication theory.*

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INTRODUCTION: A WORD ON ALBERT CAMUS

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was born in what is now called Algeria. He was raised mainly by his grandmother on his mother's side. Camus's father was killed in the First World War before he was one year old. At the age of ten, Camus won a scholarship to study at the Lycée in Algiers, later to be renamed Lycée Albert Camus. He lived in the working-class district of Belcourt in the town of Algiers with his grandmother and mother, a charwoman of Spanish ancestry, as well as his elder brother until, at the age of seventeen, his first attack of tuberculosis forced him to leave home. Thereafter he was to lead an independent life in places where he could better look after himself. He suffered recurrent attacks of tuberculosis throughout his life.

Camus read philosophy at the University of Algiers but for health reasons never wrote the competitive examination which would have qualified him to teach in a lycée. He held journalistic positions in Algiers and later Paris where he joined the Resistance Movement in 1941. A year earlier, in 1940, he married his second wife, Francine Faure, who five years later, gave birth to their twin children.

While the publication of his first novel, *The Outsider* (*L'Etranger*), in 1942 made him well known in French literary circles, Camus's increasing fame in post-war France stemmed essentially from the reputation of his body of literary works, ranging from essays to novels and plays.

Camus did not write literature for a living. When he died in a car accident near Paris in 1960, he had been a reader with the publishing firm of Gallimard for the previous seventeen years. [See Lottman (1981) on Camus's life.]

While Camus never wanted to be branded as an existentialist, he is widely regarded as one of the foremost proponents of existentialism – a philosophy of existence fathered by Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). While existentialism has a long history, it became, especially on the continent of Europe, one of the major forms of philosophy in the 20th century (cf. Billington 1993: 151-152). There are of course specific historical reasons for this. For our purposes, suffice it to say that existentialism has flourished in those countries, such as Camus's France during and after World War Two, where the social structures had been turned upside down and where previously established values had been questioned critically.

In commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Camus's death in 2010, French President Nicolas Sarkozy has indicated that he wishes to have Camus's remains moved from a cemetery in Provence to the Pantheon, the secular temple on the Left Bank in Paris where France lays to rest its greatest men and women. The Left Bank edifice houses Voltaire, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Jean Moulin, Marie Curie and Louis Braille.

RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

Given the fact that Camus is widely regarded as an existentialist, and that *The Outsider*, a masterpiece, was his first novel, the following research question may be posed: Are there traces of, and to what extent are there traces of, the existential tradition of communication theory in the mentioned work?

The aim of the study is therefore to highlight aspects of the existential tradition of communication theory as recorded in *The Outsider*. The Penguin edition of the novel (translated from the French by Joseph Laredo and published in 1983) was used for the study.

To this end, a brief summation of the storyline is provided with particular focus on the communication of the protagonist, Meursault, followed by Camus's interpretation of the novel which he wrote as a preface to the American university edition in 1955. Thereafter the gist of an existential perspective on communication and some recurring themes in existentialism are provided to facilitate and contextualise the ensuing analysis of *The Outsider*.

With regard to the methodology used, the study necessitated in the main research of literature on *The Outsider*, existentialism and existential communication. The methods employed were analytical in order to determine the relationship between *The Outsider*, existentialism and existential communication; and critical, for purposes of highlighting aspects of the existential tradition of communication theory that can be read in the novel.

BRIEF SUMMATION OF THE STORYLINE

From the outset, one acknowledges summaries of the story provided also by Thody (1957), O'Brien (1970) and Masters (1974).

The novel, written in the first person, opens with the words: "Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I had a telegram from the home: 'Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely.' That doesn't mean anything. It may have been yesterday."

Meursault receives the news of his mother's death merely with faint annoyance at having to ask for two days' leave of absence from the office where he works. The opening pages describe Meursault's journey to the home where his mother died, and the funeral. At her funeral he has no sadness or regret, and feels only the physical inconveniences of watching over her body and following the hearse to the cemetery under the burning sun.

The day after the funeral he goes swimming, meets a girl, Marie, whom he had known slightly before, takes her to a *Fernandel* (comedy) film and goes to bed with her that night. Marie would later ask him to marry her, but Meursault shows no more affection for her than he had shown for his mother. His reply to Marie is that he accepts, since it is all the same to him. When she remarked that marriage was a serious matter, he replied that it was not the case.

