

# Introduction

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When Julia Kristeva came to Berlin in the summer of 2008 – for the first time since she passed through the city on her way from Bulgaria to France in the mid-1960s – we, a group of local undergraduates with an international background from both sides of the former Iron Curtain and a common passion for French Theory, were among the crowd attending the talk she gave at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. Afterwards we came up to her, slightly nervous but curious to find out what it was like to chat with one of the pre-eminent intellectuals of our day. Little did we think that Julia Kristeva had so much generosity for, and faith in, the young generation that she would agree to participate in an international colloquium of distinguished scholars and young academics who draw inspiration from her work, a colloquium that we proposed to organise and would host one year later.

This special issue of the *Cincinnati Romance Review* is a result of this remarkable event that took place at Berlin's Humboldt University, October 30-November 1, 2009.<sup>1</sup> Conferences are a routine part of academic life and similar tributes have been paid to Julia Kristeva and the mark she has made over the years on European intellectual history. However, in many ways the Berlin Symposium was a special occasion. It was the first large-scale event in Germany devoted to Kristeva's thinking. While her career

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took off in France in the 1960s and 70s and quickly spread to English-speaking academia during the 80s and 90s, when her work began to feature prominently in humanities course syllabi even at the undergraduate level, in Germany she was mostly read by an audience of insiders and experts specialising in French postmodernism and psychoanalysis. Some of her most influential books, such as *Soleil noir*, were translated into German but with considerable delay. Many have not yet been translated, as is the case with *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*. The colloquium was a sign that her work was finally gaining greater recognition in this part of Europe, twenty years after the Fall of the Wall.

Likewise, the choice of Berlin as a venue has special importance. The colloquium was the occasion for Julia Kristeva's second visit to the city. What better place for a thinker who is so much concerned with the revolutionary transgression of boundaries than the city long divided by the Wall, the concrete manifestation of the insurmountable ideological divide of the Cold War, the Wall that Kristeva had crossed earlier in life, westbound? What better place to address the question of European cultural identity and to emphasise its openness and constitutive diversity, as she did during a more recent stay, than what has arguably become the fastest changing and most heterogeneous capital in Europe? Conversely, this city, which notoriously attracts young intellectuals, artists and bohemians from all over the world, where many cultures and individuals from all walks of life interact closely while enjoying a high degree of freedom to pursue very different lifestyles, seems to be particularly receptive to Kristeva's explorations of polyphonic identities and subversive affects. This nascent symbiotic relationship might help to explain why Julia Kristeva has lately received and accepted several invitations from this European hotspot.

The colloquium was also special in its organisational design; we wanted it to enact the theory it presented. Ours was an attempt to bring out the humanity of the humanities, so to speak, by promoting the idea of academic thinking as an endeavour that does not consist in an objective treatment of clearly circumscribed topics but in a highly subjective investment in real life issues. Hence, a focus was placed not only on intellectual content but on the way it relates to the context from which it grows. People think differently because they live different lives, and this difference can be harnessed for creative thought processes through encounters and dialogue.

The title of the colloquium – *Kristeva in Process: The Fertility of Thought* – was chosen to reflect this idea of an open, dynamic subjectivity as the basis for intellectual productivity. It adopted Kristeva's much-commented notion of the *sujet-en-procès* that she uses to redefine subjectivity in the context of contemporary society. The original French, more accurately rendered in English as “subject in process/on trial” (Lechte and Margaroni 23), conveys the double meaning of a perpetual development and an ongoing conflict with fixed structures and norms. For the *sujet-en-procès* is one that undergoes change while trying to negotiate its position in relation to established codes of meaning that it never completely inhabits. Kristeva herself, as a “European citizen, of Bulgarian origin, French by nationality and American by adoption” (Kristeva,

“Thinking” 13), embodies this kind of cross-border subject that has a home in many places and continually moves between and beyond these, engaged in a persistent grappling with conventional identities and an endless self-refashioning and repositioning. This floating subjectivity becomes manifest at an intellectual level in a wariness of tying oneself down to any one discipline and of casting oneself as a defender of any collective cause. For Kristeva, experience – life and its transposition into thought and writing – is always individual, tied to the local, rooted in specific circumstances, and can never be extrapolated to other subjects in a categorical way, as she makes clear in her book on Hannah Arendt:

Reconnaître la contribution majeure de quelques femmes extraordinaires qui, par leur vie et leur œuvre, ont marqué l’histoire de ce siècle est un appel à la singularité de chacune. Le dépassement de soi, à l’horizon d’exemples qu’on peut apprivoiser, n’est-il pas le meilleur antidote aux diverses massifications, qu’elles soient généreusement libertaires ou sagement conformistes? (*Génie féminin I* 12)

This desire to make the thinking individual stand out, disconnected from defining origins and all-encompassing discourses of identity, free to recreate himself or herself by bringing internal and external resources into play and by constantly reaching beyond his or her confines towards an horizon of ideals, was one of the guiding ideas behind the colloquium. It was intended not only to highlight the dynamism and multiple directions of Kristeva’s own development but also to emphasise its implied ethical imperative that exhorts everyone not to follow paths other have taken but to embark on his/her own journey of intellectual self-exploration and “to surpass himself or herself in a similar way” (Kristeva, “Is there a feminine genius?” 117).

