

CINCINNATI ROMANCE REVIEW

Kristeva in Process :
The Fertility of Thought –
La pensée féconde –
Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens



SPECIAL ISSUE EDITED BY

Michèle E. Vialet, Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska,
Azucena G. Blanco, and Stefan Hollstein

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Volume 35 (Spring 2013)

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*Michèle E. Vialet, Irene Ivantcheva-Merjanska,
Azucena G. Blanco, and Stefan Hollstein*

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Introduction

Stefan Hollstein

Berlin Humboldt-Universität and Freie Universität



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, 2009.¹ 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

¹ Dr. Azucena González Blanco and I especially thank *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* for making this event possible, especially Professor Helmut Pfeiffer (Professor of Romance Literatures and Literary Studies) and Professor Joseph Vogl (Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies) for providing essential financial and moral assistance, but also the President of the university at the time, Professor Christoph Marschies, and the university's research department for their unfailing and, above all, friendly support. We also thank the German Research Foundation (DFG) for financial support of The International Colloquium "Kristeva in Process," the PhD-Net "Das Wissen der Literatur" (Humboldt Graduate School), and L'Institut français. We especially thank Martin Pasekand and Paulo Degenhardt for their essential help as part of the organization committee, and Georg Basler for his lovely help and support. Foremost we express our gratitude to all the participants who kindly accepted our invitations, sometimes in spite of adverse circumstances, and above all to Julia Kristeva who gave her warm support to The International Colloquium "Kristeva in Process" and graced it by her invaluable participation: without her this colloquium would not have happened. We also thank the *Cincinnati Romance Review* and its editors for kindly agreeing to peer-review and publish some of the work presented.

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,² 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

² 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.³ 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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Applying the Abject : Working with Kristeva's Concept of Abject toward a Cultural History of Poisoning

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Abstract: This contribution will argue that Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject is a valuable tool of analysis for writing the history of poisoning in an interdisciplinary perspective. The article will concentrate on discourses in science, literature and film. The project started with an analysis of scientific texts, which was then extended to literature and to film studies. From the beginning, one of the aims was to better understand the explicit and implicit gendering of poison discourses and poisoning stereotypes. This essay will first provide a short account of the most important metaphors and motives in a "Kristevan" account of the scientific discourses on poisoning. In a second part, literary texts dealing with the topic of poisoning will be analyzed. Finally, the third section of this paper will investigate the poison narration in Charles Chaplin's film *Monsieur Verdoux* (USA 1947).

Résumé: Cet essai soutient que la notion d'abject de Kristeva est un outil d'analyse qui permet d'écrire de façon interdisciplinaire l'histoire de l'usage de poisons. Concentré sur les discours en sciences, littérature et cinéma, il commence par une analyse de textes scientifiques qui est ensuite étendue à la littérature et aux études de cinéma. Un des objectifs de départ était de mieux comprendre les questions de genre explicite et implicite des discours sur les poisons et des stéréotypes de l'emploi de poisons. L'essai fait d'abord, dans une perspective kristevienne, le point sur les métaphores et les motifs les plus importants des discours scientifiques traitant de l'empoisonnement. Une analyse de textes littéraires suit. La troisième section est consacrée à l'examen du récit du poison dans le film de Charles Chaplin *Monsieur Verdoux* (USA 1947).

Keywords: abject – poison – poisoning – poisoner – gender – money – modern subjecthood – sublime – Shakespeare – *Hamlet* – *Romeo and Juliet* – *Timon of Athens* – Bulwer-Lytton – *Lucretia* (1846) – *Monsieur Verdoux*

This paper will argue that Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject is a valuable tool of analysis for writing the history of poisoning in an interdisciplinary perspective. We will concentrate on discourses in science, literature and film. Our project started with an analysis of scientific texts, which was then

extended to literature and to film studies. From the beginning, one of the aims was to better understand the explicit and implicit gendering of poison discourses and poisoning stereotypes. The linkage between poisoning stereotypes and gender stereotypes has been stable over centuries, and even today, the prejudice that women have a greater propensity for poisoning others in comparison with men is still alive.¹ Crossing the borders between science, literature, and arts, the subject of poisoning has traveled through a rich history of memories, translations, and citations. We are convinced that gender stereotypes and implicitly gendered narrations have a particularly stabilizing effect on political and scientific discourses. Taking the example of poisoning, we will argue that these stereotypes generally endow discourses with a surplus of significance, and maybe even credibility.

Consequently, viewing our topic from the perspectives of history of science and literary and film studies, it seems worthwhile to look deeper into the epistemological structure of poisoning discourses. This is where our interdisciplinary cooperation started. The idea to apply Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject (*Pouvoirs* [*Powers*]) to this discursive field occurred somewhere in the middle of our research process, when we saw how deeply-rooted in history some of the metaphorical elements of "poison," "poisoning," and "poisoner" are.²

Our paper will first provide a short account of the most important metaphors and motives in a "Kristevan" account of the scientific discourses on poisoning. Here we propose to distinguish three main motives describing the epistemological structure of poisoning. These three motives are present in scientific discourses from 1750 to 1900; but they can be traced back even farther. They may be considered as an epistemological backbone of poisoning discourses across the disciplines. In a second part, we will analyze literary texts dealing with the topic of poisoning. Within this literary section, we will first analyze the interwoven motives of poison and money in Shakespeare's work. Then we will turn to a nineteenth-century novel comparing the figure of the Renaissance woman Lucretia Borgia with Bulwer-Lytton's nineteenth-century Victorian version of that figure, *Lucretia. Or The Children of the Night* (1846). Here, blurred identities and abstraction intersect with an abject femininity, with the secret, and the sublime. Finally, the third section of this paper will analyze the poison narration in Charles Chaplin's film *Monsieur Verdoux* (USA 1947).

This common contribution on the abject and poisoning has one grammatical, but three psychological subjects: The first section represents the perspective of Bettina Wahrig, the second was written by Martina Mittag, and the third section is authored by Heike Klippel. We hope that the text will at least in part convey to the reader our experience: We feel that we have already defined quite a lot of common ground.

¹ Critical discussion in Watson 45ff.; Wahrig 317ff.

² Our understanding of the term will be explained in section 1.

1. A “Kristevan” account of the scientific discourses on poisoning

When looking for a field of historical research that would simultaneously put a focus on gender, power and knowledge between 1750 and 1850, I observed that authors in medical and pharmaceutical journals often drew the attention of their audience toward the topic of poisoning. Many of the images were implicitly or explicitly gendered. Medical and pharmaceutical writings on poisons were heavily loaded with central cultural values like responsibility (of the powerful toward the powerless, but also of the “subject” toward society), the power of science, and the value of nations. Misogynous statements were present all along, but the narratives and their contexts changed over time.

In order to get beyond collecting and describing my corpus of medical and pharmaceutical journals, I committed a transgression. I scanned a representative collection of German literature from the eighteenth to the twentieth century on CD-ROM (Bertram), searching for “poison” and “poisoning,” and I started to construct a deliberate conceptual/metaphorical grid which condensed the most frequent and the most persistent metaphorical elements in the texts I had found. So this was a double transgression – just looking at fragments of texts instead of reading them from the beginning to the end as I had been taught, and disregarding the fact that I was (and am) a historian of science, and not a literary studies person. But indeed the grid brought to light a series of images and concepts that seemed to be applicable both to literary and scientific texts. Apart from finding direct quotations from and allusions to literary texts and motives in my scientific texts, it now occurred to me that there was a deeply rooted tradition that manifested itself in the terms “poison” and “poisoning.”

I then sought help from a professional historian of literature, Martina Mittag. Later on, we thought that since a text is a text is a text, it might be instructive to look at a different medium, and at that point Heike Klippel, a film historian, joined us. Martina jolted me back in time, because she pointed out that many of the motives that I found in eighteenth-century scientific literature lead us right to the time of Shakespeare, whereupon we discovered that in principle we should have gone as far back as Latin and Greek Antiquity. Somewhere in the process we found that Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject was applicable to the issue of poison and poisoning, which might explain why poisoning has remained such an equally alarming and attractive subject. If the abject articulates a cultural constellation and a pattern of concepts/imaginings that are deeply rooted in “Western” culture, it might be worthwhile analyzing the functioning of poisoning discourses in science, in general public and in artistic productions. There is much to be learned from applying or modifying this category.

In her book *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* Julia Kristeva argues that abjection is the important but inarticulate ground for the genesis of symbol-production under the law of the “nom du père.” The latter breaks up the indiscriminate unity between mother and

child and normalizes the child's sign production, but it leaves behind a field where the "logic of the forbidden" – as Kristeva formulates it using a phrase coined by Georges Bataille – still exists. This abject creates the "*misère de l'interdit*" (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 79).³ The field of the abject implies a form of subject/object relation prior to, or – as I would like to shift the argument – alternative to subject/object relations which are in keeping with the Aristotelian logic of the excluded third. But abjection in Kristeva's understanding is not only a necessary precondition for symbol-production in the father's name. It also and simultaneously undermines the latter:

Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles. L'entre-deux, l'ambigu, le mixte. (*Pouvoirs* 12)

It is not the absence of propriety or sanity which makes someone/something abject, but that which troubles an identity, a system, an order. That which does not respect the limits, the places, the rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the mixed (existence). (*Powers* 4)⁴

Hence, abjection is a process that implies exclusion, but it also represents a contrasting process: Since abject sign production persists, it undermines and circumvents the separations and exclusions inherent in the logic of social order and its concomitant forms of communication.⁵

Our interest in abject sign production lies mostly on the epistemological side. Understanding the abject as a psychological entity can *help us understand its role in scientific discourse*, but we do not intend to engage in a discussion about whether or not psychology is prior or "basic" to the discourses we interpret. Hence, we are less interested in a possible *ontology* of the abject than in the abject as an *instrument* of critical analysis. Abject sign production then may be seen as a reservoir of subversion. Scientific discourse is generally understood as erecting clear borders between one object and another, as requiring a neat distinction between the subject and the object. When looked at from the perspective of the abject, the analysis of these discourses focuses on a

³ "Il s'agira, dans ce qui suit, de suggérer que cette relation archaïque à l'objet traduit en somme la relation à la mère" (Kristeva *Pouvoirs* 79) ["In the following, my point will be to suggest that such an archaic relationship to the object interprets, as it were, the relationship to the mother" (Kristeva, *Powers* 64)].

⁴ The English translation uses "composite" instead of "mixed," but mixing is a thoroughly pharmaceutical activity.

⁵ For a dialectical interpretation of Kristeva, see Maria Margaroni.

subversive undercurrent of scientific discourse – an undercurrent that undermines distinctions and is just as productive as the distinctions themselves.⁶

In our specific case, the discourse on poisonous substances implicitly articulates the social order and the threat under which it is erected and upheld, namely the threat of reversion, subversion and upheaval. Images pertaining to these threats have been deeply inscribed into explanations of the nature and effects of poisons.

Central Paradox Question: What does the abject articulate? Three motives

It is now interesting to note that scientific poisoning discourses not only take up narrations of poisonings and poisoners from the literary and cultural context but that they have a kernel of knowledge which can be spelled out as a remembrance of the abject. I will try to explain this by asking a paradoxical question: “*What does the abject articulate?*” A preliminary answer will be given by short descriptions of our three central narrative moments, our three “motives.”

These motives overlap, and it looks as if they all together constitute the theme of sublimation/the sublime within the figure of the abject. But this is something to be further discussed by the three authors of this paper.

First motive: Small quantity, enormous effect

In many definitions of poison (from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries) we find the statement that poisons are those substances that have an enormous deleterious effect even in a very small quantity.⁷ This resonates with

⁶ A still popular image depicting science as an activity that brings about clarity and regularly starts off with clear-cut definitions and distinctions no longer corresponds to the general perception of historians of science. Defining, classifying, and identifying are still regarded as essential activities of the sciences, but they come at the price of boundary objects (see Löwy).

⁷ For example: “POISON*, in medicine, a malignant quality in some animal, vegetable, or mineral body, which renders it hurtful, and even mortal, to those who take it in even a small quantity” (Chambers *Suppl.*, no page given). In their medical encyclopedia, Johann Samuel Ersch and Johann Gottfried Gruber distinguish between the *scientific* notion of poison that does not depend on the quantity but on the effect of a substance, and a *commonsensical and juridical* notion that does depend on quantity: “Eine fernere Eigenschaft der Gifte in diesem Sinne ist es, daß ihre verderblichen Wirkungen schon durch eine verhältnißmäßig kleine Menge in die Erscheinung treten, wodurch eben die Möglichkeit bedingt ist, sie jemandem in verbrecherischer Absicht und mehr oder weniger unbemerkt beizubringen” (Theile 81). In the *Dictionnaire médical* of 1887 the notion of poison is no longer dependent on a small dose but, at the same time, an exact definition seems to have become impossible: “Si la signification du mot poison est parfaitement saisie et presque toujours exactement appliquée par tout le monde, il est cependant impossible d’en donner une définition qui puisse convenir dans tous les cas.” Hence, there is now a contrast between the everyday concept of poison and poison as a scientific concept, which also means that poisons more or less escape classification: “Les poisons ne constituent pas en effet un ordre ou un groupe naturel doué de propriétés assez nettement définies pour pouvoir être isolés et caractérisés par

narratives dating from Antiquity like that of the poisoning of Heracles, who suffered greatly from the effects of just one drop of blood from the dying Hydra on his own arrow : The Centaur that he had killed with this arrow took revenge and donated some of its blood to Heracles' wife who later sent him a cloak impregnated with it. She (erroneously) believed that this would help to rekindle Heracles' waning love. In Ovid's version, sudden and violent action is represented by the metaphor of cast iron which as a result of its extreme heat causes the sudden evaporation of water : Arthur Golding's translation of 1567 remains close to the Latin original, "The scalding venom boiling in his blood, did make it hisse, As when a gad [spike, bar] of steel red hot in water quenched is" (Ovid 1567, 113: Book IX). In his 1727 translation, Samuel Garth compares the poison's action with a process of fermentation : "As the red iron hisses in the flood, / So boils the venom in his curdling blood" (Ovid 1727, vol 2, 49).⁸ In contrast to the earlier translation, the process is now envisaged using a popular alchemical metaphor. Curdling or fermentation occurs almost instantaneously after the addition of *just a few drops* (e.g., of acid) to milk or blood.

Likewise, in 1702, the physician Richard Mead was fascinated by the observation that "one drop" of viper poison would "do the execution" (Mead 9). He thought that poison crystals had sharp edges that could slice open the red blood cells, and the liquid thus set free would make the blood suddenly curdle by releasing some chemical agent.⁹ From about 1820, pharmacologists wondered whether there was an active contribution of the organism to the process of poisoning (Wahrig "Organisms"). This, too, could explain the enormous effect of small quantities.

Second motive: Underdetermination

The commonplace that poison is a substance that acts in a very small quantity is old, but it was undermined very early. Amongst the most interesting commentators in early modern times is Paracelsus. His famous dictum *dosis facit venenum* has been dramatically misunderstood up to the present day. By no means does it point to the necessity of establishing a quantitative relation between dose and effect (see Papadopoulos). On the contrary, Paracelsus states that poison and medicament are usually present in the same substance; their separation belongs both to the art of healing and to the basic capacities of the human body. Poisons often enter the patient's body by the medium of food, or with a medicinal drug. In order to prevent this, procedures of

quelques-unes de ces propriétés qui seraient applicables, sans restriction, à chacun en particulier. La toxicité n'est pas une chose absolue . . ." (Raige-Delorm/Dechambre 78).

⁸ Note that already the ghost in Hamlet describes the action of the poison as "curdling" his blood. See the following section of this essay authored by Martina Mittag.

⁹ Mead later revised the thesis that all poisons acted mainly on the blood, but he still used concepts from fermentation and thought that mineral poisons harmed the body by the edges of their crystals. See Mead 1756.

purification, refinement, and separation have developed throughout history. Mixture is something potentially dangerous that has to be controlled. The patient's bodily constitution, his diet, and other circumstances (like astrological constellations) have to be taken into account in order to find the adequate substance and "dose." As in Kristeva's account of the abject, mixture and impurity have a close symbolic linkage. Cleaning and separating are positioned on contrasting sides, the most important procedure here being sublimation (see next section of this paper). Yet other authors in early modern pharmacy were convinced that the art of pharmacy consisted in the right composition, hence mixture.

In 1785, Joseph Plenck, the author of a toxicology textbook, defined poisons by the criterion of small dose. When he added that the quantity of the administered substance determined whether or not it was a poison, he was already steering toward a toxicology, marking the difference between poisonous and medicinal action mainly by quantity (11). The *episteme* of modern pharmacy/pharmacology, that started out around 1850, has ruled out circumstances and mixtures and concentrated on linear relations between cause and effect. Yet, subterranean motives deriving from the more ancient *episteme* have lived on. Narratives of under-determinacy were nourished by numerous court cases in which it was impossible to decide whether the amount of poison administered to the victim had been sufficient to cause his/her death. There were even individuals who habitually ingested the number-one poison of the time – arsenic – in quantities which would have been deadly to anyone else (Tschudi 1). In addition, even the most advanced chemical tests proved to be fallible when applied in forensic cases: They were potentially inconclusive and susceptible to errors.¹⁰

The aspect of under-determinacy is not only characteristic of poison as an object of forensic medicine and chemistry. It was also in the background of nineteenth-century narratives of accidental poisoning. This is illustrated by two case reports from French and Belgian medical journals. In 1869, the pharmacist Stanislas Martin was called to attend to two children who both had a mysterious illness. The children, who were apparently employed as homeworkers, complained of a general "malaise." The symptoms were vague: the young patients suffered, but it was difficult to say from what. It was only the pharmacist's acumen that led to the discovery of the cause, namely poisonous stearin candles in the children's working room. In the story, the "malaise général" contrasts with the identification of the source, but it corresponds to the expanding industrial production that was the source of many new and poisonous dyes and paints (Martin 391).

In 1873, a French physician attended to a clerk (a passionate hunter) who was feeling an extreme "dépérissement" when working in his office, which he had adorned with stuffed deer. During a stay at the seaside, the patient recovered but, after his

¹⁰ "The debate over the evidentiary value of arsenical spots, from our analytical vantage point, can be regarded as a set of contemporary reflections on the breakdown of toxicological signification stemming from a relationship of underdetermination" (Burney 102). See also the whole chapter 78-114.

“reentrée,” the “détresse” started again. The vomiting, uneasiness, anxiety, and cramps that he complained about (Wintribert 341) were (and are) all well-known symptoms of poisoning. They were reported in many cases, but they were as unspecific as the illnesses described by the words “malaise” and “détresse.” Besides, who would not complain of a certain amount of “dépérissement” in view of the “reentrée” (which seems to be a perilous moment of *passage* up to the present day)? Simultaneously, the symptoms are in line with the aspect of rejection included in the figure of the abject (Kristeva, *Powers* 2). In the case of the clerk, arsenic preparations had been used for the conservation of his hunting prey. Case reports like these often refer to the dangers of new substances that were industrially produced or of the conditions and circumstances of industrial production itself.

Third motive: Constructing identities

Under-determination and paradoxical relationships may be regarded as the origin of the urge to construct identities. It is essential to identify and define poisonous agents, poisoners, and – conversely – the healthy individual or collective body that must be defended. We find narrations of identities in the conclusions penned by the authors of the above-cited case reports : “The malaise général” is reduced to poisonous candles (containing copper arsenic); the arsenic in the stuffed deer is the origin of the “dépérissement.” The scientist can point to material causes, although most often he does not know anything about the pathogenic mechanism of the agents he identifies. The scientist in court can show the arsenic mirror produced by the most common chemical tests.

Sublimation/The Sublime

Under-determinacy, abstraction, and the process of refining are constitutive concepts of sublimation both in the chemical and in the psychological sense : Sublimation is a process of refining substances, and as such it was a concept of Early Modern chemistry. The image of a substance being heated and then condensing further up in the reaction system (in the test tube, or in the alembic) links sublimation and the sublime. The image of a sudden change in the chemical characteristics of a substance is also associated with sublimation that is in turn the nucleus of discourses on poisons. The abject borders on sublimation: it is “edged with the sublime” (Kristeva, *Powers* 11), dangerous *and* productive, creative *and* highly ambivalent.

Our next section will take up the topic of the sublime. Writing on poisons always means a zigzag along the dividing lines of power. It means articulating what should not/no longer be articulated because it is against the law of the father, because it is something which points to a relationship with the mother, to the indistinct, the dangerous, but also to creativity and power.

2. Poison and Abject in Literary History

Continuing Bettina Wahrig's zigzag along the delimitations of power I will move into more abstract zones and comment on the abject as the shadowy Other of modern subjecthood. It develops from its early modern beginnings to its full-fledged version in the nineteenth century. Having departed from questions of a) gender and b) secrecy in the early modern period I soon came across the topic of gendering in the history of science and like Bettina Wahrig developed an interest in those discursive boundaries that are as symptomatic of the talk on poison as they are of secrets. Once it had dawned on me that a poison is not a poison is not a poison (see the three motives formulated above), it was clear that there was a definitive link between secrecy and poison as culturally defined phenomena, and the link pointed to the question of power. Some examples from Shakespeare might suffice to illustrate early modern reformulations of the connection between poison and power, and they are all the more valuable for pointing to the past and to the future at the same time : *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, the most well-known example, depicts a poisoning case still anchored in a traditional order of things, which is, of course, about to collapse. The secret murder of Hamlet's father through henbane not only points to the death of an individual and a king, it also attacks a whole universe, a worldview : not the "I," but "[t]he time" ... "is out of joint" (1.5.189). The notion of the abject as we know it is hardly applicable if seen from a more traditional pre-modern perspective. Rather than autonomous self and individual will, Gertrude, Claudius, Polonius, and Ophelia here seem to be the victims of changing circumstances. Even Claudius' ambitions remain childlike, pale and little strategic. While most individuals in *Hamlet* die with old Denmark, the reconstruction of subjecthood as a decontextualized, autonomous entity marks a central aspect of the modern age and is accompanied by shifting notions of power and subjecthood. The abject in *Hamlet* begins with a transformed subject, where the construction of self calls up and necessitates its other, where Claudius's ambition turns into murder and Hamlet's revenge into the erasure of a whole family. Indeed, what emerges out of that earthquake is an individual severed from his contextual network of dynasty, family, and mother, an individual who will read and think, and change the world – and is perfectly able to hide his thoughts from the outside world. Shakespeare's worlds are full of seeing and seeming, of outward show and inner will, of individual desire and outward constraints. The new focus on this hidden interiority of the subject is supported by the early modern "media revolution," that will (slowly, of course) give rise to the modern reader, one whose bodily surfaces do not necessarily reflect mind and soul, and a subject that has started "writing" itself, withholding secrets, producing others, always caught in the tension between seeing and seeming that marks many of Shakespeare's (and his

contemporaries’) plays.¹¹ It might also not be a coincidence that the victim in *Hamlet* is poisoned through the ear, thus pointing to the approaching end of an aural-oral economy that will give way to a new focus on sight, a culture of reading and reasoning. Hamlet’s revenge will be an individual revenge, but he cannot rescue the collective order of Denmark.

As an obvious indicator of economic power, the *topos* of money as poison serves as a focus in *Timon of Athens* to illustrate that change : whereas money in a contextual framework of church or court had a positive connotation in a world run on principles of loyalty and honor, it will assume rather negative qualities in a society run on hard cash. Thus the once rich and generous Timon, who had lived in utmost pomp and luxury until he lost all his riches, left Athens to seek shelter from human beings in the woods. In this abject state of savage life he ironically accuses money as the medium of abjection, lamenting its poisonous nature and its effect of corrupting the order of things:

Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,
Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.
. . . . This yellow slave
Will knit and break religions, bless the accursed;
Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves
And give them title, knee and approbation
With senators on the bench (Shakespeare, *Timon* 4:3.27-37)

It is here that Shakespeare recognizes the trap of the modern subject, its Other, and great equivocator, and – at the same time – shows how our construction of identities is motivated by the necessity to defend ourselves against the abject. Marx was extremely fascinated by this passage and declared that money was

the distorting and confounding of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities. . . . Money is the alienated *ability of mankind*. That which I am unable to do as a *man*, and of which therefore all my individual essential powers are incapable, I am able to do by means of *money*. Money thus turns each of these powers into something which in itself it is not – turns it, that is, into its *contrary*. (190)

Whereas the reversal at work in *Hamlet* – the play ends with the extinction of a whole family instead of a new legitimate king – is an ontological phenomenon, realized through poison in its concrete sense, in *Romeo and Juliet* the secret swapping of poisoned

¹¹ In *Othello*, see the many references to “seeing” and “seeming” that characterize the early modern rise of (hidden) individual ambition vs. traditional values of honor and public responsibility.

swords and poisoned drinks by which the lines between murderer and victim, good and evil are blurred and in a most literal sense *con-fused*, is taken to a more abstract level when focusing on money and poison in a metaphorical sense.¹² Money and poison as the great equivocators reappear when Romeo, believing Juliet dead, buys poison from the poor apothecary in order to set an end to his now worthless life:

There is thy gold, worse poison to men's souls
Doing more murders in this loathsome world
Than these poor compounds that thou mayst not sell.
I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none
Come, cordial and not poison, go with me
To Juliet's grave, for there I must use thee. (Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*
5.1.80-86)

The con-fusions of poison and money, those that Friar Laurence points to when he says “confusion’s cure lives not in these confusions” (4.5.65), parallel the inversion of death and life, which accompany early modern reformulations of the subject. If money appears in its corrupted version in Romeo’s lines, poison helps to stimulate life in an emerging economy of subjecthood that privileges romantic love over family arrangement. From that perspective Romeo’s “cordial” parallels Cleopatra’s poisonous snakes in *Antony and Cleopatra* that are to end her life (“Dost thou not see the baby at my breast, / That sucks the nurse asleep” [*Antony and Cleopatra*, 5.2.304-5]) commented by Burton Raffel in his introduction to the play: “Rather than seeing herself as the ‘victim’ of a poisonous snake, Cleopatra here turns herself into the giver, not the recipient, and what she gives is, metaphorically, life rather than death” (Shakespeare, *Anthony* xxxi). Likewise, the reformulation of values in *Romeo and Juliet* is recognized by Capulet, Juliet’s father, after her presumed death:

All things that we ordained festival,
Turn from their office to black funeral;
Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change,
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corpse,
And all things change them to the contrary. (*Romeo and Juliet*, 4.5.84-90)

As in *Hamlet* (and differently from *Antony and Cleopatra*) the poisonous substance seems to multiply and undermine all previous planning through the uncontrollable

¹² Marx points to this resemblance himself when he characterizes money as the “true agent of separation and the true cementing agent [:] . . . it is the chemical power of society” (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*).

effects that frame its use (the ghost of the Father, secret sabotage, miscommunication, secret interchange). However, *Romeo and Juliet* takes inversion to a level of abstraction that is symptomatic of a more general process of change in the early modern period. Instead of the illicit relationship, it now perverts parental planning, previously conceived of as “promotion” (4.5.71); instead of wealth, money promotes death. And more than that, poisonous substances as well as financial factors affect the stability of individuals, pluralizing meaning in the sense of Kristevan abject-hood : they potentially enable love like in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (when Titania falls in love with Bottom), bring death as in *Hamlet*, serve as cordial as in *Antony and Cleopatra*, lead to excessive desire as in *The Merchant of Venice* (where affection and avarice compete when Salanio mimics Shylock’s cries of “My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!” (2.8.15-16)¹³ – both money and poison trouble the very categories that the newly emerging subject is based on, they trouble “an identity, a system, an order” (Kristeva, *Pouvoirs* 12). This paradox becomes particularly acute where it foreshadows the opening of new markets, the introduction of paper money and the opening of the Bank of England in the later seventeenth century. These will be essential factors in relocating the multiplicatory nature of money toward a new level of abstraction and dematerialization that parallels similar developments in the use of poisons through quantification and realignment within a logic of cause and effect.

Money then points to both the newly emerging “I” that is conjured in the staccato repetition of “Put money in thy purse” in Othello – and the Not-I, perfect medium of abjection, as it triggers fusion and confusion. In a full-fledged nineteenth-century subject economy, after all the one that Marx referred to, this paradoxical relation is of course far more pronounced than in these early modern beginnings. In order to illustrate the gendered nature of the abject, Bulwer-Lytton’s novel *Lucretia, Or, The Children of the Night* (1846) provides an excellent starting point. Here Bulwer-Lytton builds on the story of the fifteenth-century Italian star poisoner, seen as whore and holy at the same time, translating her into what seems a very British nineteenth-century logic

¹³ It is worth looking at the full description of Shylock’s reaction to the theft and subsequent escape of his daughter because it reflects his confusion over the objects of desire (keeping in mind that this is Salanio’s perspective):

I never heard a passion so confused,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable,
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
‘My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
Justice! the law! my ducats, and my daughter!
A sealed bag, two sealed bags of ducats,
Of double ducats, stolen from me by my daughter!
And jewels, two stones, two rich and precious stones,
Stolen by my daughter! Justice! find the girl;
She hath the stones upon her, and the ducats.’ (Shakespeare, *The Merchant* 2.8.12-22)

between the Victorian angel in the house and the cold-blooded poisoner. What is at stake is of course MONEY, and Bulwer-Lytton's Lucretia murders for a legacy that would otherwise be denied to her. However, her scheme does not reflect the dirty world of crime and intrigue but an intricate quasi-scientific venture that opens up to Lucretia those very qualities that are denied to nineteenth-century women : knowledge, power, and respectability. Whereas poisoning was traditionally gendered as an effeminate version of murder, it is here linked to (male) scientific knowledge, and at times the story reaches a paradoxical state where subject and non-subject merge, a moment that turns the poisonous substance into an agent of sublimity :

It is a mighty thing to feel in one's self that one is an army, – more than an army. What thousands and millions of men, with trumpet and banner, and under the sanction of glory, strive to do, – destroy a foe, – that, with little more than an effort of the will, with a drop, a grain, for all his arsenal, – one man can do. (Bulwer-Lytton 215)

The “man” who poisons is of course a woman, and this passage represents a curious version of the Burkean sublime, that mixture of utter pleasure and horror which seizes body and mind equally. Considering the historical context of the French Revolution – which Burke had commented on – it also forms part of the connection between a woman's descent into crime and the fear of the nation's collapse into political turmoil. In her dialogue with her French collaborator Dalibard, Bulwer-Lytton's Lucretia partakes of a moment of sublimity that is usually not ascribed to women :

There was a horrible enthusiasm about this reasoning devil [Dalibard] as he spoke thus; his crest rose, his breast expanded. That animation which a noble thought gives to generous hearts, kindled in the face of the apologist for the darkest and basest of human crimes. Lucretia shuddered; but her gloomy imagination was spelled; there was an interest mingled with her terror. (Bulwer-Lytton 215)

Interest and terror : far more than in Bulwer-Lytton's contemporaries' strange fascination with the coolness of murderers, the nineteenth century presents itself here in all its strange ambivalence : reason topples over and becomes its opposite — sheer violence and utter brutality. The fascination about the latter is definitely not founded in reason. While this ambivalence reaches far wider than our perspective allows for, the question of gender evoked in the situation appears interesting in itself. As with the sublime, (male) subjecthood is challenged by a monstrous unfathomable femininity, which exceeds and negates it. Like (feminine) nature the figure of the murderess threatens humanity at its core but – for the reader, of course – is kept at bay by her virtual nature. The space of the novel allows for the doubling gesture of being both self

and Other characteristic of the Kantian as well as the Kristevian experience. Performing the uncontrollable multiplication that already linked money and poison in Shakespeare's plays and made for the paradoxical relation of self and other, the fusion of "interest" and "terror" now point to a sublimity outside that very economy of s/abjecthood.

If for Kant the sublime marks the edge of the subject (see section 3 below), Kristeva's sublimity is explicitly linked to the abject – and a notion of the sublime which fuses Kant's metaphysical and Burke's psychological sublime, empowering challenge to the powers of the subject AND utter loss of self:

As soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers – it has always already triggered – a spree of perceptions and words that expand memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where "I" am – delight and loss. Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is something added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling. (Kristeva, *Powers* 12)

3. Poisoning as an abject activity in popular cinema

It was in fact the reading of Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* that directed my attention toward Charles Chaplin's *Monsieur Verdoux* (USA 1947) among the wide selection of films in which the topic of poisoning occurs. To my understanding the film elaborates and visualizes certain topics that are crucial to Kristeva's work and which have been applied to discourses on poison by Bettina Währg: the first is the idea of the utter opposition to subject as well as object (Kristeva, *Powers* 1), an unspeakable that cannot be identified and can only be traced to bodily wastes, fluids, unstructured organic matter, decay and definitely death.¹⁴ A second important aspect is the deep involvement into the archaic maternal, aeons before any differentiation takes place (*Powers* 10-15). The third topic which is important for the film is the abject criminal who (in the Kristevian sense) neither breaks nor denies the law but winds himself around it in a parasitical manner, being false, corrupt, cheating (16-18). In the following I will first shortly sketch some characteristics of Chaplin's film and in the next step develop the discourse of the abject through the film analysis.

Monsieur Verdoux is a dark comedy with serious and dramatic elements. It is part of the later work of Chaplin who at the time was 58 years old. As the well-known *Arsenic and Old Lace* (USA 1944) it treats the serial killing of elderly people, but in Chaplin's film the apparent motive is not mercy, and the ones to be killed are women.

¹⁴ "Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver" (Kristeva, *Powers* 3).

M. Verdoux is a polygamist who is married to several women at a time. He kills them off to inherit their money. Since he lost his job, this is his way of supporting his son and young wheel-chair-bound “true” wife. Finally caught, he chooses not to escape the police. While walking up to the guillotine he remains aloof and acts like an aristocrat, acknowledging having lost his case but admitting no guilt, and attenuating his own crime by criticizing modern society for the mass murder in World War I. When the priest asks him to make his peace with God, Verdoux answers : “I am at peace with God. My conflict is with man. [...] Who knows what sin is. Born as it was from heaven, from God’s fallen angel. Who knows the ultimate destiny it serves?” And to the priest’s prayer, “May the Lord have mercy on your soul,” he answers: “Why not. After all it belongs to Him.”¹⁵

Verdoux uses various means to kill that generally remain off screen. The exception is killing by poisoning : it is a central narrative element of the film. Verdoux first extracts information about a certain poison from the local apothecary¹⁶ and wants to test it on a young woman he happens to meet in the street but decides against it in the last moment. Instead, he rather casually poisons a policeman who is in possession of evidence against him. The climax of the poison thread is Verdoux’s unsuccessful effort to kill one of his wives who has the telling name of Anna Bonheur.

The combination of Verdoux’s inability to poison the young woman, the easy riddance of the wives and the prolonged complications of the attempted murder of Mme Bonheur all lead to the assumption that the film displays a strong interest in the dispensability of unfertile femininity. All of Verdoux’s victims are portrayed as clearly post-menopausal : they have their hair pinned up, they lack feminine characteristics or sinuous body shapes; instead they are either heavy and stately or dry and rigid. There is no tenderness in their physique, and only to Mme Bonheur a certain softness is allowed, but this is the unpleasant softness of a face fallen out of shape, of exaggerated feminine attire, ostrich feathers and inadequate frills. Neither of the two younger women (the one Verdoux considers poisoning and his wife) is depicted as erotic or sensuous. They are rather sensitive, thoughtful, and their faces are lit to appear bright and innocent when they look up to Verdoux, their benefactor. Here it is interesting to consider the age of the actresses in the film. The actresses playing the illegitimate wives, their maids, or their sisters are all in their fifties. However Martha Raye portraying Annabella Bonheur is 31. Raye was obviously chosen because she was a comedian, qualified to play the frighteningly grotesque female. As Verdoux’s official and beloved wife, Mady Corell was almost forty, but nevertheless she appears youthful and maiden-like and seems much younger than Annabella Bonheur. It is not an uncommon practice in Hollywood cinema to cast younger actresses for the roles of older women. Film mothers, for

¹⁵ *Monsieur Verdoux*, 1:56:15-1:56:59.

¹⁶ The poison should be a composition of exnide, ethna bromide and C2HC, supposed to be infallibly deadly, leaving no traces in the body.

example, are often played by women who are not significantly older or may even be younger than the male actor who interprets their son.¹⁷ The age of women on the screen corresponds to their physicality only to a very limited extent. It is instead an effect of the discourse of the film text that intentionally makes age disappear or reappear as indeed a physical characteristic. With this in mind it is rather unusual to see in *Monsieur Verdoux* middle-aged actresses whose age is pointed out. This choice creates a very strong impression of aging women dominating the film, an impression to which the character played by Martha Raye, emphasized through a number of very disadvantageous shots of her, which again equate 'unattractive' with 'old,' is easily subsumed.

It is obvious that these women are not individuals but act as a negative figuring of the improper and unclean which, according to *Powers of Horror*, disturbs identity (Kristeva, *Powers* 4). The absence of the horrors of maternity is the main characteristic of all femininity in the film. At the same time maternity is the demarcation line between acceptable and deeply rejectable femininity, which must be done away with. The innocent state before maternity is allowed to live. The female body past maternity is not just worthless but a threat by its very existence, a reminder of death : its status must be clarified by becoming really dead, a process emphasized by the introduction of the film's first dead woman shown in the form of smoke. Verdoux, whom we see for the first time, is cleaning up a house after his recently deceased wife, whom we know he has killed and presumably burnt since heavy smoke is coming out of the incinerator. The black smoke communicates the idea that something very dirty and difficult to destroy is being burnt, contaminating the idyllic garden in which Verdoux is enjoying the roses.¹⁸ In a way the black cloud represents all the women to follow : strong, menacing and at their best only when destroyed and retransformed in ignoble dirt, earth returned to earth.

The women's function is to save the main male character from becoming an obsolete figure. He is also aging, but he is lively, agile, and determined by his spirit, not his body. For a man, it is suggested, being in his fifties is not a problem: fifteen or fifty, a man has apparently a claim to an unchanging existence. There is a strong implicit idea that a man stays alive and well as long as he bans maternity into the unspeakable beyond and holds on to innocent femininity. This idea is especially emphasized through Chaplin's well-known private situation at the time. Four years prior to *Monsieur Verdoux* he had been the subject of a scandal due to a paternity suit from which he emerged triumphant by marrying Oona O'Neill just after her eighteenth birthday. Like Verdoux in the film, Chaplin had small children, confirming that menopause and infertility only

¹⁷ To give just one example: in *Notorious* (USA 1946, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock) Leopoldine Konstantin, born in 1886, plays the mother of Claude Rains, born in 1889.

¹⁸ At the same time a vague menace for him comes from the remarks of the elderly neighbor women : "I wonder how long he's going to keep that incinerator burning. It's been going for the last three days" (0:06:28).

devalues actual or potential mothers. Not even death can question this – as the film tells us from the first minute. Interestingly enough the film begins in a graveyard : Verdoux is already dead. Far from being a dirty cloud, he is represented by an erect stone with clear-cut writing. The camera lightly moves around the bright graveyard, creating the impression that his soul is hovering among the trees. Unsurprisingly, he still speaks, introducing his story in his mannerist, would-be self-ironical but in fact cocky style.

Nevertheless, the narrator's attempt to appear as a clean and honorable man fails. The structure of the film too bluntly marks the abject, obsessively repeating the empty gesture of throwing away : we never see a murder actually happening, only the before and after. The women's bodies do not actually become cadavers in this film, they are shown to us only when still alive. Out of this refusal to create an object of rejection, no subjectivity, as Kristevas says, can be recovered. As a character, Verdoux is contaminated by his compulsive loathing of women : neither his brilliancy nor the comedy elements can cover up his dwarfish, foppish appearance. The false eyebrows and the pouting mouth are meant to be funny, the elegance and "English" accent are supposed to be refined, but they cancel each other out and leave the dreadful impression of a little man with dyed hair whose latently hysterical warding off of death is despicable. But his "abjectivity" goes much further and emanates from a deep lack of identity and "uncleanliness" on various levels. The film is neither comedy nor drama. Verdoux is neither a criminal nor a philosopher, but most of all he is neither a man nor a woman – he is a poisoner. As shown by Bettina Wahrig, poison is a most undefined and fatal substance and the poisoner the lowest and most unmanly type of murderer. Poisoning is the alleged classical murder method of women. Being too weak and cowardish to use violence, the poisoner abuses intelligence and science for her/his base purposes. In the respective discourses poisoner and poison are regularly conflated, both being insidious and thoroughly evil. Poisoning as an abject activity is in fact what accounts for the unsavory effect of the film.

Presenting poisoning as a highly comical episode unfolds the gender aspects of poisoning. The most infallible mixture, proven by the death of the policeman, fails against Anna Bonheur. At first sight it seems that Anna Bonheur cannot be killed because she is a joke, a farce of femininity. She belittles Verdoux, scolds him, calls him "pigeon," and in her presence he completely loses control. I concur with Robert Warshow's observations : "Not only does she defeat him : she overshadows him at every moment. With Annabella, Verdoux is a subdued man; intelligence is on his side, but in this case intelligence does not count – Annabella has the vitality. There is a kind of desperation in his painstaking and elaborate attempts to kill her [...] he is up against a force greater than his own" (Warshow 190).

Verdoux's complicated effort to poison Anna indicates how important it is for him to get rid of her. But the comedy of *quid pro quo* makes him the butt of his own scheme. Verdoux leaves the bottle with the label "Peroxide" containing the poison in the bathroom while putting the real peroxide in Annabella's wine – in the meantime the

maid dyes her hair with the bottle. Giving Annabella Bonheur a harmless substance by mistake is not confusing enough : instead of drinking his sarsaparilla, Verdoux accidentally drinks the “poison” himself when Anna, with her big behind, moves the tray with the glasses. Believing he has ingested the poison, Verdoux has a hysterical fit and gets his stomach pumped.

Annabella is transgressive in that she does not accept her position as inferior, which leads to her being portrayed as particularly loathsome. While the film depicts the killing of elderly women as virtually natural, it makes the death of Annabella Bonheur a necessity, as reflected, for instance, in a comment made by French filmmaker Claude Chabrol in a short documentary devoted to *Monsieur Verdoux* : “A striking detail in *Verdoux* is the fact that the women he kills are ugly and unbearable. . . . [Annabella Bonheur] represents all the elements that in a European mind define American vitality and vulgarity. . . . Martha Raye’s character is really the kind of person you want to murder. Kill her already!”¹⁹ Comments made on the Internet Movie Data Base show that Chaplin’s concept of the woman “over the top” was successful. One comment reads : “Brash loudster Martha Raye, often considered a bust in films for being intolerably larger-than-life . . . [is] a shrill, obnoxious . . . dame whom nobody would really mind seeing knocked off” (Brumburgh).

Annabella seems old in a specifically appalling way because she claims sexuality for herself. Not only the remarks she makes but the ways the camera shows her use her body and display conjugal and domestic affection continuously underscore her inappropriateness. When sitting with Verdoux on the sofa, she throws her legs onto his knees. The camera keeps on lingering in a crude manner on her seemingly wide behind, large bust, her big mouth, and garish getup. On the night preceding the poisoning attempt, Verdoux resorts to chloroform to save himself from having to perform his marital duties. Chaplin’s film not only jokes about Annabella’s sexual appetite but also about the horror of her becoming a mother. When she holds up a pair of baby socks, Verdoux seems shocked. He produces a contrived smile when he learns that it is the neighbor who is pregnant. To Verdoux, grotesque as she may seem, Annabella is the bad weed : spreading all over the place, devouring everything in the way and even threatening to reproduce: the situation requires poisoning.