Meursalt spends the following day (a Sunday) in his room (of a house with many tenants) watching the people in the street below.

At his work, he is more interested in a detail like the pleasant dryness of a hand-towel at midday and its clamminess in the evening than in a possible promotion and transfer to Paris. After a routine day at the office, Meursault meets an elderly neighbour, Salamano, who has a dog which he is in the habit of beating. Then he meets another neighbour called Raymond who asks Meursault whether he was not disgusted by the way that Salamano treated the dog: "I answered no." Raymond asks Meursault to eat with him: "It struck me that this would save my having to cook my dinner, so I said, 'Thanks very much.'"

Raymond asks Meursault's advice on a personal matter. He had been keeping a girl, a Moor, who had "let him down" and he wanted to teach her a lesson. "He wanted to write her a letter 'with insults in it and at the same time things to make her sorry'. When she came back he'd go to bed with her and 'right at the crucial moment' he'd spit in her face and throw her out of the room.' I agreed it wasn't a bad plan; it would punish her all right."

Raymond asks Meursault to write this letter for him and Meursault agrees. Soon afterwards, Meursault and Marie hear thuds and a scream from Raymond's room: "Marie and I went out of the room to see. The woman was still screaming and Raymond still knocking her about. Marie said, wasn't it horrible! I didn't answer. Then she asked me to go and fetch a policeman, but I told her I didn't like policemen."

Raymond is charged with assault and Meursault agrees to act as his witness by saying that she had cheated on Raymond. Later Raymond rings him at the office: "It's like this," he said. "I've been shadowed all morning by some Arabs. One of them's the brother of that girl I had the row with. If you see them hanging round the house when you come back, pass me the word." "I promised to do so."

Meursault gives evidence for Raymond about the girl having been false to him. The police, without checking Meursault's statement, let Raymond off with a warning.

Meursault and Marie are invited by Raymond to spend some time with him at a friend's chalet near the beach. As they were about to leave the house for the bus, Meursault and Raymond observe that some Arabs, including the brother of the girl who Raymond had beaten, were staring at them.

Later, Meursault, Raymond and his friend go to the beach, where they drink and swim. The Arabs had followed them. There is a fight on the beach in which one of the Arabs draws a knife and Raymond is cut on the arm and face. Later on at the beach they (Meursault and Raymond) again meet the Arab who had cut Raymond. Raymond has his revolver and he and Meursault discuss whether to shoot the Arab. Meursault advises against shooting him in cold blood and Raymond gives Meursault his revolver. The Arabs retreat.

On their way back to the chalet, Meursault leaves Raymond and returns to the beach in the noonday glare and heat. He finds the Arab on the beach, and the Arab draws his knife. Almost unconscious, under the blinding sun, of what he is doing, Meursault shoots the Arab and then fires four more shots into his inert body: “And it was like four sharp raps which I gave on the door of unhappiness.”

In the second part of the book, which deals with Meursault’s trial and sentence, Meursault remains as detached and indifferent as he was in the first, equally preoccupied by his own sensations and equally reluctant to pretend to feelings which he does not have. He never thinks of pleading self-defence when accused of the murder of the Arab, and expresses no remorse or feeling of guilt about his victim. His lawyer warns him that the reports of his apparent indifference at his mother’s funeral might prejudice the jury against him, but Meursault refuses to allow lies to be told on his behalf.

The evidence given by certain witnesses of his insensitivity at his mother’s funeral, weighs overwhelmingly against him in his trial. The warden of the home says that he had been surprised by Meursault’s calmness on the day of the funeral in that he did not want to see his mother, that he did not cry once, and that he had left straight after the funeral without paying respects at the grave. What also struck him was that Meursault could not tell one of the undertaker’s men how old his mother was. The caretaker testified that at the home’s mortuary and beside his dead mother he had smoked, slept, and had some white coffee – the custom being that a son must refuse it beside the body of the one who brought him into the world.