The infinite transformation of the subject is contingent upon the fertility of thought – the second theme of the colloquium – which is here taken to refer to the inexhaustible richness of the inner life and its capacity for renewal and diversification of which Kristeva is such a remarkable example. By delving into the past and drawing on the rich intellectual tradition of the Occident, which she reworks and elaborates from a contemporary and also very personal point of view, Kristeva attempts to reconnect the rapidly changing post-Enlightenment societies of the Western world with their heritage. Her aim is to lay the foundations for a new conceptual framework and to update the discourse of the humanities by offering a new language to describe the human condition as it manifests itself in the cultural productions and practices throughout the ages. Yet according to Kristeva thought is above all fertile – almost in a biological sense – because it derives its momentum from the praxis of life; it is a (pro)creative process in which the subject reshapes and reconfigures his or her affects, bringing forth new structures which take on an existence of their own but which also effect a modulation of the subject from whom they spring. Thought encompasses much more than just ratiocination and

works across established categories such as body and mind. It plies between the physical and the ideational worlds, ensuring their continuity and cultivating the psychic space of the subject by establishing connections across different levels. It does not lead to truth, to a cut-and-dried system of hard facts, but is instead an internal adventure of “travelling oneself,” as Kristeva so often highlights,<sup>2</sup> a foray into unknown territory that is subsequently incorporated and developed by the subject in an expansive movement. Again, this restless force has equally far-reaching ethical implications in that it initiates internal and external change. As Kristeva points out in an early essay, thought is a mechanism of differentiation and diversification; as such, it is the hallmark of the dissenting intellectual who questions and subverts the semantic consensus by seeking new modes of expression:

For true dissidence today is perhaps simply what it always has been: *thought*. Now that Reason has become absorbed by technology, thought is tenable only as an ‘analytic position’ that affirms dissolution and works through differences. . . . But through the efforts of thought in language, or precisely through the excesses of the languages whose very multitude is the only sign of life, one can attempt to bring about multiple sublations of the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the void. (“A new type of intellectual” 299-300)

To unfold these life-giving excesses and the multitude of languages, the colloquium aimed for diversity both in terms of its participants and the topics it addressed. It was designed as a platform for exchange and inspiration cutting across nationalities, idioms, generations, hierarchies, and disciplines. Besides Julia Kristeva, contributors included senior academics and long-standing critical commentators of her work as well as professors and university lecturers, PhD students and undergraduates working in different areas of the humanities: philosophy, psychoanalysis and literary studies, of course, but also cultural studies, drama, fine art, art theory, media and communication, legal studies, and even other disciplines such as the history of science and pharmacy.

Though limited in number, the articles included in this issue give a sense of the broad range of contributions presented at the colloquium. Inter-connected by conceptual and textual echoes as their authors apply Kristeva’s work to different contexts and read it in the light of their own ideas, they follow the principle of polyphony, examining key contributions and concepts from a variety of perspectives and under different headings. Although each of these articles relates to some specific aspects of Kristeva’s theoretical essays and novels, we may perhaps distinguish a

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<sup>2</sup> Coined as a neologism – “se voyager” – by her heroine Stéphanie Delacour in the novel *Meurtre à Byzance* (240), Kristeva has taken up the metaphor again and again in talks, articles, and interviews to refer to her own intellectual adventure (e.g. “Thinking,” “A meditation” 26, “Ce qu’il manque”).

common thread in that they attempt to situate her work in the history of Western thought and to analyze her privileged contribution to the humanities.

Drawing on Kristeva's concept of the abject, **Bettina Wahrig, Martina Mittag** and **Heike Klippel** offer a very specific focus on the act of poisoning and the way it is represented in non-fiction as well as works of fiction. Their article "Applying the Abject: Working with Kristeva Toward a Cultural History of Poisoning" establishes a parallel between poisoning and abjection that serves to highlight the ambiguous nature of poison and its lack of defining qualities. Kristeva developed her theory of abjection in the context of an exploration of the feeling of 'horror,' which – alongside 'melancholy' and 'love' – is one of the constitutive human affects that, according to her, threaten the stability of the subject while also laying the foundation for its existence. In psychoanalytic terms, the abject is the indefinable result of a hateful expulsion of the maternal body by the proto-subject that prefigures but also potentially endangers the subsequent emergence of an autonomous subject and object during the Oedipal phase. It signals a split that is not a complete separation, a boundary that connects as much as it divides. Wahrig, Mittag and Klippel use this complex idea as a hermeneutic tool to shed light on three discursive representations of poisoning not by giving definitions but by drawing analogies : just as the abject cannot be captured in positive terms and never materialises in a stable object, it seems impossible to determine what exactly it is that turns a substance into a poison. Like poison, the abject is an inconclusive, hybrid 'mixture' that infects and undermines fixed identities as well as the linguistic system in which they are inscribed. Wahrig, Mittag and Klippel pursue this connection through excerpts from medical articles and dictionaries, Greek mythology, Shakespearean plays, a Victorian novel and a Charlie Chaplin film, considering issues such as poison and gender, poison and money, poison and the sublime, and showing how a highly theoretical notion can be used for close textual exegesis. Their essay is a truly interdisciplinary contribution. The authors are specialists in the history of science, literary studies, and cinematography respectively, but by combining their voices and illuminating their common topic from different angles they create an internal polyphony that breaks up the conventions of academic writing. Thus Bettina Wahrig, the historian of science, ventures beyond official scientific standards by deliberately committing what she calls a "double transgression," dealing with textual fragments instead of complete works in their logical and chronological order and including literary texts in her research. By examining the development of the concept and its ideological implications, the three authors aim to demonstrate that "a poison is not a poison is not a poison." Their approach is inspired by French Theory : acknowledging the principles laid out in Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir*, they investigate the 'discourses' and *epistemes* in which the concept of poisoning is embedded, and following Deleuze and Guattari's view that philosophy is a highly subjective enterprise and that "tout concept a une histoire" (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* 23), they give not only a dynamic account of the history of poisoning but also explain why and how they became interested in this particular topic.