But Verdoux fails and debases himself to the extreme. Counting on his superior intellect, he proves himself to be as undefined as the poison itself. He becomes involved in a most unsettling mixture of fluids : his fumbling of peroxide bottles in the bathroom, the poison on the head of the maid, the “vile” sarsaparilla he drinks confirm his lack of performance. This vile wine is literally given to him by Annabella’s behind. He has finally become the receptacle, the abject maternal body. Pumping his stomach, he discharges some amorphous inside to remain emptied, a cadaver.

¹⁹ *Chaplin Today: Monsieur Verdoux* (F 2003: TV, Dir. Bernard Eisenschitz): 0.14.56-0.16.12, English translation of Chabrol’s spoken comment.

Verdoux's existence beyond the law is reflected in the continual claim of the murderer and comedian to be taken seriously as a philosopher. In the end he even assumes that his deeds might serve some unknown destiny and puts himself on a level with God. Disintegrating in this manner, Verdoux shows what Kristeva calls "the infamy of fascism": "The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them. . . . It kills in the name of life" (Kristeva, *Powers* 15-16).

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Contemporary Theatre in “Post” Perspective: Postdrama as the Antisemiotical (R)evolution?

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Abstract: One of the main goals of both contemporary theatre and theatre theory is to overcome the traditional semiotical perspective, strongly based on structuralism. Since the 80s and following this idea, theatre artists and theorists have been thinking theatre from a post-structuralist and even deconstructivist point of view. This perspective has introduced important streams in theatre theory, such as feminism, post-marxism and postmodernity, and has given place to the phenomenon known as “post-dramatic” theatre. Having this in mind, this essay deals with some of Julia Kristeva’s reflections about semiotics, post-structuralism and postmodernity to discuss if this so-called “post-drama” breaks with the traditional theory, or if it is merely another form of postmodern provocation.

Résumé: Un des objectifs principaux du théâtre contemporain et de la théorie du théâtre est de dépasser la perspective sémiotique traditionnelle qui s’appuie fortement sur le structuralisme. Depuis les années 80, artistes et théoriciens du théâtre repensent le théâtre d’un point de vue poststructuraliste et même déconstructionniste. Cet effort a introduit des courants importants dans la théorie du théâtre, tels que le féminisme, le post-marxisme et la postmodernité, et a fait place au phénomène appelé théâtre “post-dramatique.” Cet essai s’intéresse à quelques-unes des réflexions de Julia Kristeva sur la sémiotique, le post-structuralisme et la postmodernité, afin d’examiner si le théâtre post-dramatique rompt avec la tradition théorique ou s’il n’est qu’une autre forme de provocation postmoderne.

Keywords: Artaud – theatre of cruelty – Kristeva – abjection – Derrida – Brecht – Postdramatic Theatre – Hans Thies Lehmann – *mimesis*

The theoretical roots of something new: how is the interest in post-theatre born?

From Aristotle to Nietzsche, there has always been something in theatre that has strongly interested philosophers; and from Sophocles to Peter Brook or Robert Wilson, theatre artists have thought about their art in a way that has sometimes been more theoretical or philosophical than creative. However, as with other fields of human thought, twentieth-century art has maximized these philosophical and theoretical positions and has exceeded the limits of the preceding definition of theatre in order to achieve an authentic revolution. This

post-avant-garde revolution has shaken up the traditional, ontological definition of theatre not only in an evolutionary artistic way, but also in the philosophical conception of how its essences could lead on to something artistically new, a virgin space for scholars and philosophers where they could renew their thought and even their previously-held ideas about traditional questions such as mimesis, structure, sign or canon.

Of course, the attention given by philosophy to forms of representation related to the rise of Semiotics after the Second World War has displayed a theoretical and terminological apparatus that has allowed a more scientific approach to questions traditionally treated from a descriptive and sometimes uncritical point of view. Structuralism, for example, has led to important advances in theatre analysis, especially applicable to its performative expression, and, of course, semiotics has found an attractive and almost ignored field of study, traditionally monopolized by literary studies. Moreover, theatrical companies working in the second half of the twentieth century were also researching ways to avoid the presence of literature and even words in drama, and trying to find a form of specifically theatrical – or performative – evocation of sense and meaning. In this artistic context, the work of the first poststructuralists such as Julia Kristeva has been crucial, especially her objective of configuring a less symbolic and more instinctive and connotative semiotics that indicated a relation between sign and reality similar to the ruptural mimesis of contemporary performance. It should also not be forgotten that the Kristevian concept of “abjection” has a relationship with the Artaudian Theatre of Cruelty (the genesis of almost all theatrical revolutions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), since this avant-garde artist demonstrated through his confrontation with bourgeois drama that the theatrical revolution could only be born through close proximity with marginalized artists who were capable of creating new ways of signification and work out of the limits of the symbolic order, turning their object (art) into trauma.

It is Jacques Derrida who, in the mid 1960s,¹ first takes interest in Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty and writes an almost classical paper on the theory of contemporary theatre that explains the relationship between Artaud and the new forms of signification that would arrive later : “The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation” (Derrida 208-223). Artaud’s theatrical theory must be placed in the 1920s in an artistic stream that was strongly opposed to realist-figurative theatre, and should also be related to the ideological opposition to the *dominant* forms of literary, bourgeois and commercial theatre. However, Derrida much like Julia Kristeva later on, is actually attracted by the Artaudian concept of *cruelty*, and is specially interested in two of the defining lines of this concept : a) theatre as direct presentation, not as *representation*; that is, theatre as (sacred) life; and b) theatre as a new language.

¹ *Writing and difference* was first published in 1967.

In his essay, Derrida points out most of the elements and debates that would progressively be discussed in contemporary theatre's theory and practice. Nevertheless, Derrida does go as far as to propose the keys for a deconstructive reading of classical theatre, and he does not look very far away from Artaud when showing his support for a desirable renewal of drama in terms of the presence of cruelty. Did Derrida not see a possible deconstruction of theatre in Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty? Or otherwise, was Derrida's interest in Artaud caused by the intuition that only a vision like *cruelty* could remove the old structures of theatre and redefine its essential elements in order to prove that a *de-centered* theatre based on another concept of subject was possible?

This paper takes this last question as a hypothesis and point of departure for a discussion about how contemporary theatre could break with (*deconstruct*) antique structures of drama by maintaining its semiotic definition and by rooting the review of its languages in the maintenance of the concept of *meaning* and *interpretation*. In fact, the theatrical application of postmodern doubt about the subject and the significant presence of sign has led to a review (and commonly a rejection) of the traditional structures of "drama," marked by their *central* categories, such as *character*, *conflict*, *time in progression*, and *space of reference*. This doubt has made artists since the 1920s redefine the ontological status of theatre: without characters, stories, conflicts and deals, can theatre still be considered a *representation*? What does it represent? How can the old and hackneyed *mimesis* be integrated into postmodern thought and art?

All these questions converge in today's performing arts and comprise the first great critique of Aristotelian theatre after Bertold Brecht. And this critique has been made, in part, by "pure philosophers" interested in "different" performing "artists" working within the limits of the traditional definition of theatre. Performing against the *canonical drama* or against drama and theatrical text itself in order to prove that theatre is more than written words and to show that *scenic* semiotics are most probably the real basis of theatrical processes of signification.

Consequently, this *bouleversant* point of view consists in the convergence of theatre artists' interest in Artaud's work (specially the so-called revolutionary companies: Living Theatre, Grotowski and Tadeusz Kantor among others) and theatre artists also influenced by postmodern thought in the 1980s (Pina Bausch, Peter Brook, Müller, Sarah Kane). However, as shown above, this revolutionary theatre also attracts art philosophers such as Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Alain Badiou or Julia Kristeva, all of whom strive to give sense to these artistic forms placed at the limits of the traditional definition of art as representation. This is how a new conception of artistic semiotics is born within a redefinition of the concept of art and new research on the social and communicative position of artists. Furthermore, a new and more active and creative definition of audiences is needed in order to lead them to their new role in the face of new forms of decodification

In his well-known book *Postdramatic Theatre*, Hans-Thies Lehmann established an interesting point of view when he manages to describe a total concept simply through

the name that he confers upon this *new* theatre (*new* and not so *new*; that is, *contemporary* but also *post* anti-Aristotelian theatre, or *anti-dramatic* theatre) that is the object of his analysis. “[P]ostdramatic” as a term or name certainly has its detractors, but its descriptive capacity is undeniable.² Lehmann speaks about a theatre that is not exactly *drama* because:

- 1) It has broken with the structures of drama, applying to theatre the postmodern abolition of the concepts “*structure*,” even “*structured structure*,” and “*subject*,” by breaking with the character as a *central* element of theatre and life, and by forcing to rethink the roles of the audience and the stage;
- 2) It is constructed by means of a renewal of the concept of *mimesis*, redefining performing arts from the point of view of a scenic re-presentation or a new kind of *mimesis* constructing a *possible world* which is not read through the old simulation-agreement, but through a simple disbelief-agreement;
- 3) Strongly influenced by French thinkers related to post-structuralism and semiotics (the *Tel Quel* group and Kristevan thought, for example), contemporary theatre from the 1970s has questioned the traditional *language* of theatre in order to attest to the necessity to redefine other *languages* giving sense to the performance itself.

However, this *postdrama* or this *contemporary theatre*, this *new theatre*, IS theatre. Or rather, it demands our consideration of it as a *performing art*, and seeks to escape from its traditional dramatic or textual definition and to open itself up to a general *scenic* conception. Postdramatic theatre reaches a redefinition of the concept of theatre itself although it abolishes its own defining categories (structure and subject, *mimesis*, language) because it does not abolish the concept of sign. More precisely, it does not reject a hermeneutic possibility in the process of making theatre or in the process of *receiving* or *reading* theatre. In short, *postdrama* does not reject theatre as a kind of communicative process derived from its essential need for the spectator’s *co-presence* and its development *hic et nunc*, in time and space. Thus, the break with structures of drama and the construction of a new *mimesis* or *fiction* is rooted in the preservation of the concept of *sign*, at least in a hermeneutic sense.

Postdrama as (a new) sign

For many reasons, those who think that a semiotic perspective in theatre studies

² “Face à un mode foncièrement différent dans l’emploi du signe théâtral, il semble judicieux de nommer ‘postdramatique’ un secteur significatif du nouveau théâtre. Dans le même temps, le nouveau *texte* de théâtre qui, lui, réfléchit sans cesse sur sa constitution comme construction du langage est souvent un texte de théâtre ‘ayant fini d’être dramatique’. En faisant allusion au genre littéraire qu’est le drame, le titre ‘théâtre postdramatique’ indique l’interdépendance continue entre théâtre et texte, même si ici le discours du théâtre occupe une position centrale et que, de ce fait, il n’est question du texte que comme élément, sphère et ‘matériau’ de l’agencement scénique et non en tant qu’élément dominant. Il ne s’agit là en aucune manière de quelque jugement de valeur ou de quelque a priori” (Lehmann 20).

has been already superseded are correct; at least, they are correct in a meta-theoretic sense. However, the basic affirmation of the semiotics of theatre has not yet been refuted. Tadeusz Kowzan was right when he said that everything on stage signifies something, which recalls the famous and attractive quote from Roland Barthes about theatre’s “density of signs.” Everything is theatrical sign, even things which consciously refuse their theatrical definition and even performances where there is an attempt to break with the traditional enciphering and deciphering of drama. When then do they break? Surely they break with a specific use and stylization of dramatic sign, with the use of sign that is directly determined by the structure of drama, and this is relatively new.

In the great revolution Bertold Brecht brought about in theatre, and contrary to Lehmann’s opinion, what he calls “dramatic theatre” has its *raison d’être* in a characteristic use of the sign. This use is determined by the fact that it “takes place” (action) at the same time that it is performed in the presence of the audience. This is the *essence* of the theatrical sign, and it is universal (if it is not that way, then it is not theatre). In *dramatic theatre* this characteristic definition of the theatrical sign shares space with the disposition of some structured fictional categories that strongly influence the definition of theatre itself. They are the classical and Aristotelian notions of character, conflict, time, objective, etc., all of which are related to a confused and unstable notion of *mimesis* that in essence causes the willing suspension of critical sense which Brecht correctly identifies with the Greek *catharsis*. It is against these *dramatic* elements of theatre and against the social-political position of theatre at his time that Bertold Brecht involves himself.

However, Lehmann’s *postdrama* places in crisis the essence of all these dramatic structures in order to show that theatre does not require them to make its “simulation” (French *simulacre*) on the stage, because they only define *how* this simulation is done and *what is told* through it. The *post-* stresses the fact that what really defines theatre is *how* the significant codes of performing arts force a specific reception, a concrete hermeneutics that can only be modified by putting in doubt the status of the theatrical sign itself, after (and only after) the structures conforming the Aristotelian *mimesis* are definitely abolished.

This is the reason why postdramatic theses are more anti-Aristotelian than Brecht’s paradigm, because postdramatic puts firmly into question the main concepts of the dramatic illusion in order to show that *another form of illusion* is possible through a redefinition of the audience’s agreement (“We are at the theatre”), redefinition coming from a profound review of the scenic language.

This is, actually, one of the main things claimed by Artaud in his *Le théâtre et son double* when he asks for a “new language” next to Oriental theatre’s codes and described as follows :

It is not a question of suppressing the spoken language, but of giving words approximately the importance they have in dreams. . . . Since it is

fundamental to this language to make a particular use of intonations, these intonations will constitute a kind of harmonic balance, a secondary deformation of speech which must be reproducible at will. Similarly the ten thousand and one expressions of the face caught in the form of masks can be labeled and catalogued, so they may eventually participate directly and symbolically in this concrete language of the stage, independently of their particular psychological use. Moreover, these symbolical gestures, masks, and attitudes, these individual or group movements whose innumerable meanings constitute an important part of the concrete language of the theater, evocative gestures, emotive or arbitrary attitudes, excited pounding out of rhythms and sounds, will be doubled, will be multiplied by reflections, as it were, of the gestures and attitudes consisting of the mass of all the impulsive gestures, all the abortive attitudes, all the lapses of mind and tongue, by which are revealed what might be called the impotences of speech, and in which is a prodigious wealth of expressions, to which we shall not fail to have recourse on occasion. There is, besides, a concrete idea of music in which the sounds make their entrance like characters, where harmonies are coupled together and lose themselves in the precise entrances of words. From one means of expression to another, correspondences and levels of development are created – even light can have a precise intellectual meaning. (94-95)

Artaud has nothing to object to the existence of “meaning” and, consequently, he defends the use of sign in theatre, although it must be a kind of sign far removed from western stages. This is the reason why Derrida and similarly the artists of the 1960s and 1970s are interested in Artaud’s writings. Derrida sees in Artaud the possibility of recuperating the origins of Western theatre because what Artaud proposes is an *avant-la-lettre* deconstruction of dramatic structures. But he does not reach his goal, because Artaud focuses upon the redefinition of a new theatrical language and, despite his attempts, he does not totally overcome the binary oppositions of performance-text and life-representation; he only proposes the elimination of the first term in each opposition in order to supposedly redefine a new “use” of *word* in theatre and a new concept of *mimesis* far from its “naïve form” and next to a Nietzschean-Artaudian “imitative concept of art, with the Aristotelian aesthetics” in which the metaphysics of Western art comes into its own” (Derrida 295). As Derrida asks,

Is this to say that Artaud would have refused the name representation for the theater of cruelty? No, provided that we clarify the difficult and equivocal meaning of this notion The stage, certainly, will no longer represent, since it will not operate as an addition, as the sensory

illustration of a text already written, thought, or lived outside the stage, which the stage would then only repeat but whose fabric it would not constitute. . . . Cruel representation must permeate me. And non representation is, thus, original representation, if representation signifies, also, the unfolding of a volume, a multi-dimensional milieu, an experience which produces its own space. Spacing [*espacement*], that is to say, the production of a space that no speech could condense or comprehend . . . thereby appeals to a time that is no longer that of so-called phonic linearity, appeals to “a new notion of space” and “a specific idea of time.” (299)

Artaud initiates a break with the traditional categories of drama (character, structure) but still maintains something similar to conflict (what is, then, *cruelty*, but an extreme conflict between theatre and audience?) and does not even doubt the significant presence of the theatrical sign. However, the main opposition of theatre, the truly defining element of theatrical representation is the opposition audience-stage, which appears to be unchallengeable because without such a dichotomy theatre ceases to exist. In fact, Artaud’s “First Manifesto for Theatre of Cruelty” discusses the audience in these terms: “THE PUBLIC : First of all this theatre must exist” (99).

In the same sense, neither Artaud nor Derrida imagine a theatre without signs. They could not: Artaud never neglects the opportunity for hermeneutics, for interpretation and decoding performing arts.

This is the reason why postdrama re-takes Artaud in order to redefine theatre, and why most of Derridean elements of postmodern thought are present in contemporary theatre and constitute the roots of the main critique (and destruction) of traditional dramatic structures.

What Artaud and after all Derrida have shown is that theatre can be considered without taking into account traditional structural categories (usually binary oppositions) and have finally opened the door to a new opposition, present in the theatrical field and in society itself, between drama and postdrama.³ In fact, the question today is whether postdrama demarcates a new theatrical paradigm (on the understanding that the deconstruction of dramatic categories will have been successful) or postdrama is only a

³ “Parmi les raisons extérieures pour lesquelles il convient pourtant de continuer à lire le nouveau théâtre en relation et en opposition aux catégories du ‘drame’, on peut citer la tendance de la critique quotidienne qui – dans son appréciation du théâtre – opère avec un critère normatif dominé par la polarité des valeurs ‘dramatique’ versus ‘source d’ennui’. Souvent même plus de façon occulte, le besoin d’intrigue, de divertissement et de suspense se sert des règles esthétiques du concept du drame traditionnel pour mesurer à cette même aune le théâtre qui, manifestement, se dérobe à ces exigences” (Lehmann 46).

genre (on the understanding that only formal modifications of theatrical semiotics will have been).⁴ Only time will tell.

How to proceed from a renewal of semiotics to an essentially new theatre

As shown above, “postdramatic” represents for Lehmann a basically semiotic concept, which allows for a questioning of the status of the structural categories of drama. Moreover, Lehmann recognizes that postmodern elements such as the fragmentation of narratives, the heterogeneity of styles, a certain hyper-naturalism, grotesque aesthetics, or the employment of a new kind of expressionism, are not, by themselves, what define postdrama because they can be found in modern and contemporary dramatic plays. For Lehmann, “Seule la constellation des éléments décide en fin de compte si un moment stylistique peut être considéré comme inherent à une esthétique dramatique ou postdramatique” (31). In other words, it is the “constellation” of relationships among signs that will define postdrama, constructing for this new theatre its own *grammar* if Derrida’s term is employed. Did Artaud therefore speak about a *grammar* in this sense when he spoke about the elimination of Text?

In fact for Lehmann, when Lyotard (12) writes about a new theatre called “energetic” because it has no meaning but force, intensity or presence, he is not aware that this kind of indefinable energy is perceived through signs, through a kind of *mise en scène* (organization of performing languages) (Lehmann 44). This “energy” has to do with new exigencies being placed upon a new spectator. The new audience for the new theatre has to learn to interpret a new language on stage in a new receptional way, although all these languages are based of course on our present semiotics of the world, our current languages, and on our contemporary codes of communication. Without these, theatre would be impossible, because *understanding* (even when free, or open, or different or other) is indispensable for the existence of theatre itself because it gives sense to the present of the (indispensable) public.

Theatre is (Derrida has attested it) a language and energy, defined as nothing, is nothing. It is therefore better to consider theatre as a language, even though the concept

⁴ “Si dans le paysage théâtral des dernières décennies, la série de phénomènes qui problématisent les formes traditionnelles du drame et de ‘son’ théâtre, justifient l’emploi d’un nouveau *paradigme du théâtre postdramatique*, le mot y indique la délimitation négative commune des techniques de jeu fort variées du théâtre postdramatique envers celles du théâtre dramatique. Ces travaux théâtraux sont également paradigmatiques parce que, éventuellement même à contrecœur, ils sont généralement reconnus comme témoignages authentiques de leur époque et développent une force de ‘critérisation’. Le concept de paradigme ne devrait pas favoriser l’illusion selon laquelle l’art, en son mouvement de va-et-vient, se laisserait enserrer comme la science dans la logique évolutive des paradigmes. En discutant sur les moments stylistiques postdramatiques, il serait toujours facile d’attirer l’attention sur ce que le nouveau théâtre partage avec le théâtre traditionnel qui subsiste. Un nouveau paradigme est constitué par la cohabitation quasi inévitable de structures et d’éléments stylistiques ‘futurs’ et des composantes traditionnelles” (Lehmann 31).

of language should be redefined in order to integrate new contemporary or postdramatic theatrical codes.

The word as text, the main element questioned by postdrama (as by Artaud) in its claim for a more performative, represents a more *scenic* theatre. *Verbal language* then is more autonomous, but it does not give up being language. This renewed *speech* in contemporary theatre, as the main quality of human beings, is the key to understanding a de-centered subject that is able to de-centre the other dramatic categories and our own perception of what happens on stage, a de-centered subject that becomes aware of its body and all the possible significances of the body as a sign. Lehmann insists on this idea of the awareness of the body as a contemporary substitute of verbal codes (in fact, dancers such as Pina Bausch or Merce Cunningham have provided the key for the renovation of theatre). In this sense, the “density of signs” is constantly subverted by the use of a paratactic relation amongst them (an absence of hierarchies is one of the “rules” of post-dramatic theatre) which allows a new “*sémantique des formes*” (Lehmann 129) for inanimate beings and also for human beings. Everything on stage is expected to construct its meaning from a renewed point of view, giving place to a constant play with a spectator who should *read* theatre in a *productive* sense (he or she must produce what is not performed), and to a post-dramatic *mimesis* generated by the post-dramatic theatrical sign, a *mimesis* that is still action, because from a Lehmannian perspective the reality of contemporary theatre begins with the elimination of the triangular relationship drama-action-imitation, where theatre becomes victim of drama and where reality loses its meaning because of its perpetual repetition.

A sign in post-drama is definitely and ostentatiously iconic, simultaneous and polysemic. The sign in post-drama does not refuse and those who want to kill theatre should take note that *iconicity* means *representation* and, therefore, everything on stage *is* theatre. Post-drama presents a particular possible world on stage (external or internal-psychological, as Artaud stipulated), and, unlike traditional drama, this possible world has to be constructed by the hermeneutic ability (or “theatrical competence” as Marco de Marinis would say) of the spectator simply employing the elements provided by the stage manager. It is his or her art to control the use of the signs in his or her theatrical language to win the audience’s attention in order to express a sense that should be perceived by the same audience as something general, intuitional, free, and possibly susceptible of being interpreted in the same intuitional and free sense. Contemporary theatre, then, does not mean anything: it means what each participant wants it to mean. The magical, the fascinating question of this meaning is that post-dramatic grammar leads always to common interpretations and even common misinterpretations for unitary languages. Why? Because in this theatre the new language, whose main devotee was Artaud, has succeeded and because this theatre has been able to break the old structures of traditional theatre, a theatre that, since the nineteenth century, has been clearly insufficient when enabling dialogue with all the facets of the complex society and art of the twentieth and, above all, the twenty-first century.

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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

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Abstract : Using Kristeva's *Meurtre à Byzance* [*Murder in Byzantium*] (2004), the first part of this study examines the relationships the two main characters we see as *Doppelgangers* of the author have with the language of the Other they use. In our second part, we focus on Kristeva's use of the novel as a genre in *Murder in Byzantium*. While we situate her contribution in the wake of Bakhtin's work on polyphony and carnivalization, Arendt's reflections on narration, and Kundera's claim that the novel is the quintessential European genre, we show Kristeva's introduction of the figure of the psychoanalyst as a *topos* but most importantly as a receptacle of subjective languages, thus a receptacle of polyglossy. Kristeva's fictional production, we argue, poses dialogical identity, psychoanalysis, and the novel as archetypal to European culture, a culture grounded in inquiry and quest. References to essays from *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), *L'avenir d'une révolte* (1998), and *La haine et le pardon* (2005) help us link Kristeva's creative *écriture* to her theoretical work.

Résumé: Utilisant *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004) de Kristeva, la première partie de cette étude examine les relations avec la langue de l'Autre de deux personnages principaux que nous voyons comme *Doppelgangers* de l'auteur. Dans la deuxième partie, nous nous concentrons sur l'utilisation que Kristeva fait du roman en tant que genre dans *Meurtre à Byzance*. Bien que nous situions sa contribution dans le sillage des travaux de Bakhtine sur la polyphonie et la carnavalisation, des réflexions d'Arendt sur la narration, et de l'affirmation de Kundera que le roman est le genre européen par excellence, nous montrons que Kristeva introduit la figure du psychanalyste comme un *topos* et, qui plus est, comme un réceptacle de langues subjectives, donc un réceptacle de polyglossie. Selon notre lecture, la fiction de Kristeva pose l'identité dialogique, la psychanalyse et le roman comme archétypes de la culture européenne, une culture fondée sur l'enquête et la quête. Les références à des essais comme *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), *L'avenir d'une révolte* (1998), et *La haine et le pardon* (2005) nous aident à établir un lien entre l'écriture créative de Kristeva et son travail théorique.

Keywords: Kristeva – la langue de l'Autre – altérité – identité dialogique – roman – *l'inter-esse* – psychoanalyse – Europe – européenneté

Pour commencer donc à entrer en matière, quant à la signification de ce mot *Barbare* : Barbares anciennement étaient nommés ceux qui ineptement parlaient grec. Car comme les étrangers venant à Athènes s'efforçaient de parler grec, ils tombaient souvent en cette voix absurde *Barbaras*. Depuis, les Grecs transportèrent ce nom aux mœurs brutaux et cruels, appelant toutes nations, hors la Grèce, barbares Ces raisons me semblent suffisantes de faire entendre à tout équitable estimateur des choses, que notre langue (pour avoir été nommée barbare, ou de nos ennemis ou de ceux qui n'avaient loi de nous bailler ce nom) ne doit pourtant être déprisée, même de ceux auxquels elle est propre et naturelle, et qui en rien ne sont moindres que les Grecs et les Romains (Chapitre II : “Que la langue française ne doit être nommée barbare”).

Joachim du Bellay, *La défense et illustration de la langue française* (1549)

Dans cet essai, notre investigation sur le dialogue identitaire et langagier dans l'œuvre de Kristeva se penche surtout sur le roman *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004) et sur certains essais d'*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), de *L'avenir d'une révolte* (1998), et de *La haine et le pardon* (2005) pour refléter notre conviction que chez Kristeva la problématique de la langue se lie à l'identité en procès et passe par des chaînes de thèmes à travers lesquels l'Europe, Byzance et la France sont mises en rapport avec le village imaginaire planétaire Santa Barbara qui représente le barbarisme au sens large. Ces quatre groupes forment des *topoi* dont l'écrivain explore la dynamique historique et imaginaire dans sa trilogie romanesque *Le Viel Homme et les loups* (1991), *Possessions* (1996), *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004), et tout particulièrement dans le dernier roman de la trilogie. Chère à Kristeva la problématique dont il s'agit consiste à reconstruire dans son œuvre entière l'espace de la *polis*, où règne le dialogue. Écrivaine et femme-penseur, Kristeva comprend de plus en plus le dialogue comme un partage au cœur de la polyglossie nomade portée par l'exil.

Dans notre étude, nous allons d'abord analyser certains des choix, des comportements et des traits de caractère de deux personnages principaux de *Meurtre à Byzance*, Sebastian Chrest-Jones¹ et Stéphanie Delacour. En tant que doubles de l'auteur, ces deux personnages nous intéressent dans leurs rapports à la langue, plus précisément dans leurs rapports à la langue étrangère qu'ils emploient. Dans la deuxième partie de cet essai nous nous concentrons sur *Meurtre à Byzance* en tant que roman, c'est-à-dire en tant que texte conçu comme genre de la culture de dialogue et de questionnement et dès lors comme genre représentant par excellence la culture européenne. C'est également le genre de la quête d'où vient d'ailleurs l'appellation sous-générique choisie par Kristeva,

¹ C'est l'orthographe que Kristeva utilise pour le prénom de ce personnage. Dans cet article l'abréviation PS renvoie à *Possessions* (1996), MB renvoie à *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004). Placées entre parenthèses à la suite des passages cités, elles sont suivies de la page du livre en question.

celle de *polar*, une appellation qu'elle explique en révélant ses intentions de faire de ce roman un "polar métaphysique".² On se souvient que, selon Mikhaïl Bakhtine, dans son livre de 1929 *Problemy tvortchestva Dostievskogo* [*Problèmes de la poésie de Dostoïevski*], Dostoïevski aurait réussi dans la littérature classique russe à faire un roman total en investiguant également le crime.

Les personnages migrants en quête du dialogue identitaire et langagière

Les deux personnages principaux du dernier roman polar de Julia Kristeva *Meurtre à Byzance*, Sebastian Chrest-Jones et Stéphanie Delacour, manifestent un dialogisme inhérent qui est une des conséquences de leur statut d'êtres hybrides et déracinés. Ces êtres dont l'identité est "en procès" ne sont ni fixes, ni fluides : ils sont "entre", leur identité s'ouvre vers l'autre car elle est dialogique. Il faut souligner que pour Kristeva, c'est le français qui permet la création, le raisonnement et le dialogue. Elle fait son choix définitif du français comme langue d'écriture, dans un geste d'appropriation francophile volontaire : le français est le lieu à partir duquel elle décide de s'exprimer. Comme l'écrit bien Anne-Marie Smith, "The French language is the place from which she speaks and to which she returns, yet it is not her native language" (*Julia Kristeva 2*).

Le dédoublement est un procédé qui est souvent utilisé par la littérature romantique. Les personnages principaux dans les romans kristeviens, y compris dans *Meurtre à Byzance*, sont explicitement et implicitement traités comme des doubles de l'auteur, ce que Kristeva admet dans son interview avec Pierre-Louis Fort lorsqu'elle décrit le type de roman qu'elle invente non pas comme un "roman du Moi" mais comme un "roman du Sujet", différence fondamentale car "l'intimité du Sujet se diffracte dans une mosaïque³ d'aveux" (Kristeva, *La haine et le pardon* 610). Pourquoi est-ce que le roman du Sujet est nécessaire ? Cela a à voir indirectement avec la sérénité de

² "Un autre genre de narration s'est imposé alors, que j'appelle 'le polar métaphysique'. Inconsciemment, il s'appuie sur l'idée de Freud selon laquelle toute société est fondée sur un crime commis en commun. Je vous rappelle que dans *Totem et Tabou*, l'inventeur de la psychanalyse développe l'hypothèse selon laquelle les frères de la horde primitive tuent le père, puis fondent un pacte pour partager les femmes et finissent par créer l'exogamie. Il en résulte une culpabilité collective inconsciente phylogénétique. Mais de nos jours où chercher ce crime ? Il est tellement disséminé qu'on ne peut pas trouver le(s) coupable(s). Le polar métaphysique raconte des histoires politiques et des passions humaines, pour exhiber cette criminalité intrinsèque et toujours sous-jacente au lien social. Le 'polar métaphysique' me permet donc de raconter une aventure et une expérience intérieure, douloureuse ou extatique, situées en contexte historique, sans me priver de distiller un certain nombre de réflexions sur le monde actuel" (Ivancheva-Merjanska et Vialet, "Entretien avec Julia Kristeva" 163).

³ L'art de mosaïque dont le concept refuse l'unidimensionnalité est purement byzantin. En choisissant le roman du Sujet, Kristeva reste dans son choix byzantin. L'intertextualité dont la créatrice théorique est Kristeva a beaucoup à voir avec l'art du texte comme mosaïque. Le dialogisme bakhtinien, qui est le concept fondateur de l'intertextualité, est aussi un produit de la pensée byzantine contemporaine, celle de Bakhtine et de son cercle.

l'éloge et de l'invective lancée contre le crime qui passe aussi par la "transverbération"⁴ de la "perte de soi dans le crime" : "L'intimité du Sujet est en transverbération avec celle des autres (dédoublement des personnages, gémellité, doubles en série, projections, pertes de soi dans le crime, mais aussi dans la sérénité, *Meurtre à Byzance* d'en est tissé)" (Kristeva, *La haine* 610). Dans la même interview avec Fort, Kristeva met le procédé de dédoublement et le roman du Sujet dans le contexte du brassage des cultures et du métissage des identités et des langues :

Oblique, cubiste, plurielle, une intimité de brassage, à la croisée de mes rencontres, des langues que je parle et que j'écris, des temps divergents qui les habitent et m'habitent, de mes identités inconciliables. Si je me sens d'emblée plus à l'aise dans le roman du Sujet que dans le roman de Moi, est-ce à cause de la psychanalyse, est-ce à cause de l'histoire qui m'a faite migrante, d'origine bulgare, de nationalité française, citoyenne européenne et d'adoption américaine ? (Kristeva, *La haine* 610).

Notons que cette application du dédoublement par Kristeva est semblable à la technique selon laquelle Kafka traite ses personnages, une technique décrite dans l'analyse de Gilles Deleuze en termes psychanalytiques: "la grande série se subdivise en sous-séries . . . une sorte de prolifération schizophrénique illimitée" (97). Rappelons aussi que dans *L'avenir d'une révolte*, Kristeva affirme à propos de Gloria Harrison, l'héroïne de *Possessions* : "La femme décapitée, c'est moi" (16). Tout en faisant écho à Flaubert, l'auteure exprime non seulement l'empathie qu'elle éprouve pour son personnage principal mais aussi la présence discursive d'un *alter ego*. Kristeva continue à se dédoubler, à se multiplier en affirmant que sa présence s'étend plus profondément encore dans *Possessions* puisqu'elle se retrouve aussi dans le personnage de Stéphanie Delacour: "Je suis également l'enquêtrice qui mène l'investigation policière, au côté du commissaire principal Northrop Rilsky : une autre femme, Stéphanie Delacour, une journaliste parisienne" (*L'avenir* 16, nous soulignons).

Le procédé de prolifération et de dédoublement est amplement utilisé par Kristeva dans toute la trilogie romanesque sur Santa Barbara qui devient par cet aspect une série de "romans autobiographiques" dans le sens de Philippe Lejeune.⁵ Dans

⁴ La transverbération est un terme qui désigne le transpercement spirituel du cœur par un trait enflammé dans la doctrine du mysticisme catholique. Celle-ci est représentée dans la sculpture par la *Transverbération de sainte Thérèse* de Bernin, une sculpture qui se trouve dans la Chapelle Cornaro de Santa Maria Della Vittoria à Rome.

⁵ "Ces textes entreraient donc dans la catégorie du 'roman autobiographique' : j'appellerai ainsi tous les textes de fiction dans lesquels le lecteur peut avoir des raisons de soupçonner, à partir des ressemblances qu'il croit deviner, qu'il y a identité de l'auteur et du *personnage*, alors que l'auteur, lui, a choisi de nier cette identité, ou du moins de ne pas l'affirmer. Ainsi défini, le roman autobiographique englobe aussi bien des récits personnels (identité du narrateur et du personnage) que des récits

Possessions, par exemple, on trouve au moins deux hypostases de la personne Kristeva: une journaliste parisienne (Stéphanie Delacour) et une traductrice américaine et mère passionnée (Gloria Harrison) qui représentent respectivement l'expérience parisienne et l'expérience américaine de Kristeva. Les figures du traducteur et du journaliste sont mises dans un contexte plus large. Le contexte est celui de la quête de l'identité introuvable, d'une vérité difficile, par un retour en arrière vers ce qui s'est passé ou a été dit ou écrit et qui attend d'être traduit, rapporté, renié pour que la base de la révolte et du questionnement existe. Dès lors, les deux figures de femmes appartiennent à la culture du questionnement, celle de Byzance et de la France (nous y reviendrons), dont Kristeva parle souvent et particulièrement dans son essai "Quelle révolte aujourd'hui?" dans *L'avenir d'une révolte*. La révolte, qui par nature cherche la vérité individuelle,⁶ peut être mise à l'œuvre pour répondre aux crises du monde postmoderne. La révolte est en effet au cœur de la philosophie qui émerge de l'œuvre de Kristeva, de ses romans, de ses écrits psychanalytiques et sémiotiques et de ses réflexions philosophiques. Par la perspective de la révolte, Kristeva commente également son utilisation du genre de la satire, de l'invective ou du blâme, un genre qui cible la société du spectacle en ce qu'elle affaiblit l'intensité même de la révolte :

Je schématise et durcis le tableau de notre actualité pour mieux mettre en évidence ce que nous ressentons tous : non seulement la révolte politique s'enlise dans les compromis . . . mais une composante essentielle de la culture européenne – une culture de doute et critiques – perd sa portée morale et esthétique. Lorsqu'elle existe, elle est marginalisée au titre décoratif d'alibi toléré de la société du spectacle; quand elle n'est pas tout simplement submergée et rendue impossible par la culture-divertissement. (*L'avenir* 16)

Continuons notre quête en examinant la caractérisation des personnages dans l'œuvre romanesque de Kristeva. Pourquoi sont-ils enquêteurs et étrangers au sens précis et au sens large ? Dans *Meurtre à Byzance*, Sebastian et Stéphanie sont tous les deux des étrangers,⁷ des exilés, des détectives (enquêteurs) au sens large, des migrants et des *inter-essi* de plusieurs cultures. En somme, les deux personnages incarnent le message

'impersonnels' (personnages désignés à la troisième personne); il se définit au niveau de son contenu. À la différence de l'autobiographie, il comporte des *degrés*. L'autobiographie, elle, ne comporte pas de degrés: c'est tout ou rien" (Lejeune 25).

⁶ "Nous entendons aujourd'hui par révolte une contestation des normes, des valeurs, des pouvoirs déjà établis" (*L'avenir* 15).

⁷ Il est pertinent de mentionner l'observation de Ralitsa Mihailova-Frison-Roche: "Dès le début du roman, une caractéristique commune aux personnages retient l'attention du lecteur. Ils sont tous d'origine étrangère, ce qui laisse présager qu'ils seront tous concernés par la traversée identitaire du temps. La plupart portent d'ailleurs des patronymes slaves. Russes ? Ou plutôt bulgares ? Popov, Rylski, Tomov, mais aussi Stéphanie Delacour, ont tous un lien avec les pays de l'Europe Orientale" (n. pag.).

central du roman qui favorise la culture du questionnement. D'autre part, dans ces essais, Kristeva cesse de se cacher et de se métamorphoser dans ses personnages et commence à parler au lecteur avec sa propre voix. Ce raccourci a une fonction politique, celle de l'appel à l'action, qui est destiné à nous faire réagir dans l'*ethos* non pas de la révolte, mais d'une révolte, c'est-à-dire d'une révolte individuelle. Tout ce qui lui rappelle le totalitarisme dont elle s'est échappée en s'exilant en France, en se créant une Byzance provisoire, fait peur à Kristeva. Elle valorise toujours l'*haecceitas* dont elle parle dans l'entretien que nous avons réalisé à Berlin.⁸

C'est assez remarquable que Sebastian écrive un journal⁹ sans dates, hors temps, parce que dans la métaphysique de ce roman¹⁰ Byzance représente le Hors-Temps. Dans ce hors-temps Sebastian et Stéphanie sont en quête d'un personnage, celui d'Anne Comnène,¹¹ princesse et historienne byzantine qui se passionne au XI^e siècle pour sa Byzance à elle en écrivant l'éloge de son père, l'empereur Alexis Comnène, intitulé *L'Alexiade*.¹² Anne Comnène, peut-être le troisième double de Kristeva dans le roman, est une figure du génie féminin,¹³ une femme que Kristeva considère comme la première intellectuelle de l'Europe. En 1991, l'écrivaine bulgare Vera Moutaftchieva (1929 - 2009) écrit à la fin de son roman *Moi, Anne Comnène* : "Твърде точно историята сочи кога съм се родила – по изгрев слънце на втори декември хиляда осемдесет и трета, - но не ѝ е известна годината от смъртта ми. Тя си остава моя лична работа. Прочее който поиска, нека си мисли, че съм още сред вас" ["L'histoire montre très précisément quand je suis née - au lever du soleil le deux décembre, mille quatre-vingt-trois, mais elle ne connaît

⁸ "On ne peut pas considérer l'histoire du christianisme sans se rendre compte qu'il a généré l'idée de sujet, de sujet singulier. Et cela, dès Saint Paul. Plus explicitement encore, c'est Duns Scott qui a développé le concept d'*haecceitas* : c'est cet homme-ci, cette femme-là ; chacun est une singularité. En anglais, on dit '*thisness*'... La 'vérité', ce n'est ni l'idée générale, ni la matière, mais le 'ceci' et le 'cela'. Il fallait oser le penser! Les catholiques ont compris qu'il n'y a de liberté qu'individuelle, que l'homme abstrait n'existe pas, et que les communautés sont toujours des redoutables adhérences qui entraînent l'écrasement de toute individualité" (Ivantcheva-Merjanska et Violet, "Entretien avec Julia Kristeva" 181).

⁹ Le chapitre "Le Journal du disparu" (89-106) dans *Meurtre à Byzance*.

¹⁰ Rappelons que Kristeva caractérise les romans de sa trilogie comme "polars métaphysiques" (voir note 2).

¹¹ "Fille aînée de l'empereur Alexis I (qui régna de 1081 à 1118), Anne Comnène, née en 1083, épousa le César Nicéphore Bryennios et brigua en vain la couronne impériale. L'échec de ses ambitions politiques lui valut une retraite forcée qu'elle mit à profit pour reprendre un projet laissé inabouti par la mort de son époux. À la demande de sa belle-mère, ce dernier avait commencé à écrire l'histoire du règne d'Alexis I. Le résultat fut un ouvrage monumental en quinze livres, *L'Alexiade*, écrit sous le règne de Manuel I (1143-1180)" (n. pag.) <www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie> Web. 12 janvier 2011; voir aussi : Anne Comnène, *L'Alexiade* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2006).

¹² Le genre de l'éloge et du *trenos* d'un père n'est pas étranger à Kristeva. C'est en fait le deuil qui suit la mort de son père qui l'a poussée à commencer à écrire la trilogie sur Santa-Barbara dont le premier roman *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* est consacré à son père, comme Kristeva l'atteste aussi dans notre entretien (Ivantcheva-Merjanska et Violet, "Entretien avec Julia Kristeva" 162-63).

¹³ Un concept cher à Kristeva qui a réalisé la trilogie *Le génie féminin* dont les trois volumes sont consacrés à Hannah Arendt, Mélanie Klein et Colette.

pas l'année de ma mort. Cela reste mon problème intime. Ainsi, que celui qui le veut puisse penser que je continue à être parmi vous”] (Moutaftchieva 286, nous traduisons).