The prosecutor emphasises Meursault’s callousness and his connivance with Raymond. As the prosecutor declares to the jury and others: “Has he even expressed any regrets? Never, gentlemen. Not once in front of the examining magistrate did he show any emotion with regard to his abominable crime.” (At this point, Meursault informs the reader that he would have liked to explain to the prosecutor in a friendly way, almost affectionately, that he had never really been able to regret anything. He was always preoccupied by what was about to happen.) The prosecutor alleges that Meursault has no soul and that he had no access to any humanity nor to any of the moral principles which protect the human heart. He argued in conclusion that Meursault had no place in a society whose most fundamental rules he ignored. “I ask you for this man’s head, and I do so with an easy mind,” the prosecutor said.

The defence pleads guilty (of homicide) with extenuating circumstances and argues that the fact that “for one tragic moment he lost his self-control” when killing the Arab should not earn Meursault the death sentence. The court decides otherwise. He is condemned to death. The judge told Meursault that he would be decapitated in a public square in the name of the French people.

While awaiting execution he rejects the chaplain’s offer of religion. Meursault responds almost violently by proclaiming that this absurd life on earth alone is all that is certain and that in it the inevitability of death obliterates all significance. For him, this applies to everyone. And what difference would it make if, after being charged with murder, he were executed because he did not weep at his mother’s funeral, since it all came to the same thing in the end.

The novel ends with Meursault feeling that he had been happy in his life, that he would like to live it all over again, and that he hopes, in order that all may be fulfilled, that there will be many people at his execution and that they will greet him with cries of hatred.

CAMUS ON *THE OUTSIDER*

The following, in Camus's own words, first appeared as the Preface to the American University Edition of *The Outsider* in 1955 and as an Afterword to *The Outsider*, translated by Joseph Laredo in 1982 and published by Penguin in 1983.

> A long time ago, I summed up *The Outsider* in a sentence which I realize is extremely paradoxical: "In our society any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death." I simply meant that the hero of the book is condemned because he doesn't play the game. In this sense, he is an outsider to the society in which he lives, wandering on the fringe, on the outskirts of life, solitary and sensual. And for that reason, some readers have been tempted to regard him as a reject. But to get a more accurate picture of his character, or rather one which conforms more closely to his author's intentions, you must ask yourself in what way Meursault doesn't play the game. The answer is simple: he refuses to lie. Lying is not only saying what isn't true. It is also, in fact especially, saying more than is true and, in the case of the human heart, saying more than one feels. We all do it, every day, to make life simpler. But, contrary to appearances, Meursault doesn't want to make life simpler. He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings and society immediately feels threatened. For example, he is asked to say that he regrets his crime, in time-honoured fashion. He replies that he feels more annoyance about it than true regret. And it is this nuance that condemns him.
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> So for me Meursault is not a reject, but a poor and naked man, in love with a sun which leaves no shadows. Far from lacking all sensibility, he is driven by a tenacious and therefore profound passion, the passion for an absolute and for truth. This truth is as yet a negative one, a truth born of living and feeling, but without which no triumph over the self or over the world will ever be possible.
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> So one wouldn't be far wrong in seeing *The Outsider* as the story of a man who, without any heroic pretensions, agrees to die for the truth. I also once said, and again paradoxically, that I tried to make my character represent the only Christ that we deserve. It will be understood, after these explanations, that I said it without any intention of blasphemy but simply with the somewhat ironic affection that an artist has a right to feel towards the characters he has created.

WHAT IS AN EXISTENTIAL PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION?

From the outset one may note that among the many existentialist writers on communication we can differentiate between those who follow a religious (Christian, Jewish, etc.) or non-religious approach.

Whether one adopts a religious or non-religious existential perspective on communication, the basic starting point is that communication embraces the whole of man[1] (human beings in their totality): it is a mode (way) of existence, an ontological concept of man's being (existence) (Van Schoor 1979: 13).

The existential view of communication transcends the view of communication as a social activity and holds that communication forms the centre of man's existence. Man is what he is in communication; his existence is defined by his ability to remain in communication – not only with others, as a prerequisite for any participation in the social process, but also with himself as a source of genuine feelings and appreciations of his environment (Hardt 1972: 178).