Thus, the essay is itself an exercise in ‘mixing,’ not only because it blends different voices and disciplines, but also because it challenges the clear separation between subject and object on which the scientific method builds : the abject is at work in science as well.

In her contribution entitled “Contemporary Theatre in ‘Post’ Perspective: Postdrama as the Antisemiotical (R)evolution?,” **Inmaculada López Silva** considers the place of contemporary drama and theatre in postmodernist thinking, investigating the relationship between artistic practice and its conceptualisation in philosophical discourse. The connections between art and theory often escape the critical focus even though French theorists are aware of the great importance of dramatic art for their own projects as they attempt to widen philosophy’s field of inquiry to include avant-garde art forms. Philosophers look to contemporary drama as an exemplification and enactment of their ideas while performing artists in their turn draw inspiration from the powerful concepts developed by these thinkers to push the boundaries of their art. Both theoreticians and practitioners share many concerns, such as the revolt against established forms, the questioning of symbolic modes of representation, the search for heterogeneous layers of meaning and the desire to get closer to the body and to uncover the physical substratum of cultural practices. Both also face the challenge of relying on established signifying conventions that they have to modify in order to break free from the constraints of tradition.

In view of these parallels, López Silva argues that dramatic theatre is currently undergoing its most fundamental critique since Brecht and that this critique is largely conducted by interdisciplinary theorists who chip away at the established epistemological pillars (such as the subject, space and time) on which the Western world has built its conception of reality. This is evident, for instance, from the attention thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Kristeva pay to the revolutionary theatre of Antonin Artaud. The central question López Silva asks is whether renewal is only possible through a complete destruction of canonical certainties, as suggested by the title of Artaud’s ‘Theatre of Cruelty,’ or whether theatre may also be reformed while maintaining traditional notions such as representation, meaning and interpretation. If it is true that theatre cannot escape the insights of postmodernism, what remains of it if its central Aristotelian premises are destroyed? What happens when deconstruction is acted out on stage?

By way of an answer, López Silva invokes Hans Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre that is more thorough, in her view, than Brecht’s revolt and also strikes a compromise between radical deconstruction and an adherence to established forms. She argues that postdramatic theatre may have abolished traditional unifying elements such as plot and character but that it has not abolished the sign and the possibility of meaning. Insisting on the essential relevance of speech to scenic performances, López Silva claims that this new theatre is a communicative process, a linguistic practice that is inevitably hermeneutic as it is played out between actors and

spectators in a shared space at a given moment in time. It thereby salvages the concepts of signification and representation for theatre, provided they are liberated from their metaphysical corset and redefined in a dynamic way as Kristeva and other thinkers have suggested. Thus, while philosophers identify the artistic avant-garde as the space where their critique unfolds in a practical way, they also give meaning and a sense of direction to this practice at the same time that they add to it an intellectual dimension. López Silva demonstrates that concepts such as the postdramatic show up a way of making revolutionary theatrical practices amenable to analysis without relying on traditional categories.

**Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska** conducts an exegesis of Kristeva's latest novel *Murder in Byzantium* and other texts in order to show how Kristeva's notion of an open and open-ended subjectivity relates to her theory of a European culture of revolt that is characterised by irreducible diversity and a constant self-interrogation. In "Cheminements vers l'identité européenne : l'autre langue, la psychanalyse, le dialogue et le roman dans *Meurtre à Byzance* et dans des essais de Julia Kristeva," Ivantcheva-Merjanska establishes a complex connection between different aspects of Kristeva's theory : first, the notion of the *sujet-en-procès* as being intrinsically linked to the multilingualism of Kristeva's fictional characters and to Kristeva's own linguistic hybridism, and second, 'Europeanness' as based on this polyglot and polyphonic subjectivity which is best expressed and embodied by Kristeva's own genre of the 'metaphysical crime novel.' Kristeva's idea of Europe is a current hot topic in Kristevan scholarship and has been variously highlighted as a paradoxical community (Gratton), an impossible place (Margaroni) or as a generalisation of her cosmopolitan ideal (Varsamopoulou). Ivantcheva-Merjanska considers its importance as an actual political project that can be implemented through the methods of psychoanalysis and a recovery of a 'Byzantine' complexity in thinking that is likely to counter the double threat of a retreat into communitarian politics and an intellectually impoverished society. She sees this "Europe de la pensée et de la liberté d'esprit" as being constituted through a particular use of language, namely the language of the novel, which according to Bakhtin and Kundera is an essentially European genre marked by dialogue and a questioning of received truths and which in Kristeva's hands becomes a way of multiplying the subject and of eliciting many different echoes of the self: "il n'y a pas d'absolu dans le roman, c'est une forme polyphonique, et le mien est peut-être plus polyphonique que les romans d'aujourd'hui, parce qu'il renoue avec la tradition du roman renaissant ou du dix-huitième siècle" ("L'interview"). In a biographic interpretation of *Murder in Byzantium*, one that is justified by Kristeva's own identification with its characters, Ivantcheva-Merjanska argues that polyphony consists above all in the multiplicity of languages and linguistic estrangement as exemplified by the novel's protagonists. Creating new linguistic identities might lead to nostalgia for one's lost origins but it is also the precondition for infinite creativity, as Kristeva's ambiguous attitude to her own bilingualism shows. As Ivantcheva-Merjanska reiterates,

for Kristeva, French is both the language of intellectual achievement and of painful separation; it represents rational clarity and embodies the literary and civilised refinement that she aspires to but because of her inability to rid herself completely of her native Bulgarian substratum she will forever remain a foreigner in it. However, linguistic migrants like Kristeva act as ‘translators’ who fertilise their host language by injecting new life into it. By thinking and writing in French, Kristeva has reinvented and revitalised both the language and herself, albeit at the cost of forever mourning the loss of her primordial linguistic home. Thus, Ivantcheva-Merjanska effectively explains not only why Kristeva writes brilliantly in French, but also why her theories and novels like *Murder in Byzantium* essentially centre on the experience of estrangement and exile and, above all, why this experience is vital to the construction of a dynamic European identity.

**Sigrid Hackenberg y Almansa** is concerned with feminine modes of writing in her contribution entitled “in friendship of the Letter(s) : Kristeva/Clément and the 'fe-mə-nən' sā-krəd.” As the unusual form of the title indicates, her text is not a critical investigation in the traditional sense of the word, but a resourceful response to the exchange of letters between Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément that was originally published under the title *Le féminin et le sacré*. Like the two philosophers who in their dialogue tread new ground by exploring the link between femininity and the sacred from changing perspectives and with a highly subjective, lyrical twist, Hackenberg y Almansa tries to find a new voice that resists classification. Rather than analysing her object of reference, she reinvents it in a boldly creative and experimental way.

At first sight, the text appears chaotic. It plays with the sound of words, takes typographic liberties and transgresses grammatical standards, using phonetic script, nonstandard orthography, and inconsistent punctuation, mixing upper and lower case letters, eliding spaces, abruptly switching to other languages, and inserting symbols and geometrical shapes. The prose appears to lack rational consistency as it is completely dominated by poetic playfulness : a single term triggers a plethora of associations, related ideas, declension paradigms, derivations, translations. It is a linguistic flood advancing in many directions, washing away established patterns of expression, and making room for new structures to emerge. Yet, for all its mutability, Hackenberg’s text has a serious intellectual dimension : it takes up crucial concepts from Kristeva and Clément’s book, such as religion, time and love, around which it weaves a web of elaborate echoes.

One could say that this essay pits content against form. When read out aloud, its unfamiliar musicality and rhythm predominate and take over the senses. Yet its very musicality is cast in the mould of an established genre and follows the model of a scholarly article with all its trappings : explanatory footnotes, direct quotations, references to other authors, and stock phrases like “in Kristeva’s words” and “as stated by Clément.” Perhaps the text may be taken as an embodiment of one of Kristeva’s original concepts: the conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic. Significantly, the



semiotic is characterised as feminine because it is irreducibly different, springing from the maternal *chora* and challenging the rigid paternal law of the symbolic. This would tie in with the underlying intention of Hackenberg y Almansa's essay to probe the possibilities of feminine writing. Like Kristeva's heterogeneous spheres, essentially different yet dependent on one another, form and content interpenetrate in the text, creating an exquisite tension. While the flow of words violates the pre-established laws of grammar that struggle to contain it, the formal constraints nevertheless curtail the textual excesses and impose limits on its desire for transgression.

Taking theory to the level of practice and vice versa, the text plays out Kristeva's vision of a multi-layered language space that does not ignore its subliminal energy but instead spreads it out across other layers of human experience. What it tries to communicate is not uniform rationality, but otherness, specificity, the elusive, unique subjectivity that is as dear to Kristeva as it is to Hackenberg y Almansa in her artistic exploration.