Dans *Meurtre à Byzance*, Kristeva et ses doubles, Sebastian et Stephanie, sont parmi ceux qui continuent à penser à Anne Comnène en essayant de se figurer la vie de la princesse et historienne byzantine qui a été marquée par une double souffrance : le deuil du père et la destruction lente de Byzance.¹⁴ Dans les portraits fictionnels de Sebastian et de Stéphanie, surgissent tous les concepts majeurs de Kristeva, théoricienne et essayiste, et pourtant comme narratrice qui maîtrise bien son rôle, elle garde une distance ironique envers eux. En décrivant par exemple Sebastian, le professeur d'histoire des migrations, la narratrice rajoute : “Le professeur avait tendance à se prendre pour un révélateur de la condition humaine. Peut-être même pour son rédempteur?” (MB 95).

Qui est Sebastian ? Analysons ce personnage auquel le roman accorde une multitude de rôles parmi lesquels celui de professeur d'histoire des migrations, mais aussi de meurtrier de sa maîtresse chinoise. Il est également un rêveur, un romantique, passionné du passé et emporté par son rêve de “chasseur d'images paternelles” (MB 328), comportement qui en termes psychiques est lié à la psychose.¹⁵ Sebastian croit dans la “théorie de l'inséparabilité” dont l'auteur est un physicien quantique et selon laquelle “il suffisait que deux objets se fussent une seule fois rencontrés dans certaines circonstances pour qu'ils restent ensuite inséparables pour l'éternité” (MB 39). Cette théorie soutient en effet très bien sa propre croyance que le passé est toujours vivant dans le présent et dès lors la princesse érudite byzantine Anne Comnène est également inséparable de Sebastian par le fait qu'il se transsubstantie par son roman dans “le temps absolu de la survie, donc de la vie” (MB 39). Ainsi “Avec son roman sur Byzance, Sebastian en détenait pourtant la preuve : Anne Comnène était *non séparable* de Sebastian Chrest-Jones, et réciproquement, grâce à un ancêtre qui avait croisé la première et

¹⁴ Dans la préface de l'*Alexiade*, Anne Comnène se décrit en termes de souffrance : “To turn to myself – I have been conversant with dangers ever since my birth ‘in the purple,’ so to say; and fortune has certainly not been kind to me, unless you were to count it a smile of kind fortune to have given me ‘emperors’ as parents, and allowing me to be born ‘in the purple room,’ for all the rest of my life has been one long series of storms and revolutions. . . . Verily, my grief for my Caesar and his unexpected death have touched my inmost soul, and the wound has pierced to the profoundest depths of my being. All previous misfortunes compared with this insatiable calamity I count literally as a single small drop compared with this Atlantic Ocean, this turbulent Adriatic Sea of trouble. . . . However, I see that I have let my feelings carry me away from my subject, but the mention of my Caesar and my grief for him have instilled devastating sorrow into me.” <www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/AnnaComnen-Alexiad00.html#PREFACE> Web. 27 Dec. 2010.

¹⁵ “Logiquement, mathématiquement, le délire de cet hyper mnésique chasseur d'images paternelles qu'était Sebastian Chrest-Jones devait le mener, depuis les Croisades, en passant par la Thrace, Philippopolis, Byzance, à un crochet poétique par Nessebar et Sozopol, puis à un implacable retour, enfin, au paradis des origines, tout droit au point de départ languedocien de ses présumés ancêtres. Peut-être Clermont? Vézelay? À coup sûr, Le Puy” (MB 328). C'est effectivement l'itinéraire et le parcours géopoétique que Sebastian, le chasseur du passé, fait dans le roman *Meurtre à Byzance*.

engendré le second. . . . Il était absurde de prétendre vivre dans un autre espace que celui de non-séparabilité” (MB 39). Après le meurtre de sa petite amie chinoise, dont personne ne le soupçonne, “le prof” disparaît et le commissaire Rilsky est chargé de faire l’enquête. La femme de Sebastian, Hermine, dresse son portrait devant le commissaire et souligne l’obsession de Sebastian à remonter à ses origines familiales qu’il cherche “dans la région de Plovdiv, en Bulgarie, l’ancienne Philippopolis, d’où la famille Chrest était originaire” (MB 86). Après la consultation d’un document, ce professeur d’histoire des migrations est en train de reconstruire l’histoire de ses racines qui le lient à un passé ancien et riche de ce carrefour qu’était la Bulgarie au Moyen-Age au temps des Croisades. Comme le récit de sa femme Hermine l’atteste, Sebastian a découvert le nom de son “arrière-arrière-arrière-grand-mère” : “une femme [qui] s’appelait Miltsa Christi ou Militsa Chrest, peu importe, les sons bougent, vous comprenez, du latin à ce magma des langues slaves, puis en santa-barbarois, n’est-ce pas?” (MB 86). Sebastian décide alors de se focaliser sur la Première Croisade à cause de la rencontre entre Ebrard et Anne Comnène, une rencontre secrète mais qui porte une beauté exceptionnelle, un élan vers l’amour absolu : tout ce qui est nécessaire pour se refaire un idéal. Par ailleurs, Sebastian se caractérise en individu sans port d’attache : “Je suis un apatride” (MB 94). Selon sa classification des émigrés, il n’appartient à aucun groupe : “Moi, je n’ai ni fui ni choisi. Pourtant, *chez moi, je ne suis pas chez moi*. Et quand je vais à l’étranger, je reconnais sur les visages des inconnus cet air familier d’être de *nulle part*: est-ce leur air à eux, ou seulement l’instant fugace de mon déracinement à moi, à moi seul? Je ne suis d’aucun espace; peut-être suis-je du temps quand il se contracte en hors-temps . . .” (MB 95, nous soulignons).

Dans son journal, Sebastian examine le phénomène de la langue comme signe d’appartenance à l’ethnie et se demande si apprendre le code intérieur d’une autre langue est une tâche impossible lorsque l’on vient du dehors et qu’on porte en soi son étrangeté qui s’inscrit dans la langue d’adoption : “Parler toutes les langues et n’en parler aucune, c’est parler une langue de silence. Je ne suis pas des leurs, je parle comme j’imagine qu’ils veulent que je parle, ce qui n’est pas nécessairement une fausse langue, mais c’est déjà un rôle. D’un rôle à l’autre, je me surprends à bavarder. L’enfant écorché qui se taisait est devenu un homme bavard qui parle une langue de silence” (MB 93). Ceci fait écho aux pages d’*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* où, dans l’essai intitulé “Le silence des polyglottes” (26-29), Kristeva utilise la figure de l’oxymore pour donner son interprétation illuminant ce phénomène existentiel : parler plus que sa langue maternelle et en même temps se sentir muette, vivre en silence : “Ainsi, entre deux langues, votre élément est-il le silence ?” (27-28). Par la création du personnage de Sebastian, Kristeva révèle pour la première fois son origine et se réapproprie son pays natal tout au long de ce roman : “le voyage bulgare” est en effet un itinéraire de tous les lieux de culte de la Bulgarie : “le svelte portrait de Dessislava” dans l’église de Boyana du XIIe siècle qui pressent le style de Giotto, la tour de Baudouin à Tîrnovo “où étaient enfermés des croisés des troupes de Baudouin de Flandre auxquelles aurait appartenu le premier des

Chrest, selon une des fantaisies de Sebastian” (MB 102). Lorsqu’il partage quelques souvenirs de ce voyage avec son épouse, elle atteste devant le commissaire que le professeur d’histoire des migrations “parlait avec cette voix d’amoureux” (MB 102). Si l’on y ajoute la description faite par la narratrice du journal de Sebastian comme “deux cahiers de cent pages couvertes d’une de ces grandes écritures romantiques qu’on ne retrouve plus que dans les lettres d’amour des vieilles dames” (MB 91), on comprend qu’en effet Kristeva, par le truchement de Sebastian, exprime sa nostalgie toujours sous-jacente pour son pays d’origine. Selon l’éthique et l’esthétique de migration de Sebastian, “la seule création humaine qui vaille” ce sont “les œuvres, les monuments, les jardins, les livres, les tableaux, la musique, les archives. . . . Sebastian ira plus loin encore : *il suffit de chercher, de voyager, de migrer pour se souler de beauté, de vestiges*. Aujourd’hui la beauté n’est plus que papillons et vestiges” (MB 254-55, nous soulignons). Dans ce contexte, il faut admettre que la façon dont le thème de la migration est traité dans le roman est tout à fait exceptionnelle par ses élans poétiques qui font l’éloge aux “papillons et vestiges” en tant qu’éthique de vie qui nie toute appartenance.

Il est nécessaire de réitérer l’affirmation que toute la problématique de la langue, y compris de l’autre langue, dans *Meurtre à Byzance* passe à travers les deux personnages dédoublés que sont Sebastian Chrest-Jones et Stephanie Delacour. La façon dont Kristeva pense les rapports entre l’autre langue et la langue maternelle dans *Meurtre à Byzance* se rapproche de l’analyse qu’elle en donne dans certains des essais de *L’avenir de la révolte*, surtout celui intitulé “L’amour de l’autre langue”. Chez Sebastian, la problématique de la langue se lie avec l’étrangeté et avec l’inter-langue: c’est lui qui étonne avec sa “byzantine étrangeté de l’érudition” (MB 91), un homme polyglotte qui rédige “ses notes en grec, en latin, en français, en allemand, et avait même utilisé l’alphabet cyrillique. Pour transcrire quelle langue ? Du bulgare, du serbe, du macédonien ? ou tout cela pêle-mêle ?” (MB 92). L’auteur évoque le “talent linguistique de Sébastian” (MB 92) qui, éblouissant par ses notes en langues différentes, fait de son journal un endroit qui abrite l’utopie personnelle du personnage qui croit en l’art de la polyglossie et du dialogue entre les langues.

De son côté, Stéphanie Delacour décrit par ses propres mots ses états d’étrangeté d’une *inter-esse*¹⁶ et de passage entre deux langues :

Je ne me retire au fond de moi, puisque ce fond se dérobe, mais je passe dans un entre-deux, ni fond ni surface, et loge dans ce vide que j’appelle étrangeté. On me prête plusieurs langues, je n’en ai aucune. Je ne m’exprime ni en mots ni en phrases, comme font les autres dans leur

¹⁶ Rappelons que chez Arendt, il y a dans l’*inter-esse* la connotation de *polis*. Kristeva dans *Hannah Arendt* précise : “Cette *polis* n’est pas une localisation physique, comme sera la Cité romaine, mais une ‘organisation du peuple qui vient de ce que l’on agit et parle ensemble’... Lieu donc de l’*inter-esse*, de l’entre-deux, un tel modèle politique n’est fondé sur rien d’autre que sur l’action et la parole, mais jamais l’une sans l’autre” (122).

langue maternelle, bien que j'aime à tracer des rythmes et des visions plus aisément en français, car c'est la langue de mon fils, une langue désormais infantile pour moi aussi, et cependant méditée, précautionneuse comme l'est celle des enfants demeurés longuement mutiques – des huîtres qu'on a prises pour des pierres. Plus et moins que les mots et les phrases, c'est le dessous de la langue¹⁷ que je sens couler dans ma bouche, s'échapper de mes doigts quand j'écris mes reportages de Santa Barbara ou d'ailleurs. Certains de nos lecteurs, locuteurs natifs, ressentent mon expression comme empruntée, froide ou lointaine – “Vous allez trop loin, ma chère Stéphanie”, ponctue mon chef de service, heureux limité! Et moi-même je ne m'oublie pas vraiment dans le jus de cette coquille de mots, comme *font les autochtones dans leurs babils maternels*. Mais, toujours retenue par les voyelles, consonnes et syllabes, je vais à la rencontre d'un insaisissable *feu sous l'écorces des signes*, humeur et sens, bonté méchante et naïve, fluide, fleuve fuyant sans cesse changeant, où le fameux vieux sage ne saurait jamais se baigner deux fois dans le même. . . . Je ne suis, s'il m'était possible de fixer le verbe au présent, qu'une Byzantine. Qui est-ce ? Etrangère, je sais que je viens de Byzance, qui n'a jamais existé si ce n'est dans mon âme de femme, sans réalité bien crédible. (MB 112-13 – nous soulignons)

L'amour de l'autre langue

En se basant à la fois sur les rapports des personnages du *Meurtre à Byzance* avec le français et le texte de “L'amour de l'autre langue” de *L'avenir d'une révolte*, il nous semble que l'interprétation de Kristeva change la perspective de la *Défense et illustration du français*. À la différence de Joachim du Bellay, elle traite le français comme une autre langue. Mais Kristeva attribue au français ce que Du Bellay a remarqué pour le latin. Un exemple significatif de ce problème est fourni par l' “illustration de la langue française” de Kristeva dans son essai “L'amour de l'autre langue” :

La clarté logique du français, l'impeccable précision du vocabulaire, la netteté de la grammaire – non sans mal – une droiture à ma complicité avec la mer Noire des passions. Je regrette d'abandonner l'ambiguïté lexicale et les sens pluriels, souvent indécidable, de l'idiome bulgare . . . en résonance avec la prière du Cœur et la nuit du sensible. *Mais j'aime la frappe latine du concept*, l'obligation de choisir pour tracer *la chute classique de*

¹⁷ Dans ce passage, les expressions comme “le dessous de la langue” et le “feu sous l'écorces des signes” démontrent effectivement que Kristeva continue toujours le mouvement vers la *chora*, donc le côté sémiotique du langage dans sa théorie, devenu la base de son livre *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974).

l'argument, et cette impossibilité de tergiverser, plus politique en définitive que morale. (*L'avenir* 71, nous soulignons).

Au français, Kristeva donne le rang de l'équivalent contemporain du latin et, par conséquent, toutes les connotations qui dérivent de ce statut, comme celles de l'universalisme et de l'humanisme. Par ailleurs, ce qui est intéressant dans ce passage est que Kristeva emploie une attitude émotionnelle et morale par rapport aux langues, ce qui est une approche de la critique impressionniste. Dans *Meurtre à Byzance*, le rôle du français est explicitement ou implicitement celui de la langue classique contemporaine, équivalent du grec et du latin du passé, un substitut du byzantinisme à notre époque. Le byzantinisme de Kristeva peut être perçu aussi comme une identité construite, qui serait l'expression sophistiquée d'une valeur profondément émotionnelle chez elle, autant qu'une invective indirecte qui se dresse contre le barbarisme contemporain.

Parmi les arguments principaux de Kristeva en faveur du choix du français comme l'autre langue, retenons celui de la langue de Proust dont l'œuvre et la vie sont pour elle l'épitomé du raffinement et l'opposé extrême du barbarisme. En effet, les textes de Proust représentent à ses yeux un lieu qui lui permet de réconcilier dans son imagination esthétique le goût et le raffinement français avec ceux de Byzance. Kristeva avoue même qu'elle a choisi de s'exprimer en français à cause de Proust.¹⁸ Pour l'érudite littéraire qu'est Kristeva, Proust représente en effet sa Byzance française. Elle le caractérise comme le plus grand écrivain du XXe siècle parce que "traducteur du sensible" (*L'avenir* 75). Passionnée également par Colette pour des raisons semblables, Kristeva l'appelle "'notre' Colette" (les guillemets autour de l'adjectif possessif 'notre' sont de Kristeva et sont une expression subtile de son sens de *l'inter-esse* qui ne peut pas dire 'notre' dans son sens habituel, non-ambigu, celui des autochtones). Ainsi, dans "L'amour de l'autre langue", Kristeva se rend compte que sa relation avec la langue

¹⁸ "Si je devais résumer, je dirais qu'en définitive et malgré tout je m'accroche au français 'autre langue' parce qu'un des plus grands écrivains français, peut-être le plus grand du XX siècle était un traducteur. Je pense naturellement à Proust" (*L'avenir* 75). Le choix d'une langue à cause de la littérature écrite dans cette langue est surtout une raison esthétique et profondément philosophique. Ce type de choix arrive surtout aux écrivains, par exemple à Joseph Brodsky. Daniela Hurezanu dans son article "La langue maternelle et les sources de la création" nous donne une explication très pertinente à l'égard de Brodsky: "Joseph Brodsky, qui avait quitté l'Union Soviétique pour émigrer aux Etats-Unis en 1972, nous donne sa raison à lui: "pour plaire à une ombre" ("to please a shadow"). L'ombre est celle de Wystan Hugh Auden, l'être que Brodsky considère comme "l'esprit le plus grand du XXe siècle". C'est pour avoir accès au même "code de conscience" que le poète qu'il admire tant et pour être à même de continuer son travail spirituel dans la même veine, que Brodsky écrit en anglais" (n.pag.). Kristeva partage cette typologie du choix avec Brodsky car la même raison, l'adoration d'un grand écrivain, agit: dans le cas de Kristeva c'est Proust qu'elle définit comme le "traducteur du sensible" et comme "le plus grand du XXe siècle" (*L'avenir* 75). Évidemment il y a un dédoublement psychique qui guide sa lecture de Proust, une lecture qui fait des emprunts profonds dans l'esprit de Kristeva comme lectrice attentive et aussi sensible à la mélancolie du temps et des espaces perdus, de l'écoulement de la vie, tout ce qui fait la partie la plus sensible de notre expérience d'êtres mortels.

française est très forte dans son aspect littéraire : la littérature française pour elle a non seulement une très haute valeur objective mais aussi une très haute valeur subjective car la formation de son goût et sa compréhension du français et de la francité, autrement dit sa mentalité, sa sensibilité, son raisonnement et son style, y ont trouvé leur lieu.

Toutefois, dans le même essai “L’amour de l’autre langue”, Kristeva nous rappelle que le français n’est pas la langue de son enfance, c’est la langue de son fils. En effet, grâce au babillage de son fils, elle apprend cette couche de la langue, la *chora* du français. Le don de cet aspect de la langue se fait par son fils. Dans la foi catholique, le Saint Esprit procède du Père et du Fils, *Filioque*. Si nous reprenons l’une des problématiques chères à Kristeva,¹⁹ nous dirions que le Saint Esprit (la langue dans notre métaphore) procède du Père par le Fils, *Per filium*. Ainsi, même dans cet aspect, par une coïncidence pure, Kristeva reste orthodoxe. Jusqu’au moment précis de la naissance de son fils, Kristeva n’avait accès qu’au symbolique du français acquis par le truchement des études, de la littérature et des conversations, une langue qui lui est devenue sienne après coup. Malgré sa sensation d’acquisition et de maîtrise parfaite, l’inquiétude d’être inadéquate persistait, un sentiment sous-jacent qu’il n’est pas possible de rendre l’autre langue complètement sienne, de sorte que les “autochtones” reconnaissent en celle qui la parle non pas une étrangère qui parle et écrit merveilleusement bien dans leur langue, mais un membre de leur communauté linguistique :

Tragédie, parce que l’être humain étant un être parlant, il parle naturellement la langue des siens: langue maternelle, langue de son groupe, langue nationale. Changer de langue équivaut à perdre cette nature, à la trahir, ou du moins à la traduire.²⁰ L’étranger est essentiellement un traducteur. Il peut parvenir à se fondre parfaitement dans sa langue d’accueil, sans oublier la langue source, ou en l’oubliant partiellement. Le plus souvent, cependant, il est perçu comme étranger précisément parce que sa traduction, quelque parfaite qu’elle soit, trahit une mélodie ou une mentalité qui ne s’ajuste pas tout à fait avec l’identité de l’accueillant. (*L’avenir* 61)

Ici, Kristeva nous présente un raisonnement ayant lieu dans la tête d’un autochtone fictionnel qui résume la problématique de la xénophobie provoquée par l’inquiétante

¹⁹ Dans son discours “Europe divisée” (Kristeva, *La haine* 47-86), l’essayiste développe cette problématique à travers les thèmes de l’apport culturel du monde slave de tradition orthodoxe (61), notamment à travers le *topos Per Filium* (68-74) où elle affirme : “Dieu est triple en orthodoxie, mais autrement que dans le catholicisme; le Saint-Esprit procède du Père et *par* le Fils pour les orthodoxes (*Per Filium*); le Saint-Esprit procède du Père *et* du Fils pour les catholiques (*Filioque*)” (68), à travers l’hésychasme (74-80) et enfin l’icône (80-82).

²⁰ Kristeva évoque évidemment l’aphorisme italien *traduttore traditore*.

étrangeté : “Curieuse, amusante, excitante, cette trace allogène irrite les autochtones: ‘En voilà une autre langue’, se disent-ils, c’est bien un autre (un traducteur) qui s’exprime là, il n’est pas des nôtres,²¹ il n’en est pas, que veut-il ou elle dire, on n’en veut pas...” (*L’avenir* 62). C’est pourquoi le “je” reste scindé dans l’espace de l’entre deux parce qu’il est impossible de ne pas sentir et de ne pas se servir de sa langue maternelle, surtout au niveau très profond, celle de la langue matrix qui en effet nous permet l’acquisition d’autres langues:

*Je n’ai pas perdu ma langue maternelle. Elle me revient, de plus en plus difficilement, je l’avoue, en rêve; ou quand j’entends parler ma mère et qu’au bout de vingt-quatre heures d’immersion dans cette eau désormais lointaine, je me surprends à nager assez convenablement; ou encore quand je parle un idiome étranger – le russe ou l’anglais par exemple –, et qu’en perte de mots et de grammaire, je me cramponne à cette vieille bouée de sauvetage soudain offerte à ma disposition par la source originelle qui, après tout, ne dort pas d’un sommeil si profond. Ce n’est donc pas le français qui me vient à l’aide quand je suis en panne dans un code artificiel, pas plus que si, fatiguée, je sèche sur mes additions et multiplications, mais bien le bulgare, pour me signifier que je n’ai pas perdu les commencements. Et pourtant, le bulgare est déjà pour moi une langue presque morte. (*L’avenir* 65, nous soulignons)*

Pourquoi “presque morte”? Parce que comme elle l’explique plus tard : “Il y a du matricide dans l’abandon d’une langue natale” (*L’avenir* 68). Un matricide²² dont le produit est ce “je” scindé qui engendre la problématique de l’inquiétante étrangeté, mais aussi du dialogue et de la psychanalyse parce que c’est un “je” schizophrénique et définitivement créatif. L’un des “je”(s) de Kristeva veut s’inscrire dans la littérature française parce que c’est la patrie spirituelle de la langue française, ce qui signifie que par le symbolique de la littérature (française dans ce cas), l’on peut oser avoir accès non seulement au symbolique mais aussi au sémiotique, à la *chora* d’une autre langue. Pour illustrer l’étendue de ce problème, il suffit de reprendre “L’amour de l’autre langue” où Kristeva insiste sur le fait que l’étranger-traducteur, comme l’écrivain, appartient à la famille des créateurs de la langue : “Il arrive, dès lors, que notre étranger-traducteur ne puisse se choisir d’autre patrie que celle des constructeurs de langues : des écrivains. . . . Et l’écrivain, depuis la nuit des temps, n’est-il pas pour cela même le pendant du législateur, un “logothète” face au “nomothète” qui modifie la langue comme le juriste

²¹ Selon Slavoj Žižek, la langue est l’un des atouts qui constitue ainsi la soi-disant *cosa nostra* de la tribu, de la nation (594-606).

²² Sur cette problématique, voir tout particulièrement l’étude de Miglena Nikolchina, *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (2004).

la loi ?” (*L’avenir* 63). Ici surgit la notion de modification de la langue comme un trait constitutif de tout acte créatif d’écriture pour lequel il faut être étranger au sens large. En bref, dans la philosophie créative de Kristeva, il est nécessaire d’être étranger, c’est-à-dire traducteur puisqu’il faut être capable d’interpréter le sensible pour écrire.

Tout compte fait, Kristeva prône le métissage parce qu’il s’agit de complexité et de polyphonie. D’autre part, dans *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* se trouvent deux parties intitulées “Toccatà et fugue pour l’étranger” (9-60) et “De quel droit êtes-vous étranger ?” (139-152) où l’essayiste démontre que le métissage aboutit à un exil réussi aussi bien qu’à un exil raté avec des conséquences sociales, psychologiques, et même métaphysiques. Dans le cas de Kristeva, c’est un exil réussi qui résulte de son histoire d’amour avec la langue française, une histoire d’amour qu’elle nous communique théoriquement et fictionnellement de manière sensible par son raisonnement, son cœur, et son esprit à travers toute son œuvre. Quand bien même, cet exil réussi pose question : l’intégration totale dans un processus d’acculturation est-elle possible? Il me semble que la réponse que Kristeva nous donne est non, car même l’intégration la plus favorable n’est que partielle, graduelle. Néanmoins, cet état des choses est loin d’être tragique parce qu’un tel résultat ouvre la voie vers le dialogue dont le lieu principal est le “je” scindé, *l’inter-esse* qui, à travers l’écriture, qu’elle soit celle de l’essai ou celle de la fiction, ce qui dans le cas de Kristeva signifie la création de ses romans, construit ce *polis* utopique où Byzance et la France sont toujours co-présentes à travers le goût et le raffinement au sens plus large. Dans ce contexte, le rôle du traducteur,²³ de l’étranger, du psy, de l’investigateur, du journaliste, de toutes ces figures qui essaient sans cesse de mettre à jour la vérité de notre inquiétante étrangeté est essentiel. Plus particulièrement le rôle du psy est de servir comme un lieu de *polis* imaginaire qui permet d’être en relation constructive avec autrui. Cette notion “d’être ensemble” est celle qui fait référence à la *polis* et celle qui est soulignée dans les *Nouvelles maladies de l’âme* : “Votre vie psychique est un discours en acte, nuisible ou salvateur, dont vous êtes le sujet. Nous sommes *ensemble* pour l’analyser : pour dissoudre et repartir à neuf . . . avec Freud, la psychanalyse vit une vie nouvelle; enrichie par la pluralité judaïque des interprétations, l’âme sort *multipliée, polyphonique* pour mieux servir la ‘transsubstantiation du corps’” (13-14, c’est nous qui soulignons). Pour Kristeva l’essayiste, nous, les êtres humains, dans notre aspect santa-barbarois, n’avons plus d’âmes parce qu’ “on n’a ni temps, ni espace nécessaire pour faire une âme” (*Nouvelles maladies* 16). C’est pourquoi on peut se reconstruire, se refaire dans un lieu comme Byzance qui est hors temps. Le symbolisme de cet endroit imaginaire est la destination de voyage, seule alternative aux images du spectacle qui nous “remplacent” : “Vous êtes saturés d’images, elles vous portent, elles vous remplacent, vous rêvez. Ravissement de l’hallucination : plus de frontières entre le plaisir et la réalité, entre le vrai et le faux. Le spectacle est une vie de rêve, nous en voulons tous. Ce ‘vous’, ce ‘nous’ existe-il ?” (*Nouvelles maladies* 17).

²³ “L’étranger est essentiellement un traducteur” (*L’avenir* 61).

La lutte qui en résulte chez Kristeva consiste à revendiquer le sujet pour lui réapproprier une âme à travers le dialogue et son aspect carnavalesque. Opposés au spectacle, le dialogue et son aspect carnavalesque donnent un nouvel angle d'interprétation à cette problématique dans le texte kristevien. Il ne faut pas oublier que dans le contexte de Kristeva ces deux voies portent un aspect politique dans le sens de *polis* à travers la revendication du sujet. Kristeva tient compte de l'expérience, parfois celle de la souffrance qui accompagne l'intériorisation du français qu'elle décrit, toujours dans "L'amour de l'autre langue". Dans cet essai magistral, le lecteur peut voir une personnalité qui maintient en soi au moins deux perspectives sur le monde. Sa construction permanente est dans le débat, dans le questionnement, dans la révolte. C'est le travail même demandé au sujet-en procès. C'est une dialectique, un dialogue qui contribue à la renaissance identitaire :

Quand j'écris [les romans] je suis en voyage, en traverse. . . . Cette perturbation, cette plongée, ce "je est un autre" me livrent certes des continents noirs de mon inconscient, mais aussi des régions de sens avant la signification, qui devraient intéresser la théorie analytique mais qui ne l'intéressent pas prioritairement (si ce n'est dans quelques textes de Julia Kristeva²⁴ quand elle lit Merleau-Ponty) : la sensation, la perception. S'ajoutent des rythmes, des mélodies, des scansion – autant d'approches présyntaxiques, "sémiotiques", de ce qu'est devenu pour moi le langage : musiques donc qui, pour moi *conjoignent des vocalises français et slaves*, et génèrent *une sonorité étrange*, que certains ne trouvent pas de très bon goût, pathétiques, en définitive pas françaises. En tout cas, il s'agit *d'une sonorité et donc d'une intimité monstrueuse*, plus monstrueuse peut-être que celle des géants de la fin du Temps retrouvé. Car non contente de convertir le temps en espace sonore, sémantique, linguistique, mon intimité à moi (mon expérience à moi) *ajoute au temps de la langue française un autre temps d'une autre langue*. (*L'avenir* 61)

La question centrale que ce "texte réfléchissant" (Bensmaïa 1986) de Kristeva pose est celle-ci : pourquoi effectivement l'autre langue est-elle nécessaire? Il est fortement question de ce que Bakhtine appelle dialogisme et du rôle dans ce dernier de l'extra location (*vneshodimost*).²⁵ Selon Bakhtine, l'autre culture se rend entièrement aux yeux de l'autre, de celui qui est étranger à cette culture. Grâce à cette extra locution, le

²⁴ C'est une méta-remarque, évidemment, qui fait partie de différentes mises en abyme et du dédoublement dans le roman *Meurtre à Byzance*.

²⁵ Un terme qui apparut dans *Estetika slovesnago tvorčestva* (M.M. Бахтин, *Эстетика словесного творчества* [*L'esthétique de la créativité verbale*], Москва: Наука, 1992, 7-19). Ce titre dans la traduction anglaise de ce livre de Bakhtine est transformé en *Speech genres and Other Late Essays*. (Trans. Vern W. McGee; Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas P, 1986).

sujet-en procès est capable de poser à une culture étrangère de nouvelles questions, celles que les sujets dans la langue ne pourraient pas produire à cause du manque du *vmenabodimost*. Il nous semble que ce phénomène se lie à la défamiliarisation, un procédé fondamental de la littérature, souvent considéré comme l'essence de la littérarité par le formalisme russe. Prolongeons ce raisonnement en disant que l'exil travaille comme un procédé de défamiliarisation,²⁶ impliquant donc que c'est l'exil qui devient l'essence même de la littérature. On voit par ce qui précède que l'autre langue est nécessaire pour participer au dialogue, pour dialoguer. Dans l'espace dialogique, notre identité se transforme, se multiplie, se transpose et se métamorphose, et se laisse elle-même traduire. La prise de la langue, dans sa dimension dialogique, à partir de l'extra location rend possible des passages comme celui-ci où, parmi des messages multiples, Kristeva insiste sur le fait que le français, son "français de migrante", est sa "seule langue d'écriture", celle qui est devenue le moyen d'écrire "le bonheur et le malheur des déracinés" :

... l'histoire et la culture de l'Hexagone protègent les Français de ces êtres nomades dont je suis et que sont mes personnages. Faudrait-il écrire en anglais, en hébreu ? En effet, mes romans sont davantage appréciés à l'étranger, et pourtant le français est désormais ma seule langue d'écriture. Il m'arrive à partager mes craintes avec mon éditeur: à quoi bon essayer de faire entendre le désert d'un Chrest-Jones, d'un Wuxian ou d'une Stéphanie Delacour à des gens sûrs d'eux-mêmes et bien enracinés ? ... En réalité, je ne peux pas faire autrement que me dévouer aux causes impossibles. Des exemples ? Eh bien, les étrangers, le handicap, l'Europe. Qui ont en commun ceci: ces causes n'intéressent pas grand-monde. Non, non, on ne remue pas les Français avec ça, j'en suis témoin. Alors, pourquoi est-ce que je m'obstine à dire cette expérience migrante ... en français ? Parce que le pari de *Meurtre à Byzance* c'est bien ça aussi: écrire dans mon français de migrante le bonheur et le malheur des déracinés. Oh, bien sûr, j'ai de bonnes raisons: la France m'a adoptée bien mieux que d'autres nomades; je suis même une "personnalité en vue", comme on dit, bien qu'"atypique"; les Lumières du XVIIIe et les marges des avant-gardes récentes m'ont donnée mon ossature morale, et j'aime ces gens tout compte fait plutôt simples, pleins de bon sens et de bon goût, fiers de leur passé, de leurs avantages sociaux et de leurs maisons de campagne, qui essaient de

²⁶ Le terme "défamiliarisation" (*ostranenie*) est forgé en 1917 par Victor Chklovski dans son essai "L'art comme technique" (Voir en anglais : Shklovsky, "Art as Technique").

donner le ton à ce continent européen si problématique... (Kristeva, *La haine* 637-38)

Par sa volonté de transgresser les barrières entre les genres et d'établir la polyglossie, l'œuvre de Kristeva toute entière nous apparaît comme une sorte de journal immense. Un journal d'écrivain, une version étrange et étrangère à la manière de Dostoïevski. Par l'effet de la polyglossie dans son ouvrage théorique, dans le dialogue que Kristeva entame avec ses prédécesseurs, Lacan est bakhtinisé et Bakhtine lacanisé. Dans ce contexte théorique, retenons que c'est la *chora* qui travaille en transformant le symbolique. La langue maternelle qui travaille la langue adoptive par les erreurs venant *de profundis* montre clairement la déchirure du sujet parlant marqué par l'écart des cultures mais prêt à lutter avec tout ce qu'il possède pour le droit de dialoguer avec l'autre.

Nous avons déjà vu comment la langue participe à une dialectique complexe qui lie les notions, les concepts et les *topoi* comme Byzance, l'Europe, l'étrangeté, le français (l'autre langue), la littérature. C'est par la *polis*, cet endroit imaginaire mais vitalemment nécessaire de partage de nos récits, que la lutte de préserver le sujet de Kristeva passe, une lutte qui à travers les efforts de la littérature et de la psychanalyse pour la préservation et le développement de l'aspect humaniste de l'humanité contemporaine revendique l'âme humaine. Pour avoir une idée de cette complexité vers laquelle Kristeva nous emmène, il faut enfin aborder le problème du choix du genre, le problème du roman et de son origine européenne.

Le roman et la psychanalyse: cheminements vers l'identité européenne

L'art du roman procède par des mouvements de nouements et de dénouements d'hypothèses. L'investigation faite par un "polar métaphysique" peut être perçue comme un mode de dialogue entre les genres romanesques établis. En transformant la formule célèbre d'Alexeï Tolstoï que le récit est une "virgule plus mais",²⁷ nous proposerons une définition qui place le roman au carrefour de voix différentes. Ces voix, par le truchement des virgules (c'est-à-dire des méandres des récits, des histoires), des "si" (hypothèses) et des "mais" (qui détournent le récit en le dirigeant vers le mode de la recherche de la vérité) posent ses questions au lecteur et l'invite à la quête. Dans ce sens, le "polar métaphysique" est un sous-genre qui est en fait le précis de tout ce qu'on peut trouver dans un roman, l'épitomé des traits constitutifs du roman.

Développons ainsi la thèse que dans la poétique et dans l'idéologie de l'écrivain Kristeva, la notion de liberté se lie avec la polyphonie, ce qui permet de faire surgir une

²⁷ Selon la formule d'Alexeï Tolstoï: "Архитектонически новелла должна быть построена с запятой и 'но'" (Алексей Николаевич Толстой, "Что такое маленький рассказ?" <<http://klikin.ru/txt/tolstoj2.html> > Web. 1 Dec. 2010) ["L'architecture du récit doit être construite avec virgule et 'mais'" (Alekseï Nikolaïevitch Tolstoï, "Qu'est que le récit ?" nous traduisons)].

figure presque messianique, celle du psychanalyste. Dans la philosophie de Kristeva, la psychanalyse est vue comme un des lieux potentiels de la liberté. De plus, dans l'œuvre de Kristeva la figure du ou de la psy s'établit comme un *topos* à travers lequel passent et se croisent les récits et les idéologies des aspects fondamentaux de l'euro péenneté. Notons que dans l'œuvre de Kristeva, le psy est aussi un réceptacle des langages subjectifs, donc un réceptacle de polyglossie. Or la polyglossie peut être mise en évidence par le roman qui est le genre qui permet précisément cette expression car elle lui est adéquate. Par conséquent, choisir comme genre littéraire le roman polyphonique, genre dont le roman de Kristeva relève sans aucun doute, s'approche de la motivation idéologique qui sous-tend les travaux de Mikhaïl Bakhtine sur la carnavalisation et la polyphonie. C'est aussi s'approcher de textes d'Hannah Arendt sur le récit et de ceux de Milan Kundera qui, dans son étude *L'art du roman* (1986), voit dans le roman le genre le plus européen. En choisissant d'écrire dans le genre du roman polyphonique, Kristeva donne également suite à son travail érudit sur l'œuvre critique et la contribution théorique de Bakhtine.

Le roman et la psychanalyse, selon nous, sont les traits constitutifs de l'euro péenneté telle qu'elle est comprise par Kristeva dans son essai intitulé "L'Europe divisée : politique, éthique, religion" que nous considérons comme un discours magistral où se distille l'essence de ses recherches intellectuelles et artistiques. Il nous semble avoir, devant nous, un programme d'engagement, basé sur des aspects politiques et spirituels de l'individuation. Ce plan d'action est de construire dans un élan presque utopique une Europe désirable qui malheureusement, maintenant, s'éloigne de nous à cause de notre inaction, parce que nous n'accordons pas suffisamment d'estime à la liberté de l'individu. C'est que Kristeva, en tant que philosophe et psychanalyste, donne à la notion kantienne de liberté une valeur tout à fait européenne :

Affirmer que l'Europe est un enjeu de civilisation nous conduira à envisager les différentes conceptions de la personne humaine et de la subjectivité qui s'affirment et s'affrontent dans cet espace européen dont l'homogénéité est aussi réelle que lourde de divergences. Dans cette optique, l'histoire de la philosophie et de la religion guidera mes réflexions d'inspiration psychanalytique, et une valeur centrale, la *liberté*, éclairera mon exposé. ("L'Europe divisée" 49)

Dans un autre passage du même discours, Kristeva avance le diagnostic du problème de notre civilisation et cherche une solution éthico-politique (qui est aussi tout à fait polyphonique) pour résoudre la division européenne.

... je tenterai de montrer que ce que je nomme les "nouvelles maladies de l'âme" (1993) menacent le sujet libre tel que l'Europe l'a construit avec brio – car cette liberté a ses revers, ses échecs, ses difficultés. Face à

cette menace, l'expérience orthodoxe de la subjectivité et de la liberté, avec ses limites et ses avancées, pourrait peut-être compléter, stimuler et enrichir l'expérience occidentale. Et, réciproquement, la conception orthodoxe bénéficier des acquis de l'Occident. (50-51)

Nous avons déjà souligné que la question qui préoccupe Kristeva est comment effectivement créer un lieu politique, un substitut de *polis* dans la perspective d'Hannah Arendt. Ainsi son rôle de psy-philosophe est de nous inviter, au sens large, à entrer dans un espace de dialogue propre à la civilisation européenne. Ce que Kristeva propose donc est un dialogisme qui mette en relation l'expérience orthodoxe et l'expérience occidentale cartésienne. Soulignons de nouveau que dans l'œuvre de Kristeva, le psy est un réceptacle de la polyglossie que le roman polyphonique met en évidence. Comme théoricien littéraire, Kristeva soutient depuis *Semiotikè* la thèse selon laquelle "toute narration... contient cette dyade dialogique que le narrateur forme avec l'autre..."(158).

Dans *Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme*, Kristeva définit le problème de la civilisation européenne contemporaine comme "un psychodrame" :

Cependant, c'est là que le drame éclate. Cette vie intérieure, bâtie en Occident depuis Plotin, lequel au début de l'ère chrétienne, avait transformé la double face de Narcisse dans la jonction des mains en prières, consolidée par l'itinéraire spirituel aussi bien que par le carnaval du Moyen Age, explicitée dans le moi fragile de Montaigne, les passions de Diderot, les méditations de Hegel ou Kant, s'achève dans le drame psychique, dans le psychodrame. (50)

Nous trouvons qu'ici l'usage du mot "psychodrame" pourrait être substitué à celui de roman, qui peut englober le psychodrame en soi, mais est aussi son produit. Remarquons qu'en même temps qu'elle nous offre cette formule, Kristeva dresse une vision propre à elle de l'Europe, une Europe de la pensée et de la liberté d'esprit.

Un des motifs récurrents qui permettent d'établir un espace de liberté dans l'œuvre de Kristeva est l'emploi du chant. De par ses implications polyphoniques, le chant représente ici la légèreté, l'infini des signes, donc l'apesanteur qui est une valeur très précieuse pour Kristeva. Le chant est aussi un genre à travers lequel on est libre de narrer, donc de s'ouvrir aux autres en partageant son histoire. Il est nécessaire ici de stipuler que les chansons dans le folklore bulgare et dans les Balkans sont surtout en forme de *trenos*, c'est-à-dire de lamentations, le sens du mot grec. Ces lamentations expriment la douleur de ne pas être libre et de chercher en vain la liberté sociale et absolue. Cette tradition est encore forte de nos jours et son usage culturel et politique est toujours présent. Dans le roman *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (1991) par exemple, se trouve un chant pour lequel le vieux Professeur Septicius Clarus ("alias Scholasticus, alias le Professeur, alias le Vieil Homme", VH 14) et "son ami, son double" (VH 236),

l'ambassadeur à Santa Barbara et le père de la narratrice Stéphanie Delacour, se passionnent. Dans ce chant, il s'agit d'un jeune preux qui demande à porter une chemise blanche avant d'être décapité, "pour accueillir l'Éternel dans la blancheur et le vent" (VH 218). C'est une scène tout à fait classique du folklore bulgare, une scène qui est l'incarnation de l'idée de liberté absolue. Dans le même roman, l'on trouve également le chant grégorien, le chant orthodoxe par lequel Septicius Clarus et le père de Stéphanie chantent "la gloire de Dieu à la gueule des loups" (VH 248). C'est une métaphore utilisée par Kristeva pour représenter l'horreur quotidienne et existentielle de la vie dans la société totalitaire de la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle, une société où garder sa religion signifiait résister contre le régime totalitaire athéiste. Nous avons déjà montré par la citation ci-dessus que Kristeva envisage le métissage de la culture cartésienne occidentale avec des éléments de la religion et de la culture orthodoxe comme l'une des voies qui permettraient de constituer une meilleure union européenne sur le plan culturel.

Dans les romans et les essais de Kristeva, en plus de l'art du chant, le *topos* du vol est souvent présent. Il en va de même des trois figures humaines que sont l'écrivain, le traducteur, et le psy. Posons donc ici la question suivante : peut-on interpréter les figures du psy et de l'écrivain comme des variantes du vol car les deux figures pourraient être omniscientes comme des oiseaux en vol? D'autres interprétations possibles qui viennent à l'esprit déchiffraient ces figures comme des sublimations des nouvelles maladies de l'âme. Cette interprétation pourrait aussi nous amener à penser à ces figures comme à un état d'entre-deux, d'*in between* de la maladie et de la sublimation, ce qui *mène encore* vers la notion de *l'inter-esse*, une possibilité qui est tout à fait valable, car l'écrivain et le psy sont des exilés métaphysiques, des étrangers à eux-mêmes et aux autres. Par conséquent, on observe souvent chez Kristeva une certaine esthétisation et surtout une éthisation de l'exil. Les motifs du chant, de la polyphonie, de l'écriture qui vole et est volée sont, à notre avis, des voies différentes vers la même notion: la condition de *l'inter-esse*. En effet, ces instruments, ces figures d'investigation et ces motifs littéraires (le chant, l'écriture, la psychanalyse) aident à surmonter l'inquiétude primordiale, appelée par Kristeva, qui suit Freud, "l'inquiétante étrangeté."