Communication is a mode of existence because it qualifies our existence, it tells something of our way of being. Therefore, the nature and quality of man's mode of existence will depend on the nature and quality of his communication, as manifested in specific forms of communication that he adopts, and which he adheres to predominantly.

In conceptualising man as a communicating being, one also proceeds from the assumption that man needs man and that man is capable of forming a living relationship with people (and with the world).

Guignon and Pereboom (2001: xxv) note:

> Although existentialists are concerned with getting people to recognize their responsibility as individuals, they nevertheless emphasize the fact that the world in which we find ourselves initially is essentially a shared, public life-world, a realm of meanings constituted by our public practices. And this means that, as being-in-the-world, we are at the deepest level participants and place-holders within a social context. It is in terms of a shared "herd consciousness" or "they-self" that we pick up our initial sense of reality, and it is on the basis of our belongingness to the public that we can later strive to discover our identity as individuals. Thus, just as existentialists tend to think that consciousness is an achievement rather than a given, so they hold that our being as individuals is something we make rather than something we find.

But are there different ways of being in communication with others?

Existentialism often distinguishes between two major ways of existing or being in communication with others, that is inauthentic and authentic being-with-others (remembering that it is inherent in man that he simultaneously displays both these modes of existence); and specific ideal-typical forms of communication associated with these modes of existence. In elucidating the argument for the purposes of this article, specific reference is made to selected ideas of Soren Kierkegaard, the father of modern existentialism – even though Kierkegaard was a Christian and Camus an atheist.

The writings of Kierkegaard on the question of inauthentic (and authentic) being-with-others can be related to his exposition of specific spheres of existence, the aesthetic, ethical and religious spheres of existence, and the ideal-typical form of communication predominant in each sphere. In his doctrine on the spheres of existence, Kierkegaard sets forth a philosophy of communication in which he describes the fundamental existential alternatives open to every human being.

For Kierkegaard, man's whole existence is becoming conscious of and realising his self, and it is the extent that he becomes conscious of himself that determines how far he actualises himself (Jansen 1986: 4). Self-actualisation entails self-discovery and self-expression in communication. The different spheres of existence, coupled to their ideal-typical forms of communication, presuppose various levels of self-actualisation, and it is the form of communication in which man predominantly expresses himself that reveals the quality of his existence.

Kierkegaard's aesthetic sphere of existence, to which we are all given at birth, and its concomitant aesthetic communication are representative of an inauthentic being-with-others. Although we normally use the term aesthetic for art, Kierkegaard uses it in its broader sense of anything that refers to the sensual, the immediate, this worldly here-and- now.

Inauthentic being-with-others in communication is a negative concept, but one that is, almost ironically, possibly easier to understand, because man tends to exist inauthentically much of the time.

For Kierkegaard the aesthetic sphere of existence is characterised by a predominant affiliation of man to his external conditions. Here man is overly conscious and desirous of external reality. He feels compelled to enjoy and gratify himself and lives for the moment of gratification. This apparently legitimate goal is a form of self-deception, for it amounts to an emphasis on selfish satisfaction and fulfilment under the guise of being-with-others. The aesthete lives only for the moment, but can never repeat it. He can remember it, but can never relive his experience, so that his life becomes tedious and dull (Jansen 1986: 6). This existence culminates in boredom and ultimately in despair. Although we all start out in life in the aesthetic sphere of existence, self-becoming demands that we adopt a different outlook on life.

An authentic being-with-others is for Kierkegaard adopting an ethical lifestyle. In the ethical sphere man consciously chooses to express his own self, to express what is uniquely his own and to communicate this to others in his own particular way. Man is committed to be the accountable source of his own state and self. The ethical individual knows himself, but this "knowing himself" is not as a result of mere contemplation. More is involved. This knowledge of himself is a reflection upon himself which is in itself an action, and is more accurately reflected in the expression "choose oneself" (see Van Schoor 1980: 30). The ethical sphere of existence contains the core of Kierkegaard's communication concept (see Anderson 1971; Van Schoor 1980: 28). Ethical communication, as the ideal-typical form of communication in the ethical sphere of existence, is not ethical because the message content reveals high moral standards. Communication is ethical only when it is truly expressive of the individual's inwardness, an inwardness that is present in every person. Although Kierkegaard regards the religious sphere of existence as the ultimate sphere of existence (Valone 1983: 191), the ethical existence underlies religious existence.