In his article "Kristeva and Derrida : Face-to-Face (Who Invented Deconstruction?)," **Manuel Asensi**, Professor of Literary Theory and Comparative Literature at the University of Valencia in Spain, revisits the beginning of what today is usually subsumed under the label of French Theory, examining the interaction between Julia Kristeva and other major thinkers of her generation, notably Jacques Derrida and Philippe Sollers, who were active in the *Tel Quel* group and together contributed to the rise of post-structuralism during the 1960s and 70s. According to Asensi, *Tel Quel* ought to be considered as a heterogeneous movement with distinct socio-political aims rather than as a streamlined literary phenomenon removed from real life. Criticizing the linear narrative of literary history that smooths over conflicts and contradictions and retrospectively posits uncontroversial origins, he argues that French Theory was born out of a climate of conceptual competition and parasitism (adopting a term used by J. Hillis Miller) rather than a serene cooperation of independent minds. His aim is to show that, far from being intellectually self-contained, the works of these thinkers are heavily indebted to one another and that Julia Kristeva's position within this development is more complex and influential than has generally been recognized.

Starting from the assumption that the relationships between the members of the group are reflected at an intertextual level, Asensi focuses his analysis on the narrow period of intellectual cross-fertilisation (1967-1969) that saw the publication of seminal works by all three authors. Despite hedging his words with respect to clear-cut origins and histories, he nevertheless identifies a clear direction of influence. According to him, Philippe Sollers's generically elusive novel *Nombres* (1968) provides the basis for the subsequent development of post-structuralism as it had an impact both on Derrida's *La dissemination* and Kristeva's *L'engendrement de la formule*, both published one year later, in 1969. It is Derrida, however, whose ideas are most profoundly influenced by the work of the other two Telquelists. This is how Asensi explains the apparent shift in thinking that occurs between Derrida's early work on grammatology and his later work on

deconstruction. The years around 1968 were crucial for Derrida: he came into contact with the ideas of the *Tel Quel* group and, reading both Sollers's abstract fiction and Kristeva's linguistically inspired essays, expanded his horizon beyond the boundaries of the philosophical texts and the metaphysical tradition that he had hitherto worked on. As Asensi illustrates, the influence can be gauged from concepts such as "writing" and "undecidability" that Derrida uses in different ways before and after that period.

Most importantly, and perhaps most controversially, Asensi claims that Kristeva's theory of paragrammatism is the forerunner to Derrida's concept of deconstruction. While Kristeva had originally developed it to describe the semantic infinity of poetic language, Derrida appropriates her idea and turns it into an instrument to elucidate the multiplicity of meaning hidden in any kind of text. Thus, Manuel Asensi effectively demonstrates that the well-known concepts associated with French Theory are not the result of a single-handed stroke of genius but rather of a complex process of elaboration between very different thinkers.

In his paper "Fertile Thinking or Thinking About the Fertility of Thinking," **Christian Kupke** investigates some implications of the colloquium title from a psychoanalytic perspective. He constructs a complex argument around the notion of fertility that leads him to trace the origin of language back to the ambiguity of the divided/unified psyche of the subject and the underlying unconscious mechanism of repression and translation, which for him represents an infinite and hence truly fertile process. Distinguishing fertility from the related concepts of productivity and creativity, he defines it as an activity that does not yield a finite product but instead prompts another activity, and so *ad infinitum*. In a second move, Kupke highlights the biological overtones of fertility, arguing that it refers to the sphere of nature as the elusive antithesis of culture. As a consequence, we cannot satisfactorily explain fertility within the cultural matrix alone since, by definition, it describes something pre-conceptual, physical, material. In order not only to mean but to work in practice, fertility needs to be open to this outside which Kupke describes as double strangeness: an external strangeness – being a foreigner in a foreign world – and an internal strangeness – the unconscious. Strangeness calls for translation; when people are faced with something unfamiliar they try to comprehend it in terms of what is familiar to them. In psychoanalysis, translation relates to the efforts of both analyst and analysand to align each other's languages, i.e. to revert the effects of repression and to uncover the suspected original meaning hidden in the unconscious. However, as Kupke claims, repression itself constitutes another kind of translation occurring at a deeper level that changes the original meaning and divides the psyche into consciousness and the unconscious. This process is inherently ambiguous as it produces a categorical split but also maintains the unity of the psychic space. In fact, repression may be likened to a translation because it does not abolish its object (leaving a blank or void) but disguises it (through displacement and condensation), which is what language essentially does. What is repressed is not truly absent but masked. Kupke concludes that this translational

repression establishes language as a fertile mechanism of endless translatability. It is fertile because the possibilities for further translation and disguise are infinite: language leads to more language.