Une variation et une problématisation de ce thème apparaît de façon remarquable dans plusieurs pages d'*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988) consacrées au bonheur: "Le bonheur étrange de l'étranger est de maintenir cette éternité en fuite ou ce transitoire perpétuel" (13). Kristeva y explique ce qu'elle entend par bonheur spécifique de l'étranger:

Ne pas chercher à fixer, à chosifier l'étrangeté de l'étranger. Juste la toucher, l'effleurer, sans lui donner de structure définitive. Simplement en esquisser le mouvement perpétuel à travers quelques-uns des visages disparates déployés sous nos yeux . . . les fuir non par le nivellement et l'oubli, mais par la reprise harmonieuse des différences qu'elle suppose

et propage. *Toccatas et Fugues* : les pièces de Bach évoquent à mes oreilles le sens moderne que je voudrais de l'étrangeté reconnue et poignante, parce que soulevée, soulagée, disséminée, inscrite dans un jeu, neuf en formation, sans but, sans borne, sans fin. Etrangeté à peine effleurée et qui, déjà, s'éloigne. (*Étrangers* 11)

Il est aussi important de revisiter la dimension politique de *l'inter-esse*, celle de la *polis* où le psychodrame devient partageable à travers la narration. Il faut ici rappeler la lecture attentive d'Hannah Arendt que donne Kristeva et le respect intellectuel qu'elle accorde à sa pensée, une pensée orientée vers la fusion de l'éthique et du politique. Dans l'extrait du texte kristevien qui suit, on peut entendre l'écho sous-jacent du philosophe Arendt à propos de l'importance du récit qui est au centre des valeurs de la *polis* :

Par son attention au récit et au roman, [H. Arendt] démontre comment la narration peut participer d'une autre politique, celle de la mémoire ouverte, renouvelée et partagée, qu'elle appelle une *vie* de "qui". Que le narrateur puisse se tromper ou voir juste est un autre problème qui laisse intacte la potentialité structurelle de la narration comme action politique déhiscente et infinie, offerte à la perspicacité jugeante de *l'inter-esse*. (*Hannah Arendt* 159)

Alors la narration, "offerte à la perspicacité jugeante de *l'inter-esse*", crée un monde polyphonique qui permet à l'auteur de jouer sur le clavier sans limites du roman polyphonique. Kristeva peut y mêler le rêve et le "réel", se disperser parmi ses personnages avec un lyrisme bouleversant en se distanciant ironiquement ou en tombant amoureux d'eux, narcissiquement, fusionner le temps de l'histoire et le temps du récit. Pour résumer, tous ces traits, présentés dans le roman kristevien, constituent le triomphe du carnaval, de la polyphonie, de la liberté.

La liberté d'écrivain chez Kristeva s'exerce aussi contre la tradition littéraire qui la précède. En fait, elle crée un polytope, c'est-à-dire un lieu multidimensionnel du passé de la littérature, des arts et des idées. Ses personnages et ses narratrices se permettent, par exemple, de bombarder la madeleine de Proust, de jouer avec Goya et Ovide, de citer sans guillemets. Tout cela aboutit à un texte qui ressemble par certains aspects à une machine de citations soit explicites, soit implicites à différent degrés, mais c'est toujours elle, Kristeva, en sa fonction institutionnelle d'auteur, de pilote qui dirige le vol de tous ces signifiants envolés de la bibliothèque mondiale pour qu'ils puissent se retrouver sur les pages des romans kristeviens. L'instance de l'auteur, l'institution que Kristeva représente, est très complexe. En simplifiant, nous trouvons que cette institution d'auteur chez Kristeva se fonde sur les trois domaines d'expertise que Kristeva exerce dans sa vie. Dans son œuvre, ces trois domaines sont représentés par trois figures, celle de la femme écrivain et philosophe, qui soutient personnellement

l'idée que le génie féminin existe, celle d'une "psychanalyste engagée dans le siècle et la culture" (Aisenstein 63) qui s'occupe des maladies de l'âme, et enfin celle de la sémioticienne qui est fascinée par la complexité des cultures, et surtout de deux cultures, la culture française et la culture byzantine.

Byzance est vue par Kristeva comme un "signe vers l'innommable" (MB 118) qui permet de poser des questions hors de ce qu'on juge pratique et immédiatement applicable. Une telle description fait de Byzance un lieu spécial²⁸ que Kristeva, comme nous l'avons déjà démontré ici, oppose fortement dans ces romans à Santa Barbara. Ce dernier lieu est un lieu fictionnel qui représente le phénomène du monde moderne qui a perdu la force intellectuelle et spirituelle de penser paradoxalement. De plus, comme le démontre son discours "Europe divisée", Kristeva est en faveur de la réinvention de l'esprit byzantin (donc Orthodoxe) pour restaurer à la pensée sa complexité et sa richesse, voire même sa surabondance baroque. En même temps, Kristeva soutient que dans le monde contemporain, c'est la culture française qui, sans être capable de le faire entièrement, a remplacé par sa complexité l'esprit byzantin.

Pour Kristeva, un choix idéologiquement, esthétiquement et politiquement nécessaire est de restaurer Byzance en la réinventant. Umberto Eco parle dans *La recherche de la langue parfaite dans la culture européenne* (1997) de la difficulté de définir les frontières de la culture européenne. Selon Kristeva, c'est par Byzance qu'on devient européen. Aujourd'hui pour elle, Byzance reste une vieille culture, mais elle se transforme, comme nous l'avons déjà noté, dans la culture française, une vision qui nous permet de comprendre l'éloge kristevien de la culture française et de sa complexité caractéristique : une culture complexe ou, selon sa métaphore savante, une culture byzantine.

La pensée féconde de Kristeva nous mène vers l'idée que pour construire notre identité européenne, il faut cesser de chercher nos racines d'une façon qui relève du nationalisme, une approche qui a caractérisé les théories ethnoculturelles du XIXe siècle. Kristeva essaie de sensibiliser le public sur l'importance de préserver la polyphonie du patrimoine européen, occidental et orthodoxe, pour en profiter intellectuellement et spirituellement. Dans la mesure où il est possible de penser et de parler d'une identité européenne ou cosmopolite, il est nécessaire de comprendre que c'est tout d'abord notre capacité (que nous devons développer) de mettre en cause les dogmes, de poser des questions sur notre propre identité, de nous changer en devenant un *sujet-en-procès*.

L'identité européenne, toutes proportions gardées, s'est formée d'une

²⁸ Voir dans ce sens particulièrement les articles "Byzantium: The Future Anterior of Europe?" de Maria Margaroni et "Du côté de chez Stéphanie Delacour" de Pierre-Louis Fort dans *Julia Kristeva : prix Holberg* 71- 87. Voir également l'interview de Pierre-Louis Fort avec Julia Kristeva "Meurtre à Byzance, ou Pourquoi 'je me voyage' en roman," dans Kristeva, *La haine* 609-655, et notre interview avec Kristeva (dans ce volume). Voir aussi des comptes rendus parmi lesquels ceux de Christine Rousseau, de Bernard-Henry Levy, d'Alison Jasper, de Mélanie Gleize et de Ralitsa Mihailova-Frison-Roche.

surabondance d'éléments qui comprennent aussi bien des éléments religieux et mythologiques des civilisations fondatrices grecque et romaine, que des apports de la raison critique de l'Occident fondée sur l'union de la science et de la philosophie. Dans ce cadre vaste de l'identité européenne, une place particulière est réservée à la littérature et notamment au roman. Milan Kundera dans son livre *L'art du roman* considère que le roman c'est l'Europe et vice versa. Il a en vue cet esprit de distanciation du critique envers le discours scientifique et social au sens large, une approche de l'art de juger qui est propre au genre du roman. C'est le genre à travers lequel se manifeste la pensée critique contre le dogmatisme quelles qu'en soient ses formes, puisque c'est le genre qui met tout en cause, qui interroge tout. Rappelons-nous que Barthes insistait sur cette opposition entre la langue qui est le pouvoir et la littérature qui est ce qui met en question la langue, donc le pouvoir. À la voix de Barthes se joint la voix de Bakhtine qui y ajoute sa terminologie, celle du carnaval et de la polyphonie.

La compréhension de la polyphonie qu'offre Kristeva a ses racines chez Bakhtine bien sûr. Ce qui est le plus intéressant cependant est que Bakhtine est le prédécesseur qui met en évidence l'euro péenneté comme trait caractéristique du roman. Dans son étude sur le roman, Bakhtine distingue trois caractéristiques fondamentales de ce genre: la stylistique de trois dimensions, le changement radical du système du temps de l'image littéraire et enfin une zone ouverte qui crée toujours un sens nouveau. Dans "Epic and Novel", Bakhtine lie définitivement ces trois caractéristiques avec l'histoire de la civilisation européenne:

These three characteristics of the novel are . . . all been powerfully affected by a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semi patriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships. A multitude of different languages, cultures and times became available to Europe, and this became a decisive factor in its life and thought. (11)

Dans ce contexte élargi s'explique ainsi la solidarité que Kristeva éprouve pour la philosophie de l'identité performante et polyphonique de Proust lorsqu'elle souligne ainsi la démarche discursive de l'auteur de *À la recherche*: "Proust se plaît à *désidentifier* la nation après avoir *transsexualisé* le sexe. Lui-même s'avoue personnellement attaché, notons la nuance, non pas au 'corps-France', mais à 'l'acteur France'" (*Proust* 1-2). Immédiatement après ces lignes où elle réfléchit à la dialectique corps-acteur, Kristeva souligne "l'identité polyphonique" de Proust et se demande d'une façon rhétorique: "Comment pouvait-il en être autrement, si l'on admet que le 'kaléidoscope social' de *À la recherche* est la première vision de la 'société du spectacle', écrite par quelqu'un dont l'identité polyphonique a pu être décrite par un admirateur, Jacques Rivière, comme une 'débandade d'atomes'"? (*Proust* 2). En nous appuyant sur notre analyse de l'œuvre de

Kristeva nous posons que l'identité de Kristeva est aussi une identité polyphonique qui s'est élaborée dans le dialogue entre la culture byzantine et la culture française.

L'œuvre de Kristeva promeut le roman, l'identité européenne qui s'ouvre vers le cosmopolitisme, les styles et les pensées de Proust, de Barthes, de Lacan, de Bakhtine et de tant d'autres écrivains et penseurs. Ce que Kristeva nous offre est une relecture et réécriture de tout ce corpus de pensées. A travers les romans de Kristeva chante la polyphonie de ses lectures, de ses pensées, de ses rêves et abjections, en bref de sa vie, une vie construite par la quête de la connaissance de l'étrangeté de chacun, une vie qu'elle ne cesse de se raconter et de nous raconter pour nous créer cet espace politique de la *polis* où l'on peut dialoguer, faire de l'art, de la théorie, de la politique et se sentir libre par les effets d'une polyphonie dont le prix se paie par une souffrance sublimée. Mais ce qui est encore plus important est que Kristeva est en train d'établir une image de l'Europe qui est une référence incontournable. Le genre le plus européen, celui du roman, lui permet en tant qu'écrivain de transmettre en français, l'autre langue, cette image de la complexité féconde de la culture européenne.

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in friendship of the Letter(s) :
Kristeva/Clément and the 'fe-mə-nən'¹ 'sa-krəd'²

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Abstract : Employing future, past and present tenses, “in friendship of the Letter(s)” takes an intimate look at the written exchange between Julia Kristeva and Catherine Clément, published under the title *Le féminin et le sacré*. Ruminating on the question of a sacred and undisclosed language (*écriture sacrée/écriture sainte*), and making reference to multiple languages, this work transgresses the notion of beginning, middle and ending. Expanding on the territories of poetics and mysticism, and actively re-inscribing philosophy in the feminine, “in friendship of the Letter(s)” elucidates a revelatory and precipitous language.

Résumé : Employant le futur, le passé, et le temps présent, “dans l’amitié des Lettre(s)” jette un regard intime sur l’échange écrit entre Julia Kristeva et Catherine Clément publié sous le titre *Le féminin et le sacré*. Ruminant sur la question d’une langue secrète et sacrée (*écriture sacrée/écriture sainte*), et se référant à de multiples langages, ce texte transgresse toute notion d’un début, d’un milieu, et d’une fin. Etendant les territoires de la poésie et du mysticisme et ré-inscrivant activement la philosophie au féminin, “dans l’amitié des Lettre(s)” met en lumière une langue révélatrice et précipitée.*

*Translated by Catherine A. F. MacGillivray.

Keywords : Kristeva – Clément – Daly – Durga – virgin – fragrance – tantrism – sacred – feminine



ear(est) Julia—Dear(est) Catherine—(in fidelity of the letter to her) sche³ the written to be written they who have has written writes:

Dakar, JANUARY 7, 1997, *Dear Julia*, YOUR LETTER UPON your return from New York fell down on me like the rain from a monsoon, I opened my umbrella and began to sort out the seeds. (Clément, Kristeva 17)

¹ Feminine – pronunciation: 'fe-mə-nən. Word pronunciations, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from *www.merriam-webster.com*. Future references to *merriam-webster.com* will be abbreviated as *mwc*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

² Sacred – pronunciation: 'sā-krəd.

³ She – Middle English *sche*. See *www.en.wikipedia.org*. Future references to *en.wikipedia.org* will be abbreviated as *w*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

Oxford, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1997, *Dear Catherine*, I HAVE NOT yet received your letter, it seems to me you are traveling, and in any case, nothing requires us to pursue this correspondence as call and response. . . . Night has fallen over Oxford, a very English rain is pouring down on the lawn under my windows, and I do not feel like sleeping. (42)

Letters *such as these, as they are, and will be written* – in 'sē-krət⁴ – from the Anglo-French *secré* *ənd*⁵ Latin *secretus*,⁶ “from past participle of *secernere* to separate, distinguish, from *se-* apart + *cernere* to sift – more at *secede*” *ənd* in relation to that which may be “[un]certain,”⁷ that is, secretly, in astonishment *ənd* admiration, we, I *ənd* Thou, I *ənd* you, I you, *Ich und Du*⁸ (Martin Buber), that is, *You ənd I* may wonder how does a woman write to another woman, that is to say, *Sche* write to eachone or an *ōther*,⁹ to the other, other’s other, *andar*¹⁰ *ənd antara*,¹¹ for the other, to be for her/ber? Whilst perhaps, more urgently, we may consider, (t)hence, *hence*, thenceforth, or, henceforth, the relation of the *how*, or, the, *what is*, of the *how* it *is*, that they *reply*, the reply, such as it were, that is, under which particularity to counter the letter, *sche*, they, in confluence *ənd/or* divergence, to speak that is to say, say to speech, vociferate, resound or resonate, resonare, in *Latin*,¹² to one *ənd* (an) other, each other, *Ēchōing*¹³ the intimacy in the figuration of a rapture, the very delineation of the a voice, *her/voice* herself, they, themselves, *specifically*?

To pine away, perhaps, that is, *perchance*, “possibly but not certainly,”¹⁴ maybe, *mā-bē*,¹⁵ we mean, meaning – truly to reply to one another – that is to return the favour in fidelity to the letter *ənd* to the *woord* (*Afrikaans*).¹⁶ As it were, keepers of the Letter(s), whilst, remarkably, transgressing the very notion of the gatekeeper(s) her *sie ihr ihre*

⁴ Secret – pronunciation: 'sē-krət.

⁵ And – pronunciation: ən(d).

⁶ Secret – Latin *secretus*. Dictionary definitions and/or word pronunciations, including references to Old English, Old High German, Old Norse, Anglo-French, Latin, Medieval Latin, Late Latin, Vulgar Latin, Greek, Hittite, and Sanskrit, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from *mvc*.

⁷ See *mvc/secret*.

⁸ This is a reference to Martin Buber’s *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*).

⁹ Other – Old English *ōther*.

¹⁰ Other – Old High German *andar*.

¹¹ Other – Sanskrit *antara*.

¹² Resound – Latin *resonare*.

¹³ Echo – Greek *Ēchō*.

¹⁴ See *mvc/perhaps*.

¹⁵ Maybe – pronunciation: mā-bē.

¹⁶ Word – Afrikaans *woord*. Afrikaans translations, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from www.stars21.com/dictionary/English-Afrikaans. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

youshe *them* you *du*¹⁷ to reply or turn about face, fold a-bout, fold-around-and-about, to turn twist revolve, as in a turning, “face to face” (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 207), that is to say, to gather or ungather momentum toward, as in *gegenübertreten begegnen durchhalten gegenüberstehen ansehen*,¹⁸ or, *to reply*, *répondre*, *répliquer*, *réponse*,¹⁹ *and* profess *professus*,²⁰ that is, to *prophecy friendship*,²¹ in allegiance or avowal, *avouer*,²² *namely* to confess confesser (confés),²³ “having confessed, from *confessus*” *and* “*fari* to speak,”²⁴ as in *répondre répliquons répliquent répliquez*,²⁵ to respond *and* to reply *beside and aside*, the letter.

Corresponding, no less, as in letters exchanged like rivers in flood²⁶ rising *and* flowing wildly, turbulently, enfolding, holding, *and* keeping *them, themselves, in her their* implacable and impeccable manner(s) in relation *and* circumstance wither=against²⁷ or whither *hwider to*²⁸ *correspondere* (correspondence).²⁹ Letters *such as these* facing *East West North + South*, excreting the odors of saints *of the feminine type, saintesses*, so to speak, conjuring “snake-headed women,”³⁰ Egyptian cobras (*Naja haje*)³¹ – goddesses and Sphinxes *alike* – at the banks of the *White Nile* an-Nīl al-Ābyaḍ³² *and Blue Nile* an-Nīl al-Azraq.³³ *Neilos* (Νεῖλος)³⁴ great river(s) of the primeval bræth breth, brādam (breath)³⁵ *and* exhalation, that is aer³⁶ aēr³⁷ the unhidden uninvisible, “Of the name for primordial

¹⁷ You – German *du*. German translations, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from *www.dict.cc*. Future references to *www.dict.cc* will be abbreviated as *dict.cc*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

¹⁸ To face someone or something – German *gegenübertreten, begegnen, durchhalten, gegenüberstehen, ansehen*.

¹⁹ Respond – French *répondre, répliquer, réponse*. French translations, unless otherwise noted, are quoted from *www.freedict.com*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

²⁰ Profess – Late Latin *professus*.

²¹ See *mvc/profess*.

²² Avowal – French *avouer*.

²³ Confess – French *confesser (confés)*.

²⁴ Confess – Latin *confessus* + to speak – Latin *fari*. See *mvc/confess*.

²⁵ Respond – French *répondre, répliquons, répliquent, répliquez*.

²⁶ See *mvc/flood*.

²⁷ Against – Old English *wither*.

²⁸ Whither – Old English *hwider*.

²⁹ Correspond – Medieval Latin *correspondere*.

³⁰ See *www.thefullwiki.org/Amenti*. Future references to *thefullwiki.org* will be abbreviated as *fw*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

³¹ See *n/Egyptian cobra – Naja haje*.

³² See *n/White_Nile*.

³³ See *n/Blue_Nile*.

³⁴ See *n/Nile* – Greek *Neilos* (Νεῖλος).

³⁵ Breath – Old English *bræth*, Middle English *breth*, Old High German *brādam*.

³⁶ Air – Latin *aer*.

³⁷ Air – Greek *aēr*.

air meaning (one who) is hidden,”³⁸ the Egyptian goddess *Amunet Amonet Amaunet Amentet Amentit Imentet Imentit Ament*, that is, *Amunet* in the feminine S(he) *and Amun* in the masculine³⁹ *themothervoisfather*⁴⁰ facing *West* ungathering upon threshold(s) *and* portal(s), parallels *and* circle(s) of latitude, celestial spheres *and* horizons – facing *ecliptic*⁴¹ *East* – *great circles of breath balare*⁴² = breathing (Irigaray, *The age of the breath* 14 E) breath alive as if by it were “fire” (Clément and Kristeva 108) inhaling *and* exhaling (Aristotle, “On Breath” 764) (a) breath in the very letter(s), a responderesponsum such as this, *which is, bow*, that is, to reverberate, flesh out, or to deflect upon the letter each to herself *and* other, conceivably marking a the letter *tober* as if it were in the figuration of an inscription, the body *bending*, turning aside, beside, kneeling, reclining, inclining, lying prone or prostrate, that is spread or thrown, leaning or reflecting, folding splitting or bending back, in consideration, or, just as likely, in deviation of the letter, that is in its peculiar fidelity and delineation towards the enumeration of that which is, that is, secretly whispered in correspondence.

Letters strewn about, dispatched, tumbling, gushing, caressing, crashing, laughing hysterically, *circling beside laughter* carcajadas (in Spanish) *sich zerkrugeln sich tot lachen vor Lachen brüllen prusten Lachenfall vor Lachen platzen* (in German)⁴³ *and* taunting each other oneanother *et*⁴⁴ + *and* also besides, as well as, together, in turn, turning, folding pliez pli plient plions plissons plier,⁴⁵ *letters* cascading, rolling at each another, veiling voiler⁴⁶ *and* unveiling the other, *unfolding the letter* that is creased, gathered, pleated, doubled up turned over *and* under, *outspread in celebration* of each to the other.

Letters such as these of truest voice, *Maat Kheru*, in *Egyptian* = the “True of Voice,”⁴⁷ excelling in mystical incantation(s), aiding *eyden*, *aider*, *adjudare*⁴⁸ one another in “sharing” (Clément and Kristeva 1), *peut-être*⁴⁹ *possibly* with one another *in the manner of a the* unremembered of *spirit that is mouth mouthing* turning (to turn) *vertere*⁵⁰ or enfold(ing)

³⁸ See egyptiandreams.co.uk/amunet.php. Future references to egyptiandreams.co.uk/amunet.php will be abbreviated as *ed.co.uk*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

³⁹ See *fw/Amenti*. See also *w/Amun* and *w/Amunet*.

⁴⁰ See *ed.co.uk*.

⁴¹ See *w/Ecliptic*.

⁴² Breathing – Latin *halare*.

⁴³ Laughter – German “to burst with laughter”: *sich zerkrugeln*; to die with laughter: *sich tot lachen*; to roar with laughter: *vor Lachen brüllen*; to snort with laughter: *prusten*; “fit of laughter”: *Lachenfall*; to be convulsed with laughter: *vor Lachen platzen*. See dict.cc/laughter.

⁴⁴ And – French *et*.

⁴⁵ Fold/folding – French *plier, pli, plient, plions, plissons, plier*.

⁴⁶ See *w/Veil/veiling* – French *voiler*.

⁴⁷ “True of Voice” – Egyptian hieroglyph *Maat Kheru*. See *w/Maat_Kheru*.

⁴⁸ Aid – Middle English *eyden*, Anglo-French *aider*, Latin *adjudare*.

⁴⁹ Perhaps – French *peut-être*.

⁵⁰ Turn – Latin *vertere*.

the friendship of the *feminine jinnée* (genius) reimagining in Daly's words, a "Memory of the Future" (Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* xvi), that is to engage in the act of sharing as in the figuration of a distribution or contribution to an other, that is to share *schare scear scaro*, meaning (to) plowshare, *and scieran*,⁵¹ to (un)cut, the letter *and*/or word that is to shear *and* *schare* in the fluidity of the letter. In Kristeva's words, in "the spirit" of fidelity *and* faith, "trust and polemics," *and* in "writing to the other" (Clément and Kristeva 3), as stated by Clément, *such as they were*, are, to be, that is letters of courtship *schaering* passage hinting at – a modality of *friendship* – the *feminine* incurring intimacy in the figuration of *adornment*, therein procuring the ring of voices luminous, radiant, *and* dazzling.

Les plus belles pages – Page after page, letter after letter, *Les plus belles lettres* *bel-letr*⁵² *litterae*⁵³ (letter(s) in the plural) that remained *and* were still to be written in time, that is of a time that is to *leave time* behind *time* – to act slowly or deliberately to *hesitate* to *delaytime* as in a *woman's time*, as designated by Kristeva. A "mystical" time *and*/or "*chora*" "anterior to the One" engulfing "*repetition and eternity*," the "cyclical and [the] monumental," along the borders of an "extra-subjective time" *tīma tīmi*,⁵⁴ that is to *give* time – *līcian* (like)⁵⁵ a surging tide gushing – *sich Zeit lassen aller Zeit lange zeit unserer reichlich herausgeschunden massenhaft Zeit erübrigen verbringen herausschlagen jede Zeit tolle Zeit*⁵⁶ – anything but the time of "progression and arrival," "beginning [or] ending" (Kristeva "Women's Time" 407), a temporal modality of an anterior *Before*⁵⁷ *unfastening, escaping and delineating* "the regaining of Time as a form of eternity of the word," as noted by Kristeva in "The Passion According to Teresa of Ávila."⁵⁸ That is, *before the beginning*, lessening the time beside the time of a time *tomaketime beside the time* that is hearkening back to Levinasian "dead time,"⁵⁹ *so etwas wie eine Totzeit oder - tote Zeit*⁶⁰ delineating the interruption of history – a temporality, drifting beneath time that *drifts, drīfan*,⁶¹ *and* flocks *flocc flokker*⁶² in *and* out of particular places or place(lessness) beckoning *exile essil*⁶³

⁵¹ Share – Middle English *schare*, Old English *scear*, akin to Old High German *scaro*, Old English *scieran*.

⁵² Fine letters – French *belles lettres*, pronunciation: *bel-letr*³.

⁵³ Letter – Latin *litterae*.

⁵⁴ Time – Old English *tīma*, Old Norse *tīmi*.

⁵⁵ Like – Old English *līcian*.

⁵⁶ Time – *Zeit*.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Additionally, see Mary Daly (1998) on the subject of intergalactic space and time and Levinas (2004, 2002) on the subject of an anterior dimension that travels the passage in excess of that which is being and nothingness.

⁵⁸ No page number available. See "Works Cited" for further reference.

⁵⁹ For Levinas, the death of time marks the "rupture of historical and totalized duration [...]" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* 58).

⁶⁰ Dead time, something like a 'dead time' – German *so etwas wie eine Totzeit, tote Zeit*.

⁶¹ Drift – Old English *drīfan*.

⁶² Flock – Old English *flocc*, Old Norse *flokkr*.

⁶³ Exile – Anglo-French *essil*.

*exilium*⁶⁴ that is to be far from *and* away, such as having travelled to foreign lands, also meaning, afflicted or wretched, intimately strange, stranger Letters, *exoticus*, *exōtikos*⁶⁵ *and* *erōtikos* (Audre Lorde),⁶⁶ aromatic in their “perfume” (Clément and Kristeva 16), the finest of letters, to be certain *and* to be sure, *bespeaking in(f)inite* the other world(s) *grēat and smæl*,⁶⁷ *secret and sacred*, *geheim heimlich einsam verborgen verschwiegen und versteckt still und leise*⁶⁸ *cachetteen dérobée*,⁶⁹ whilst (un)identically or nonidentically (Adorno 320) openmouthed, *letters* facing *openoffen übersichtlich aufgeschlossen revolvierend aufblättern*⁷⁰ *ouvert*⁷¹ such as amongst (her, sche, their, there) African letters from *Dakar – Afrikaase briewe brief lettere briefkorrespondensie es fletter geletterd Afrikaans*.⁷²

Dear Julia, EVER SINCE YOU told me about the strange link between women and the sacred, I run into it at every turn, right here in Africa. (Clément and Kristeva 5)

beside *American* (11) *and Parisian* Letters:

Dear Catherine, I TELL YOU about atheistic communism, a religious atheism that will swallow anything, even worms, and you reply: “*La vache*.” Brava! (33)

beside *and aside* British Letters, Oxford Letters, to be precise:

I like the academic rituals of the English, I like them very much now, though a few years ago they seemed to me ridiculous in a sinister way. (42)

That is, an *impressive* accumulation of *Indo-European Letters*, not withstanding, *and* beside the occasional *Fārsi Pārsi Persianus and Persia* (Latin) Πέρσις *Pérsis* (Greek)⁷³ *Persian Letter* (166).

⁶⁴ Exile – Anglo-French *essil*, Latin *exilium*.

⁶⁵ Exotic – Latin *exoticus*, Greek *exōtikos*.

⁶⁶ I am referring here to Audre Lorde’s essay, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.”

⁶⁷ Great – Old English *grēat*, Small – Old English *smæl*.

⁶⁸ Secret – German *geheim*, *Heimlich*, *einsam*, *verborgen*, *verschwiegen und versteckt*, *still und leise*.

⁶⁹ Secret – French *cachetteen* (secret, clandestine, underhand); *dérobée* (secret, undercover).

⁷⁰ Open – German *offen*, *übersichtlich*, *aufgeschlossen*, *revolvierend*, *aufblättern*.

⁷¹ Open – French *ouvert*.

⁷² African letters – Afrikaans *Afrikaase briewe*, *brief*, *lettere*, *briefkorrespondensie*, *es fletter*, *geletterd*.

⁷³ See *n/Persian_language*.

Imagine letters unspoken *bespoken* or whispered chanted in the form of high-pitched voices calling forth the fine timbre of bells, or, then again, crossedcrossing, scattereding, traverseding traversing, as if *partaking* in a game of ping-pong or a medieval duel. **Letters such as these**, still to be *written*, (un)foregathering *white ink*⁷⁴ as in a gathering storm or *tempeste*, in Middle English, *tempesta*, in *Vulgar Latin*, *and orage*, in *French*,⁷⁵ stirring up matters, that is to say, *oder beziehungsweise oder auch sonst*⁷⁶ demarcating *fidelity's friendship* that is otherwise or else *ou*⁷⁷ or meaning *other*, that is, akin to Old English "oththe" archaic: *either and whether*,⁷⁸ ~~unforegathering~~ *unraveling and unweaving* unbrushing **unspinning**⁷⁹ somewhere there thing(s) ~~un~~particular to **son, sa, elle, lela, lelaelle**,⁸⁰ letters murmuring scattering the sacred scent of the *human ən(d) divine* virgins *Virginis*⁸¹ *virgine virgin virgo*⁸² and their virgin tongue(s). *Virgo* ♍⁸³ *reclining between West and East, light years away, beside elliptical lenticular galaxies*⁸⁴ *and supernovas supernovae*⁸⁵ (the)=**le, l', laquelle, qui qui, lequel, la**,⁸⁶ **as it were**, *le sacré, Kumari Devi* (*Kumari* meaning virgin in **Sanskrit** and *devi=child*),⁸⁷ *a shining red serpent* chosen by the markings of various *[im]perfections*:

A neck like a conch shell
 A body like a banyan tree
 Eyelashes like a cow
 Thighs like a deer
 Chest like a lion
 Voice soft and clear as a duck's⁸⁸

⁷⁴ See Hélène Cixous, *White Ink*.

⁷⁵ Tempest/storm – Middle English *tempeste*, *Vulgar Latin* *tempesta*, *French* *orage*.

⁷⁶ Or – German *oder, beziehungsweise, oder auch sonst*.

⁷⁷ Or – French *ou*.

⁷⁸ Or – archaic: *either, whether*.

⁷⁹ I am referring here to Daly's "New Intergalactic Introduction: The Spinning and Weaving of this Work" (*Gyn/Ecology* xvii).

⁸⁰ Her – French **son, sa, elle, lela**.

⁸¹ Virgo – Latin genitive *Virginis* (virgin).

⁸² Virgin – Anglo-French *virgine*, Latin *virgin, virgo*.

⁸³ See *w/Virgo*.

⁸⁴ "Messier 49 (also known as *M 49* or *NGC 4472*) is an elliptical/lenticular galaxy about 49 million light-years away in the constellation Virgo. The galaxy was discovered by Charles Messier in 1771." See *w/Messier_49*.

⁸⁵ See *w/Supernova*.

⁸⁶ The – French **le, l', laquelle, qui qui, lequel, la**.

⁸⁷ See *w/Kumari*. See also *sacred-destinations.com/nepal/kathmandukumarighar*. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

⁸⁸ See *w/Kumari* and *w/Indra_Jatra*.

Whilst at the same or another time the letter withheld, tethered *and* released before a future time, anterior to the one, conjures pronouncements of the Hindu goddess(es) *Durga and Kali*⁸⁹ “divine female energy”⁹⁰ *and* “force of time (*kala*),”⁹¹ respectively, she, *Durga*, consort of the Hindu god Shiva,⁹² meaning the “auspicious one,”⁹³ or, just as likely, Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada⁹⁴ (Saint Teresa of Ávila), *Μαρία Κάλλας* (*Maria Callas*), “*La Divina*,”⁹⁵ or Breton women (Clément and Kristeva 8-9), for that matter. Goddesses in the plural theirs telling tales *from* Old English *talu*⁹⁶ *and* Old Norse *tala*⁹⁷ to “talk”(ing) *mutter(ing) and/or murmur(ing)* utterances secretly overheard, by *Nandi*, the ‘*sā-krəd* bull *and* gatekeeper of Shiva’s abode,⁹⁸ where *murmurings sā-krəd sacren and divine(də-’vīn)*⁹⁹ (Latin) floweringflower among(st) lovers in amorousamorous¹⁰⁰ embrace *embrassement embrasser embrassons embrassent (embraces)*¹⁰¹ ungathering the earthly aromas and celestial delights brought forth by the ambrosial communion between Lord Shiva *and* the Hindu goddess Parvati.¹⁰² *The celestial goddess, Parvati*, engendering herself under the *felicitous* nomenclature *fragrant earth*,¹⁰³ Divine Shakti,¹⁰⁴ and manifestation of “*the total energy of the universe*”¹⁰⁵ *Shailaja*¹⁰⁶ “daughter of the Himalayas,”¹⁰⁷ that is, “She of the mountains”¹⁰⁸ therein calls the erotic upon the sacred *herlover* beloved himselfherself *herber him him inanother*. Thereupon, *andthus*, the tastes of the *Kāma Sūtra kamasutram* (Sanskrit: *Kāma Śhāstra*)¹⁰⁹ *dare to sing such song*:

⁸⁹ In *Syncope*, Clément notes, “One of the best-known representations is the double image of the feminine emanation of the God Shiva: called Durga when she is beneficial and Kali when she is driven by fury” (136-37).

⁹⁰ This is a reference to the Hindu goddess Durga. See *w/Durga*.

⁹¹ See *w/Kali*.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ This is a reference to the Hindu god Shiva. See *w/Shiva*.

⁹⁴ Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582). See *w/Teresa_of_Ávila*.

⁹⁵ Maria Callas – Greek *Μαρία Κάλλας* (1923-1977). See *w/Maria_Callas*.

⁹⁶ Tale – Old English *talu*.

⁹⁷ Tale – Old Norse *tala*.

⁹⁸ “Nandi is the bull which Shiva rides and the gate keeper of Shiva and Parvati in Hindu mythology.” See *w/Nandi*.

⁹⁹ Divine – pronunciation: *də-’vīn*.

¹⁰⁰ Amorous – Latin *amorousus*.

¹⁰¹ Embrace – French *embrassement, embrasser, embrassons, embrassent*.

¹⁰² See *w/Parvati*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See *w/Shakti*.

¹⁰⁵ See *w/Parvati*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ See *w/Parvati* and *w/Himalayas*.

¹⁰⁸ See *w/Parvati*.

¹⁰⁹ See *w/Kama_Sutra*.

Spread this ointment on your body
 Use the leaves of the blue lotus and the roots of all the others
 Cover it with *leaves of pure gold*
 Have them gold-plated and hold them in your hand (Vatsyayana 161)¹¹⁰

Whilst the “porousness” (Clément and Kristeva 7) between earthly *and* celestial love its fragrance in yet another letter blossoms blooming blooms in the *Song of Songs Shir ha-Shirim* (Hebrew) *Canticum Canticorum* (Latin)¹¹¹ *das Hohelied*¹² (German - the high song), *thesongofsongs* descending upon the night, as it were, *her song*:

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.

Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee.

Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. (“Song of Solomon,” *The Bible: King James Version*, chapter 1, verses 2, 3, 4)¹¹³

Such is, to be, had been, will be, “[...] the languor of [love]” “the languor of the beloved” (Clément and Kristeva 103) being of no other semblance nothing other than *porous* (7), *stranger* (103) that is “sacred because at the crossroads of love” (104), as Kristeva indicates in her letters, besides of the side beside the ambrosial vapours of “calico roses” (41), *sche thesacredbodyofawoman* (104) naming “her desires” (103) as *lover loved and beloved* the lover’s love, that is “. . . the woman, the individual in love” (104) therein drawing the ‘*sā-krəd* against the body of a stranger. The very stranger that is love, A lover’s *sacred* love at once ‘*sā-krəd* and beside the tiers of religion, love in pronouncement of the *secularsacred*, or, then again, as whispered by Clément, a ‘*sā-krəd surrounded by filth*, waste adrift in the unwashed tousled, tangled *and windswept* hair of maidens *and* dancing girls (86), or “[w]hat is called the “Tantrism of the left hand” (32), a reveling in bodily fluids *and* encrustations. *Le sacré*¹¹⁴ therein remaindering upon the **letter**, as it were, a *password*, *countersign* and/or *watchword*.

¹¹⁰ Emphasis added.

¹¹¹ *w/Song of Songs*.

¹¹² The Song of Songs – German *Das Hohelied*. See de.w/Hobes_Lied.

¹¹³ See www.fourmilab.ch/etexts/www/Bible/Song_of_Solomon.html. Web. 31 July 2012.

¹¹⁴ The sacred – *le sacré*.

ever virgin ἀειπάρθενος *aeiparthenos*¹¹⁵

Behold! The angels said . . . (“The Annunciation,” Qur’an, Sura 3, Al-i-Imran - The Family of Imran, verse 45)¹¹⁶

an(d)

[T]he Angel Departed from her . . . (“The Annunciation,” The Bible, the book of Luke, chapter 1, verse 38)¹¹⁷

The invocation of ἡ θεός Gr Theos¹¹⁸ (*in the feminine*) *and/or* “matrix” (Kristeva “Women’s Time” 407) delineating a “matrixial” traversing (Ettinger)¹¹⁹ transversing or trespassing of the flesh, as it were, the underflown and underhanded 89underneath beneath body living life, passaging death ungathering amongst and beside goddesses or demons daemon daimōn(s), “from daiesthai,”¹²⁰ which is to distribute *and* to divide, in the plural. A fallen *language an(d) or demon* dominating the conversation, intrigue manifesting the letter, sayingunsaying saying around the circular *and* the Serpentine as the invocation of a prophecy in the fashion of a culte cultus¹²¹ *and/or* Adoration *adouren* (Middle English) *aurer, adourer* (Anglo-French) *adorare* (Latin). A form of adoration, the letter, entails*entailing* the ungathering or unweaving of *language* as adoration of such matters as **perpetual virginity** or the “ever virgin” ἀειπάρθενος *aeiparthenos*;¹²² a *Virgin language, a blessed language*. Theotókos Θεοτόκος, meaning God(ess) Θεός *and* parturition τόκος, childbirth or bearing, that is “God-bearer” *in other words* a

¹¹⁵ Perpetual virginity / “ever virgin” – Greek ἀειπάρθενος *aeiparthenos*. See *w/Perpetual_virginity*.

¹¹⁶ See *w/Annunciation*.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ “The gospel further identifies logos as divine (theos).” Theos – Greek ἡ θεός. See *w/Logos* and *w/Theos*.

¹¹⁹ In *The Matrixial Borderspace*, Ettinger describes this traversal in relation to the advent of an “enlarged subjectivity” as follows: “From the moment we speak of the subject, we may also speak of an enlarged subjectivity. In the Matrix a meeting occurs between the co-emerging *I* and the unknown *non-I*. Neither assimilates or rejects the other, and their energy consists neither in fusion, nor repulsion, but in a continual readjustment of distances, a continual negotiation of separateness and distance within togetherness and proximity. *Matrix is the zone of encounter between the most intimate and most distanced unknown*. Its most internal is an outer limit, and the limits themselves are flexible and variable. They are potential or virtual thresholds (14).”

¹²⁰ Demon – Latin *daemon*, Greek *daimōn*, “from daiesthai.” See *mvc/demon*.

¹²¹ Cult – French *culte*, Latin *cultus*.

¹²² Perpetual virginity / “ever virgin” – Greek ἀειπάρθενος *aeiparthenos*. See *w/Perpetual_virginity*.

femininlanguage that bears *and* “gives birth to God”¹²³ *and* the Goddess, that is, to give birth to, *birthing the godly*, Maryām Miriam, in Arabic, *Dei genetrix and Mater Dei*,¹²⁴ in Latin, (Mother of God, a the 'fe-mə-nən of God) or “Maria,”¹²⁵ the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *niche wicke wicken* (“to bewitch”) *wiggle* divination *wīb* holy¹²⁶ *witch* *Hexe*¹²⁷ evoking miraculous **Visitations**, Annunciation(s) *and* Incarnation(s), Angels amongst Messengers amongst Angels engel angele angelus ἄγγελος angelos mal'akh¹²⁸ *and* Holy Ghost(s) wherein the Word “embodied in flesh” or “taking on flesh”¹²⁹ accrues, becoming the 'fe-mə-nən də- 'vīn anteriorfuture the gift of prophecies *and* pronouncements.

incantations *in fidelity of the reply, to her*

let us say to say then that the 'sā-krəd of the letter that is saythat that is to say or to listen tothe flesbwood¹³⁰ that *which* entail(s) a *vroulike*feminine (Afrikaans) like the telling *and* or *luister*¹³¹ that is to listen into or the listening *weg been uitwaarts*¹³² (awayfrom) *awaybetween* in the between “between-the-two” (Clément, *Syncope* 139) thebetween *unter unter uns untereinander* *zwischen*¹³³ let us say, two women (woman *vrou* women *vrouens*),¹³⁴ *zwischen*¹³⁵ thebetween, letters at once *a priori and a posteriori without or before* hearkening to the tidings from *elsewherebefore creatio ex nihilo* (something coming from nothing) *creatio ex materia, creatio ex deo*,¹³⁶ *and/or chaos* *χάος khaos*,¹³⁷ unraveling the chasm *chasma*¹³⁸ or cleft *fissure* or

¹²³ “**Theotokos** (Greek: Θεοτόκος, translit. *Theotókos*) is the Greek title of Mary, the mother of Jesus used especially in the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, and Eastern Catholic Churches.” See *w/Theotokos*.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ I am referring here to the actress, Gudrún Gísladóttir, performing the character of “Maria” in Andrei Tarkovsky’s, *The Sacrifice*, 35mm film, 1986.

¹²⁶ Witch – Middle English *niche*, Old English *wicce*, Middle High German *wicken* (“to bewitch”), Old English *wiggle* divination, Old High German *wīb* holy. See *mwc/witch*.

¹²⁷ See *w/Witch* – German *Hexe*.

¹²⁸ Angel – Old English *engel*, Old French *angele*, Latin *angelus*, Koine Greek ἄγγελος *angelos*, Hebrew *mal'akh*. See *w/Angel*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Word – Afrikaans *woord*.

¹³¹ Listen – Afrikaans *luister*.