RECURRING THEMES IN EXISTENTIALISM

Two groups of themes may be identified (cf. Macquarrie 1973; Billington 1993; Guignon & Pereboom 2001; Cox 2009):

- Those which constitute the core of personal being, namely decision, freedom and responsibility; and
- Those which address the tragic elements in human existence, namely alienation, anxiety, guilt, finitude and death.

For existentialists, *decision* for man includes the inwardness and pathos of action – the latter implying that decision is never simply self-fulfilment but it is also self-renunciation. Man fulfils himself also by decisions that may be painful because of what they cut out of his life. As Macquarrie (1973: 142) notes: "…the stress on decision means a corresponding stress on the intensiveness of life rather than its extensiveness. Every decision is a decision against as well as a decision for; and every decision limits the range of possibilities that will be open for future decision."

Freedom for existentialists is almost synonymous with existence. It is the exercise of freedom (or the right to choose) and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all other things on earth. "It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself" (Macquarrie 1973: 4). Freedom implies action and should be understood both as the starting point and the way, and also as the end and the aim – there is therefore a distinction between the freedom that is prior to action and the freedom that is subsequent to it.

To exist as a human being is to go "beyond one's facticity (concrete context with determinate meanings and values laid out by the practices of a particular historical community) by taking it over, interpreting it, and trying to make something of in the light of one's long-range projects. We can through the exercise of our freedom transcend our facticity. To say that we transcend our facticity is to say that we always stand out into an open range of possible courses of action for the future" (Guignon & Pereboom 2001: xxv-xxvi).

It is the *responsibility* of man in his quest for authentic selfhood, which also has a communal dimension, to make the necessary decisions which are reflective of his true self. The emphasis on the individual's own responsibility is arguably the most valuable and enduring contribution of existentialism (Guignon & Pereboom 2001: xxxvii). Existentialists also regard it as their responsibility to be free to criticize every socio-political movement or technological-bureaucratic system that restricts human freedom and diminishes human dignity – in fact, every system that sets the abstraction of the system itself above the concrete well-being of the persons whom the system is supposed to serve.

Alienation, for the existentialist, is understood mainly in inward terms. It is man's alienation from his own deepest being. He is not himself but simply a dot in the mass-existence of the crowd or a cog in the technological system. Usually the concept of alienation suggests estrangement from or powerlessness in society, and the depersonalisation of the individual in large and bureaucratic organisations.

Anxiety is a kind of instability or tension experienced prior to action when exercising one's freedom. It has been described as the so-called "dizziness" of freedom. Macquarrie (1973: 129) states that freedom is by its very nature pregnant with possibility, and it is the stirring of possibility in the womb of freedom that is experienced as the basic anxiety in man. In sum, man is in a condition of anxiety arising from the realisation of his necessary freedom of choice, of his ignorance of the future, of his awareness of manifold possibilities and of the finiteness of his existence which will end in death.

Guilt arises within man when he fails to live up to his potential or when he has not done something which he should have done, for man is so constituted that he stands in the possibility of falling in the sense of failing to measure up to the stature of his possibility. Macquarrie (1973: 159) suggests that there is "something like a tragic conception of guilt among the existentialists. From the very way he is constituted as a *finite* being who is also free, man is placed in the possibility of guilt, and his 'rising' seems to be inseparable from his 'falling'."

For existentialists *death* is not simply the termination of life, not just an event that comes along at the end of the story, but itself enters very much into the story. For the existentialist, the existent's inward awareness is that his being is a being-toward-death. In existing, death is already present as a certain possibility, the most certain of all possibilities. In the mood of anxiety, man is aware of living in the face of the end.

Man exists first (he is born) and then creates himself (essence) and this creation is only *finalised* at his death.

Let us now turn to the communication of Meursault, the protagonist of *The Outsider*.

MEURSAULT'S WAY OF COMMUNICATION

From the very first paragraph of the novel the reader is confronted with Meursault's stance towards finitude and death. For him, it is no big deal that his mother has died today or yesterday, for her death merely represents a happening which everyone is to confront. Meursault confirms this at the end of chapter 2 by saying "I realized that…nothing had changed". (Interestingly, the first part of the name Meursault, that is "meurs", is a French verb form which means "I die" or "You die" in English.)