As the title of his essay suggests, Kupke's text is an exercise in meta-thinking: its central concern is with fertile thinking not only as an object of discussion but also as an activity. The ambiguity of position/negation that he considers essential to language as a system is also at work in his essay. Kupke invents what he calls "semantic" and "signifying" machines to test and to question philosophical concepts; he advances hypotheses and retracts them; he embarks on a "detour" that he never completes: the detour is in itself an illustration of his theory as it repeats the condensation and displacement that is characteristic of the unconscious psychic processes he describes. At the same time, his exposition is didactic and clearly structured, making use of binary pairs such as gap/unity, defence/admission, negation/position, etc. In the end, Kupke's postulates, neat though they may seem, may perhaps themselves have to be considered as the result of an infinite translation, not as final products but as links in the chain of the fertile activity of language production that in this case is inspired by Kristeva's output (as Kupke admits) and might lead to other responses in the future.

Being similarly inspired by the colloquium title for her essay "The Pathos and Ethos of Thought in Julia Kristeva," **Maria Margaroni**, Associate Professor in Literary and Cultural Theory at the University of Cyprus, investigates Julia Kristeva's conception of thought as a transgressive force that is not a mere function of the intellect but an essential condition of subjectivity. Margaroni sets out to demonstrate that Kristeva establishes the link between thought and subjectivity by reworking different philosophical and psychoanalytic concepts. She advances an innovative reading of Kristeva's ideas in the light of authoritative predecessors and contemporaries, covering a vast territory from Hegel to Freud, from Barthes to Derrida, from Kojève to Agamben, and within Kristeva's oeuvre from her earliest writings on semanalysis and the revolution of poetic language to recent works such as the trilogy on the powers and limits of psychoanalysis, all with the aim of showing that thought is never an abstract end in itself but a way of unfolding the irreducible multiplicity of the inner life of the subject.

The linchpin of Margaroni's complex argument, however, is the Hegelian legacy in Kristeva. She takes issue with the view of most critical commentators who see Kristeva in opposition to Hegel, claiming that he remains an important influence throughout her work. Margaroni uncovers surprising parallels between the two thinkers, though she tends to bring Hegel more into line with Kristeva's concerns rather than vice versa. In fact, she points out that Hegel subsequently abandons what she qualifies as the quasi-Kristevan premises he had held, which is why Kristeva turns to Freud for a materialist revitalisation of his dialectics. In contrast to Derrida, Margaroni claims, Kristeva continues Hegel's original project at the same time that she sets out to remedy its perceived shortcomings, placing greater emphasis on the aspects of negativity and

materiality. Kristeva's revised version of dialectics, as manifested by her concepts such as the *sujet-en-process* and *signifiance*, is that of an open-ended process that never arrives at a complete harmony and integration of opposites; there is no totality as each affirmation is only partial and remains a fragment of an immeasurable heterogeneous space that no synthesis can ever completely fill and homogenise. This, however, is where thought comes into play as a vector of negativity that prevents the dialectical movement from reaching its *telos* despite always aspiring to it. It is this ambivalence of thought, Margaroni affirms, that provides the common ground on which Hegel and Kristeva meet.

In the course of further analyses involving Kristeva's use of the Freudian concept of sublimation, Margaroni develops her idea of thought as a fight on two fronts. At one end, there is complete negativity, immediate physicality, raw being or, as Kristeva says, "experience"; at the other, there is complete affirmation, absolute sublimity, the divine. Caught in the middle is the subject; it has its sights firmly set on both opposite extremes that nevertheless will forever remain beyond its ken. This difficult situation leads to what Margaroni eventually calls "the pathos and ethos of thought" which she locates at the heart of Kristeva's project. In thinking, the subject mourns the loss of ontological immediacy, yet rejoices in its power to represent and thus indirectly to recover this loss while simultaneously climbing towards rational abstraction. Stretched and torn between the two ends of the spectrum, it uses language as a mechanism for the infinite production of meaning to establish and elaborate significant connections within itself and with others. For Kristeva, thought, subjectivity, and language are all coextensive; they are part and parcel of the same dynamics of sublimation across space and time.

By drawing together various strands of a momentous philosophical debate, Margaroni demonstrates that Kristeva's overarching concern for the speaking subject is largely inspired by a reading of Hegel through Freud. However, one might add that in taking her predecessors to a new singular level of representation Kristeva enacts the very process of transformative thinking that her concepts describe, thereby showing that philosophical theories derive their uniqueness not from objective and abstract insights but from their roots in the life of the subject.

The double nature of thought that Margaroni describes, its pathos and its ethos, is played out by the last two essays in this volume. Its ethical dimension, captured by Kristeva's approach to sublimation, is investigated in greater detail by **Francey Russell** in her contribution entitled "Strange New Beauty: In Defense of Kristevan Sublimation." Delving deep into psychoanalytic theory, Russell argues that Kristeva offers the most cogent account of this concept. The problem Russell identifies with previous conceptions of sublimation is that, although describing an economy of mediation between the unconscious and consciousness, they are predominantly used in a way that enshrines the supremacy of consciousness over the unconscious. This supremacy is reflected, for instance, by the common topological model according to

which the drives of the unconscious are somehow represented as debased and low while the products of sublimation are thought of as elevated and high, something that is suggested by Freud's own words. In these earlier views, the irreducible alterity of the unconscious gets lost on the way as the drives are defused or dissolved in the process. By contrast, Russell claims, Kristeva's approach to sublimation takes the fundamental heterogeneity of the unconscious seriously and puts it on an equal footing with consciousness by acknowledging a transformative influence on the latter.