¹³² Away – Afrikaans *weg been, uitwaarts*.

¹³³ Between – German *unter, unter uns, untereinander, zwischen*.

¹³⁴ Woman – Afrikaans *vrou*, Women *vrouens*.

¹³⁵ Between – German *zwischen*.

¹³⁶ “[C]reatio ex nihilo (“creation out of nothing”), contrasts with *creatio ex materia* (creation out of some pre-existent, eternal matter) and with *creatio ex deo* (creation out of the being of God). See *w/Ex_nihilo*.

“hollow between” “a hollow between ridges,”¹³⁹ **between two**,¹⁴⁰ “as of plowed ground,”¹⁴¹ that is, that which is, let us say, beyond beginning, *radical* in its bodily intemperance *and* unsheltering, “where,” that is, wherein or whereof, in Kristeva’s words, “transcendence is [to be] considered immanent” (Kristeva, *This Incredible Need* 25). Such as it were, *facing West and facing East* as a in as in a silent traversing in the silent of silent silence, the silentsilence, “the inaccessible” *and* or “invincible” unspeakable speakable¹⁴² such as that which is are to *call* calls or *unname* unnames that which is beside fidelity *and* faithlessness a the written that is thus *therein thereof* to be spoken is but *the ancestral and the Unconscious (of the) letter*.

incantations in the flesh of the word

Therein *in that in this and* aside, Such as it is to be in the *unbidden* Saying of *the word veriya* meaning to call, or name¹⁴³ *that is to doubly u(n)name* or fold to double unfold the *woord*¹⁴⁴ unruly *and* underhanded *the unspoken unwritten and/or* whispered, of *the letter*, “*la lettre*,”¹⁴⁵ as it were, *chanted* in high-pitched voice(s) in the form of a prayer *la voix the voice of the letter*.¹⁴⁶

Aside beside the stranger Alterity that is *in between the furrow* of the *telling of things “wholly other”* (Otto 25) *and* “of things set apart and forbidden” (Durkheim 47) that is in *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Latin), that which is at once “frightening, fascinating, and mysterious,” as noted by Otto,¹⁴⁷ *the ‘sā-kerad*, as a *password, countersign and* or *watchword shibboleth* (Hebrew)¹⁴⁸ *a priori and a posteriori* ascribing yet *another(s) celestial tongue(s) – le féminin et le sacré*¹⁴⁹ in *amorous embrace* and pronouncement of *the flesh of the word*, in the book of John:

... the **W**ord became flesh and dwelt among us ... (John 1:14 *New*)

¹³⁷ See *w/Chaos* – Greek χάος *chaos*.

¹³⁸ Chasm – Latin *chasma*.

¹³⁹ See *mvc/cleft*.

¹⁴⁰ See *mvc/dictionary/ocean%20ridge*.

¹⁴¹ See *mvc/ridge*.

¹⁴² See *w/Durga*.

¹⁴³ Word – Hittite *veriya*.

¹⁴⁴ Word – Afrikaans *woord*.

¹⁴⁵ Letter – Anglo-French *lettre*.

¹⁴⁶ Voice – French *la voix*.

¹⁴⁷ See *w/Rudolf_Otto*. See also Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, chapter 5 & 6.

¹⁴⁸ See *w/Shibboleth*.

¹⁴⁹ The feminine and the sacred – French *le féminin et le sacré*.

American Standard Bible).¹⁵⁰

... and the Word was **divine** (John 1:1 The Bible).¹⁵¹

A bodilylogos liquid in its *perfume*, a tale *tala* (Old Norse=talk(lessness))¹⁵² that without or before as it were *écriture sacrée écriture sainte*¹⁵³ *ənd*/or other wherein or whereof a *fémininsaying*¹⁵⁴ unravels *sunravelling* an anterior (Kristeva, “Women’s Time” 407) future *Past* passing *ənd*/or threshold upon a furrow ridge or indentation such as “[...] the space [...] between life and death, body and corpse” (Clément and Kristeva 92). An “intermediary” (103) *fragrance* ungathering itself around *ən(d)und*¹⁵⁵ about the between bespeaking spoken speaking upon the “wholly other” (Otto 25) adumbrated *ənd* *unbeknownst* *unbeknownst* “intermediary” (Clément and Kristeva 103) in its stance, as it were, according to Kristeva, “of the one who opens the way from the ‘lowly’ (the stranger, the substance, the body) to the ‘beyond’ ” (103). A stranger *unhearing* a writing *the written* that remainders remains unwritten ungathering *ənd* unweaving the *sacredlogoslessness* that sweeps *ənd* sways like a pendulum upon the bodily *ənd* the ethereal, “sentence, saying, [*ənd*] oration,”¹⁵⁶ as if Sche it were skirting pestilence that is the underside of perfume, *mit Duft erfüllt*,¹⁵⁷ neither the one nor the other, but always already accordingly, one another.

*in fidelity to the traunce*¹⁵⁸

That which is “porous” (Clément and Kristeva 7) breaks *breaking herself* upon the arc of a *trance traunce transe* “from *transir*” *ən(d) trancire*,¹⁵⁹ plural in its delineation, suggesting polyvalence, espouses *espousing herself* ~~as the~~ an indefinite modality mode of the “vaporous” (Clément and Kristeva 16) unfolding *fragrance* or “odor” (20) in *sublime abandonment ungathering ənd* encircling the nebula of a momentary chasm, cleft or “cleavage” (27) as in a turning unweaving threshold transparent yet opaque,

¹⁵⁰ See nash.scripturetext.com/john/1.htm. See also bible.cc/john/1-14.htm and w/John_1:1. Web. 31 July 2012.

¹⁵¹ See w/John_1:1.

¹⁵² Talk – Old Norse *tala*.

¹⁵³ Sacred and saintly writing – French *écriture sacrée et écriture sainte*.

¹⁵⁴ Feminine – French *féminin*. See wordreference.com/enfr/feminine.

¹⁵⁵ And – German *und*.

¹⁵⁶ See w/Logos.

¹⁵⁷ Perfumed – German *mit Duft erfüllt*.

¹⁵⁸ Trance – Middle English *traunce*.

¹⁵⁹ Trance – Middle English *traunce*, Anglo-French *transe* “from *transir*,” Latin *trancire*. See mwc/trance.

unbelonging breathing the “exquisite lapse”¹⁶⁰ (27) *thebetween* “biology and meaning” (15) “blood” and “milk” “transition” and “passage” (97) crossing in the unpronouncement of “an outburst of disorder” (Clément 133) and effervescence (137) ungathering both the *‘femā-nān* and the *‘sā-krād*, as it were, in the crevassing of the body, unfolding another divergence, unfastening the body, or, *beforebody*, archaic, arcane and anteriorfuture (Mary Daly)¹⁶¹ as the passagepassaging threshold, recollecting, a re-collection *tothe* future, finitude, and/or nothingness.¹⁶² Therein, *the letter*, whispering upon *flesh* as if *sche* were Theotókos Θεοτόκος¹⁶³ giving birth *that is breath breathing the breath of fire*, the body of bodies, primordial and primeval in her *Nature*, ancient and before her beginnings, the letter aromatic in its arrangement, *infinite in dimension*, crossing *language upon the bodie of a woman* As if *Sche* were the *bodyoflanguageherself that is Seshat Sefkhet Sesat Seshet Seshata*¹⁶⁴ *writingherself* beside a language that remains uninhabited and without limits (Clément 138), “eyes rolled back” (Clément and Kristeva 7) in a *traunce*. A writing *flesh* that paradoxically scatters unbinds **unties** and separates¹⁶⁵ through “*lalangue*” (Lacan 44)¹⁶⁶ the pleasures of *‘sā-krād jouissance*.

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¹⁶⁰ Whilst in *Syncope*, Clément notes: “Not to unite or bind; rather to separate and untie, allowing the gap to remain free” (139).

¹⁶¹ Here I refer to the concept of an anterior future, or, in Daly’s words, “Archaic Future.” See Daly’s *Quintessence*, where she writes: “Ignoring phony promises of a ‘better future,’ Wayward Women *will* to find and create a Real Future. We Time-Space travel beyond archetypal deadtime [not to be confused with Levinas’ use of the term “dead time”] and reach deep into our Memories, our Deep Past, to Discover the roots of an Archaic Future, beyond the limits of patriarchal linear time” (3).

¹⁶² In a letter dated January 14, 1997, Kristeva notes: “Paradoxically, in evoking the divine—the absolute of spirituality—we evoke journeys to the opposite limit, where the human sinks into animality and nothingness” (Clément and Kristeva 24).

¹⁶³ See footnote 123.

¹⁶⁴ “In Egyptian mythology, **Seshat** (also spelled **Sefkhet**, **Sesat**, **Seshet**, **Sesheta**, and **Seshata**) was the Ancient Egyptian goddess of wisdom, knowledge, and writing.” See *w/Seshat*. See also Kristeva’s reference to Seshat in *Language – The Unknown* (63).

¹⁶⁵ In *Syncope*, Clément notes: “Not to unite or bind; rather to separate and untie, allowing the gap to remain free” (139).

¹⁶⁶ See additionally, Lacan’s reference to “our so called mother tongue (*lalangue dite maternelle*), which isn’t called that by accident” (Lacan 138).

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Kristeva and Derrida : Face-to-Face (Who Invented Deconstruction?)

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Abstract: This essay is an attempt to revisit the history of literary theory by considering the role Julia Kristeva played in it. A closer examination of Kristeva's works from the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s gives a different picture of her position from the one usually associated with her. In particular, what Kristeva calls "paragrammatism" is the term for what Derrida calls "grammatology." It is worth realizing that the two theorists were pointing out the necessity of moving beyond the limits and possibilities of linguistics and semiotics. Both Kristeva and Derrida claim that linguistics and semiotics cannot adequately account for the true nature of language, especially for the practices that true nature nourishes and exploits. My essay investigates the implications of what happened between 1967 and 1970 for the history of literary theory. After the publication of *De la grammatologie* (1967), Derrida came into contact with the *Tel Quel* group and, through this contact, changed the direction of deconstruction, since by reading Sollers's and Kristeva's texts he discovered that deconstruction could be applied beyond the close reading of concrete contradictions. I argue that Derrida adopts the logic of paragrammatism from Kristeva's theory, using it not as an object specific to poetic language but as a strategic tool for his analysis, while also sketching out a complementary logic when his texts deal with poets like Mallarmé or novelists such as Sollers or Joyce. Deconstruction in its most recent form is based on paragrammatism as a particular mode of reading. In fact, what we are used to calling deconstruction is the application of paragrammatism to philosophical, political, or theoretical texts.

Résumé : Cet essai est une tentative de revisiter l'histoire de la théorie littéraire en considérant le rôle qu'y a joué Julia Kristeva. Un examen attentif des travaux de Kristeva de la fin des années 1960 et du début des années 1970 donne une image différente de la position qui lui est habituellement associée. En particulier, ce que Kristeva appelle "paragrammatisme" est le terme de ce que Derrida désigne par "grammatologie". Il est intéressant que les deux théoriciens soulignent la nécessité d'aller au-delà des limites et des possibilités de la linguistique et de la sémiotique. Kristeva et Derrida arguent tous les deux que la linguistique et la sémiotique ne peuvent plus suffisamment rendre compte de la vraie nature du langage, en particulier des pratiques qui se nourrissent de sa véritable nature. Mon essai se penche sur les implications pour l'histoire de la théorie littéraire de ce qui s'est passé entre 1967 et 1970. Après la publication de *De la grammatologie* (1967), Derrida est entré en contact avec le groupe *Tel Quel*, et c'est ce contact qui a changé la direction de la déconstruction, car en lisant Sollers et Kristeva, Derrida découvre que la déconstruction pourrait être appliquée au-delà de la lecture minutieuse ("close reading") des contradictions concrètes. J'argue que Derrida adopte la logique du paragrammatisme de la théorie de Kristeva, en l'utilisant non comme un objet spécifique à la langue poétique mais comme un outil stratégique pour son analyse, tout en inventant une logique complémentaire lorsque ses textes traitent de poètes comme Mallarmé ou de romanciers tels que Sollers ou Joyce. La déconstruction dans sa forme la plus récente est basée sur le paragrammatisme comme un mode particulier de lecture. Ce

que nous sommes habitués à appeler la déconstruction est en fait l'application du paragrammatisme à des textes philosophiques, politiques ou théoriques.

Keywords: Julia Kristeva – paragrammatisme – *Tel Quel* – Jacques Derrida – deconstruction

In 2006, I published *Los años salvajes de la teoría* [The Wild Years of Theory], a book dedicated to *Tel Quel's* contribution to the formation of post-structuralist literary theory. In this paper I am going to develop and extend some arguments of that book, above all because some of them focus on Julia Kristeva's work. First of all, it is necessary to clarify that when I talk about *Tel Quel* I mean not only the review bearing this name but also the "space" of *Tel Quel* extending the name of the review to a press management, a political activity, a creation of different groups of study. It is worth remembering that Roland Barthes employed the expression *telquelisme* in 1961 in order to describe the political attitude of this heterogeneous group. Jean-Michel Rabaté has insisted on the same point. In fact, for him *Tel Quel* was more than a review, it embodied what we call today the "Time of Theory" (Rabaté 411).

If I mention the meaning of the phrase *tel quel* it is because it reveals the framework of my argument. What is that framework? It is the strong heterogeneity in which it is not easy to identify either the author, or the "origin" of an idea or of a movement. From the point of view of the history of literary theory (or precisely, theory) where a movement begins and where it ends seem clear enough; these moments do not appear problematic or reveal conflicts and disagreements. However, a pedagogical exposition and illustration of a historical phase in any field ought not to be confused with the critical knowledge of what actually happened, even if we have to acknowledge the limits and negativity of that knowledge and the impossibility of reaching any kind of absolute information about the context. That is to say, following the Nietzschean and Foucauldian genealogies, I maintain that history is effective when it introduces discontinuity into its analysis: behind any kind of "origin," behind "what already existed," there is a secret without essence, low, ironic, full of mistakes to be found (Foucault 1978). In this sense, we can consider this paper as a kind of revision of the history of literary theory and of the role Kristeva has played in it.

For this reason, I would like to focus my comments on a set of texts produced and published between 1967 and 1969 by three protagonists: Phillippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, and Jacques Derrida. In 1968, Sollers published *Nombres*, a continuation of another "novel"¹ published in 1965, *Drame*. 1968 and 1969 are the years when "La pharmacie de Platon" (*Tel Quel*, 1968) and "La dissémination" (*Critique*, 1969) by Derrida as well as "L'engendrement de la formule" (*Tel Quel*, 1969) by Kristeva appear

¹ Quotation marks are mine (M. A.)

in print.² There is no doubt that close readings of the two Sollers' "novels," *Drame* and *Nombres*, were very important to these three essays. I write "novel" (*roman* as Sollers termed these texts) in quotations marks because it is very problematic to say to which register or genre such texts belong. Kristeva herself points out the difference between what she calls "text" and "literary," "poetic," "scientific," "religious," etc. discourses. In fact, *Nombres* does not belong simply to literature; it gives birth to a set of theories that are at the heart of what will be called "post-structuralism."

In order to realize the importance of Sollers's novels we have to take into account how Derrida's article "La dissémination" (in *Dissémination*) and Kristeva's "L'engendrement de la formule" were explicitly written by taking these two novels as points of departure.³ I take pains to use the phrase "points of departure" and not expressions like "written on" or "written about," because one of the main problems that occurs when one focuses on these texts is precisely the extent to which they differ from one another. In more than one sense, it is very difficult to indicate where the voices of Derrida and Sollers begin in "La dissémination" and where they end. As Philippe Forest has noted, what happened with that text was at the origins of the break between Derrida and Sollers : "Ce texte relève d'une étrange analyse qui semble s'appropriier entièrement son objet: étudiant *Nombres*, Derrida 'réécrit' ce roman, comme s'il s'attachait à déloger Sollers du lieu de sa propre création" ["This text is the result of a strange analysis that seems to take over its object entirely: in his analysis of *Nombres*, Derrida rewrites the novel as if he was trying to displace Sollers from his own creative space"; all translations of French texts are my own] (402).

Somehow we can imagine the contact between these three texts as a relationship between a *host* and a *parasite* with all the ambivalences implied in those words as analyzed by J. Hillis Miller in his essay "The Critic as Host." In a similar way, it is not possible to ignore Kristeva's statement in "L'engendrement de la formule" : "Nous allons tenter de soutenir dans ce qui suit un tel type de discours qui est bien entendu entièrement rendu possible et disons-le, entièrement *prévu* par le texte que nous abordons : *Nombres* de Philippe Sollers" ["In what follows we shall attempt to maintain a type of discourse which, of course, is entirely made possible and, to be frank, entirely anticipated by the text we are analyzing : *Nombres* by Philippe Sollers"] (41). Here Kristeva conceives the relationship between Sollers's text and her own as both belonging to the same textual space. She speaks in fact of "rendu possible" [made possible] and "prévu" [anticipated] in allusion to the connection between her essay and Sollers's *Nombres*.

In this text, and already in *Drame*, a theory of writing is revealed within the limits of a mode of representation in the (before-) borders of "literature," a theory from which Derrida learned much concerning deconstructive strategies: not only the deconstruction

² Let us also mention Roland Barthes's essays dedicated to Sollers that appeared after 1965 and were regrouped under the title *Sollers écrivain* in 1979 (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1979).

³ Derrida's "La dissémination" first appeared in *Critique* 261-262, 1969.

of the opposition *langue-parole*, the disappearance of the author in traditional terms, intertextuality, the infinity of *différance* or unlimited *semiosis*, the undoing of the existence of a transcendental meaning as such (the main topics of deconstruction), but also the modes of representation that Derrida moves from the field of synthetic writing of “literature” to the analytic field of philosophy.

What, then, is the role that Kristeva played in this trio? The most common answer is to identify Kristeva (at least, the early Kristeva) with linguistics, semiotics, and psychoanalysis. Her reflections on *sémanalyse* for instance are considered within the limits of semiotics, even if the subject of *sémanalyse* is not signification but the signifying process [*signifiance*]. There is no doubt that her language at that moment was steeped in linguistics, semiotics, and psychoanalytic terminology. But if we look carefully at her work from the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s we discover some important facts that ought to modify our current understanding of her contribution. Take, for instance, her theory about the “géo-texte,” defined as the “engendrement du tissu de la langue . . . non pas l’autre scène par rapport au présent formulaire et axial, mais l’ensemble des autres scènes dans la multiplicité desquelles il marque un index présent écarté-écartelé par la surdétermination qui définit, de l’intérieur, l’infini” [“the engendering of the fabric of language . . . not the ‘other scene’ in relation to the formulary and axial present but the ‘entirety of the other scenes’, in the multiplicity of which the present index is set aside-torn apart by the overdetermination that defines infinity from within”] (Kristeva, “L’engendrement” 35-38).

As it is well known, the “géo-texte” is not opposed to the “phéno-texte” (Šaumjan’s and Soboleva’s terms)⁴ precisely because the “phéno-texte” is the place of emergence of the “géo-texte.” It means that what we read in some passages of *Nombres* is not the result of a selection realized by the subject as Roman Jakobson describes in his classical essay “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances” (1956)⁵. In fact, it is the moment before, in which the subject has not yet decided and is boiling within the infinity of linguistic and non-linguistic possibilities. *Nombres* is not forced to eliminate the infinity of linguistic sequences that can fit on a white page but instead projects all this infinity onto the space of the page. Obviously, the coexistence of the infinity of linguistic sequences becomes a text full of contradictions, paradoxes and non-sequiturs. For example, when *Nombres* talks about a mysterious woman represented in the text by the pronoun *elle* (even if we guess this “elle” could be the same Kristeva, to whom the “novel” is dedicated), the reader is disoriented by the fact that the description does not follow a logic of actions (as Aristotle conceives of it):

⁴ See Kristeva, “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes.”

⁵ Jakobson’s essay first appeared in Jakobson, Roman and Morris Halle. *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Mouton, 1956.

Et en somme je la voyais accrochée à la nuit, et j'étais sa respiration dont je suis l'habitant passager et mort. . . . J'allais vers elle, je venais d'elle, je savais d'elle ce qu'il fallait savoir pour apprendre à savoir, j'ignorais tout d'elle, je savais tout d'elle, je ne voyais rien d'elle, je ne pouvais éprouver que sa surface ivre, son "rien, jamais rien" dissipé, actif. . . Elle n'arrivait pas jusqu'aux mots, les sons "or" ou "if" la désignent mieux dans les phrases que je viens d'écrire. (Sollers 41)

And in fact I saw her hooked on the night, and I was her breathing that, transient and dead, I inhabit. . . . I went to her, I came from her, I knew what one needed to know about her in order to learn to know, I didn't know anything about her, I knew everything about her, I didn't see anything of her, I could only feel her drunk surface, her dissolute and active 'nothing, never anything.' . . . She didn't get as far as words, the sounds 'or' or 'if' describe her better in the sentences I have just written.

It is not clear from this passage if the protagonist is heading toward her or if he or she is coming from her, nor is it clear if s/he knows all of her or if s/he knows nothing about her, if s/he is a body or a mere linguistic conjunction. And this blurring precisely results from the way the text functions within all the possibilities alive at the same time. Combination is without selection. However, we have to take into account that three years earlier Kristeva dealt with a similar problem. Indeed, in "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes," Kristeva had identified the same phenomenon in relation to poetic language. After pointing out that the limits of scientific logic do not allow one to account for "les fonctions du discours poétique" [the functions of poetic discourse], she explains the reasons for that impossibility: poetic language contains "toutes les figures combinatoires que l'algèbre a formalisées dans un système de signes artificiels" [all the combinatory figures which algebra has formalized within a system of artificial signs] and represents "le code infini ordonné" [the ordered infinite code], "la seule infinie du code" ["the only infinity of code"] ("Pour une sémiologie" 54-56).

As we can see, the definition of poetic language gives way to the definition of the geno-text. What was the main feature of poetic language in 1967, using Saussurean and Chomskyan arguments against Saussure and Chomsky, becomes the most important thread in a kind of text that cannot be reduced to literature, to signification, to binary logic two years later. And what was the 1967 definition of a paragram (the literary text functions within the totality of texts and is an affirmative or negative writing of-reply to other texts [Kristeva, "Pour une sémiologie" 58]), is reformulated in the 1969 essay "L'engendrement de la formule" in the following manner: "les mots-signes peuvent se succéder et se tordre de façon indéfinie pour marquer que la langue nage sur un fond idéal illimité duquel émergent ces signes" ["the words-signs can follow one

another and twist and turn indefinitely in order to demonstrate that language is floating on an ideal and unlimited foundation from which those signs arise”] (Kristeva 49).

In the final pages of my essay I will concentrate on Kristeva’s text, “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” (1967), because it holds great importance for the “invention” of deconstruction theory. As a matter of fact, it is this text that actually gives Derrida the key for developing what is known today as deconstruction. Inasmuch as Kristeva’s essay finishes with a reference to “poetic paragrams,” it is clear that the aim of her essay is to account for some kind of specificity in poetic language as had been common in the writings of the Russian Formalists. However, we should not overlook the fact that very important shifts take place throughout the essay. Sometimes Kristeva substitutes the phrase “poetic language” for “literary text,” as we have seen in the former quotation: “Le texte littéraire . . . est une écriture-réplique.” [“The literary text . . . is writing as reply/replica”] (58). Of course, this example is not the only one. The shifts point out that paragrammatic science – *science paragrammatique* (74) – is not limited to poetic language but applies to literary (poetic or non-poetic) language in a general sense as well. Here lies the reason why Kristeva includes a text like Sollers’s *Drame* within the framework of the paragrammatic practice. But taking another step forward, Kristeva at times claims that language itself is the place of paragrammatism: “La pratique littéraire se révèle comme exploration et découverte des possibilités du langage” [“Literary praxis proves to be an exploration and a discovery of the possibilities of language”] (“Pour une sémiologie” 56), that is to say, we can find the features attributed to poetic and literary texts in language, not in a similar mode of expression, but selecting some possibilities and refusing others, placing linguistic activity within a binary logic.

How should we locate this figuration of paragrammatism in relation to the three semiotic practices Kristeva distinguishes? On the one hand, we have the semiotic system based on the sign as it appears in scientific and representative discourse. As Kristeva indicates, this semiotic system is conservative, limited, and oriented toward the *denotatum*. On the other hand, we have transformational semiotics that is oriented toward the other, not tied to the *denotatum*. It is called “transformational” precisely because it changes the sign and seeks to modify it. Finally, there is “writing” (*écriture*), the most important activity of eliminating the sign in order to stir up a bees’ nest of (para)grams (“Pour une sémiologie” 67). As it is easy to observe, these three practices are defined in relation to what they do to the sign: either to use it linked to the *denotata*, or to use it detached from the *denotata*, or to eliminate it. For me the equation is the following: since poetic language is defined as a class A that has the same power as the function of the infinity of codes so that all other languages are quotients of A limited by rules of construction, it means that paragrammatism is wider than semiology and linguistics, and that the latter are included in the former.

Why is this clever conclusion so important for the history of literary theory? Because what Kristeva calls “paragrammatism” is what Derrida calls “grammatology.” It is worth realizing that both are pointing out the necessity of moving beyond the limits and possibilities of linguistics and semiotics. Both claim that these disciplines cannot adequately account for the true nature of language, especially in the practices that true nature nourishes and exploits. Kristeva writes that such disciplines even disguise the logic of complementarity of ordinary language (“Pour une sémiologie” 55). The term used for describing the modality of the emergence of paragrams or grams is the same: *écriture*. The point is that both Derrida and Kristeva are paving the way for post-structuralism at the end of the 1960s : “La sémiologie littéraire tend à dépasser déjà ce qu’on croit être les défauts inhérents au structuralisme” [“Literary semiology already tends to overcome what are supposed to be the inherent shortcomings of structuralism”] is the opening sentence of the essay “Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes” (53). And needless to say this overcoming of structuralism is achieved according to classical Marxism or hermeneutic positions. The following statement is common to both grammatology and paragrammatology and marks the distance between these two perspectives and those of classical Marxism and hermeneutics. Talking about syntactic or syntagmatic grams, Kristeva points out that “le paragramme refuse de lui prêter une valeur, un *sens stable*” [“the paragram refuses to assign it a value, a *fixed meaning*”] (“Pour une sémiologie” 65, italics by Kristeva).

It is strange that when Derrida, in his essay “La structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines” (lecture delivered in 1966), asks “Où et comment se produit ce décentrement comme pensée de la structuralité de la structure?” [“Where and how does this decentering, in terms of thinking the structurality of structure, occur?”], his answer does not take into account along with Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger and Lévi-Strauss the work done before within the space of *Tel Quel* and, particularly, by Sollers and Kristeva. As a matter of fact, the parallel between Kristeva and Derrida is more than a simple parallelism. Take, for example, the term “writing” (*écriture*) as a fundamental concept shared by authors belonging to the review *Tel Quel* (Jean-Louis Baudry, Marcelien Pleynet, Denis Roche, Jean Thibaudet, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva), and others participating in the space of the *Tel Quel* group (Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, etc.). What does “writing” mean for these authors?

If we come back to Kristeva’s description of three social semiotic practices, we realize that the notion of “writing” (*écriture*) conceives of the text as being under a continuous reflection (actually, hyper-reflection), the written reply to the code, to the law, even to itself. “Writing” designates the material practice in which paragrammatism appears and in which logocentrism is placed upside down. However, when Derrida is dealing with “writing” between 1962 (year of his publication of Husserl’s *L’origine de la géométrie*) and 1967, what he attempts to say is that writing, in its usual and traditional

sense, as opposed to speech, has been repressed by the metaphysical tradition from Plato to Saussure and beyond. Writing in this sense is inscription. Derrida is not referring to “writing” as a kind of text undermining binary oppositions as such but to the inscription of speech on a supporting medium. At that time, Derrida used “writing” either in its vulgar or transcendental sense. That is what we find if we read, for example, *De la grammatologie* (first published in *Critique*, 1965). In fact, this is what Derrida means, for instance, when he writes : “D’une part, selon la tradition occidentale qui règle non seulement en théorie mais en pratique (au principe de sa pratique) les rapports entre la parole et l’écriture, Saussure ne reconnaît à celle-ci qu’une fonction *étroite et dérivée*” [“On the one hand, in keeping with the Western tradition that not only in theory but in practice (at the root of its practice) governs the relationships between speech and writing, Saussure only grants the latter a *narrow and derived* function”] (*De la grammatologie* 46).

Since *De la grammatologie* is a close reading of Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* what allows Derrida to deconstruct the opposition between writing and speech (*langue-parole*) as a logical contradiction implicit in the thesis maintained by Saussure? A thesis concerning the arbitrary nature of the sign and, even more, about difference as a condition of the possibility of signs system : “On doit donc récuser au nom même de l’arbitraire du signe, la définition saussurienne de l’écriture comme ‘image’ . . . de la langue” [“Therefore, Saussure’s definition of writing as an ‘image’ . . . of language needs to be rejected on the very grounds of the arbitrary nature of the sign”] (66). As Derrida himself recognizes, “Saussure accumule ainsi les arguments contradictoires . . .” [“Saussure thus accumulates contradictory arguments”] (67). And this is the reason that supports the act of opposing Saussure to himself : “C’est donc encore à lui-même qu’il faut décidément opposer Saussure” (77). Following a classical logical argument and adopting a Heideggerian strategy of not simply employing an opposition, Derrida proclaims the necessity of “reformer le concept de l’écriture” [“reforming the concept of writing”] (80). That is to say : to reform writing does not mean to maintain that every sign is writing but to argue that every sign finds its condition of possibility in writing. Of course, this last “writing” is not “writing” in its vulgar sense but what he calls “archi-writing” or *différance*: “C’est que l’archi-écriture, mouvement de la différence, archi-synthèse irréductible . . .” [“That is to say, archi-writing, the movement of *différance*, the irreducible archi-synthesis”] (*De la grammatologie* 88). In other words, “archi-writing” is not identical with writing in its vulgar sense, nor with speech, yet at the same time it represents the condition of the possibility of writing (in its vulgar sense) and speech.

So the point is that, between 1965 and 1967, what Derrida includes under the concepts or archi-concepts of “writing” and “archi-writing” has nothing to do with what the *Telquelists*, Sollers and especially Kristeva, conceive of as “writing.” As Gasché has demonstrated, Derrida’s work takes place within the limits of phenomenology and a philosophy of reflection. And he is right, but only if we talk about Derrida’s work before 1968. As a matter of fact, we find grounds in order to develop that argument:

Derrida received a philosophical education during those years, in spite of his interest in literature (Artaud, Poe, Joyce, etc.).

What happened between 1967 and 1970? After the publication of *De la grammatologie*, Derrida came into contact with the *Tel Quel* group. Through this contact, Derrida changed the direction of deconstruction, since by reading Sollers's and Kristeva's texts he discovered that deconstruction could be applied beyond the close reading of concrete contradictions. Until that time he wrote, for example, about Artaud. Rather than being an essay similar to others about literature from 1967-1968, his article "La parole soufflée," first published in 1965, then in 1967 in *L'écriture et la différence*, is a text which projects onto Artaud all of the problems concerning the reaction against metaphysics, whether in the field of philosophy, in the field of literary commentary, or in the field of clinics: "Artaud a voulu détruire une histoire, celle de la métaphysique dualiste qui inspirait plus ou moins souterrainement les essais évoqués plus haut: dualité de l'âme et du corps soutenant, en secret, bien sûr, celle de la parole et de l'existence, du texte et du corps, etc." ["It was Artaud's desire to destroy one history, namely the history of dualist metaphysics which was the inspiration, in a more or less underground way, for the essays mentioned above: the duality of mind and body which, secretly of course, underlies the duality of speech and existence, text and body etc."] (*L'écriture* 261).

And what is it that Derrida learns from Kristeva (and from Sollers)? He learns all of the content and form that we pointed out in Kristeva's essay "La sémiologie des paragrammes." In Derrida's work, events take a rather unforeseen turn when he becomes conscious of the power of language as analyzed and introduced by Kristeva in that essay with relation to the logic of the paragram. My argument is this: Derrida takes from Kristeva's theory the logic of the paragram not as an object specific to poetic language but as a strategic tool for his analysis. Of course, he also sketches out a complementary logic when his texts deal with poets like Mallarmé or novelists like Sollers or Joyce. However, deconstruction in its most recent form is based on the use of paragrammatism as a particular mode of reading. In fact, what we call deconstruction is nothing but the application of paragrammatism to philosophical, political or theoretical works.

As we have seen, Kristeva's aim is to prove that poetic language is the only infinite code. What is important in order to develop my argument is that if a text explores this path it will be impossible to establish a contradiction with relation to its statements. The conclusion of her argument will be taken into account by Derrida: "le lp [langage poétique] est un formalisme indécidable qui ne cherche pas à se résoudre ["pl [poetic language] is an undecidable formalism that doesn't seek its resolution"] (Kristeva, "Pour une sémiologie" 64, translation is mine). All readers of Derrida know how crucial the notion of "undecidable" is. The infrastructures like *pharmakon*, supplement, *différance*, archi-writing, dissemination, subjectile, etc. are the tools employed by Derrida against metaphysics and logocentrism.

The relationship between the undecidability of infrastructures (according to Derrida) and the undecidability of the semantic level of poetic language (according to Kristeva) is quite clear. On the other hand, a close reading of Derrida's work before 1968 reveals that he is not yet using that notion of "undecidability," at least not in a systematic way. The explanation is not difficult at all: until then, he places his discourse mainly within a transcendental horizon. However, when he reads Kristeva he realizes that the idea of undecidability fits in very well with his first infrastructures like *différance* or archi-writing.

The jump from *De la grammatologie* to *La dissémination* is too radical to go unnoticed, and the exceptional change is due, without doubt, to Derrida's reading of Sollers and Kristeva. We can describe it, first of all, as the passing from a transcendental level to an empirical level. In order to reach the latter, Derrida adopts the logic or non-logic of paragrammatism. It produces a kind of hybridization in his work that will enjoy great success following a chance meeting with two critics coming out of New Criticism and Close Reading: Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller. As I have pointed out, Derrida realizes that what Kristeva states in relation to the undecidability of paragrammatism fits in very well with his infrastructures, and from that moment he begins to use the notion of undecidability in a systematic way, above all in the essays that will appear in 1972 in the book *La dissémination*. For example: can it be unfounded that Derrida refers to Gödel in order to explain what he understands by "undecidability"? The answer is no, because it is the same allusion made by Kristeva in order to justify the undecidability proper to poetic language. The context of this reference is very similar because they both speak of poetry.

Kristeva alludes specifically to the features of the "grammes scripturaux sémiques" (and the examples are extracted from *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Lautréamont):

La notion de constructibilité (qui implique l'axiome du choix), associée aux autres observations sur le langage poétique, explique l'impossibilité d'établir une contradiction dans l'espace du langage poétique. Cette constatation est proche de la constatation de Gödel concernant l'impossibilité d'établir la contradiction d'un système par des moyens formalisés dans ce système. . . . Fait d'oppositions surmontées (liées), le lp [langage poétique] est un formalisme *indécidable qui ne cherche pas à se résoudre*. ("Pour une sémiologie" 63-64; my italics)

The idea of constructability (which implies the axiom of choice), in conjunction with the other observations on poetic language, explains why it is impossible to establish a contradiction in poetic language. This observation is close to Gödel's observation about the impossibility of establishing the contradiction of a system by means of something that is formalized within this system. . . . Since it is made up of oppositions that

have been overcome (are tied up), pl [poetic language] is an *undecidable formalism that does not seek its own resolution*.

Note how Kristeva's approach to the semantic level of poetic language is made from a syntactic perspective, and this is the reason why she talks about "formalisme."

For his part, Derrida refers to Gödel in the context of the analysis of the practice of "play" in the poetry of Mallarmé [*la pratique du 'jeu' dans l'écriture mallarméenne*]. He is writing on the word "hymen" and on the position of this word within the syntactic structure of his poems :

C'est bien l'opération qu'on appelle ici par analogie indécidable. Une proposition indécidable, Gödel en a démontré la possibilité en 1931, est une proposition qui, étant donné un système d'axiomes qui domine une multiplicité, n'est ni en contradiction avec eux, ni vrai ni fausse au regard de ces axiomes. *tertium datur*, sans synthèse. (*La dissémination* 248-249)

This is exactly the operation that, by analogy, we will call undecidable here. An undecidable utterance – which Gödel proved to be possible in 1931 – is an utterance that, given a system of axioms controlling a multiplicity, does not contradict them and is neither true nor false with respect to these axioms. *tertium datur*, without synthesis.

In both texts the mention of Gödel is made with care: Kristeva says that her statement is close to Gödel; Derrida affirms that he speaks of "undecidability" only by analogy. In both fragments we find the more or less explicit allusion to a corrosive effect of "undecidability" on metaphysics or logocentrism. And finally, both authors comment on the impossibility of overcoming undecidability with almost the same words: undecidability does not look for a resolution (Kristeva); the undecidable proposition does not have any possibility of synthesis (Derrida). And what is more important: in both cases "undecidability" appears as a fundamental political tool. Kristeva speaks of the revolutionary aspect of paragrammatism and undecidability (close to the Leninist position shared by other *Telquelists* at the time), and Derrida speaks of the strategic operation accomplished by undecidability within and against metaphysics. At the same time, they are conscious that the only way of fighting against metaphysics, against the law, is from within: according to Kristeva, it is not possible to separate poetic language from the law ("Pour une sémiologie" 56).

On the other hand, Derrida uses paragrammatism as a strategic tool of reading. The deconstruction of Husserl, Saussure, and Rousseau is a consequence of the real existence of a logical contradiction in their texts. As we have seen before, the theory of a grammatology comes as a result of the contradictory arguments about the arbitrariness of sign and difference that governs the semiotic system. As Derrida reads these texts he

realizes the contradictory conflict at work here. However, in *La dissemination* things don't follow in the same way. *La dissémination* is composed of three texts and was first published in 1968, a year that was revolutionary not only in the streets, in the social imagination and in fashion, but also in the trajectory of Derrida's thought. I would like to reiterate that it is in that timeframe that he encountered and read Sollers's and Kristeva's texts from the three or four previous years. The point is that in the first essay of *La dissémination*, "La pharmacie de Platon," which represents a link between the first and second deconstruction, Derrida uses a different strategy for deconstructing the Platonic opposition between writing and speech.

In the limits of this essay we cannot walk through the entire Derrida's essay, nor do I think it necessary to do so. It is well known that the aim of the essay is to demonstrate how Plato's accusation against writing ends up turning against itself. The word Derrida focuses on is, in fact, *pharmakon* and its family, *pharmakeus*, *pharmakeia*. The Greek word oscillates between the meanings "poison" and its opposite "cure" in such a way that it becomes an undecidability. An undecidability that again represents the condition of the possibility of writing and speech, being the form that allows the appearance of all forms. Apparently, this is the same pattern Derrida followed in his deconstructive criticism of Saussure. Somehow it has to be the same in order to underscore how the metaphysical scheme repeats itself throughout history with similar arguments. However, it is not the same procedure because such a deconstruction does not happen as a result of a logical contradiction explicitly present in Plato but as a consequence of the paragrammatism, used and projected by Derrida onto the Platonic text. Derrida is perfectly aware of that situation when he writes that :

Platon semble ne faire porter aucun accent sur le mot *pharmakon* au moment où l'effet d'écriture vire du positif au négatif . . . Il ne dit pas que le *pharmakon* est le lieu, le support et l'opérateur de cette mutation. (*La dissémination* 148)

Platon does not seem to emphasize the term *pharmakon* when the effect of writing switches from positive to negative. . . . He does not claim that the *pharmakon* is the place, the support and the operative agent of this mutation.

That is to say that Plato says nothing about the opposite meanings of the word *pharmakon* ("poison" and "cure"), nothing about the fact that *pharmakon* becomes the agent of a transformation from one meaning to another. So what? Derrida resorts to the convention that "an author can't control the entire net of meanings of the language he has employed," and writes : "On peut dire en tout cas que tous les mots 'pharmaceutiques' que nous avons signalés faisaient effectivement, si l'on peut dire, 'acte de présence' dans le texte des dialogues" ["One may, at any rate, claim that all the

‘pharmaceutical’ terms we have been highlighting actually ‘put in an appearance,’ so to speak, in the text of the dialogues”] (148). What is more, Derrida uses words not utilized at any moment by Plato. Derrida recognizes this : “Si nous le mettons en communication . . . nous ne pouvons plus nous contenter de reconstituer une chaîne” [“If we connect it . . . we can no longer be content with reconstructing a chain”] (148). He points out that if *pharmakon* becomes undecidable this is not the result of a logical contradiction in the Platonic text but an act provoked by him. The following words clarify the question : “Comme tout texte, celui de ‘Platon’ ne pouvait pas ne pas être en rapport, de manière au moins virtuelle, dynamique, latérale, avec tous les mots composant le système grec. Des forces d’association unissent, à des distances, avec une force et selon des voies diverses, les mots ‘effectivement présents’ dans un discours à tous les autres mots du système lexical” [“Like any text, Plato’s cannot help being connected, at least in a virtual, dynamic, lateral way, with all the words that make up the Greek system. At a distance, by virtue and means of different pathways, associative forces unite the words that are ‘actually present’ in a certain discourse with all the other words of the lexical system.”] (*La dissémination* 148).

Is this not the generalization of paragrammatism? What Kristeva highlights as a feature of poetic language (“le texte littéraire se présente comme un système de connexions multiples qu’on pourrait décrire comme une structure de réseaux paragrammatiques” [“the literary text appears as a system of multiple connections that might be described as a structure of paragrammatic networks”], “Pour une sémiologie” 60), is generalized by Derrida as a common feature of all texts (“tout texte”) and converted into a tool that, when projected onto a text, can provoke its deconstruction. Thereby, we can affirm that the emergence of Derrida’s deconstruction is the result of his reading of the paragrammatic theory of Kristeva. Following this reading, Derrida adopts the paragrammatic logic and applies it to unexpected texts, to texts that are not poetic yet nonetheless sustained by the same rules of poetic language, even if this is a secret. But precisely such a secret is what occurred between Kristeva and Derrida.

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Fertile Thinking or Thinking about the Fertility of Thinking

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Abstract : This semi-scientific paper (it does not answer any philological or hermeneutic question concerning Kristeva's writings) elucidates one of Kristeva's main ideas: that the symbolic order, as an order, is infertile, or that the symbolic is nothing, ineffectual, without its complement: the semiotic. Thus Part I of this essay discusses the difference between three concepts: productivity, creativity and fertility, and in this way tries to illustrate the enigma of fertile activities like philosophical thinking or psychoanalytical practice: that they lead to a product that is, again, a fertile activity. Part II deals with language and its labor of translation, assuming that translating the unconscious discourse into a conscious one is one of the main tasks of the talking cure and so may serve as a paradigm for its fertility. Finally Part III shows that this assumption proves to be wrong. For translation, as we shall see, is not only or not necessarily a symbolic process; it cannot be reduced to such a process. It is in itself a fertile product of *another* translation: a semiotic activity on the verge of nature and culture.