Before the chain of events which led to his arrest and trial, Meursault, on the one hand, submits himself predominantly to an aesthetic way of life. In his solitary and sensual way he shows an affiliation to his external conditions – notably the heat, the sun, the sea and Marie's body. He does not question anything, he asks no questions. As Masters (1974: 20) points out, "the reader feels that he sees very little point in life, but merely carries on for want of anything better to do. He sleeps, eats, works, all without enthusiasm."

Meursault observes with detachment other people's doings. It is as if their and his existence is dominated by habit. Elsewhere Masters (1974: 23) notes that Meursault lives for the now, which is so characteristic of an aesthetic way of life and aesthetic communication.

> Not looking backwards, he cannot know remorse. Not looking forward, he cannot know hope. These words are to him empty generalities. This is why, when Marie asks him if he loves her, he says that the question is meaningless. "Love" as she understands it involves permanence, a commitment to the future. Meursault knows that no one can predict what he will feel in the future, and so the question cannot honestly be answered. She asks him if he would like to marry her. He says that it is all the same to him, but they could if she wanted to. He is not thinking of a continuing emotion; he is thinking no further than of what she may like to hear now.

On the other hand, his clear indifference towards entrenched societal values shows him to have also chosen a way of existing, a way of communication, that is geared predominantly towards being authentically himself. Meursault does his own thing. For example, society expected and demanded that he weep at his mother's funeral, that he should have fallen on her tomb, that he should not have smoked a cigarette after seeing the body, that he should not have gone swimming or have gone to the cinema to see a comedy or have enjoyed carnal pleasure so soon after his mother's death. Meursault acted against the prevailing sentiments of society.

Meursault is never prepared to lie about his own feelings. Thody (1964: 41) observes:

> When his lawyer asks him if he had suffered at his mother's funeral, he receives the surprising reply that 'Certainly, I was fond of mother, but that didn't mean anything. All normal people had more or less wished for the death of their loved ones.' It is this refusal to disguise what he feels and thinks in hypocritical phrases that leads to Meursault's condemnation, for Camus's account of the trial leaves little doubt that a few well-judged tears about his poor mother would easily have secured a verdict of homicide or self-defence.

In this sense his communication is ethical with the expression of subjective truth being paramount. It does not mean that truth for Meursault is to be identified with private prejudice against the police, the (nameless) Arab whom he kills, the lawyers, the journalists at the court practising pseudo-objectivity (except for one who confirms in Meursault the new awareness of himself as an outsider who does not fit the categories of prisoner or murderer to which the other journalists and lawyers have relegated him) the prosecutors, judge or chaplain.

For Meursault, truth in the fullest sense comes out of the inward depth of existence that is rooted in the openness of existence. He refuses to lie. Yes, objectively speaking, he does lie when he agrees to act as Raymond's witness by saying that Raymond's girl had cheated on him, as O'Brien (1970: 21) notes. But in the context of the work, he does so more out of a state of indifference towards legal technicalities. Meursault says what he is and he refuses to hide his feelings. And in the end, as Camus in his preface to *The Outsider* states, Meursault agrees to die for the truth.

Meursault's decisions in the novel resonate with the idea of decision in existential communication. On the one hand his decisions such as to smoke, sleep and drink white coffee at the home's mortuary and beside his dead mother as well as his decision to shoot the unnamed Arab and to refuse to plead self-defence when accused of the murder of the Arab imply self-fulfilment, but on the other hand also self-renunciation in the sense that he does not care an inkling what others think or whether it will count against him.

Meursault exercises his freedom, or the right to choose, continually. He does not compromise about being authentically himself. He refuses other people's notions of love and career and clings to his existence as he feels it. He gives primacy to lived experience in the sense that he believes that man's only guide is his direct experience. Life is to be lived rather than dreamed about or mulled over. Man exists among or against others in a brutal adventure, to which he must by his actions give meaning.