In the course of her analysis, Russell revisits Kristeva's powerful conceptual apparatus in the field of developmental psychoanalysis that she subsequently maps onto the idea of sublimation. Using Kristeva's model of the semiotic and the symbolic modes, Russell concentrates on a developmental stage that is dear to Kristeva: the semiotic phase prior to the advent of the symbolic order and the constitution of the ego. She cites Kristeva's characterization of primary narcissism and the *chora* to show that difference and otherness exist even within this archaic realm. The other is already present as the father of personal pre-history with which the child lovingly identifies through a form of "proto-sublimation." Yet although the Oedipal complex subsequently establishes a preemptory split and gives rise to the ego that is free to find infinite ways of representing the loss of the other, no stable separation is ever achieved. Primary narcissism is never completely overcome, which is why sublimation is an ongoing process as the split constantly needs to be renegotiated.

What is most important for this sublimatory process to be successful, as Russell notes, is a required two-fold movement: going back to the instability of the semiotic and returning again to the safe haven of the symbolic. The return movement digs up semiotic affects that produce a change in the elements of the symbolic, upsetting their order and leading to an explosion of strangeness within what is familiar. As a consequence, Kristeva privileges certain forms of discourse that are particularly apt to initiate such bidirectional movements and bring the semiotic and symbolic spheres closer together, namely psychoanalysis, religion, and art. These are transformative discourses that are open to the subversive impact of the drives: to Russell's artistic example of Francis Bacon's paintings one might add Hackenberg y Almansa's text in this volume.

Russell shows that sublimation conceived on the basis of Kristeva's metapsychology is an optimistic approach to the subversive potential of the drives. By making concessions to the unconscious and meeting it halfway, sublimation is a way of lessening its destructive effects on consciousness and symbolic forms; bluntly put, it provides a cathartic outlet that results not in madness but in poetry. Sublimation is possible because Kristeva's theory reinstates the semiotic unconscious in its function as a vital component of subjectivity that needs to be considered not as something to be either repressed or assimilated but as a modality in its own right that is essential to the richness of language and thought.

The pathos of thought, its suffering and mourning, is illuminated by **Todd Kesselman** in his essay “The Abject, The Object, and The Thing.” Kesselman uses Kristeva’s psychoanalytic concepts to characterise and potentially redress the predicament of philosophy’s contemporary state of disillusionment and its inability to offer guidance to a secular society in decline. Analysing philosophical tradition from a psychoanalytical perspective, he argues that this disillusionment can be traced back to German Idealism and its insertion of the subject into aesthetics, notably through Kant’s idea of aesthetic reflective judgment that is not bound by objective reality but instead emphasises the subjective freedom of the imagination. However, this move turns out to be self-disabling as the subjective dimension has serious consequences for the status of philosophy. The subjective element, Kesselman claims, changes the nature of theory: it no longer hovers above the muddle of reality but is immersed in it. Philosophy can no longer pretend to apply its rational tools to the world without being affected by it. Applying its insights to itself, philosophy has developed a self-consciousness that precludes the belief in objective truth.

Consequently, as post-Idealist philosophy suffers from its own inadequacy to provide an ontological safeguard against the chaos of life, Kesselman qualifies it as a work of mourning. He resorts to Kristeva’s metapsychology to describe its descent into a state of depression and melancholia: like the infant in Kristeva’s *Soleil noir* that has not yet secured its status as a speaking subject as it gravitates towards the primordial “Chose” which Kristeva qualifies as “*un suprême bien innommable*” (*Soleil noir* 23), Idealist philosophy had aspired to a perfect transcendence, a Kantian sublime or Hegelian absolute, as its supreme good. However, just as the loss of the “Chose” and the inability to replace it with linguistic signifiers leads to depression in the child, the abolition of the dream of perfection leaves a void in philosophy. Hence, rather than embarking on an intellectual journey of discovery in a higher, abstract realm, the contemporary philosopher suddenly bears the burden of having to create some partial truth out of his compromised position within physical existence or, should he fail, to theorise the fact that there simply is no such truth to discover. Accordingly, Kesselman conceives of contemporary discourses as being “deprived of substance” as they merely revolve around this absence without being able to turn it into a productive process.

However, philosophy’s impotence is correlated with a yearning for substance in contemporary society. Kesselman invokes two of Kristeva’s concepts as possible ways to overcome this impasse: the abject and the sacred. The abject is the counterpart and successor to the Kantian sublime as it similarly refers to a transsubjective experience of fullness or substance before the onset of thought. Yet in contrast with the sublime it comes from below, bringing the subject back into contact with sordid physicality, thus explaining why the abject is suited to the modern condition of disillusionment. As it recognizes the split nature of the subject, with its roots in the biological substratum of life on one side and its mastery over language and the world of symbolic forms on the other, the sacred might offer a reconciliation with disillusionment. The sacred enables

the tentative yet cautiously optimistic emergence of meaning at the precarious threshold of nature and culture. It is at this dynamic site that sublimation begins its work, not by showing up predetermined paths as in Idealist philosophy, but by opening up infinite possibilities of meaning. Sacred sublimation does not define its goal but simply provides the promise that some kind of goal may be reached, providing hope to humanity.