Résumé : Cette contribution semi-scientifique (parce qu'elle ne donne pas de réponses aux questions ni philologiques ni herméneutiques des écrits discutés) tente d'éclairer une des idées phares de Julia Kristeva: à savoir que l'ordre symbolique en tant qu'ordre est stérile, autrement dit: que le symbolique n'est rien, qu'il est simplement inefficace, sans son complément, le sémiotique. À cette fin, en première partie, l'essai discute d'abord les différences entre les trois concepts de "productivité", "créativité" et "fécondité" afin d'illustrer l'énigme de certaines activités censées être fécondes/fertiles/prolifères comme la pensée philosophique ou la pratique psychanalytique: c'est-à-dire qu'elles produisent elles-mêmes une activité féconde. La deuxième partie traite du langage et de son travail de traduction dans le cadre de la supposition que la traduction du discours inconscient dans un discours conscient est un des devoirs majeurs de la "talking cure" et peut ainsi servir de paradigme de sa fécondité. Enfin, la troisième partie montre que cette hypothèse s'avère erronée. Car la traduction, comme on le verra, n'est pas seulement et même pas nécessairement un procès symbolique: elle s'avère irréductible à un tel procès, étant en elle-même le produit fécond d'une *autre* traduction: d'une activité sémiotique aux confins de la nature et de la culture. [Traduction du titre : La pensée féconde ou penser sur la fécondité de la pensée]

Keywords : symbolic order – symbolic process – semiotic process – productivity – creativity – fertility – nature – culture – translation

I. Productivity, Creativity, and Fertility

1. *A Beginning*

The central question of my paper is: What is fertile thinking? And a supplemental, implicit question will be: What does it mean to *think* about *fertile thinking*? Is there a fertile thinking *of* thinking? Or is any thinking *of* thinking, the philosophical activity, an infertile thinking, an infertile activity?

When I was invited to present my research at the Berlin congress “Kristeva in Process. The Fertility of Thought” I looked at its announcement and was deeply astonished, if not to say shaken or shocked. The subtitle of the congress theme read: “The fertility of thought – La pensée féconde – Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens.”

I asked myself: What was going on in the mind of the organizers of the congress to choose such a subtle subtitle? What was their intellectual or conceptual motivation for the choice of such a vocabulary? The subtitle of the conference could have been “The *productivity* of thought” (“La pensée productrice” / “Die Produktivität des Denkens”) or “The *creativity* of thought” (“La pensée créatrice” / “Die Kreativität des Denkens”), but in fact it ran as “The *fertility* of thought” (“La pensée féconde” / “Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens”).

As a philosopher whose one and only medium is language, I am bound to be precise in choosing my words. And so, in the use of English as a foreign language for me, as French has been a foreign language for Kristeva, one of the main purposes of my paper will be to propose an explanation of these words and to clear up their relevance for psychoanalytic discourse and my discussion of Julia Kristeva’s cultural theory.

And by the way, I do not want to scientifically interpret Kristeva’s writings. I am not interested in philological or hermeneutic questions. Kristeva’s writings are a constant inspiration for me to ask some fundamental conceptual – or you could say philosophical – questions, for instance concerning the ontological status of language.

2. *A Difference*

There is, of course, a certain difference between the terms *productivity*, *creativity*, and *fertility* (of thought); and each term, I think, could serve as an adequate subtitle for a symposium on Kristeva’s theory. But what exactly is their difference? And how can this difference be applied to psychoanalytic discourse? I would like to insist on the following three statements.

First, a *productive* activity is an activity that leads to something that is or becomes a substance of its own, that is independent from its origin and that we call the *product* of the productive activity. For instance, an industrial product is independent of the machine it was produced by and can be used by others. Thus, speaking is a productive activity insofar as it is producing words or signifiers that can be used and understood by others.

Second, a *creative* activity is also an activity that leads to something that becomes a substance of its own, but the product it leads to is entirely *new* and – at least for a

certain time – *unique* and *irreplaceable*, i.e., it has never been seen, heard, etc. before. And, because it is new, everyone wonders or wants to know how it could have been done. So, a creative activity is always already a productive activity, but a product must not necessarily be new and unique. It may be, for instance, the replaceable copy of a certain product-design, whereas the product-design itself may be the unique product of a creative activity.

And third, a *fertile* activity is also a creative activity (as a creative activity is also a productive activity), but the product it leads to is not only new, unique and irreplaceable but it also produces a new fertile activity that again leads to another fertile activity – and so on. So, a fertile activity leads to a chain of fertile activities that does not come to an end in any product, whatever it may be, and therefore is possibly *infinite*. While the product of a productive and creative activity is a static end of this activity, the product of a fertile activity – like, for instance, fertile thinking – is again an activity, which means that, in a certain respect, the activity and its product and, vice versa, the product and its activity are identical or one and the same.

3. *A Semantic Machine*

Unfortunately, by making up this trilogy of productivity, creativity and fertility – supposing its logical structure is clear and will be accepted – we do not really know what *fertility* or a *fertile* activity is. That a fertile activity is an activity that leads to another fertile activity may be a good formula to differentiate fertility from productivity and creativity, but it does not give us any hint as to the semantic question of what fertility *is*.

Let me take it like this: In the last section I constructed a little semantic machine with one term being the logical basis of the other: productivity being the basis of creativity, i.e., creativity as a specific mode of productivity, and creativity being the basis of fertility, i.e., fertility as a specific mode of creativity and productivity:

Productivity → Creativity → Fertility

But at the end of this machine, at the peak of its explanatory power, we are moving in a circle: fertility leads to fertility. The semantic machine may be productive and even creative, but it is – as any machine – *infertile*.

What is the reason for this particular embarrassment? I think that we are satisfied to hear that creative and productive activities lead to specific or non-specific products. But we are puzzled when we hear that there is an activity that leads to a *product* that is *not* a product but, again, an *activity*. For we are used to making a distinction between activity and product or – to say it in epistemological terms – between subject and object: the activity being the subject and the product being the object. But the identity of subject and object, as any identity of opposites, seems to be enigmatic to us or is, in a certain way, tautological.

4. *An Alternative*

One possible option to avoid this difficulty would be to change the conceptual matrix and to refer to another difference: not to the difference between subject and object but to the difference between *nature* and *culture*. The advantage in doing so would be double.

First, what we are interested in when discussing the fertility of Kristeva's work and the concept of fertility in her work, are *cultural, not natural* activities, be they productive, creative, or fertile. Kristeva's main focus lies in cultural activities like speaking, writing, or making art; and so her theory, all in all, is a theory of culture.

But, secondly, speaking of fertile activities, even in cultural studies, implies or at least alludes to a certain – for instance, biological – concept of nature. Fertility in this naturalistic context means, as anyone knows, the *biological capability of giving life*. And supposing this is a necessary semantic component of the term, however figuratively it may be used, we have to acknowledge a certain *reappearance* or *persistence* of nature within culture, a certain *implemence*, as I would like to say.

Indeed in my intellectual queries over the years I have long suspected that Kristeva's work is balancing on the verge of nature and culture. Like Freud's psychoanalysis, Kristeva's theory, especially her theory of the semiotic process, rests on a principal assurance: that the basis of this process, of the subject's activity – that which psychoanalysis calls *the drive* [*la pulsion/der Trieb*] – is situated on the conceptual borderline between psychic and somatic life, between culture and nature.

5. *An Obstacle*

It would be a seductive alternative to follow this trace and to concentrate on this hypothesis during the second part of my paper. But the term *nature* is a problematic term for a lot of reasons. It is like the humpbacked dwarf in the chess-playing machine Benjamin speaks of in one of his "Theses on the Philosophy of History": it is hidden within the machine although the machine – like any machine – does not work without it, has to keep it out of sight ("Über den Begriff" 251).

In fact, no one who is engaged in cultural theory or cultural studies these days is talking about nature any longer. Although *nature* is the only antonym of *culture*, and vice versa, *culture* is the only antonym of *nature*, the concept of nature, and even the signifier *nature*, seems to be repressed – if not to say foreclosed – from intellectual discourse, especially from so-called poststructuralist, postmodernist, or neo-Lacanian discourse.

Even Kristeva, I think, is very cautious in using the term *nature*. I do not remember it to be central in any one of her publications, that is, I never really stumbled upon it. On the contrary, it seems to be incidental in her work and, if at all, a noteworthy term only in casual remarks – like, for instance, in a passage I found in one of her letters to Catherine Clément where she talks about the "sacred origins of our humanity" that are situated "at the crossroads of the self and the other, nature and

culture, drive and language” (Clément and Kristeva, *Versprechen* 200; Kristeva, *Fremde* 198).

6. *A New Beginning*

Although I think the difference between nature and culture is a central point in Kristeva’s work – which is open well beyond academic debates – I do not want to insist on it or stress it directly: I will make a detour. The whole remaining part of my text is such a detour. And it will be an *infinite* detour.

I would like to ask: As, in cultural theory, we are concerned with at least productive or even creative activities like learning and educating or, in general, speaking and writing, what are the necessary conditions for a fertile activity, for fertile thinking, or any fertility of thought?

One way to answer this question could be to set in motion once again our little semantic machine and to analyze the differences between necessary conditions first for a productive, then for a creative, and finally for a fertile activity. But, as I pointed out before, such a machine may be helpful for propaedeutic reasons but leaves us alone with the central question concerning a positive foundation of fertility. This machine is productive – even more than productive, perhaps creative – but it is not fertile.

Thus, instead of treating the trilogy of productivity, creativity, and fertility again – which is, all in all, infertile – I want to make the following statement that I hope to be fertile: There is no fertility, no fertile thinking without any transcendence or transgression of the subject, without *going* beyond or what *is* beyond it: its thinking, feeling, self, language, or whatsoever.

But what does that mean? To go beyond or to go beyond myself or my personal – linguistic, cognitive, emotional, etc. – context means to confront myself with strangeness – not only with *an* other, *the* other or *others* in general but with an otherness that is *foreign* or *strange* to me: first, with an *outer* strangeness that may be perhaps another life in another country or a foreign attitude and language, and second, with an *inner* strangeness that is my own unconscious life, the “dark continent of the soul,” as Freud designated it.

In the following, second, part of my lecture I want to deal with these alternatives – the foreign continent outside of me and the dark continent within – and try to present them as necessary conditions of any fertile activity – and fertile thinking in particular.

II. Outer and Inner Strangeness

7. *An Outer Strangeness*

A good example for experiencing the first kind of strangeness is confronting oneself with the foreign attitudes in a foreign country and, especially, with a foreign language. I must confess that I was astonished to read in an interview with Françoise

Dosse (by the way: astonishment may also give way to fertile thinking) that for Kristeva French *was* but still *is* a foreign language (*Geschichte* 86).

And I was even more astonished to read in another text that Kristeva found that the “distrustful and cold hospitality” she was confronted with by her academic colleagues at the end of the 1960s when she came from Sofia to Paris was “nevertheless effective and trustworthy” for her. She writes : “The greater tolerance of the English and greater American capacity for assimilation doubtless offer more existential opportunities. But finally they are, because of their lower resistance, less favorable to the production of new thought” (“Mémoire” 42).

Let me repeat the remarkable key statement of this short passage: *Greater tolerance*, Kristeva says, because of its *lower resistance*, is *less favorable* to the production of new thought. Except for the fact that production of new thought means creativity and not necessarily fertility (although fertility *implies* creativity), the strangeness felt abroad is not only intellectually acknowledged (which is easily done) but, obviously, lived through. And this means: one has to labor under it – labor under it by translating one’s own language or transforming one’s own culture into another and, vice versa, by translating another language or transforming another culture into one’s own.

8. *An Inner Strangeness*

Before I try to determine this two-sided, dialectical labor of translation and transposition (which is, I think, a paradigm for fertility) I first want to take a look at the inner strangeness we have to deal with in the case of our unconscious life. On the one hand, Kristeva states, we are strangers in a strange world – this is the outer strangeness – but on the other hand we are also strangers to ourselves: *étrangers à nous-mêmes*, as a well-known title of one of her books goes. “We are our own strangers,” Kristeva says, “we are split” (*Fremde* 198). Or : “The other, this is my (own) unconscious” (200).

That means we are not only confronted with an *outer world* that may be unknown or, at least, unaccustomed to us, but also with what was repressed or even foreclosed from our ego or consciousness into an *inner world* – which, for instance, is the case with mental illnesses or with our daily life practices that are often characterized by strange fantasies and desires, slips of the tongue and pen, fixations and false associations or parapraxis, acting-out, automatic anxiety, sense of inferiority, and so on.

All of these experiences form an *inner* strangeness that carries even a greater weight than the *outer* strangeness, for the person concerned with the *latter*, the outer strangeness, still has the opportunity to escape from it – finally, into the person’s inner world. But the person cannot, of course, escape from this inner world, the inner strangeness; and therefore the impulse or vital drive to translate one’s own foreign language (e.g., the language of a recurring nightmare) or the foreign attitude (e.g., a compulsion or an addiction) may fail, in most cases at the cost of an even deeper strangeness and more desperate efforts to cope with it – for instance in a psychoanalytic cure.

9. *A Plausible Assumption*

One may ask: How is such an inner strangeness possible? And what is fertile about it? Or what does it mean to transform this inner strangeness by translating the foreign, unconscious thought or attitude into a conscious one – and, perhaps, vice versa? So, what is this labor of translation about; what kind of fertile activity is it?

To answer these questions we have to take a look at the process of repression. As our language, according to Saussure’s view, is a certain signifier-signified unit (in a simplified manner written as S / s) it may be, at first sight, a plausible assumption that what is repressed from the subject’s conscious discourse is the signifier (S) and that a *certain* signifier, let’s call it the *first* signifier (S₁) – in a metaphorical process (S / S) – is totally substituted by another, *second* signifier (S₂/S₁).

But obviously this is not a plausible assumption. For the conscious discourse of the subject is not minimized in its material, *signifying* part – the ego is still equipped with all formal possibilities of wording – but in its immaterial, *signified* part. What is obviously affected by the process of repression is to realize a certain meaning that, in a former discourse, was associated with the first signifier but cannot be associated with it any longer (Kupke, “Psychoanalysis” 753-54).

For instance, Little Hans, Freud’s young patient who is traumatized by his father’s hostile attitude toward him is, of course, able to use the signifier “father”: he is talking about his father with Freud (Freud, “Analyse der Phobie” 26ff.). But he is not able to associate the signifier “father” (S₁) with the specific meaning of the danger (s₂) he was exposed to by his father or with the signifier “danger” (S₂) that represents this specific meaning (s₂) for him.

$$\begin{array}{c} S_1 \leftarrow S_2 \\ \hline s_2 \end{array}$$

Simplified: S₁ (s₂); read: S₁ as a function of s₂.

So, as a result, the only danger he can talk about is the danger that comes from the “horse” (S₃) – which is then over-determined as it is also associated with the danger (s₂) that comes from the father.

$$\begin{array}{c} S_2 \rightarrow S_3 \\ \hline s_2 \end{array}$$

Simplified: S₃ (s₂); read: S₃ as a function of s₂.

10. *A Signifying Machine*

So, what we have here again in order to explain what fertile activity is is a little machine: a signifying machine. For now we are able – or seem to be able – to explain what the labor of translating a foreign language into one’s own and one’s own language into a foreign language really is. This labor consists of a double-sided, complex activity. On the one hand Freud and his little patient have to translate each other’s language into their own. That is, Freud tries to understand that, in his patient’s language, the specific danger (s_2) that *was* connected with his father (S_1) *is* now disconnected from S_1 and connected with or displaced to S_3 . And, vice versa, his patient tries to understand that, in Freud’s language, s_2 *is* connected with S_1 and *not* displaced to S_3 . They try to understand that what in the patient’s conscious language is meant by “the horse” is the father in Freud’s language and in the patient’s unconscious language:

$$S_3 \rightarrow S_2 (s_2) \rightarrow S_1$$

But on the other hand Freud and his little patient have to translate their own language into each other’s language too. That is, Freud tries to understand that even in his own language s_2 *can be* disconnected from S_1 and displaced to S_3 . And, vice versa, his patient tries to understand that even in his own language s_2 *can be* connected with S_1 and *does not have to be* displaced to S_3 . They try to understand that what in Freud’s language or the patient’s unconscious language is meant by “the father” is, in the patient’s conscious language, the horse:

$$S_1 \rightarrow S_2 (s_2) \rightarrow S_3$$

It seems that this is, in principle, the labor of translation that goes on in every psychoanalytic cure. But, surprisingly or not, this is not the case. For, although Freud’s patient may understand that in another language s_2 *is* connected with S_1 and *not* displaced to S_3 and even in his language *can be* connected with S_1 and *does not have to be* displaced to S_3 , it does not mean that, for him, it *is* connected with S_1 and that it *is not* displaced to S_3 . “The intellectual admission of what is repressed,” Freud says, “does not suspend the process of repression. It preserves what is essential with it” (“Verneinung” 374).

III. Language as an Effect of Repression

11. *Another Obstacle*

So, what we have here is another obstacle: Once again we are trapped in a cage, in a kind of linguistic pitfall. The little machine we tried to bring in motion – now a signifying machine – has again failed. It proved to be as infertile as the semantic

machine we tried to use before. That means, such a machine is helpful in a certain way – I said: for propaedeutic reasons – but leaves us alone with the decisive question: What does it mean to translate one language into another? And what is fertile in this activity?

One may argue that the specific labor of translation in a psychoanalytic cure cannot be described or analyzed by the usual linguistic term *translation*. For, in such a cure it is not only necessary to understand what in another language is a *possible* diction and is even a *possible* diction in one's own – this is merely the technical meaning of translation – but to realize that what *seems to be possible* is already *real*: that the subject's language is always already *another* language.

This realization means that on the one hand Freud's patient, Little Hans, is not able to associate the signifier "father" with the meaning "danger" or with the signifier "danger" that represents this specific meaning for him. But on the other hand his whole discourse is already characterized by the *reality* of this very association, by the fact that even for him the signifier "father" is, nevertheless, associated with danger. For, if it were not associated with danger there would be no need to defend himself against the reality of it.

The patient's *incapacity* to connect S_1 with s_2 is therefore the – somewhat paradoxical – result of the fact that it is *already* connected with s_2 and cannot be disconnected from it again. It is an active denial, a defense strategy of a psychic *reality*: What is unconscious : "It is my father who is dangerous" (S_1 (s_2)), is not unknown but already known to the psychic system, it is a kind of knowledge. And this *original* knowledge is just blocked off from conscious discourse by the anticathexis of *another* knowledge : "It is (not my father but) the horse that is dangerous" (S_3 (s_2)).

12. An Implemental Symbolization

Now we have a first hint of what went wrong with our signifying machine. We tried to translate, i.e., to understand what, in the discourse of Little Hans, S_3 means: it means S_1 . Or, in other words, we tried to understand a certain process of equation: S_1 being equated with S_3 by the meaning of S_2 , i.e., by means of s_2 . This is the *process of symbolization*, by which S_3 ("the horse") became the *symbol* for S_1 ("my father").

But in reconstructing this equation with our little machine ($S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ (s_2) $\rightarrow S_3 \rightarrow S_2$ (s_2) $\rightarrow S_1$) we did not take into account that, with the process of repression, this translation has already taken place or that this process of symbolization – as any process of symbolization – is inseparable from a process of repression that has already taken place (Kupke, "Andersheit" 101ff.).

For, what has happened to the psychic system cannot be undone. And although this rule (what is done cannot be undone) seems trivial, it is absolutely fundamental to understanding the ontological status of language: its impotence and delay. It is an indication of our naturalness, especially our temporality and mortality.

This means that the fact that what has happened is denied in an implicit conscious discourse ("It is not my father") does not prevent it from actually being

present to the psychic system. What is true (“It is the father”) reappears and persists *within* the negative statement (“It is not the father”) and its positive displacement (“It is the horse”). It is an unconscious *implement* of the subject’s conscious discourse. And it seems that it is this *implemence* that is able to explain what the labor of translation is and, especially, what its fertility is.

13. *A Fertile Activity*

Let us first take a look at this unconscious implement as the basis of fertility. As it is an unconscious effect of the process of repression and this process is a process of translation the process itself must be an unconscious process. Although what has happened is totally present to the psychic system there is no consciousness of what has happened *to* and what has happened *within* the system: trauma and translation. Both trauma and translation, are *masked* by our conscious thinking; and as they are masked by our conscious thinking – that serves as a kind of anticathexis here – they remain unconscious.

Yet every mask, more or less, shows the features of the face it tries to hide. That is, while on the one hand the masquerade involves a certain *split* within the subject: what is unconscious is unknown to the ego, on the other hand it involves a certain *unity* too: what is unconscious is, nevertheless, known to the psychic system as a whole. And as it is known to the psychic system as a whole, this system is obviously unable to strictly separate what is unconscious from what is conscious.

First, what is unconscious is represented in the denial of the conscious discourse (“It is not my father”). This negation, as any negation, is, as Freud says, a certain acknowledgement of what is present to the psychic system or what is part of the psychic reality. And second, what is unconscious is even represented and acknowledged in its displacement (“It is the horse”) as this constitutes a *new* symbol, which is a usual signifier charged with an unusual meaning that, as it is unusual, serves as a hint to or a trace of the unconscious process, as a symptom.

So, to translate here constitutes a double activity – and this double activity, I think, is a fertile activity. First, to translate here means to point out the *gap* between conscious and unconscious thinking or to *separate* what is unconscious from what is conscious. It is realized through *defense*. And second, it means to point out the *unity* between conscious and unconscious thinking or to *combine* what is unconscious and what is conscious. It is realized through *admission*.

As Freud says: every symptom is a compromise-formation between two psychic tendencies: defense and admission, it is a condensation of these tendencies, a metaphor, as Lacan would say. And we may perhaps conclude: Every conscious discourse is such a compromise, such a condensation. It is an effect of the fertile activity of translation that is both defense and admission. And this translation is an unconscious activity.

14. *An Effect of Repression*

Now, let us take a look at the conscious discourse that results from this unconscious fertile activity. It is phenomenologically characterized by two logical aspects : an implicit negation and an explicit position, for what the patient Little Hans constantly affirms is that “it is *not* my father *but* the horse.” While the implicit negation (“It is *not* my father”) is the logical and linguistic descendant of the pleasure principle and of the first psychic tendency – defense – the explicit position (“It *is* the horse”) is the logical and linguistic descendant of the principle of reality and of the second psychic tendency – admission.

As noted above, both tendencies are opposites and nevertheless combined or unified within conscious discourse. This combination or unity here appears as the unity of *implication*. That the negation is an *implicit* negation means that it is the logical condition of the *explicit* position, for to say “it is the horse” in the patient’s discourse logically implies that “it is not the father.” So the character of conscious discourse all in all is positional. But as any logical or linguistic position of conscious discourse is part of a contextual meaning, its symbolic order is totally characterized by the possibility of negation – by the negativity of language.

So, I think, what is indeed remarkable about conscious discourse is its implicit negation. For as there is no language without any negation we may conclude first that language, although it seems to be the medium of translation, is itself dependent on the very process of translation which is identical with the process of repression as analyzed above. That means that any language – although it is our main principle of reality – seems to imply a certain defense against reality. It appears to be an effect of repression. And second, it seems to be our conscious thinking that is structured like a language and not – or not necessarily and primarily – the unconscious. For there is no negation within the sphere of the unconscious, Freud says, and therefore any negation is and has to be part of conscious discourse.

In fact, to say “it is the horse” in the *conscious* discourse of Freud’s patient logically implies that “it is not the father.” Negation and position constitute a logical unity, a unity of implication : any position is an implicit negation, or, as Spinoza says: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. But this logic, of course, is not the logic of the *unconscious*. To say “it is the horse” *does not* imply that “it is not the father”; and to say “it is the father” does not imply that “it is not the horse.” It is only our conscious thinking, its language and its symbols that are characterized by a defense against reality. What is unconscious, that “it is the father,” is characterized by a general principle of reality – an admission without any defense.

15. *A Résumé*

Although these theses (and especially the last one) need further explication, let me now take a look at the results of my analysis. Any fertile activity, I stated, leads to another fertile activity and – starting from one of Kristeva’s proposals – to confront

oneself with an inner or outer strangeness provokes a labor of translation that in and of itself is fertile. The analysis then concentrated on the psychoanalytic experience of strangeness and revealed a certain ongoing process of translation that constitutes the difference between, and at the same time the unity of, our conscious and unconscious thinking. This ongoing process of translation has a specific character.

On the one hand it is the – natural – reaction to an outer strangeness that, as it is a traumatizing event, prolongs itself, extends to an inner strangeness. That means a process of repression takes place by which the subject tries to reduce this strangeness in a double compromising strategy: in a strategy of defense and in one of admission. But on the other hand this double strategy constitutes a symptom – a symbol of what is repressed – and so again leads to an experience of strangeness which may cause the subject to look for help, for instance, in a psychoanalytic cure. Thus, indeed, the process of repression is – without any irony – a fertile activity, a translational act, that leads to another fertile activity : for instance, a psychoanalytic act, a talking cure.

But this is not the only result of my analysis; it is just the surface of an observation that deals with the deeper concept of subjectivity, thinking, language, and self on the whole. As the process of repression is a double process of translation that constitutes a symbolic relation, and as any symbol is part of a symbolic order, it seems that there is no symbolic order without this process of repression or, in other words, any symbolic order seems to be an effect – a unique and irreplaceable product – of repression. In short, language is a symptom. A symptom of what? Of our close encounter with the real.

What does this mean for the status of translation? Translation then is not, or not necessarily, a symbolic process. Although we are in the need to explain translation as an act of language because we do not have any other model to explain it, it cannot be reduced to such an act. For language in itself is a – fertile – product of translation. It is dependent on a non- or pre-symbolic process that reappears and persists within its logical chain of negation and position. Or to say it with a term that is a constant point of reference in Kristeva's work: it is the *semiotic* process that is the fertile basis of language. The symbolic order, as an order, is infertile. It is nothing, ineffectual, without its complement: the semiotic.

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The Pathos and Ethos of Thought in Julia Kristeva

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Abstract: This essay constitutes an attempt to situate Kristeva within the long dialectical tradition (from Hegel to Sartre) that not only opposes thought to any form of dualism but, more importantly, has systematically defined the event of thinking in terms of the “historical, loveful violence” that characterizes any mediating process (Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle* 241). Comparing her approach to language and being with those of Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben, my aim is to argue that thought in Kristeva is the life-enhancing encounter between *the pathos of the negative* (*qua* revolt, questioning, irony, critique, displacement, de-stabilization) and *the ethos of sublimation* (understood as the “patience” of knowing, the infinity of meaning, “the dignity of Beauty” [Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt* 251 and *Sense and Non-Sense* 7]). As I shall demonstrate, it is through this encounter that a *passage*, an enabling economy of relations, can open up between the suffering of the immanent (flesh or bare life), the transcendence of every singular “I,” and the community held together by the sharing of the sign.

Résumé: Cet essai tente de situer Kristeva dans la longue tradition dialectique (de Hegel à Sartre) qui non seulement oppose la pensée à toute forme de dualisme mais, de façon plus importante, définit systématiquement l'acte de penser en relation avec la “violence historique, aimante” qui caractérise tout processus de médiation (Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle* 241). En comparant son approche du langage et de l'être avec celles de Jacques Derrida et de Giorgio Agamben, mon objectif est d'arguer que la pensée chez Kristeva est l'expérience enrichissante d'une rencontre, d'un face-à-face, entre *le pathos du négatif* (*qua* révolte, interrogation, ironie, critique, déplacement, déstabilisation) et *l'ethos de sublimation* (compris comme la “patience” du savoir, l'infini du sens, “la dignité de la Beauté” [Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt* 251 et *Sense and Non-Sense* 7]). Comme je le démontre, c'est à travers ce face-à-face qu'un *passage*, qu'une économie favorable de relations, peut s'ouvrir entre la souffrance de l'immanence (chair ou “vie nue”), la transcendance de tout “Je” singulier et la communauté liée par le partage du signe.

Keywords: pathos of the negative – ethos of sublimation – thought – *signifiance* – experience – nobility of thought – Hegel – Derrida – Agamben – *Desire in Language* – *Sense and Non-Sense* – *Intimate Revolt* – *New Maladies of the Soul* – *La haine et le pardon*

Thought, Mediation and the Hegelian Legacy

ven a cursory reading of Kristeva's early work will disclose her commitment to a rethinking of Hegelian dialectics, a framework that she obviously considers significant for her project, as she begins to formulate it in the late sixties and early seventies. Indeed, Hegel's non-metaphysical, non-dualistic understanding of consciousness as well as the world, his concern with intersubjectivity and his insistence on thinking the relationship between the Infinite and the Finite, transcendence and immanence have had a determining influence on her theorization of the interplay between semiotic/symbolic and her introduction or re-investment of such concepts as dialogism, *signifiante*, genotext, *chora*, intertextuality, the subject-in-process/on trial and *metaphorein* (to mention the most familiar of these concepts). In "The System and the Speaking Subject" (1973) she openly admits that what she calls "*semanalysis*" "can be thought of as the direct successor of the dialectical method" (*Kristeva Reader* 31).¹ In opposition to semiology (as it develops from Saussure and Peirce to the Prague School and structuralism), *semanalysis* "conceives of meaning not as a sign-system but as a *signifying process*" (*Kristeva Reader* 27, 28) and seeks to account for the production of "this very unrest" that Hegel calls "self" (12) and that Kristeva renames "the subject of the [signifying] practice" (*Kristeva Reader* 29). In drawing attention to the conflictual articulation of biological and signifying operations, *semanalysis* emerges as a metalanguage whose object is neither the language system nor the biological code but *rhythm*, as Hegel defines it: i.e., as "the result of what hovers between" (Kristeva talks about the "'remainder,' the 'waste,'" *Desire in Language* 31) "and unites both" (Hegel 36). In "How Does One Speak to Literature?" (1971) Kristeva discusses the Barthean concept of writing in similar terms: "The practice of writing," she argues, "becomes the edge separating and uniting the subjectivity to which style attests... with the objectivity represented by social history. . . . [I]t brings one back to the other, neither subjective individuality nor exterior objectivity, it is the very principle of Hegel's 'self-movement'" (*Desire in Language* 110). This essay is, in fact, most representative of her early concerns, both a tribute to her mentor, Roland Barthes, and a re-reading/re-inscription of his "dialectical conception of writing" in the interests of the avant-garde (*Desire in Language* 105). In her account of Barthes's contribution to the introduction of a "new field" (i.e., literature as the "missing link of human science," 98), Kristeva credits Hegelian dialectics with first pointing to "the masterly lines of this interplay between limit and infinity, rationale and objectivity – a stumbling block for contemporary sciences" (98). As she goes on to explain, Hegelian dialectics "succeeded in this by imposing at its foundations the *knots*, invisible without it, where the opposites – *subject* and *history* are interwoven" (99). If, according to Kristeva, Barthes is the

¹ I have made some preliminary remarks on Kristeva's relation with Hegel in "Towards an Economy of Violence: Julia Kristeva in the Between of Ethics and Politics."

“founder of modern literary studies” this is because he located literary practice at the site of these invisible knots between subject and history (93). In doing so, he opened a path towards the appreciation of the materiality of writing, its immersion in history and its sexual overdetermination (100). Writing, then, as Barthes (this “rational empiricist”) has bequeathed it to us, is the product of the *transposition* of dialectics in the field of language (100).

However, as Kristeva does not tire to point out throughout her analysis, this transposition far from leaves dialectics intact. So Barthes’s way is a “*transformed* dialectics” (104; my emphasis) because he re-inscribes its transcendence-bound movement “in a fragmented space that transforms the idealistic matrix” (113). In opposition to dialectical law, scriptural law “is upheld not by the subject of understanding, but by a divided subject” (111) and, though the negative mode crosses and is absorbed into the affirmative, this affirmation (Kristeva insists) is “only a semblance, because what is inscribed is always already broken up within the ungraspable, impersonal, transsubjective, anonymous, musical plurality of the paragrammatized text” (104).

Thus, it is clear that (contra Juliet Flower MacCannell’s view) Kristeva’s is not “the official undeconstructed Hegel” (Lechte and Zournazi 89). Despite her allegiance to the Hegelian framework as a *tool of critique* (*Desire in Language* vii-viii), she has evidently taken on board post-Heideggerian philosophical engagements with “the speculative labyrinth of absolute mind” (*Desire in Language* 100).² This can be easily demonstrated through a close study of *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974). The affinity between Kristeva’s project, as she frames it in her Prolegomenon to this book, and Hegel’s philosophical agenda is striking. Like Hegel in his own Preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, she foregrounds metaphors of movement, life, process and change.³ She shares with him a concern with concreteness (i.e., embodiment as well as embeddedness in the world)⁴ and with a negativity that is neither subordinate to affirmation nor exterior to reflective thought. What is more, the targets of the critical impetus that shapes her interrogation into the revolutionary potential of poetic language are no other than the transcendental, disembodied, a-historical subject that Hegel sought to de-center and the “degradation” (as Hegel puts it) “of what is self-moving to the level of mere matter” (Hegel 26). As she goes on to demonstrate, however, Hegel’s dialectical thinking is

² Examples of Kristeva’s critical reading of Hegel abound and are dispersed throughout her work. In their analyses of *Revolution in Poetic Language* and Kristeva’s appropriation of Hegelian negativity, a number of Kristevan scholars have pointed to her departures from “the purity of the source” (Kristeva, “Preface” viii). See Oliver, Coole, Beardsworth, Lechte and Margaroni, Sjöholm, Bové. In this context, Anna Smith’s discussion of Kristeva’s feminine strategy of miming (and thus displacing) Hegel is particularly interesting.

³ See, for example, Hegel 12, 25-26, 28, 30-31 and Kristeva, *Revolution* 13-17.

⁴ For attention to these aspects of Hegel’s thought see Russon.

limited by what Otto Poggeler describes as a kind of “forgetting,”⁵ the forgetting precisely of the *force* of the negative, which is reclaimed under the category of the Notion and absorbed into the teleological movement of Hegelian “Becoming,” i.e., “the immediate disappearance of the one into the other” (*Revolution* 112). In addition, as she contends, Hegel divorces this force from its concrete base in the self-organization of matter; hence her decision in *Revolution* to re-read “Hegel through Freud” and his dialectical, materialist theory of the drives (118).

In seeking to reinvest the force of Hegelian negativity by throwing light on its materiality and heterogeneity, which “Hegel was unable to see” (*Kristeva Reader* 31), Kristeva seems, interestingly, to reiterate the question Jacques Derrida raises in *Glas* (a book published in the same year as *Revolution in Poetic Language*): “what, after all, of the remain(s), today, for us, here, now, of a Hegel?” (1). What needs to be noted, however, is that, unlike Derrida, Kristeva insists on using the Hegelian remainders (namely, negativity and materiality) in her attempt to rethink the nature of mediation and to open up dialectical passageways beyond the limits of the Hegelian legacy. It is in light of this attempt, I believe, that we need to understand Kristeva’s ambiguous commitment to Hegelian dialectics, a commitment that remains unwavering in her ’90s and post-’90s work. Though the prevalent interpretation in Kristevan scholarship at present⁶ is that her shift from a concern with revolution in 1974 to an exploration in the ’90s of what she calls a “revolt culture” marks her decisive departure from “an old-fashioned form of a materialist dialectics” and the open acknowledgement of what, according to Cecilia Sjöholm, has always haunted her aesthetic, psychoanalytic or political ventures (namely, “an unease with dialectical thought as such,” 125), my contention here is that Hegel has not ceased to be an important interlocutor for Kristeva. In my reading, Kristeva’s most recent work continues to be an exploration (a mapping and re-mapping) of what in 1971 she saw as “the common ground” between psychoanalysis and Hegelian dialectics: i.e., the realization that “the being-in-itself-and-for-itself of the ‘objective’ other that negates and determines the ‘subjective’ is active within *language* and adheres to certain *laws*” (*Desire in Language* 119). The key in this context, as Sara Beardsworth suspects in her very insightful analysis of Kristeva’s ’80s trilogy, is precisely “the problem of mediation” (169). Yet, Kristeva’s thought on mediation is not limited (as Beardsworth suggests) by “her outright dread and rejection of Hegel, a position that leaves the resources in his thought for thinking through modern social and political experience

⁵ Poggeler writes : “In the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, before he calls attention to Aristotelian teleology, Hegel warns us not to forget the seriousness, the pain, the patience and the labor of the negative, in considering the life of God as a play of love with itself. But doesn’t Hegel himself forget this seriousness when he later says ‘God is love, i.e., the making of distinctions and the nullifying of such distinctions, a play of distinctions which is not serious; distinctions which are annulled as soon as they are posited, the eternal simple Idea?’” (Quoted by Williams 235).

⁶ See, for example, Chanter and Ziarek, especially the editors’ introduction and the essays included in Part I of the volume, entitled: “Femininity, Race, and Revolt.”

preemptively suppressed” (213-14). Far from being “slight,” Kristeva’s contribution as a thinker of mediation is valuable and is yet to be appreciated.

Her three-volume meditation on “the Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis” (published between 1996 and 2005) seems to me to be most important in this respect. The first two volumes set out to investigate the possibilities of revolt in contemporary spectacle-inundated society and are in reality the product of Kristeva’s determination to engage with what in the ’70s she called “the [persistent] illusion that the negative – death, violence – does not concern” us (“The Novel as Polylogue” 161). For all the irregularities of its landscape, “the tremendous Hegelian continent” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 169) remains the background against which she attempts to assess (via the equally rough pathways of Heidegger) the legacy of three twentieth-century authors: namely Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon, and Roland Barthes, who constitute the primary focus of both volumes. What is particularly interesting in this context is Kristeva’s revisiting of her 1970s appraisal of Barthes which, in my view, demonstrates the persistence of a dialectical edge in her conceptual voyage from a revolution eventalized in poetic language to culture *qua* revolt. She writes :

What Barthes asks us to ponder is complex: it is not a matter of fleeing a secret or obeying the universal legality of an inert praxis and subjecting oneself to the collective imperative; it is a matter of making a crossing, which must indeed be described as dialectical and leads from the secret to freedom. . . . I still see no other way of grasping this dynamic of writing-as-freedom according to Barthes except to think of it in light of the Hegelian dialectic, at the crossroads of Force and Law, as I proposed in 1971. (*Sense and Non-Sense* 195)

It is true, as a number of scholars have already pointed out, that in her revolt volumes Kristeva expresses a certain disillusionment with regard to “the old dialectical model of the law and its transgression” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 27). With reference to the contemporary reality in Western secular democracies, she argues: “[i]f one considers law obsolete, prohibition weak, and values empty or flimsy, a certain dialectical link between law and transgression is impossible” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 27). This is why at the heart of her agenda in both volumes lies a desire to address the contemporary resistances to psychoanalysis (*Intimate Revolt* 10-12) by situating the Freudian “Copernican revolution” (*Intimate Revolt* 11) within the philosophical problematic of negativity that she traces back to Hegel and by demonstrating how this revolution complements (indeed, “goes beyond,” *Sense and Non-Sense* 28) the prohibition/transgression dialectic. However, it needs to be made clear that Kristeva never wholly abandons what she acknowledges are “dated dialectical forms” which, she insists, are “still possible in certain contexts” (namely, in the context of religion and in “places invested by the arts”) (*Sense and Non-Sense* 27, 29).

What I consider an important departure from her early concerns as a theorist relates, instead, to how she has come to understand the *stakes* of her reclamation and reinvestment of Hegelian negativity. In *Revolution in Poetic Language* the goal was social revolution that was seen as inextricable from the destabilization of the transcendental ego and a crisis in signification. Now, I would argue, the stakes are no more (and no less) than thought itself as the ground of human freedom, since thinking, according to Kristeva, entails both the ability to interrogate/question/engage in critique *and* the power to *transform* or, as she puts it in her discussion of Sartre, the power to create unreality (*Intimate Revolt* 139). This is, indeed, where she proves to be more faithful to Hegel than she is credited to be, for (as only the best interpreters of Hegel have pointed out) what is at issue in his work is neither totalization nor “the ‘closed economy’ where every loss is in advance recompensed” (Žižek 25). Such an interpretation, Slavoj Žižek rightly emphasizes, “results from a misreading” (25). As both Theodor Adorno and Gillian Rose have also insisted,⁷ the Hegelian saga of *Geist* tells the story of an *aporetic* reason, one suspended between its powers and limits.⁸

It is in this Hegelian tradition of aporetic reason that I would like to situate Kristeva, a thinker whose primary concern has been the co-presence of sense and non-sense, reason and its vicissitudes, thought and sexuality or, as she comes to re-articulate this in *Intimate Revolt*, thought and a-thought. It is interesting that, in the third Volume of *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* entitled *La haine et le pardon*, Kristeva redefines psychoanalysis as a theory that is today not “simply an exploration of desire, but the care of thought” (448; my translation). In a true Hegelian spirit, this practice of care involves attention to the negative that Hegel places at the heart of the mediating activity of thought, as well as a much-needed fidelity to what seems to be the most misunderstood of Hegel’s aims, as he discusses them in his Preface to *The Phenomenology of Mind*: namely, “the strenuous effort . . . to raise men’s eyes to the stars; as if men had quite forgotten the divine, and were on the verge of finding satisfaction, like worms, in mud and water” (5). This relates, of course, to the vexed issue of Hegel’s idealism and

⁷ Rose writes: “The aim of both ‘authorships’ – that of Kierkegaard and that of Hegel – . . . is how, contra Kant, to bring Revelation into philosophy: aesthetically, as the incursion of the incomprehensible; philosophically, as triune or aporetic reason – universal, particular and singular. Against the Christian tradition, Revelation does not mean that redemption is realized; against the tradition of Hegel interpretation, revelation makes it impossible to attribute the equation of thought and being to the System. In both of these authorships Revelation serves to leave the ethical open and unresolved. This is why their work – even their logic – is obsessed with beginning, and why the tradition which reads philosophy aesthetically, sees only the absurdity of ‘receiving everything back’ or ‘reconciliation’ or even ‘totalization’” (18).

⁸ In *The Suspension of Reason in Hegel and Schelling* Christopher Lauer throws into relief the connotations of “suspension” (i.e., postponement, taking out of action but also preserving to a higher level) behind the controversial term *Aufhebung* (3-6) and argues that Hegel is concerned to “explore the manifold ways that reason proves to be inadequate to the task it gives itself” (5). What is at stake, then, in Hegel is “when and how reason should be suspended” (9). He adds: “The suspension of reason only becomes meaningful when we grant it the freedom to define and redefine itself” (10).

his theological bend. As Brian O'Connor has spelled out, thought *qua* mediation in Hegel is “*an elevation*, not a lateral implication” (my emphasis) and needs to be understood in light of his concern with “knowledge of the absolute,” in other words, God. In the context of psychoanalysis within which Kristeva is working, this elevating move signified by what remains a controversial term (i.e., *Aufhebung*) translates into the equally vexed issue of sublimation which, as Joel Whitebook rightly complains, has come to be discredited due to the privileging of its utilitarian ends (that is, its function in producing the socially useful) and its reliance on a hierarchical opposition between the “higher” realm of cultural achievement and the “lower” realm of earthly sexuality. In his account, “a coherent theory of sublimation remains one of the lacunae in psychoanalytic thought” (219), a problem which, I want to argue, Kristeva (especially in her latest work) helps us to redress.