In fact Meursault regards it as his responsibility to be free to reject the predominant value system of his day as it relates to child-mother relationships, marriage, law and order (he tells Marie that he does not like policemen), the justice system (which he intentionally subverts when he testifies in Raymond's defence and when he mocks the legal men at his own trial) and Christianity. He reinforces his sense of alienation, of being an outsider at his own trial, by saying that he felt "a bit like an intruder".

He remains an outsider till the end, alienated in a society which condemns a man to death for failing to weep at his mother's funeral. He does not want to play society's game. As McCarthy (1988: 96) remarks, *The Outsider* was read as a landmark of the most important trend in 1940s French thought: the sense that man was trapped in an alien universe, and that he must protest against the artificiality of existing social systems and against his metaphysical condition.

The scene in which he shoots the Arab is an excellent example of the anxiety, the dizziness of freedom, which he experiences prior to exercising his freedom (see Camus 1983: 60).

> All I could feel were the cymbals the sun was clashing against my forehead and, indistinctly, the dazzling spear still leaping up off the knife in front of me. It was like a red-hot blade gnawing at my eyelashes and gouging out my stinging eyes. That

> was when everything shook. The sea swept ashore a great breath of fire. The sky seemed to be splitting from end to end and raining down sheets of flame. My whole being went tense and I tightened my grip on the gun. The trigger gave, I felt the underside of the polished butt and it was there, in that sharp but deafening noise, that it all started. I shook off the sweat and the sun. I realized that I'd destroyed the balance of the day and the perfect silence of this beach where I'd been happy. And I fired four more times at a lifeless body and the bullets sank in without leaving a mark. And it was like giving four sharp knocks at the door of unhappiness.

In his cell, Meursault suffers anxiety in the sense that he is not totally sure about how he will be taken away for execution, and how that execution will unfold. He does for a few moments fear death, before he accepts his fate.

Meursault shows no guilt or remorse at all. He explains to the chaplain near the end of the novel that he was sure of himself, sure of everything, surer than he (the chaplain) was, sure of his life and sure of the death that was coming to him, and that there was no God or another life after death.

Waiting for his execution, Meursault proclaims that he had been happy in his life until then, however ridiculous and meaningless it may have been, and that he was still happy – in fact, he was profoundly in love with life. Meursault faces death not in its social guise (via the death penalty) but as the great fact of the human condition. In prison Meursault reflects on death and says,

> …it doesn't matter very much whether you die at thirty or at seventy since, in either case, other men and women will naturally go on living, for thousands of years even. Nothing was plainer, in fact. It was still only me who was dying, whether it was now or in twenty years' time. At that point the thing that would rather upset my reasoning was that I'd feel my heart give this terrifying leap at the thought of having another twenty years to live. But I just had to stifle it by imagining what I'd be thinking in twenty years' time when I'd have to face the same situation anyway. Given that you've got to die, it obviously doesn't matter exactly how or when (Camus 1983: 109).

Meursault wants a crowd of spectators to be at his execution and he wants them to greet him with cries of hatred because once condemned "he wants society to give him some sign that it realizes how much he defies it, and because he know he is right and the others wrong" (Thody 1964: 40).

In drawing on Kierkegaard's idea of "choosing oneself" (see Van Schoor 1980: 30), Meursault consistently does choose to express his own self, to express what is uniquely his own and to communicate this in his own particular way. Meursault is committed throughout to be the accountable source of his own state and self.

THE OUTSIDER AS ARTEFACT OF AN EXISTENTIAL TRADITION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

The novel can make scientific theory come alive for students. The use of a novel by a renowned author to illustrate the underlying characteristics of an existential tradition of communication theory is no new endeavour in South Africa. A study of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* to show how communication (by way of the role and the misuse of language) in a dictatorship can impact on man's existence comes to mind immediately. The late Professor Nerina Jansen led such studies at Unisa's Department of Communication during the 1980s and 1990s.

The question is whether the novel in general is used enough today in the communication theory curricula of our communication science institutions. The argument is that a novel is a most useful way to illustrate theoretical traditions of communication theory. Stories appeal to all people. As the father of modern narrative theory, Walter Fisher, would say, people are by nature storytellers; all except the mentally constrained have a narrative logic which they use to assess human communication; and that the world which we know is a collection of stories out of which people construct realities (cf. Fisher 1987; Terblanche 2009: 33-35).