Finally, closing this volume is **Julia Kristeva** herself, speaking in an interview conducted on the sidelines of the colloquium by **Michèle Vialet** and **Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska**, the principal editors of this volume, also present at the event. As the title “Entretien avec Julia Kristeva : Penser en nomade et dans l’autre langue le monde, la vie psychique et la littérature” suggests, it focuses largely on issues revolving around Kristeva’s use of an adopted foreign language in her role as a theoretician of the mind and as a novelist. Kristeva talks about the intellectual implications of nomadism, about fictional writing and the origin of what she has termed her metaphysical crime novel, about the controversial concept of “francophone literature” that refers to fiction written in the French language by authors who come from outside mainland France, about faith and its crises, notably Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Islam as well as their relation to art, mysticism and atheism, and about Europe as a political and cultural project that can only be successful if it manages to revive its rich spiritual tradition. Kristeva’s main concern in all this, however, is with language and the role it plays in the constitution of identity. What comes up again and again is the privilege she accords to speech and writing as a way of translating and ordering subliminal experience, thus preparing the ground for a dynamic and rich psychic life.

The interviewers take an original approach. Vialet and Ivantcheva-Merjanska are not only academics but also share Kristeva’s experience of exile at a personal level. Being of French and Bulgarian origin respectively, yet living in the US and working across multiple languages, they know for themselves some of the situations that Kristeva has passed through. Their interview is remarkable at a stylistic level in that it includes narrative elements and takes account of the setting. It is preceded by an introductory paragraph that sets the scene for the encounter with their host, and it describes how the exchange is cut short by the arrival of another person who claims Kristeva’s attention. Thus, by chronicling the events surrounding the actual talk, the text remains true to the intention of the colloquium: to explore thinking *in situ*. Here, thought does not emerge in solitary self-containment but, quite literally, takes place, unfolding in space and time through interaction with others.

In her last reply, Kristeva admits that “[j]e me sens complètement à l’aise dans le dialogue, l’échange” (188). This professed affinity for expounding her thoughts in conversation is documented by the large number of published interviews, from Guberman’s pioneering book-length collection, *Julia Kristeva’s Interviews*, to articles in various scholarly journals in recent times, and by the frequency with which she has

appeared in newspapers, on radio shows and on TV in and outside France.<sup>3</sup> One reason for this pervasive interlocutory presence may be Kristeva's desire to explain her concepts concisely and in an accessible way. It certainly offers her a third medium to convey her ideas besides her two authorial mainstays, theory and fiction, and is perhaps the most immediate among them, giving her the opportunity to present herself in a freer and more spontaneous manner. Thus, although she often prefers to keep her words under control even after the act of speaking, revising and fine-tuning her interviews before releasing them for publication, she concedes here that maybe "il faut laisser dans l'interview un peu de spontanéité et de décousu" (188). Moreover, the conversations allow Kristeva to respond more directly to current events and social debates, showing that her concerns are not purely theoretical constructs but are anchored in, and have a bearing on, the 'real' world, as testified for instance by her *engagée* interview with Philippe Petit in *Contre la dépression nationale*. Yet the most significant merits of this genre might be its openness towards alterity, its engagement with the other, and the consequent fact that ideas are presented not as a totalizing truth but in a fragmentary, associative manner. After all, the dialogue was one of the privileged philosophical and literary forms of the Enlightenment which facilitated the radical critique of received sets of belief and knowledge, an aim that Kristeva often invokes for her own intellectual project.

Although Vialet and Ivantcheva-Merjanska state in rather general terms that the objective of the interview is to investigate a range of Kristeva's concerns for the benefit of the reader, what they seem most interested in is the link between life and thought, between the praxis of going through life and the process by which life is spread out across complex levels of psychic and linguistic representation. In doing so, they pay tribute to one of the primary achievements of French Theory, namely the introduction of the "I" into philosophical thinking. Many of their questions attempt to probe the personal foundations of Kristeva's theoretical and fictional subject-matter and to trace it back to its biographical roots. Consequently, they succeed in eliciting intriguing anecdotes from Kristeva, who talks about her relationship with her parents, her encounter with Pope John Paul II, or her acquaintance with Michel de Certeau, in such a way that makes them seem indispensable to her theory. Thus, by mixing events and thoughts and demonstrating how closely both are interwoven, the interview offers a glimpse "behind the scenes" of Kristeva's philosophy.

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<sup>3</sup> Newspapers that have published interviews with Kristeva include *L'Humanité*, *Le Monde*, *La Croix*, and *The Guardian*. She has also appeared on programs such as the ARTE TV magazine "Metropolis" and on a variety of radio shows, e.g. on the French network France Culture and on the BBC's Radio 4.



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