Indeed, in her reading of Sartre in *Intimate Revolt* Kristeva points to “two phases – and two metaphors – that describe” what she calls Sartre’s “expansion of *Nichtung*: repulsion, in its physical and physiological sense, and transcendence, with its sublimatory sense of surpassing and elevation” (154-55). “This dynamic,” she adds, “will not be foreign to those familiar with my work” (155). In fact, as she makes clear, it is precisely this dynamic that she wishes to foreground in her own theorization and practice of psychoanalysis. She writes: “What I am saying here is not aimed at reconciling Sartre with psychoanalysis. . . . I am simply urging you to contemplate, by putting them face to face, two ultimately complicitous attempts that aimed to promote what is perhaps humanity’s most sovereign venture: *questioning transcendence in transcendence itself*, to the point of atheism” (139; my emphasis). One of my main aims in this essay is to invite readers to rethink Kristeva’s project in these terms, which resuscitate Hegel (for whom the absolute was “love disporting with itself” 10), though perhaps, as she would put it, “in a strange [profoundly atheist] costume” (*Kristeva Reader* 31). As I shall demonstrate, at issue here is our understanding of language (which, Kristeva insists on reminding us, is for Freud the “higher side of man;” *Sense and Non-Sense* 30) as a Last Supper scene and, hence, as one of the (uncomfortable) remainders of a certain infamous Christian Hegel.

Language as a Last Supper Scene

As we know, this Hegel lies at the heart of Derrida’s deconstructive critique in *Glas*. In this context, Hegel’s interpretation of the Last Supper scene in “The Spirit of Christianity” serves as the background for Derrida’s demonstration of the ultimately auto-affective economy of the Hegelian *Geist*. As Derrida shows, what sustains this economy is a thought of language as a form of *Aufhebung*, that is, as a relief not only of the material thing (the referent) but also of the sensible, exterior signifier and, hence, as a foreclosure of writing and its distinctly differential, disseminating movement. For Derrida, the Hegelian dialectic of language is essentially “a dialectophagy,” i.e., a

dialectic of *the tongue* that gulps down its material body and vomits any remains (9). As such, its function in Hegel's cannibalistic economy is analogous to that of love in his account of the Last Supper scene. Like Christian love (that transubstantiates bread and wine into Jesus' body and raises the latter to the paternal spirit), language accomplishes (consummates) itself as "ideality, ... [the] thought of the universal" (25) through the consumption of finite, particular being: "To think being as life in the mouth, that is the *logos*," Derrida writes (72).

That Derrida, in his engagement with Hegel's idealism, chooses to focus on the scene of language is not surprising given Alexandre Kojève's emphasis on discourse in his own interpretation of Hegel and the impact this interpretation has had on French Hegelianism. As Stuart Barnett points out, "[w]hat was initially attractive about Kojève's reading was his detranscendentalization of speculative idealism. The discomfiting notions of the Absolute and spirit were transformed into more concrete material notions" (19). Thus, Derrida seems to take up Kojève's suggestion that the task of philosophy is "the elucidation of the character of discourse," understood as the "power to negate given being" (18-19). For Derrida, however, this sublating/sublimating power remains interior (to the System) and ultimately interiorizing. By contrast, Kristeva seems committed to continuing Kojève's project of detranscendentalizing Hegel's elevating quest. Unlike Derrida, she takes the Hegelian staircase to the stars and then uncannily demonstrates that what truly matters is their reflection in a mud pool on the pavement. In *La haine et le pardon* (a collection of essays focusing precisely on thought as the *pardon* of sublimation) she writes: "the *divine* seems to us more and more ... to be a metaphor for *the very ability to represent* which defines to the utmost degree human beings: our capacity to hallucinate/imagine/speak/symbolize" (305; my translation). God, then, she emphasizes, is not "a political, social, or media value, but an interrogation of meaning and language" (89) – and, indeed, an interrogation *through the sharing* of meaning and language. This is, in fact, what in her account renders the scene of language a "love-feast," that is, a space where "a plurality of connections" is possible in "communities that can change and can be questioned" (*Intimate Revolt* 234).

It is this understanding of language as the ever-renewed capacity for connection and, hence, as the ground of human freedom that constitutes, according to Kristeva, "the most precious and most serious gift [*don*]... psychoanalysis has given mankind" (*Intimate Revolt* 234). Significantly, in *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* she sets out to demonstrate how the Freudian scene of language differs from Lacan's familiar version of it. In a chapter entitled "The Metamorphoses of 'Language' in the Freudian Discovery (Freudian Models of Language)," the importance of which has not yet been addressed, she moves on to trace Freud's shift from a layered conception of language based on the heterogeneity of different registers (neuronic excitation, word-presentation/thing-presentation) to an "optimistic" model positing language as "an

intermediate zone, an interface between the unconscious and the conscious” (38-39)⁹ and, finally (after 1912), to a more complex model of a “vaster process of symbolization in which language had its place but was not the common denominator” (50). Kristeva calls this alternative “process, dynamic, and movement of meaning” *signifiance* (37). Because it involves an *anamnetic* return to “[w]here it (*id*) was” (“a perilous place,” Kristeva reminds us, “a difficult position for subjectivity,” 50) the “process of *signifiance* is founded on the negative” (52). As a result, it represents for Kristeva “a profound integration of the Hegelian dialectic into Freudian thought” (56).

Interestingly, Kristeva attempts to elucidate what is at stake in Freudian *signifiance* by revisiting his legendary narrative of the totemic meal that followed the murder of the father, a feast that seeks to transfer the unrepresentable, traumatic act into sacred (i.e., shareable) space and thus constitutes “a symbolic link” (45). As she emphasizes, devouring in this context needs to be understood as a complex mixture of revolt (it is an act of defiance against the tyranny of the dead father) and devotion (it is a celebration and loving assimilation of the father’s authority). If there is a relief in the Freudian version of the Last Supper scene, this refers to the process of forgiveness [*pardon*] that is inextricable from the representation of the murder that establishes community. And if a process of transubstantiation *is* activated, this does not take the form of the “holocaust” that Derrida exposes in his analysis of Hegel, in other words, the sacrifice of the particular for the ideality of the universal. Instead, it takes the form of “a qualitative leap,” Kristeva argues, by means of which the excluded, traumatized “I” is carried *across* in its “becoming power,” that is, in its identification with paternal authority and the symbolic contract resulting from it (*Sense and Non-Sense* 45).

What needs to be noted here is that in her account of Freud’s version of the Last Supper scene Kristeva draws attention to both Freud’s concern with the “alchemy of sublimation, which [he] placed at the heart of the ability to think” (56) and his “troubling” insistence on “asserting the real” or, as she comes to qualify this, “the unavoidable insistence of *being* (outside-subject, outside-language) at the heart of the human speech as it unfolds its negativity” (58). Freudian *signifiance*, then, entails a process of desexualization (i.e., a re-direction of the subject’s libidinal energy to his/her “own aptitude to imagine, to signify, to speak, to think,” *Sense and Non-Sense* 55) as much as a process of resexualization, that is, the opening up of the sublimatory activity to what in her introduction to *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* she calls “experience” (8-11). This, as a matter of fact, constitutes a significant departure from Kristeva’s early concerns. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, *signifiance* is defined as a *practice*, a term she takes pains to distinguish from that of “experience” (193-234). Though she is attentive to Mao Tse-Tung’s insistence that “*personal and direct experience* is the essential materialist feature of practice” (200), she at the same time never ceases to warn her readers against

⁹ As Kristeva points out, it “is on this second model that Lacan will later rely to construct his own theory” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 38).

the danger of reducing the “moment of struggle exploding the subject toward heterogeneous materiality” to *subjective* experience (211). The problem, she emphasizes, is to introduce “the struggle of signifiante . . . no longer just into ‘individual experience’ . . . but also into the objective process of contemporary science, technology, and social relations” (213). This is why the main paradigm of *signifiante* for her in the 1970s is the text, a mode of signification that is “rooted in social practice, or even its revolutionary phase” (196). By contrast, in *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* Kristeva defines her task as “going beyond the notion of text” (8), favoring instead a concept of experience which she goes on to define as “something unknown, surprise, pain, or delight, and *then* comprehension of this impact” (11; my emphasis).

In the remainder of this essay I would like to take the cue Kristeva offers us in her return to and reclamation of experience in order to illuminate *the pathos and ethos of thought* that I want to situate at the heart of her philosophical-cum-psychoanalytic project. Allow me first a brief detour to yet another Last Supper scene: In the opening chapter of the *Phenomenology* Hegel is concerned with the problem that immediate experience (the experience of the “this” and the “now”) constitutes for consciousness. In contrast to empiricism’s assumption of the “givenness” of sensible things, he insists on their truth as negativity. He writes :

. . . we may answer those who thus insist on the truth and certainty of the reality of objects of sense, by saying that they had better be sent back to the most elementary school of wisdom, the ancient Eleusinian mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus; they have not yet learnt the inner secret of the eating of bread and the drinking of wine. For one who is initiated into these mysteries not only comes to doubt the being of things of sense, but gets into a state of despair about it altogether; . . . Even animals are not shut off from this wisdom, but show they are deeply initiated into it. For they do not stand stock still before things of sense as if these were things *per se*, with being in themselves: they despair of this reality altogether, and in complete assurance of the nothingness of things they fall-to without more ado and eat them up. And all nature proclaims, as animals do, these open secrets, these mysteries revealed to all, which teach what the truth of things of sense is. (61)

If, as John Russon astutely reminds us, Hegel’s “ladder to the absolute” is the “way of despair” (21), this is because what appears “given” is lost in the abyss opening between “now” and “no longer now,” between the indexicality of “this” (as a material pointer to the particular) and its simultaneous taking on in language of the universality of a signifier. Despair, then, (which Hegel foregrounds in the extract above) seems to be the product of what he calls “wisdom,” namely, the realization that, in Russon’s words, “we cannot evade the complex problems of meaning – of power, love, communication,

or any other aspects of human meaningfulness – even in our attempt to grasp the sense of a single moment” (21-22). At the same time, this wisdom is the most “elementary” one and takes the form of a concrete, material experience (i.e., the animals’ devouring of sensual things). This is why for Hegel the dialectical process of mediation cum negation that he associates with thought is ultimately a *mysterium*, not a holocaust – as it ends up being in Derrida’s *Glas*. As we see in the extract from the *Phenomenology*, *mysterium* in Hegel is an event in the context of which the suffering of being in its nothingness turns into an intimate suffering that opens consciousness to its own embodied, enfleshed existence. As Russon emphasizes, in Hegel’s dialectic of the now the borders between subject/object, self/other, consciousness and life get blurred (18, 20, 22) in an experience that involves as much violence as it does piety. What we cannot fail to miss here is that life is not the inassimilable morsel stuck in the digestive track of the Hegelian system, but the *open secret* that the system itself (through its tender dialectic of the mouth) guards.

It is significant that in his attempt to trace the reliance of Western metaphysical thought on an originary nothingness, Giorgio Agamben takes as his starting point the Hegelian *mysterium* of the tongue. In his reading, Hegel’s account of “taking-the-This” constitutes an important stage in the development of philosophy as *ontotheology*, that is, as the thinking of its own negative foundation. Metaphysics, he argues, continues to dominate the history of philosophy that has not ceased to unfold around a groundless and unspeakable ground; namely, nothingness as that which “we must abandon to the violence of history and language in order to tear away from it the appearance of a beginning and immediacy” (106).¹⁰ The task for philosophy today, according to Agamben, is to think beyond this nothingness “whose nullity serves as the basis for the arbitrariness and violence of social action” (106). Interestingly and despite his much-debated utopianism, in his re-visiting of the place of negativity in the context of Western metaphysics Agamben appears committed to reclaiming a radically immanent and positive thinking, one grounded precisely no longer on the *having-been* of a long-forgotten foundation¹¹ but on “now” as a Benjamin-inspired interruptive temporal immediacy: “As you *now* speak, that is ethics,” he tells his reader in the Epilogue to *Language and Death* (108; my emphasis). In doing so, he posits the *now* of human discourse as a rupture in the assumed continuum between “Man” as a speaking and “Man” as a living (and, hence, mortal) being, nature and culture, the linguistic and the

¹⁰ In *Homo Sacer* (a book published thirteen years after the original publication of *Language and Death* in 1982) Agamben returns to the Aristotelian concept of *zōē* as precisely the negative site that grounds the Western understanding of politics.

¹¹ The main thrust of Agamben’s argument in *Language and Death* (which is too complex to fully expound here) is that the place of negativity that serves as the groundless ground of Western metaphysics is the *having-been* of a Voice.

human. In his view, the halting of the continuum is necessary if we (“Now”)¹² are to move beyond Metaphysics, understood as the sacrificial philosophical tradition that can think of its relation to the nonrelational (i.e., *zōe*, the animal, the inhuman, *phōnē*) only negatively, in other words, only in terms of abandonment, separation, and exclusion.¹³ At the same time, the temporality of “now” Agamben is eager to re-invest carries some of the implications of Benjamin’s concept of “the fragment” which is both the interruption of the continuum of history *qua* chronology *and* the messianic completion/fulfillment of history. Similarly, the “now” of human discourse erupts as a hiatus within the metaphysical definition of Man (as *zōon logon ēxon*) and constitutes simultaneously the fulfillment of Man as precisely nothing, that is, as a being of pure potentiality and, hence, as essentially poor: “Perhaps man – the animal who seems not to be encumbered by any specific nature or any specific identity – must experience his poverty even more radically,” Agamben suggests. What Agamben calls “infancy” is this radical experience of Man’s poverty (for we are *by nature* deprived of logos) that can return thought to its quotidian, banal life,¹⁴ one no longer based on a transcendent origin (i.e., being and its negative correlative) but on the immanence of human *ethos* (*qua* habit and habitation): “Is it possible that *being* (ontotheology with its component negativity) is not up to the level of the simple mystery of humans’ *having*, of their *habitations* or their *habits*? And what if the dwelling to which we return beyond being were . . . simply the *trite* words that we *have*?” (*Language and Death* 94). To the Hegelian understanding of thought as the way of despair, Agamben opposes thought as the untroubled experience of a missed encounter and the serene return to what is properly humanity’s ethos: namely, “social praxis *itself*, human speech *itself*, which have become transparent to themselves” (*Language and Death* 106, my emphasis). In his Epilogue to *Language and Death* he writes, “We walk through the woods: suddenly we hear the flapping of wings or the wind in the grass. A pheasant lifts off and then disappears instantly among the trees. . . . *Not the encounter but this flight of invisible animals is thought* (108).

Agamben’s insistence on conceptualizing thought as an immanent, mundane practice (such as walking) and a missed encounter with the sensory world, is consistent with his desire to articulate a politics *beyond relation* (*Homo Sacer* 29); a politics, in other words, that lets life (*zōe*) be, unsaved, irredeemable by human logos. In Agamben’s account of the philosophical experience, thought ventures into the open where being lies in its unconcealment but remains intact. Reluctant to commit violence against life, it

¹² Agamben writes: “*Now* we must ask if there is another experience of language within this culture that does not rest on an unspeakable foundation” (*Language and Death* 66; my emphasis).

¹³ See Agamben’s discussion of the ban as a form of relation to the nonrelational in *Homo Sacer* 28-29.

¹⁴ In his discussion of the question of the animal in Agamben, Adrian Mackenzie writes: “... thinking leads a quotidian, not a transcendent life. This means that it must involve, as Agamben says, ‘everyday zones, a very banal, quotidian mysticism’” (Ross 161).

remains inviolable. Though it registers an outside, it does so only as that which “is always in the process of being lost” (*Profanations* 27). His, then, is a profoundly undialectical thought which, in its attempt to “jam” what he calls “the anthropological machine”¹⁵ (i.e., the ruthless logic that binds the non-human to the human), redefines itself as the serenity of humanity’s homecoming, leaving life blissfully abandoned in the open: “... and now we turn back,” he concludes, “untroubled toward home” (108).

Kristeva and the Nobility of Thought

The reason why I have devoted so much space to Agamben’s reclamation of a banal, radically immanent thought is because it will allow me to throw into relief the value of Kristeva’s (quaintly old-fashioned) insistence on the *nobility* of thought. As I propose to argue, the *dignitas* of thought in Kristeva lies as much in its *pathos*, its experience of a suffering resulting from “a monstrous intimacy” with Being and its *ethos*, which goes beyond Agamben’s understanding of the social praxis of human discourse and has more to do with the qualitative leap from Man’s infantile dwelling in language to “the most elaborate spheres of my culture”¹⁶ and from the “now” of the pure mediality of a discourse transparent to itself to the *then* of knowledge and understanding.¹⁷ It is in this context, I believe, that Kristeva’s rethinking of experience deserves our attention. In “The Love of Another Language,” an essay on writing as a translation of the sensory world, Kristeva unpacks the understanding of experience that she introduced in *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*.¹⁸ Drawing on Heidegger, she sets out to discuss literature as an *experience* by bringing together and re-investing the two terms that denote “experience” in German. To start with, *Erlebnis* carries connotations of an affect-charged event that de-subjectivizes the human through the opening up of the destinal horizon that links the human with Being. Given her earlier concern over the danger of reducing the negative force of *signifiance* to a subjective crisis, Kristeva’s remembering (indeed, her *un/forgetting*) of Being in her current involvement with literature and psychoanalysis (two of the remaining sites of thought, according to her, that need reviving)¹⁹ is most important. What is at stake in the invocation of what she

¹⁵ See Matthew Calarco’s “Jamming the Anthropological Machine” in Calarco and DeCaroli 163-179.

¹⁶ Experience, writes Kristeva, “leads my infantilism to the most elaborate spheres of my culture” (*Intimate Revolt* 251).

¹⁷ It is worth returning to Kristeva’s definition of experience in *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*: “But I think we all need an experience, by which I mean something unknown, surprise, pain, or delight, and *then* comprehension of this impact” (11; my emphasis).

¹⁸ The French edition of *Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* was published in 1996, the year when the essay itself was presented at Barnard College, New York. An English translation of the essay was included in *Intimate Revolt* (2002).

¹⁹ See her speech in the context of the Holberg Prize award ceremony, published in *La haine et le pardon* as “Penser la liberté en temps de détresse” (18).

calls “the transsubjective appeal of a ray of light in what Heidegger calls Being” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 57) is precisely the destabilization of the “Now” of human discourse through the eruption within it of the timeless temporality of a lost foundation. Though this foundation is the place of negativity where both language and thought are destined to return, it is not inscribed in the metaphysical logic Agamben exposes. Rather than erase Man’s infantile dwelling in language in order to preserve the continuity between nature and culture, *physis* and *logos*, it constitutes instead the site where “the namable and the unnamable, the instinctual and the symbolic, language and what is not language, are dissociated” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 50). Because, as Kristeva points out, this “there” is “an anamnesis, a memory buried in the unconscious” (50), it is, at the same time, a “fragile, painful and jubilant” link with “the other that exalts or destabilizes me” and a reclamation of the subject’s “narcissistic sense of inadequacy,” that is, his/her inherent poverty as an *infans* (*Intimate Revolt* 251-52). Experience for Kristeva is precisely this fragile, painful and jubilant link that “extracts thought from the yoke of the rational” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 19) and opens it to a “monstrous Eucharist” with Being.²⁰

Kristeva describes such a monstrous Eucharist in her discussion of St. John’s radical semiology in *New Maladies of the Soul*. As she explains in her careful analysis of John’s understanding of signification, “according to the Evangelist, a sign does not formally indicate something for the person who receives it. A sign only has a value for its addressee if it responds to the sensory needs of the receiver” (128). In other words, the open secret of life turns into a sign-gift for us (its addressees) only if we approach it from the site of a lack which is inextricable from our own enfleshed existence: “you are hungry and thirsty,” the Evangelist reminds us (quoted by Kristeva, *New Maladies* 128). Thought (as well as language) in Kristeva begins with the acknowledgement of this need that, however, “signs-foods” are not adequate to satisfy (*New Maladies* 129). As Kristeva emphasizes in her subsequent analysis of St. John’s Gospel, a shift is necessary from the sign *qua* object/gift to the sign as *metaphor*, i.e., to the sign as a transfer (a leap, crossing, passage) to the infinite or indeed, the divine which in Kristeva, as we have seen, is synonymous with what she calls “the architecture of the idea in the human mind” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 19) and our infinite capacity for signification. It is in this light, I argue, that we need to read Kristeva’s insistence on the transcendence of “then” denoted by experience as *Erfahrung*. In “The Love of Another Language” she writes: “Experience makes a new object spring forth: immediate seizure, outpouring, blaze (*Erlebnis*). It *subsequently* [“then”] becomes a knowledge of this surging forth, a *patient* knowing (*Erfahrung*)” (*Intimate Revolt* 251; my emphasis). If what is achieved through the qualitative temporal leap entailed in experience is a “patient knowing” this is because for Kristeva (as for Hegel) the immanent ethos of “Now” needs to “take upon itself the

²⁰ Kristeva uses the term “monstrous Eucharist” in her analysis of Annette Messager’s *Casino* in *La haine et le pardon* 536.

prodigious labour of the world's history" (Hegel 17);²¹ in other words, it needs to open to the responsibility of history as the destiny of both subject and meaning: "subjectivity is coextensive to time – an individual's time, history's time, being's time [...]. *We are subjects and there is time*," Kristeva writes (*Sense and Non-Sense* 9; emphasis in the original). As I understand it, thought in Kristeva is this *patience* that carries with it both the labour of the negative (as the timeless time of Being) and the promise of a *surplus* of time gained through the infinity of meaning.

To conclude, though (contra Agamben) Kristeva remains faithful to the negative, her understanding of thought retains nothing of the Hegelian pathos in the face of the open secret of life. Her response to the suffering of embodiment that destabilizes consciousness is neither despair nor serene in/difference but an *Exultate, Jubilate* that is inseparable from what for her is "humanity's most sovereign venture: questioning transcendence in transcendence itself" (*Sense and Non-Sense* 10; *Intimate Revolt* 139). This is, indeed, what she underscores in her analysis of Hans Haacke's 1993 installation that forces the viewer to experience the collapse of a foundation: "... there is an exquisite ambiguity to this moment," she writes, "harrowing though it is, for it is not solely negative. The simple fact that an installation has been created in a place where the foundations are disintegrating gives rise to a question as well as to anxiety" (*Sense and Non-Sense* 10). If this question is "a sign of life," this is because it points to the ethos of thought as revolt (i.e., as subversion, critique, return, displacement) (10). It also points, however, to the sublimatory power of thought, the "then" "likely to give" this revolt "the dignity of Beauty" (*Sense and Non-Sense* 7). As she admits, this sign of life "isn't quite jubilation or exultation, as the response being formulated is minute" (10). Yet, I think she would agree with Hegel who (with his gaze fixed to the stars) concedes: "By the little which can thus satisfy the needs of the human spirit we can measure the extent of its loss" (5).

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²¹ Hegel writes: "Impatience asks for the impossible, wants to reach the goal without the means of getting there. The length of the journey has to be borne with, for every moment is necessary; . . . Because the substance of individual mind, nay, more, because the universal mind at work in the world, has had the patience to go through these forms in the *long stretch of time's extent*, and to take upon itself the prodigious labour of the world's history..." (16-17; my emphasis).

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Strange New Beauty : In Defense of Kristevan Sublimation

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Abstract: In this paper, I suggest that Julia Kristeva offers a powerful account of the concept of sublimation, which, to use her terminology, involves the symbolic registration of the semiotic at the level of *symbolic form*. Kristevian sublimation involves the acknowledgment of the radical alterity of the semiotic-unconscious, and registers the impact of this alterity through a transformation of the symbolic. As evidenced in the analysand's speech or in works of art, sublimation attempts to present the unrepresentable in the very texture that represents (*Tales of Love* 368). For Kristeva, sublimation does not imply the articulation of new "things" (i.e., heretofore unexpressed or unconscious feelings, affects, thoughts, etc.) : rather it registers the symbolic demand for a new expressive form.

Résumé: Dans cet article, je suggère que Julia Kristeva propose le meilleur compte rendu de la sublimation qui, pour utiliser sa terminologie, implique l'inscription symbolique du sémiotique au niveau de la *forme* symbolique. Chez Kristeva la sublimation reconnaît l'altérité radicale du sémiotique-inconscient, et enregistre les répercussions de cette altérité à travers une transformation du symbolique. Comme en témoignent le discours de l'analysant ou les œuvres d'art, la sublimation tente de présenter l'irreprésentable dans la texture même qu'il représente (*Tales of Love* 368). Pour Kristeva, la sublimation n'implique pas l'articulation de nouvelles "choses" (c'est-à-dire, des sentiments inexprimés jusqu'alors ou inconscients, des affects, des pensées, etc.) : elle enregistre l'exigence d'une nouvelle forme d'expression du symbolique.

Keywords: sublimation – alterity – semiotic – symbolic – *chora* – Nietzsche – unconscious – consciousness



While Freud never put forth a treatise on the topic, the concept of sublimation is crucial to the entire architectonic of psychoanalysis at both the theoretical and clinical levels. As Laplanche and Pontalis write, "in psycho-analytic literature the concept of sublimation is frequently called upon; the idea indeed answers a basic need in the Freudian doctrine and it is hard to see how it could be dispensed with" (433). Very broadly, sublimation is meant to designate a non-neurotic relationship between the unconscious and consciousness. It explains the means by which the unconscious drives can be channeled in a contributive manner into culture, or, put differently, how unconscious forces are transformed and

incorporated into social and symbolic forms. That is, if the unconscious could speak in a voice other than symptoms and dreams, that voice would be sublimation.

Despite its clear centrality to the psychoanalytic account of the human psyche, the role of sublimation remains imprecisely defined. It has been variously presented – by Freud and others – negatively, as the repressive domestication of the drives,¹ or as a form of defense,² and positively, as the ideal of psychic development,³ or as a rare and exceptional capacity to satisfy drives through aesthetic creation.⁴ Yet while these interpretations are clearly divergent, common to all of them is a tendency to frame the sublimatory relationship as one of antagonism or compromise, with the unruly impulses of the unconscious acquiescing to the orderly demands of consciousness. When conceived negatively, consciousness is regarded as a repressive tyrant, and when viewed positively, consciousness appears impressively flexible and capable of negotiating with an intractable unconscious, molding the latter's demands to suit the former's.

The problem is that if we regard these conceptions of sublimation from the perspective of a thinker like Nietzsche, sublimation appears to be an essentially *reactive* relationship, with the drives adapting to the impingements of consciousness or civilization, and the latter responding to the disruptive unconscious drives by “saying No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different’” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy I* §10). According to the above interpretations, sublimation seems a basically defensive or conciliatory process that renders innocuous the drives and their potentially subversive force.

This essay works to offer an alternative to these conceptions of sublimation, an alternative motivated by the desiderata of Nietzsche and thinkers following him for a non-defensive relationship between heterogeneous registers of experience. With this

¹ For example, for Adorno the concept of sublimation is simply “socially desirable activity naively glorified by Freud” (“Minima Moralia” 214), and constitutes “false reconciliation” in and with an unreconciled world. In response to such an interpretation, see for example Loewald’s essay “Sublimation” (in Loewald 2000) which works to undermine the strictly defensive interpretation of sublimation by demonstrating that the supposedly “defensive” secondary structures (like language) are not externally imposed vicissitudes of the drives but are in fact intrinsic manifestations of drive activity. Whitebook (1995) works to defend the concept of sublimation against the Adornian critique by employing Loewald’s notions of reconciliation and differentiated unity (which indeed bears resemblances to Adorno’s concept of “nonviolent synthesis”).

² In “Instincts and their Vicissitudes,” Freud groups sublimation amongst modes of *defense*, i.e., operations aimed at the reduction of instinctual excitations (more specifically, their ideational representatives) liable to disrupt the equilibrium of the psyche.

³ Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel contrasts the proper or genuine development characteristic of sublimation with the only seeming developed but in fact regressive economy of the pervert. See *The Ego Ideal: A Psychoanalytic Essay on the Malady of the Ideal* (1985) and *Creativity and Perversion*. (1996)

⁴ For example, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1930) writes: “A satisfaction . . . such as an artist’s joy in creating, in giving his phantasies body, or a scientist’s in solving problems or discovering truths, has a special quality which we shall certainly one day be able to characterize in metapsychological terms. At present we can only say figuratively that such satisfaction seem ‘finer and higher.’ . . . The weak point of this method is that it is not applicable generally: it is accessible to only a few people” (26).

philosophical commitment in mind, the above conceptions of sublimation – albeit briefly sketched – appear plainly unacceptable, predicated as they are on de-radicalizing the demands of the unconscious, either by coercive incorporation or defensive refusal. A satisfactory post-Nietzschean theory of sublimation, then, must be able to describe a relationship between consciousness and the unconscious that is irreducible to either blind rejection or appropriative inclusion. Different though they are, both of these mechanisms refuse the task of tarrying with the alterity of the unconscious, both fail to heed its unique claims on consciousness. What Nietzsche calls the “tension of the soul” (*Beyond Good and Evil* §225) – the tension of a divided psyche – is in both cases reduced or denied, whereas a post-Nietzschean sublimation must respond to and even cultivate this tension.

To represent a non-defensive and even productive interaction between the unconscious and consciousness – a vision true to Freud’s own – sublimation must describe a dynamic form of coherence or collaboration, organized not only by the structures of consciousness but *also* by the enigmatic demands of the unconscious. If everyday language is predicated on the repression of or disengagement from the unconscious, while symptoms and dreams indicate the overwhelming of symbolism by the unconscious, sublimation functions as the cultivated expression in which the unconscious finds a voice of its own, its proper form. Thus sublimation is not a matter of translating the unconscious into a language already known with which consciousness is familiar, of expressing something unknown in the language of something known (Nietzsche, *Will to Power* §479), but rather of articulating new languages, a “strange new beauty” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* II §18). It is my claim that Julia Kristeva’s work displays a sustained effort to provide such an account.

In what follows, I will present Kristeva’s developmental psychoanalytic theory in general and her discussion of sublimation in particular as attempts to re-conceive sublimation in non-defensive terms. Specifically, I will argue that sublimation involves, to use Kristevan terminology (to be explained in the next section), the symbolic registration of the semiotic at the level of symbolic *form*. On this account, the unconscious or semiotic is not some kind of object to be described, nor is it pure force to be expressed or satisfied in a neutral symbolic receptacle. Responding to or expressing the unconscious does not leave the symbolic undisturbed, but results in a transformation of the very form of the symbolic itself. Kristevan sublimation works to attest to the radical alterity of the semiotic and register the impact of this alterity through the transformation of the symbolic order; as evidenced in the analysand’s speech or in works of art, sublimation works to present the unrepresentable in the very texture that represents (*Tales of Love* 368). This, we might say, is Kristeva’s account of a sublimatory grammar: sublimation does not involve articulating new “things” (i.e., heretofore unexpressed feelings, affects, thoughts, etc.), but demanding a new expressive form. If neurosis defends against the claims of the semiotic and only involuntarily registers these claims in the form of symptoms, sublimation is the

mechanism that responds to the authority of these claims by embodying them in the symbolic structure itself.

Primary Narcissism, the Semiotic and the Symbolic: the Kristevan Topography

Kristeva's theory of sublimation is a key feature of her more general developmental account of subjectivity, which is premised on a re-thinking of both Freudian and Lacanian primary narcissism. Against both of these thinkers, for whom the Oedipal Father functions as the necessary third term which interrupts and supplements the mother-child dyad *from the outside*, Kristeva's notion of primary narcissism is an already ternary processive structure that precedes and conditions the relationship of terms that constitutes the Oedipal triangle. According to Freud, "originally the ego included everything" (*Civilization* 68) and its "development . . . consists in a departure from primary narcissism" ("On Narcissism" 100). While Freud never offered a precise definition of primary narcissism, this stage is characterized most significantly by its lack of differentiations; as Laplanche and Pontalis write, "the term [primary narcissism] is invariably taken to mean a strictly 'objectless' – or at any rate 'undifferentiated' – state, implying no split between subject and external world" (338), that is, no difference *for the infant*. Kristeva will challenge this interpretation, suggesting instead that while there are no binary differences or discrete others *as such*, the infant does experience differentiation and otherness. For Kristeva, the Oedipal triangle does not bring about subjectivity and language *ex nihilo*; both are prefigured in the provisionally differentiated structure of primary narcissism.

In Kristeva's developmental account, primary narcissism is not originary, but develops out of an earlier state that she calls the semiotic *chora*.⁵ Prior "chronologically and logically" (*Desire in Language* 283) to the onset of linguistic capacities, the semiotic *chora* is constituted by affects and drives, "discrete quantities of energy" (*Black Sun* 264), structured and arranged in and according to its environment. As such, the *chora* is not self-contained corporeal life but is always already structured and organized in relation to the symbolic, insofar as the infant's environment (i.e., its caregivers) *is* symbolic. The drives are from the start related to pre-objectal difference, "not because they are already symbolic, but because within the semiotic body there is already an exposure to otherness" ("Desire in Language" 32), otherness irreducible to the binaries of inside/outside or subject/object. Thus while there exists a pre-symbolic or bodily register of experience, the semiotic cannot be disconnected from its relations with the symbolic, just as the symbolic is inextricably bound to the semiotic.

The infant's first exposure to otherness is organized and constituted by what Kristeva calls "maternal authority" (for instance, controlling what goes into the child's

⁵ Kristeva borrows this term from Plato's *Timaeus*. There, Plato describes the *chora* as something "which always *is*, admitting not of destruction and providing a seat for all that has birth" (52B).

body, holding the child, etc.), which provides the necessary foundations for the child's entrance into the symbolic, the social world of language, and shared meaning. The regulations within the symbiotic relation with the mother provide "the necessary conditions that . . . constitute the semiotic disposition and insure its maintenance within the symbolic" (*Desire in Language* 285). Again, this early stage cannot be conceived as the pre-objectal oceanic oneness Freud had envisioned,⁶ or as an encompassing fusion of the child with the mother's body, but must rather be understood as the most tenuous and unstable moment of relatedness, the earliest exposure to otherness. The provisional, tentative regulation of the semiotic vis-à-vis the symbolic (m)other allows the order of the symbolic to map onto the proto-order of semiotic, so to speak, thereby creating a heterogeneous symbolic order, a symbolic infused with the energy and affect of the semiotic. This should not suggest that the symbolic either masks or overcomes the semiotic; rather the relationship between the semiotic and symbolic is best conceived as a hinge or pivot, with the symbolic both continuous with and differentiated from the semiotic.

Before the symbolic attains authority, the ego is "uncertain, fragile, threatened, subjected just as much as its non-object to spatial ambivalence (inside/outside uncertainty) and to ambiguity of perception (pleasure/pain)" (*Powers of Horror* 62). The child's entry into language is concomitant with the inauguration of a world of differences. Prior to that, the pre-ego is marked by the chaos of uncertain borders and affective fluctuation. This unstable stage is characterized by painful ambivalence and tension: proximity with the mother threatens to overwhelm even as it promises to comfort, while separation indicates both freedom and loss. If sublimation functions in part to enable a kind of revisitation of primary narcissism, this will not be a return to an idyllic origin, as Freud's "oceanic oneness" might suggest,⁷ but rather will function as the rearticulation of an experience that registers the psyche's being torn between the realms of sign and affect, meaning and nonmeaning : on the brink of sense and nonsense.

In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva posits a two-fold psychic action that ensures the transference of the semiotic to the site of language, motivating the transition towards stability. The advent of a discrete other, of opposition, indeed of language is preceded by the concurrent mechanisms of *identification* and *abjection*, which articulate the

⁶ One problem with the Freudian picture of primary narcissism as a strictly objectless state is that it becomes difficult to account for the development of objects and object relations out of this entirely self-enclosed phase. In Kristeva's account, primary narcissism includes relations with otherness, with some form of externality, and thus allows for a development towards mature object relationships.

⁷ Freud writes: "originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive – indeed, an all-embracing – feeling which corresponded to a more intimate bond between the ego and the world about it . . . the ideational contents appropriate to [this primary ego-feeling] would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe – the same ideas with which my friend elucidated the 'oceanic' feeling" (*Civilization* 68).

interpersonal and intrapsychic connections and separateness necessary for mature psychic functioning, symbolic capabilities, and a bounded self. Drives and affect find new satisfactions in and as symbolic forms, and the latter is filled out and given body through the force of the semiotic; while the two registers of meaning are analytically separable and it can be helpful to speak as though they were distinct, in fact the semiotic and symbolic remain inextricably intertwined from the moment they become articulated within primary narcissism.

The infant must separate from the intimate and potentially overwhelming maternal body by means of an ambivalent rejection and abjection, and must at the same time identify with what Freud called the father of “personal prehistory” (“The Ego and the Id” 31), or the imaginary father: put differently, the symbiotic proximity with the not-yet-other must be severed and a new, more dynamic connection with that lost other must be re-established in language. Only by losing the mother is a relationship with the imaginary father possible, only thanks to this loss do symbolic connections become properly meaningful. For Kristeva, this imaginary figure⁸ is not the prohibitive Oedipal father, but a loving and promising presence that provides compensation for the child as it rejects the maternal body that continues to be the primary source of care even as it threatens to engulf. On Freud’s account, the third term that disengages the mother-child dyad is the punitive father of law (the voice of the super-ego), while for Kristeva the third term that marks the initial steps towards subjectivity is a more ambiguous figure, a “simple virtuality, a potential presence, a form to be cathected” (*Tales of Love* 43). Expanding upon Freud’s brief mention of the identification with the father of *pre*-history as direct and prior to any object relation (“The Ego and the Id” 31), Kristeva suggests that this first immediate engagement with the figure of mediation – a third – introduces not a first object, but the condition of possibility for that first object, the condition for the capacity to engage an other as both separate and related.

Early identification, for Kristeva as for Freud, is characteristic of the oral phase, “where what I incorporate is what I become, where *having* amounts to *being*” (Kristeva *Tales of Love* 25). Because identification constitutes a relation with otherness prior to the distinction of subject and object, that which is identified with is not an object *per se* but an outline or a pattern to be imitated, with which one’s relation is not interactive but mimetic; for Kristeva, the “material” that best lends itself to this slippage between having and being is precisely language (*Tales of Love* 26). The child’s oral incorporation of words, her identification with the meaningful gestures and speech of the other, results with her assimilating this structure, where *having* the speech of the other amounts to *being* (or becoming) a speaking subject. Kristeva writes, “[w]hen the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other – precisely a nonobject, a pattern, a model – I bind myself to him in a primary fashion, communion, unification. An identification” (26).

⁸ While Kristeva refers to this figure as the imaginary *father*, she is clear that this figure appears prior to the child’s awareness of sexual difference and thus contains attributes of both parents, both sexes (*Tales of Love* 26).

This identification with the language of the other already requires a kind of re-routing of drives or proto-sublimation on the part of the not-yet-subject, where pleasure is produced not merely by “the joys of chewing, swallowing, nourishing oneself” (26) but by words and gestures, or more broadly, by libidinal investment in psychic activity. This early internalization does not immediately endow the infant with meaning or the capacity for speech, but introduces possibility, initiating the transition from using the language of the other to becoming a subject of language.

This propulsion towards and identification with the speech of the imaginary father is predicated upon and concomitant with the rejection of the maternal body. In order to engage the world of discrete objects and language, the child must split the mother into the abject (that which threatens boundaries with confusion) *and* the object (of desire and language). Kristeva writes:

The abject confronts us . . . within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before existing outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. (*Powers of Horror* 13)

Abjection constitutes the earliest struggle with the mother who “will eventually constitute an object separated from the Ego” (*Tales of Love* 41), but who, at this stage, represents the fusion of the child with its environment, a fusion that permits no space for individuation or meaning. Abjection is the convulsive rejection of a non-object, an attempt to institute a boundary between myself and that which is still a part of me. Abjection is difficult and painful precisely because in rejecting the not-yet-separate maternal body, the child experiences and enacts a rejection of self, an auto-rejection. Because there is such ambivalence surrounding this necessary moment, the imperative to separate from the mother, who continues to be the source of support, indeed of life, must in fact be facilitated by the mother herself through her own interest in and *desire* for an *other*. Kristeva writes:

The loving mother, different from the caring and clinging mother, is someone who has an object of desire; beyond that, she has an Other with relation to whom the child will serve as a go-between. . . . Without the maternal ‘diversion’ toward a Third Party, the bodily exchange is abjection or devouring. (*Tales of Love* 34)

The revelation of the mother’s desire for something other than (providing for) the child directs the child’s attentions toward some *other* (“I am not my mother’s sole object, thus there must be more than she and I”): by indicating otherness, she indicates the world. As Kelly Oliver emphasizes, “this is the move from the mother’s body to the mother’s

desire through the mother's love" (70). Through the institution of a space between the self and the (m)other, and at the same time, the establishment of the mimetic relationship between the child and language, the initial, tentative space for thinking, for language, is established.

Through identification and abjection, the structure of primary narcissism secures the division and connection, the division *as* connection, both within the psyche and between psyche and world. This is an *essential* division, "the root of the human psyche," the alternative being non-differentiation (or at least inadequate differentiation), barring the child from desire and language. As Kristeva asserts, "narcissism protects emptiness, causes it to exist, and thus, as a lining of that emptiness, insures an elementary separation" (*Tales of Love* 23-24). Entry into language is only feasible by suffering loss: "sadness [is the] imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway" (*Black Sun* 22). Without loss there would be no space for thinking, no motivation to re-establish a connection with the other by means of language. Primary narcissism is thus representative of the initial impact of otherness, the first registration of difference, both between the self and other, and within the self, in terms of the developing differentiation between semiotic and symbolic. Looked at from the perspective of the Oedipus complex, which secures the separateness of the other and the discreteness of the self, this period of insufficient differentiation can only appear threatening, potentially annihilating, pathological. Yet in her claim that primary narcissism, like the Oedipus complex, is never finally overcome but ever revisited and reworked, Kristeva is insisting that the apparent stability of the Oedipal or symbolic differences that characterize mature psychic functioning is continually undone and established anew by the insistence of primary narcissism. The life of the psyche is in part the negotiation of this undoing, where the unmediated (or insufficiently mediated) impact of otherness is experienced either as a traumatic blow, or as an occasion for transformation: to put it with Nietzsche, illness, undergoing, is also pregnancy (*Genealogy* II §19). For Kristeva, sublimation represents the possibility of a productive and creative re-negotiation of this tenuous moment of psychic life.

On the one hand, then, primary narcissism and the semiotic more generally must be repressed and overcome in order to engage the symbolic. Participation in the symbolic represents a psychic achievement, a capacity accomplished by way of transcending the semiotic.⁹ On the other hand, the semiotic and the dynamics of primary narcissism cannot be repressed absolutely for to do so would result in psychic pathology, a kind of defensive splitting. For Kristeva, sublimation represents the psychic labor of engaging a non-defensive, non-pathologized relationship with the semiotic:

⁹ Even this language of transcendence is not quite correct, for in truth the symbolic and semiotic are generated concomitantly. The semiotic is misrepresented when figured as the merely bodily that the symbolic rests upon. Rather, the semiotic is the other of the symbolic and is hence nonexistent prior to the symbolic: there is only a semiotic for speaking beings. Nevertheless, the semiotic is the repressed other of the symbolic, and thus it is at least permissible to speak of transcending the former.

whereas neurotic symptom formation is indicative of an involuntary registration of the impact of the unconscious, sublimation is the attempt to undergo and in some sense *suffer* this impact, while at the same time giving it new form or expression. Whether as the excessive fullness of the drives or the gaping loss of maternal proximity, sublimation attempts to take up the traces of the impact of primary narcissism, not to endow it with symbolic sense, but in order to articulate the sense that is already immanent to the semiotic. Sublimation is thus a revival of the dynamics of primary narcissism in order to find articulation for this mode of embodiment and mindedness, this particular and exigent form of being in the world. Kristeva writes: “the aesthetic task – a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct – amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn” (*Powers of Horror* 18). What is re-experienced in sublimation *qua* retracing is precisely the axis connecting nonmeaning and meaning, self and other, the ambivalent and precarious moment of intimacy-becoming-separation, of affect-becoming-word. By contrast, certain forms of psychic pathology – neurosis and psychosis – can indicate the inability to engage in this retracing and an avoidance of the need to acknowledge the authority of the semiotic.