In focusing on *The Outsider* one must emphasise that it is not only an existential (-phenomenological) tradition of communication theory that can be read into the work. Of Littlejohn and Foss's (2005) various traditions of communication theory, *The Outsider* lends itself most certainly to socio-psychological (influencing processes), socio-cultural (the ways that understandings, meanings, norms, roles and rules are worked out interactively in communication), critical (how messages reinforce power and oppression in society) and rhetorical (language style) analyses.

Although *The Outsider* was written almost seventy years ago many of the central messages still ring true. In our contemporary mass and technological society many grapple with the state of man who is continually facing attempts to reduce him to a life of mediocrity, to a life where he is part and parcel of the mass and where a questioning of societal values and various forms of authority is deemed to be "otherwise". It is not easy to stand out as an outsider, to do one's own thing despite the odds, to rebel against established thought patterns and processes and to imply that life is inherently absurd – which is a result of an awareness of one's own mortality and that nothing is to follow after death.

This is not to suggest that there are not many in society, if not the majority, who are at ease when integrated in the mass, who reject critical judgements, choices, and differentiations, because they cling to clear certainties and want it that way. They are conformists.

In a sense these conformists are fleeing from their freedom and responsibility. Their escape seems almost perfect. They admit no personal responsibility for their opinions, for they are merely accepting what their leaders tell them, and their hates and loves move with the symbolism provided by propaganda, by the propagation of all kinds of causes. Such a conformist, who is so highly attuned to the need to adjust to the responses of others that he loses the ability to be himself and to act autonomously, is one who Kierkegaard in *The present age* (1962) refers to as but one of "the public". For Kierkegaard members of "the public" are those men who do not themselves want to find out the meaning of their existence, but who rely on others and institutions, such as the mass media, to tell them about it.

One should mention that the importance of *The Outsider* also lies in the way that the novel has captured two fundamental traits of individualism, a cornerstone of much of existentialism, and which finds expression in a non-religious existential view of communication. These may be described as (1) the determination to trust one's own experience while distrusting the many and various forms of authority; and (2) the attempt to face the absence of transcendence and to enjoy this life (cf. McCarthy 1988: 102).

One may admit that Meursault would be an outsider in almost any society; he may well excite antagonism and even aggression in most people. Masters (1974: 27) rightly suggests that "we all assume feelings, points of views, reactions that are more or less manufactured, and take it for granted that we must lie or exaggerate to some extent every day. All except Meursault. He is consistently loyal to the truth of his own feelings, this being the only truth that he can know, that he can be sure about. Take from Meursault his sincerity, and he would crumple in vacuity." Yes, without his sincerity, his honesty, one would probably give him no serious thought.

There are allied problems attached to adopting Meursault's stance to existing, to being-in-communication. Two problems come to mind immediately.

Firstly, Meursault's idea of life on earth being absurd in the sense that it will certainly end in death with nothing to come thereafter, and that it therefore does not matter whether you die at thirty or seventy, belies the argument (cf. Billington 1993: 158) that it is the knowledge that our time of existence is short that makes us put effort into things. If we knew that we were to live forever, why would we attempt to achieve anything today? Existence then would be a continuous process of postponement.

Secondly, sound interpersonal communicative relationships, whether at work or home, demands involvement and caring for other people. Indifference to state of affairs in general and to others will get you nowhere, even if you are true to yourself. At the extreme end of indifference and at the point of the dizziness of freedom, killing people simply because it feels convenient to do so in a given circumstance, à la Meursault, is barbaric and must be condemned – even though, in the context of the novel, the killing of the Arab gradually became almost a non-event, because the accusers' indignation of his general nonconformist conduct overshadowed it.

However, in concluding, when looking back at the novel and situating Meursault's way of communication within the existential tradition of communication theory, one would probably agree that Camus has masterfully explored the predicament of the individual who, cut off from a sense of God, is prepared to face society's often flawed values courageously and alone, and who is prepared to die for subjective truth.

Endnotes

[1] Note that reference to "man" here and elsewhere is inclusive of all human beings.

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