If sublimation works to accomplish an incomplete return to the destabilized, initial moments of subjectivity, then accompanying profound sublimation is always the risk of psychic disintegration, radical meaninglessness, madness or silence. To descend to the foundations of the speaking subject without active transformation would result in a kind of psychosis or melancholia, whereas Kristeva is advocating sublimation as return and creative working through. For Kristeva, then, sublimation must involve a dialectic or dynamic where the movement of return is completed through symbolic articulation, for otherwise sublimation and regression would be indistinguishable. Further, this articulation does not amount to speaking *about* this experience or *about* certain repressed contents, but rather involves attesting to a fundamental disquiet and dissonance that founds and accompanies language and psychic life. This is accomplished, for Kristeva, through a transformation at the level of *form*, what Kristeva calls poetic language: symbolization that realizes the possibilities inherent in language by breaking from its strictly referential univocity and wandering “at the limits of the thinkable” (“Desire in Language” 276).

Sublimation: The Presence of the Unrepresentable in the Texture that Represents

For Kristeva, primary narcissism represents the first and most fragile registration of difference, of both external and internal otherness, an impact as overwhelming as it is promising. While Kristeva acknowledges that this stage must in some sense be overcome, all of her work can be read as an insistence that the structure of primary narcissism cannot be neglected or repressed, as though inessential or merely propaedeutic. While the *stage* of primary narcissism must be transcended, its economy or

structure must be reinvested and attended. That is, if primary narcissism functions as the ground for subjectivity and language, as the first negotiation of body and world by means of the mind, then its rejection would constitute a pathological refusal of an essential aspect of what it means to be a self, what it means to have a world. Sara Beardsworth has argued that, each in its own, psychoanalysis, religion, and art, as analyzed by Kristeva, represents an attempt to facilitate this more intimate negotiation of semiotic and symbolic, which is to say that psychoanalysis, religion, and art function as revisitations of the structures of primary narcissism.¹⁰ Such discourses – what we might call sacred discourses – work to provide social and symbolic mediation for the subject’s less mediated encounters with the semiotic, accommodating and giving sense to such pre-discursive dynamics. According to Beardsworth, Kristeva’s key insight lies in her recognition of a dimension of subjectivity and meaning – namely the point of tension or confusion between the semiotic on the symbolic – that requires specific forms of symbolic mediation, forms whose function is to mediate this tension. The reengagement of primary narcissism is necessary for a flourishing psychic life, and this must be pursued through shared symbolic forms. Importantly, it means that this process of revisitation, whether in religious practice, aesthetic experience, or on the couch, is precisely a *meaningful* experience, which is to say that it takes place in language, through the symbolic. Language is not abandoned in favor of immediacy or pure affect but is the very means by which this relationship with the semiotic is established.

However, while a meaningful relationship with the semiotic cannot take place independently of language, nor will an excessively intellectualized revisitation suffice. As Freud also perceived, a purely “intellectual acceptance of the repressed” will leave untouched “what is essential to the repression” (“Repression” 236), namely, the affective element. That is, any attempt to articulate the semiotic unconscious without the concomitant expression of affect would fail to transform the relationship with the semiotic, which is also to say such an attempt would not amount to sublimation. Thus, while affect without meaning – a pure cry – is insufficient for sublimation, similarly insufficient is a sterile conceptual description – a diagnosis, or a merely intellectual acknowledgment of an experience or feeling. In the former case, the distinction between affect and sign is collapsed, while in the latter the separation of the two is rigidified.

For Kristeva, sublimation is always a matter of a symbolic transformation at the level of *form*. To acknowledge the demands of the semiotic requires, not (only) an interpretation of the contents of the unconscious – memories, desires, or fantasies, for example – but the registration of the differentiating effects of the semiotic on the symbolic itself, on its very structure. A predominantly symbolic order represses the semiotic in favor of conceptual clarity, but when the symbolic engages the semiotic more emphatically, the former gives up some of this clarity or straightforward sense in favor of the kinds of metaphors, digressions, patterns, or breaks found, for example, in

¹⁰ See Beardsworth.

poetry or the speech of the analysand. Furthermore, sublimation does not work to interpret or make sense of the semiotic, but allows the semiotic to give rise to new forms of sense and sense-making. One can think of free association, where new connections and syntactic patterns evidence the impact and weight of the unconscious, infusing long familiar words with newfound resonance and apparently incomprehensible sentences with a kind of meaning. When signs become receptive to the force of affect, when they become properly *expressive* of that inarticulate force, the result is not a new intelligible object – a named pain, a claimed pleasure – but a new modality of naming, a new expressivity. As Kristeva notes, signs become loaded with affect, making them

ambiguous, repetitive or simply alliterative, musical or sometimes nonsensical. At that point, translation – our fate as speaking beings – stops its vertiginous course towards metalanguages or foreign languages, which are like many sign systems distant from the site of pain. It seeks to become alien to itself in order to discover, in the mother tongue, a ‘total word, new, foreign to the language’ (Mallarmé) for the purpose of naming the unnameable. (*Black Sun* 42)

Whereas the functioning of everyday speech is predicated on its distance from the semiotic, its clear separation of subject and object, which allows the former authority over the latter, sublimatory speech is characterized by its ambiguity or pathos, by a certain difficulty. Because of this, sublimation is not a matter of translating the unknown into the known while leaving both regions unchanged. Rather, sublimation involves both the transformation of the structures of the symbolic by the insistence of the semiotic *and* the conversion of the semiotic from a threatening or radical otherness to an other that is no less radically different but that exhibits a kind of sense, a different knowing. If the semiotic is and must remain the other of language, then those discourses that approach the unconscious will be to a certain extent “alien” or incomprehensible according to the logic of the symbolic. Such discourses make us not less but more fully strangers to ourselves. That is, sublimation does not offer us greater self-knowledge, but rather brings us to that which is necessarily and constitutively most different, most intimately strange.

For Kristeva, modern art represents a public discourse (as opposed to the private language of the clinical relationship) uniquely capable of registering and articulating psychic difference without falling into the trap of trying “to effect a passage of the repressed element . . . into the symbolic function” (*Revolution* 163). The semiotic cannot be encountered, in whole or in part. Rather the unconscious semiotic is “the unrepresentable [that] mak[es] its presence felt in the flaws of the texture (language, discourse, or narrative) that represents” (*Tales of Love* 368). The semiotic is not outside or prior to the symbolic but is its internal rupturing, it is the shudder of form. Sublimation takes place when the univocal economy of everyday symbolic systems are

disrupted, when the representational device itself is perverted in the process of turning towards the opaque demands of the unconscious.¹¹ This should not indicate that the symbolic is somehow weakened under the force of the semiotic; rather sublimation demands the greatest rigor from the symbolic, pressing it to its utmost capacities, the highest tension (see Nietzsche, *Will to Power* §260). Language – whether linguistic, visual, or musical – takes on a form that performs the differentiating effects of the unconscious by working to exemplify the ambivalence and dynamism upon which the organized whole rests.

One can think, for example, of the twisting bodies or distorted mouths of Francis Bacon: here, it is not simply a certain content that is presented, but form itself, the very taking shape of affective experience in a medium *other* than the affective body (the pure cry). That is, a Baconian figure is not the simple expression of anguish, but *the anguish of expression*, the agonism of the very movement from anguish to expression, from the semiotic to the symbolic. What is so striking is not that these forms are strange, though they are, but rather that they are deeply resonant, even familiar: while we do not strictly speaking *comprehend* these forms, they do have a kind of sense for us, a sense or meaning irreducible to available symbolic structures. Further, it is not that the familiarity or sense comes from seeing the outlines of a “normal” human face “behind” Bacon’s contortions; rather we see the sense in the contortion itself. We do not see the symbolic texture through the flaws but rather understand the language of the flaw. It is precisely through its resistance to determinate judgment, its appearing to be governed by a foreign though not incomprehensible logic, that art is best able to take on the weight of the unconscious. Kristeva writes: “the topography of poetic language appears as one that draws out, within a signifying device (which has been called prosody, art, and so forth), not the ‘ideational content’ of what remains outside first symbolization, but rather its *economy*” (*Revolution* 164).

Sublimation functions as the formal or structural acknowledgement of the semiotic. Without suggesting an untenable form-content distinction, for Kristeva, sublimation is a matter of a specific, semiotic form of articulation and not the referent of the speech. As such, Kristeva ensures that sublimation is not confused with lifting repression in order to welcome in some pure semiotic *content*. That sublimation continues to speak, that it remains bound to a symbolic economy, ensures that destabilization, or the return to the semiotic, is always coupled with stabilization,

¹¹ For example, in *Tales of Love*, Kristeva writes of Bataille’s *Ma Mère*: “the simple designation, the univocal naming of perverse relationships, their ‘scientific’ description, do not measure up to the ‘excessiveness’ specific to the anguish of loving. Precisely in order to respond to such excessiveness, the narrative becomes incoherent . . . it evokes the twilight state of consciousness perturbed by desire” (367). Thus, on the issue of sublimation, it is not a matter of the kind of content or characters but it is rather what becomes of the symbolic economy of the narrative itself, how it is changed by the force of the unconscious. To simply represent, for example, an “unconscious” desire for the mother, is to de-radicalize the radically unknowable and truly *different* economy of the unconscious. Representing it in this way frames the unconscious as opposite but logically similar, rather than radically different.

articulation: if sublimation wanders at the limits of the thinkable, it always remains on the near side of such limits. This is inevitable; so long as we continue to speak, to symbolize, to sublimate, we continue to operate within the symbolic, which is dependent on the differentiation from and repression of the semiotic: “as long as we speak, we shall never get rid of repression” (*Tales of Love* 366).

Freud discovered that the repressed unconscious has an inherent tendency to return; that is, these internal differentiations and psychic recesses are not benign or stabilized but make demands on the subject and compel a response. For Freud, the unconscious drive just is “the demand made upon the mind for *work* in consequence of its connection with the body” (“Instincts” 122, emphasis added). If the unconscious is experienced as a threat to the coherence and solidity of the ego, then the response – the “work” – will be defensive, reactive, neurotic; the demand will be experienced as a compulsion to separate and dissociate from the unconscious. On the other hand, it is possible that, in response to this demand, the subject can assume a less fearful position, and the work can be less reactive. We do not thereby misrecognize ourselves any less and the unconscious does not become any less unknown, but this self-strangeness might be felt less as a sickness that forecloses possibilities than as an occasion that opens onto new capacities, new structures of sense. Kristeva writes: “the foundation [that] will be repressed or reorganized by the constraints imposed by signifying social reality, will nevertheless return, *projecting itself* onto the structured surface – disturbing and reorganizing it (as ‘poetry’) or piercing and annihilating it (in ‘madness’)” (*Revolution* 169). In the latter case, the ego takes itself as a stratified and solid unity, such that the return of the repressed is experienced as traumatic and potentially annihilating. Rigid defense works until there occurs a break in the structure (a “piercing”), followed by destabilization or breakdown bordering on destruction. In the former case, the repressed semiotic returns, makes its claims, but on a system that is already open, destabilizing-stabilizing. The proximity with the semiotic reorganizes the symbolic, infusing and disrupting it, but without the catastrophe of annihilation. Sublimation (referred to here as poetry) effectuates a creative reconciliation or return *to* the repressed in order to prevent or lessen the symptomatic and damaging return *of* the repressed.¹² At the level of individual psychic experience, a non-defensive or sublimatory relationship with unconscious facilitates the formal registration of the call for a new kind of work, or working through. An open system, engaged in the ongoing work of destabilization-stabilization and the creation of new forms of expression: this is Kristeva’s dialectic of growth.

¹² Freud puts it pithily in his essay on Da Vinci: “sublimation, instead of an irruption from the unconscious” (80).

Conclusion: Strange New Beauty

Kristeva's theory of sublimation articulates how a non-coercive form of difference in unity might be achieved, however transiently, at the level of psychic experience and representation. Taking her lead from both the Freudian edifice and the ethos of post-Nietzschean Continental philosophy, Kristeva describes a creative or productive relationship between the unconscious and consciousness without framing that relationship in terms of defense against or rejection of the former. Instead, as I have argued, as a *formal* transformation of our modes of representation, sublimation bears the demands of the semiotic without imposing a symbolic framework or refusing semiotic authority. Rather sublimation is an acknowledgment of the authority of the semiotic as an organizing principle for psychic life, a principle not *opposed* to the symbolic – as though it was its mere negative – but radically different. Through this engagement with self-difference, sublimation is that mechanism that can give rise to “strange new beauty” (Nietzsche, *Genealogy* II §18), namely representational forms that are not self-transparent but paradoxically work to pronounce their internal opacity, their self-strangeness. Kristeva's essential point is that in attending to the semiotic we acknowledge the salience of this other mode of mindedness and the claim that it has on psychic life. Crucially, to acknowledge a claim is not the same as to answer or understand it; sublimation, art, poetic language, register the demands of an enigma that can neither be silenced nor deciphered. Sublimation responds, neither as coercive incorporation, nor as defensive refusal, but as creative acknowledgment, as a different kind of work.

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The Abject, The Object, and The Thing

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Abstract : Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject should be read as the legacy of the modernist aesthetics inaugurated by Kant. If Kant's *Critique of Judgment* opens up the possibility that aesthetic reflective judgment is a condition of possibility for scientific rationality, then Kristeva's "abject," as it relates to her conception of the sacred, situates this movement within the immanent sensuality of the world and the often-repudiated aspects of the body and their role in the production of meaning. Taken together, these themes offer a means by which to see philosophy itself as a work of historical mourning through its proximity or distance to its truth, and in turn, this reading suggests Kristeva's significant contribution to the philosophical tradition.

Résumé : La conception de l'abject de Julia Kristeva devrait être lue comme héritière de l'esthétique moderniste inaugurée par Kant. Si la *Critique du jugement* permet de considérer le jugement réfléchissant esthétique comme condition de possibilité d'une rationalité scientifique, alors l'"abject" kristévien, en ce qui concerne sa conception du sacré, situe ce mouvement au sein de la sensualité immanente du monde et localise les aspects souvent répudiés du corps et de leurs rôles dans la production du sens. Pris ensemble, ces deux thèmes offrent un moyen de voir la philosophie elle-même comme un travail de deuil historique, selon sa proximité ou sa distance de sa vérité. À son tour, cette lecture suggère la contribution significative que Kristeva apporte à la tradition philosophique.

Keywords : Kristeva – Kant – philosophical significance – abject – sublime – sacred – *expérience* – mourning – religion – fundamentalism – beauty – perfumatic

I would like to begin by proposing that the philosophical significance of Kristeva's work can be approached by situating the notion of the abject within the Kantian frame, more specifically in relation to *The Third Critique* (Kant 1987). It is here that a certain fragmentation of philosophy is inaugurated, creating an opening, a tradition of aesthetics that will blossom in the inheritors of Idealism that followed: Romantics, Modernists, Critical Theorists. It is here, one can argue, that Kant disrupts the gears of the sterile Newtonian universe, problematizing the potential overarching unity of philosophy, a unity elaborated as an architectonic. It is here too that *imagination becomes first philosophy*: the tradition of what will later be called "instrumental rationality," is first exposed to the threat of dethronement by a "poetic rationality," or a semiotics, for, as Bernstein argues, this event occurs prior to Hegel (7). It is precisely within the fracture of the architectonic, in

which the free play of the imagination comes to be seen as a necessary presupposition for determinate judgment, that literature and the fine arts can offer themselves as rivals to the efficient and unrelentless subsumption of the ‘world’ by science. The autonomy of aesthetic reflective judgment, in the spacing that it achieves from the epistemic and moral concerns, conditions the pathways that will split philosophy into the so-called Anglo-American and continental traditions. That is, the autonomy of the aesthetic domain is ambivalent: if it is taken to be wholly independent of the moral and epistemological interests of reason, the inextricable condition of philosophy and literature comes to be reduced to a Sunday evening affair, a kind of delicacy (Bernstein 5).

And thus, even if the *aporia* of aesthetics is to be only tenuously located within Kant’s text itself, which is to say, it is located in the negative space of the text’s failure at a reconciliation between the understanding and the imagination, or to put it another way, it is properly located in the reception of the text, and deduced from its implications as much as from the “text itself,” there is nonetheless a Kantian origin of literature that might be seen here – one that cannot be separated from Kristeva and her framing of the work of philosophy within the Freudian theme of mourning (*Black Sun* 9).

We can see in the abject as defined by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, the legacy of the philosophical critique of the alienation of the world, the alienation that some have called ‘aesthetic alienation’ (Bernstein 5), expressed through certain dead-ends of epistemology and its slicing, excision, perhaps derision of world-relations and of our relation to this world. The abject poses the question which underlies, sustains, and in some respects confuses the Kantian system – a question that is made clear from the perspective of Hegel’s critique: what does it feel like, beyond all philosophers’ theoretical *apparati*, when a philosopher touches the world?

I suspect, listening to Kristeva closely, the world feels dirty : a far cry from the affective ocean that Freud criticizes and an even further cry from the orgasm of truth, beauty, and the good that one finds pristine and cleansed within a mathematician’s Platonism. With Kristeva, we move beyond the intellectual intuition of the Gods *and* the philosopher, following Nietzsche’s injunction that we learn to philosophize with the nose, instrumentally characterized thought as “grasping.” In a text such as Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva’s *The Feminine and the Sacred* (2001), one can locate a perfumatic ontology of porousness that outstrips and permeates the clean pane of glass that is representation – one that both protects us from an overexposure to the world and at the same time cuts us off from it. The world takes on its full meaning in relation to the fullness of sensation, strongly tied to the most primordial forms of memory when we smell the world in all its weight, in its all too enticing and simultaneously repulsive, post-utopian fullness.

What then does philosophy have to learn from Kristeva? The abject, as between subject and object, inside and outside, self and other, as tied to the affective drive-body of the most contemporary subject of philosophy (a subject of imminence and

embodiment), simultaneously suggests a work of mourning that underlies meaning itself. Philosophy, it could be argued, is itself a sublation, a higher-order repetition of abjection, a work of historical mourning that operates in the shadow of an ambivalent utopianism, a tending towards and distancing from its ideal object (an object that, as Hegel shows us, turns out to be nothing other than itself, trying in vain to fully comprehend itself). And while for Hegel this aim that is to say, the Absolute, may be just within our grasp, we suspect that we are no longer so fortunate. This question, however, of the proximity, or more properly the mutual constitution of world and subject, and their original co-presence that 20th century figures have outlined in the wake of our problematic Cartesian heritage, is difficult to locate within the contemporary discourses on the secular, the sacred, and the religious, as they relate to our modern immanent frame. Is the experience of dispossession that Kristeva describes, the experience of a depression that is set into motion through the absence of effective structures of psychic investment in the secular world, due to a loss of the Absolute, the Absolute that Hegel attempts to rescue from Kantian prudishness? Is the work of philosophy a work of mourning – a work of sublimation that circulates around the loss of philosophical utopia (the failure of the total system or the discovery of the unstable fluctuations that Being turns out to be, and which, in turn, demands our participation in the production of truth)? Or can this loss be seen, not just as a yearning for an object or thing but as the specificity of that condition of art's diremption from truth. If taken as inseparable from aesthetics, philosophy, like art, now dwells in a place in which perhaps its best effort is the designation of its own limits, its failures, the beyond of any grand reconciliation.

My claim, which is perhaps an obvious one, is that we should see the abject in light of this discourse on mourning. The problem here that the abject might address, as it plays out across the intricacies of today's global field, is an equivocation between loss and lack, an equivocation that necessarily entails the movement from the absence of psychic substance within the secular world, to the violent but drive-ridden return to fundamentalism. The suture of loss and lack is the inverse of a gentrified ideal – the false fullness that underlies the merely abstract ideal of religious fanaticism and many former philosophical systems. In fact these expression represent false idols; their ideality is deprived of substance in being cleansed of the abject.

Is it justified to move so quickly from the aesthetic condition of philosophy to religious violence? This is precisely the gravity of the aesthetic question: that it is not as if the resolution of a philosophical stance might, in and of itself, dissolve terror in the world, but rather that philosophy is no longer immune to the state of the world's condition, as we now know. That loss reduced to lack deprives the secular world of the fullness of the substance of living experience, and in turn, or in conjunction with this, quietly erodes the possibility that structures of sociality can effectively function as sites within which the psyche can meaningfully invest, whether it be in language itself, institutions, or political parties. In contrast to the reduction of loss to lack, I want to

point toward the specificity of the abject here, in four respects: its materiality, its fragmentary excess, its standing outside the limits of the understanding's capacity and demand for unity, and finally, to use a term already laden with philosophical baggage, its *substance*. In other words, to return to the Kantian frame, with the abject we can detect the presence of the sublime, or its structure or function, within a time when the sublime, as such, no longer seems to be strictly possible. To put it another way, if Kant claims to offer a sublime from the starry skies above, Kristeva offers us, through the abject, a sublime that erupts from whatever it is that comes from below. Whatever this is, whether the sensuality of the body, the primordially of meaning through the drives, or the fluids and bodily excesses that reside on the crater of meaning's eruptions, it is not to be confused with the heavenly canopy.

The power of the sublime being that which demands a post-cognitive confrontation with something beyond us, something that suspends our standard operating procedures, something which questions our individual sovereignty. It both haunts and assaults the understandings demand for unity while exceeding its capacity. In other words, it is a full experience in which our everyday narcissisms, and perhaps our everyday symptoms, grind to a halt. They are reduced in the face of something that can be seen as a core of experience, perhaps something properly described without hesitation or negotiation as "an *experience*." The thought here is that the abject captures a fullness of experience that is not a false idol, that is not from the outset cleansed, and that continues to capture something beyond individualism within secular life. Is this secular religion or its equivalent? It is certainly a question worth posing, but I will not attempt to resolve it here.

In the critique of the secular, in Kristeva's own work, fundamentalism is a predictable reaction in the face of an often-bankrupt cultural frame of mere distraction and spectacle, an emptying out of substance from the world, which results in a staring contest with the meaningless void. It is at once hard to imagine, yet, patently obvious from the news reports we observe: the price that people are willing to pay for the slightest taste of the substance of life – from the extreme acts of humiliation that make up so-called "*reality*" TV to the all-to-eager sacrifice of the suicide bomber. As much as suicide, the failed act *par excellence*, serves as a self-contradictory preservation of the imaginary self (a brilliant insight that Kristeva offers to help us understand the potential dangers of contemporary neuro-pharmacology). Suicide also seems to have taken on the sense of a demand for a taste of life, or at least the demand for this demand.

What is clear from the imaginary that surrounds these accounts is that the small taste of life offered here tends to be deprived of the fullness of the abject, in its ambivalence – the abject which both underlies the appearance of beauty, the intensity of being a lived creature, a bodily creature, and an agent of speech, but that always threatens to revert, like the drive, into the appearance of the vile. The ideal that is offered there (as deprived of the abject) is an old image, as abstract and masculine as it is false. We are now forced to confront a new notion of beauty altogether, one

inextricable from the abject and, quite frankly, a superior image, which entails a greater freedom, a larger intensity of life, and a great achievement over the pristine cosmological detritus of the gods. This is the modern condition that arises when the old gods have fallen and truth can no longer be separated from the work, the process, the abjection to and fro, that engenders our subjectivity. The pre-history that Kristeva describes is in a certain sense like Hegel's history. One might say that becoming a subject entails the *slaughter bench of our own personal prehistory*.

That is all to say, however, that while such claims are inseparable from a certain conception of philosophy as a work of mourning, such positions of finitude should not, in fact, appear as wholly disheartening. Perhaps the upshot, if one can put it this way, of the dissolution of social bonds that seems to paradoxically constitute the activity of contemporary society is that the process of mourning, while infinite, *is at the same time possible* at this point in history (that is to say, the activity itself, not the mere result, is possible). That which philosophy, through or with aesthetics, mourns is also the condition that establishes the possibility of a new freedom from determination by the various possible domains of infringement. By this I do not suggest a naive sense of acquiring the absolute *as absolute*, but that the work of sublimation operates and does so despite the implicit recognition, which can eventually come to be explicit through practices such as psychoanalysis, that this work is no longer guaranteed by some abstract other. If there is a Big Other, this other is nothing other than "the meaning of discourse" (Kristeva, *Tales* 13). This is the good news. If something has been lost in modernity, then this loss is also the precondition of a new and unforeseen freedom. It is not merely the freedom of a failed Enlightenment, but a new and yet-to-be-conceived freedom.

The bad news is, of course, that the practical fulfillment of this freedom and space of creativity is most precarious at the time in which it is also the most possible. It is clear that such fulfillment often fails. The aim of practices like psychoanalysis, to which I would add the practice of philosophy, is not to determine this freedom – that is to say their aim is not simply to realize this possibility of sublimation for all, ahead of time, as it were – but to develop the institutional, or at least social, structures allowing for the universal possibility of this work to take place. This is at least the ideal.

As a refusal of both the imaginary claims of religious promise and the naive claims of scientific hegemony, the sacred appears as a third term that partakes of the abject and that aims to disrupt the simple binary opposition between scientific knowledge and religious ignorance. That which "proposes figures of consolation and of healing omnipotence..." (Clément and Kristeva, *The Feminine* 26), whether it be religion or science, is ultimately the expression of a desire to escape from finitude. The sacred strives to designate or at least indicate the impossibility of any such final transcendence or consolation. Instead, with it, we dwell in an irreconcilable rift that is precisely the space within which new meaning can arise. Writing to Clément, Kristeva wonders:

What if the sacred were the unconscious perception the human being has of its untenable eroticism: always on the borderline between nature and culture, the animalistic and the verbal, the sensible and the nameable? What if the sacred were not the religious *need* for protection and omnipotence that institutions exploit but the *jouissance* of that *cleavage* – of that power/powerlessness – of that exquisite lapse? (26-27)

The crises of meaning in secular society are carefully transposed from the cry for omnipotence to an “exquisite lapse,” the borderline between body and meaning: the power that is experienced in and harnessed by religious experience need not lead directly to the fundamentalist demand for transcendence. Instead, the meaning of meaning operates within a context of an immanent mystery; the irreducible inextricability of meaning, the body, *jouissance*, sensuality, and representation. The sacred is the captivating mystery of this irreducibility: “What if what we call the “sacred” were the celebration of a mystery, the mystery of the emergence of meaning?” (Clément and Kristeva 13). The melancholic desire for the transcendent object, or perhaps the Thing in a Kantian sense, can be exchanged for the meaning of meaning as mystery, through rituals and communication, artistic creation and analytic speech. We move from silent melancholia to a new kind of mourning. It is the “conjunction of thought and of nothing that can and ought to be celebrated as ‘sacred’” (49). The intersection of domains – biological and meaningful, bodily and psychic, “inside and outside, being and nothingness, neither one nor the other, both at once, sorrow and delight...” (60) – is thus characterized by dynamism and relationality, as opposed to the order, hierarchy, and identity that drives the institutionalization of religious life and the appropriative metaphysics of science. This intersection is signaled in the terms “difference” and “resistance” (37) : Kristeva asks, “What if the truth were only that? Not ‘a meaning’ but a ‘tension toward’ . . . Let us work toward meaning, but let us leave it . . . indefinite, always ‘to come’ . . . paradoxically, that transitory quality is its strength. A nondescript but true strength” (142). A counter-conception of feminine being as porous, or *perfumatic*, suggests the character of this other kind of mourning, and its organization into a perfumatic ontology: “I propose *perfume* as a figure for that problematic repression, that troubling porousness of women. The ‘glass’ of representation does not withstand the pressure of an internal reality: the female ego . . . is ‘vaporous’” (Clément and Kristeva 14). The term *perfume* signifies the non-identical, the dynamics in meaning, with its emphatic connotations of embodiment. The domain of being, its history of abstraction, can no longer be detached from the entire range of odors that emanate from the body, euphemistically characterized as perfume. The domain of being is not distinct from filth and bodily secretions. What can be derived from this other logic is an overcoming of the sacrificial logic that arises when the cleansed, merely abstract, ideal seems just within reach. The sacred as it appears here is not merely an opposition or exclusion from the symbolic norm that sustains it but an indeterminable presence that

constitutes the tension of both exclusion and inclusion. The sacred appears on both sides of the border, a “stranger” within the symbolic norm, irreducible to its order. The sacred thus comes to be thought as non-sacrificial.

In its imaginary economy, terror is that which sacrifices the other in the name of the transcendent One, an offering to what Lacan calls, in *Seminar XI*, the “dark God” (275). The result of a calculation within an economy of exchange, it establishes a tenable link between the scientific and capitalist economies. Beyond the calculation, sublimation thrives through undecidability, and this tarrying with the undecidable *prevents* nihilism rather than produces it. It is, perhaps to our surprise, the separation and irreducibility that engender creativity: in Kristeva’s words, “Creation comes out of a cut, the gap that opens within the signifier, and there is no Word there” (Clément and Kristeva 152). The teleology of thought, which is disrupted by Kant’s own implicit self-critique becomes essentially thematized here. Representation as teleological, as merely rule-bound, as directed toward a guaranteed end, as an element within the whole of reason’s totality, is not the condition for meaningful articulation, but merely an appearance that sustains meaningful activity in its “infantile” stages. Sublimation, understood in the complexity of Kristeva’s conception, develops and refines this insight. In this way, sublimation aims to address the crises of secular meaning by offering an alternative framework to the stilted oppositions that are commonplace in secular thought:

Supposing that a non-sacrificial sacred exists, might not the *imaginary* be one of its possible variants? The *imaginary* as eternal return, which opens the mind and body to an *inquiétude* without end, and makes it possible to stand straight and lithe in this world? (Clément and Kristeva 137)

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Entretien avec Julia Kristeva : Penser en nomade et dans l'autre langue le monde, la vie psychique et la littérature

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Keywords : symbolic order – symbolic process – semiotic process – productivity – creativity – fertility – nature – culture – translation

Réalisé le 31 octobre 2009, dans le cadre du colloque international à Berlin “Kristeva in Process – Kristeva en procès. The Fertility of Thought – La pensée féconde – Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens” (30 octobre-1^{er} novembre, 2009), l’entretien qui suit s’est tenu dans le petit hôtel littéraire, le Circus. Sous la tutelle de l’Université Humboldt de Berlin, le colloque, organisé par Stefan Hollstein et par Dr. Azucena G. Blanco, a interrogé la pensée et l’œuvre de la psychanalyste, écrivain et philosophe Julia Kristeva.¹

Berlin, fin octobre 2009, vingt ans après la chute du mur de Berlin qui a marqué la fin du socialisme et de l’État totalitaire pour tous les pays de l’Est. Cette commémoration nous a donné le sentiment que s’opérait aussi notre réconciliation personnelle avec l’Europe. Pourquoi ? Parce que nous avons rendez-vous avec Julia Kristeva, une exilée d’origine bulgare vivant en France, qui nous recevait à Berlin. “Nous”, c’est-à-dire Michèle Vialet – une exilée française aux États-Unis – et Irène Ivantcheva-Merjanska – une exilée bulgare aux États-Unis. Trois femmes, trois universitaires, trois nomades, au sens où Julia Kristeva le pense, l’écrit.

Quelques mois auparavant, nous avons envoyé nos questions à Mme Kristeva qui nous avait répondu par courrier électronique en moins de trois semaines. Elle appréciait nos questions de lectrices attentives à son œuvre. Elle nous a invitées à la rencontrer pendant le colloque de Berlin, promettant de trouver un peu de temps. Reconnaisantes et ravies, nous quittons les États-Unis, chacune de son côté, pour Berlin. Mme Kristeva, elle, quitte un colloque sur Freud qui se tient à Vienne (“The Force of Monotheism”²), où elle a donné la conférence d’ouverture. En nous rendant à l’hôtel Circus, dans le vent fripon du soir d’automne, nous sommes émues à l’idée de rencontrer, après tant d’années de lecture et de réflexion, Julia Kristeva, un des penseurs et des esprits créateurs les plus importants de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle et du début du XXI^e siècle.

Julia Kristeva nous accueille d’emblée avec chaleur. Son tact et son écoute de l’autre, qu’elle défend dans son œuvre, se perçoivent dès les premiers instants. Son regard pétille, son visage s’illumine.

¹ The International Colloquium “Kristeva in Process”, 30th of October – 1st of November 2009, Institut für Romanistik, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany : See Hollstein, “Introduction” 1, footnote 1 in this volume.

² “The Force of Monotheism: Psychoanalysis and Religions”: International Conference, October 29 -31, 2009, Freud Museum, Vienna.

Élégante, elle porte une belle écharpe de couleur enroulée autour du cou. Un peu enrhumée... trop de voyages... mais entièrement présente à nous, elle établit immédiatement un chez-soi ... un chez-nous. La conversation démarre comme si nous nous connaissions depuis des années. Nos échanges par courrier électronique sont déjà loin. Nos deux premières questions portent sur le nomadisme et l'écriture romanesque.



QUESTION: Le but de cette interview est de présenter aux lecteurs certains de vos préoccupations théoriques, littéraires et humanistes... En acceptant en 2004 le prix Holberg, un prix qui est équivalent au prix Nobel dans le domaine des sciences humaines et dont vous êtes la première lauréate, vous avez dit que cette distinction internationale “de fait honore à travers moi une citoyenne européenne, de nationalité française, d’origine bulgare et d’adoption américaine. Je me plais à imaginer ce choix, que je qualifierais volontiers de nomade...” Est-ce que cette explication nomadologique est toujours pertinente pour vous? De quel lieu parlez-vous ? D’où parlez-vous?

JULIA KRISTEVA: De plus en plus de gens vivent loin de leurs racines, parlent plusieurs langues, mélangent deux ou trois cultures, se marient avec des étrangers/ères ; c’est un mode de vie qui exige effort sur soi et dépassement de soi dans une sorte de mise à mort et de renaissance continue. Le phénomène n’est pas nouveau dans l’histoire : songez à ces familles juives expulsées d’Espagne à la fin du XV^e siècle, et celles qui ont dû fuir l’Allemagne nazie pendant les années 1930-40, aux déplacements de populations sous Staline, aux dissidents du communisme voyageant à travers le monde, à toutes ces populations déplacées lors des conflits armés en Afrique ou aux réfugiés politiques... Mais la globalisation du monde augmente ces flux migratoires et un nombre de plus en plus important de citoyens sont amenés à vivre hors de leurs territoires d’origine. Ce “nomadisme” se développe pour des raisons multiples. Nous quittons des terres de misère dans l’espoir d’un avenir meilleur, nous avons des raisons familiales, sentimentales, pour partir; ou alors ce sont des motivations professionnelles pour “mieux faire carrière”, quand nous ne sommes pas “délocalisés” bon gré mal gré, ou encore poussés par la curiosité intellectuelle, ou avides d’une plus grande liberté... Quoi qu’il en soit, non seulement nous devons nous déplacer à travers les frontières géographiques, mais aussi à travers les frontières psychiques de nos “identités”. Résultat: la plupart d’entre nous se trouve en errance, que celle-ci soit contrainte ou choisie, ce qui influe d’ailleurs la façon dont nous ressentons l’exil, l’arrachement. Devant le jury du prix Holberg, je me suis permis d’affirmer que, au-delà de mon expérience, ce phénomène de nomadisme allait se répandre et qu’il faisait écho à l’internationalisation des élites au XVIII^e siècle, à laquelle Ludvig Holberg³ a participé. Les intellectuels, qui se

³ Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754) est le premier grand écrivain scandinave des temps modernes. Julia Kristeva a reçu le premier Prix international Holberg à Bergen, ville natale de Holberg, le 3 décembre

disaient humanistes, issus de formations idéologiques diverses, venant de pays et de cultures différents, ont fait éclater le carcan de l'Europe féodale pour chercher non pas tant des réponses que des interrogations... Nietzsche affirmait, dans *L'Antéchrist* (1895), que notre préoccupation devrait être de poser "un grand point d'interrogation" sur le "plus grand sérieux". Ma propre traversée des frontières, pour revenir à votre question, m'a conduite à interroger les dogmes, les enfermements, les disciplines, à questionner l'identité, la multiplicité des identités. Même si, à l'heure actuelle, les réponses à toutes ces questions sont encore aléatoires, elles sont une respiration et un antidote à l'automatisation de l'espèce qui, via la technologie, les médias et le fanatisme religieux est une nouvelle forme de totalitarisme. Aujourd'hui, ici même, à Berlin, dans le milieu universitaire, certains de ces nomades me font une fête de l'esprit, et un grand honneur, en se réunissant pour discuter mon travail : pour penser avec ma pensée, avec mes livres. Cela me paraît d'autant plus insolite qu'en France, je ne suscite pas un tel intérêt, même si ma notoriété n'est pas négligeable et m'impressionne toujours : "est-ce de moi qu'il s'agit" ? Dotée d'une magnifique culture, ayant cimenté une identité forte avec les valeurs des Lumières et son message généreux des droits de l'homme, la France reste frileuse face à ce nomadisme moderne; des archaïsmes, des crispations identitaires dominant encore et menacent. Aussi "l'individu polyphonique", comme je l'appelle, est-il mal accepté ou mal compris, en tout cas il dérange, il inquiète. Pourtant, je suis convaincue que ce déracinement continu est une sorte d'élection, une chance, car il offre la possibilité de renaissance psychique, que le pari sur l'ouverture à l'autre est un avantage culturel. Beaucoup d'efforts, d'angoisse, et parfois de souffrance, accompagnent cette transformation – c'est inévitable – que j'essaie, pour ma part, de traduire en travail, en sublimation, en création.

QUESTION: Pourriez-vous parler de votre choix d'écrire des romans ? Le roman, genre narratif polyphonique, joue-t-il un rôle dans votre propre histoire d'exilée dans une autre langue ?

JULIA KRISTEVA. Je n'écris pas pour appartenir à un genre, quel qu'il soit. Traverser les frontières des disciplines comme je l'avais fait (entre linguistique et psychanalyse, entre littérature et psychanalyse) nécessitait une ouverture d'esprit qui s'est encore accentuée quand j'ai commencé à écrire des romans. La notion de genres est d'ailleurs assez floue, et le roman est si protéiforme qu'on a parfois du mal à le définir très précisément. Mais plutôt que de savoir dans quel genre narratif je me situe, je préférerais vous dire pourquoi j'écris. A la fin de mon analyse, il m'a semblé que j'intégrais la langue française comme un enfant apprend sa langue maternelle, et le désir d'écrire s'en est suivi. À force de raconter mes souvenirs d'enfance en français, et non dans ma langue maternelle, le bulgare, je me suis aperçue que mon français un peu littéraire, un peu

2004. Le Prix Holberg est l'équivalent du Prix Nobel pour les sciences humaines, la psychanalyse et la religion.

abstrait, un peu intellectuel, un peu “étranger” des débuts de mon arrivée en France, s’était peu à peu modulé en une sorte de “*baby talk*”, une langue intime qui laissait jaillir les sensations, les souvenirs anciens, les états douloureux... La nuit obscure de la relation précoce mère-enfant et de la petite enfance s’était finalement infiltrée dans la langue française, avec des mots simples et vrais. Je me rappelle avoir dit à mon analyste que je voulais faire une analyse pour retrouver du maternel dans le français, que même si j’avais eu de très bons contacts avec ma mère, j’avais tout de suite rebondi, comme un ballon, de son sol... et que, maintenant, je voulais rester un peu au sol. Ensuite, notre fils est né, et je lui ai parlé en français, mon mari, l’écrivain français Philippe Sollers,⁴ ne parle pas le bulgare, mes parents étaient loin : le français est devenu une langue de proximité, du quotidien... En même temps, nous sommes à la fin des années 70, un mouvement important de la culture française s’interrogeait sur les limites de la démarche philosophique et structuraliste et du métalangage, sur leur capacité de dire la vérité de l’expérience humaine... Le style revenait en force chez Barthes qui frôlait le roman, ou chez les philosophes Jacques Derrida et Gilles Deleuze qui écrivaient avec un talent tout littéraire leurs écrits théoriques. Une sorte d’illumination, de flash, m’a saisie : la littérature c’est *l’a-pensée*, ainsi que je l’ai théorisée plus tard dans mes cours sur la révolte intime (d’où le livre du même nom), et dans les ouvrages qui ont suivi. La meilleure façon de penser avec l’ensemble de ses capacités, de ses sensations, de ses désirs, de ses angoisses, c’est de travailler la narration et la langue. Au sortir de ce mouvement philosophico-telquelien structuraliste, je voulais faire le bilan de cette aventure intellectuelle sous la forme plus libre d’une narration, et *Les Samourais* ont paru en 1990. L’analyse, la naissance de mon fils, les questionnements des intellectuels français sur le rapport entre théorie et fiction et la mort de mon père en Bulgarie dans des circonstances particulièrement odieuses, m’ont amenée à l’écriture romanesque.

QUESTION : La perte de votre père est-elle à l’origine de votre roman Le Vieil Homme et les loups (1991)?

JULIA KRISTEVA: Oui. C’est toujours douloureux d’en parler... Lors du voyage en Bulgarie de François Mitterrand en janvier 1989, je faisais partie de la délégation qui

⁴ Philippe Sollers (1936 -) est un écrivain célèbre, de son vrai nom Philippe Joyaux, qui est né en Gironde dans une famille d’industriels. Après des études secondaires à Bordeaux, il est envoyé chez les jésuites à Versailles, d’où il est renvoyé en 1953. En 1957, il publie son premier texte et prend le pseudonyme de Sollers. En 1960, il fonde la revue *Tel Quel* aux Éditions du Seuil, refuge des protestataires et des anticonformistes. Il reçoit le prix Médicis en 1961 pour son roman *Le Parc*. Il commence dès lors à réfléchir sur la problématique du sujet dans *Drame, Nombres, Lois, Paradis*. En 1983, année de son roman *Femmes* et de son départ du Seuil pour rejoindre Gallimard, il fonde une nouvelle revue, *L’Infini*, et prend la direction de la collection du même nom. Il est membre du comité de lecture des éditions Gallimard. En 2007, Philippe Sollers publie ses mémoires sous le titre *Un vrai roman*. Julia Kristeva et Philippe Sollers se sont mariés en 1967. Ils ont un fils, David.

l'accompagnait, et à cette occasion, le Président a fait la connaissance de mon père. En septembre 1989, mon père devait subir l'opération d'un ulcère à l'estomac qui s'était cicatrisé. Il s'agissait simplement d'écarter les parois. C'était une intervention bénigne et, semble-t-il, très simple. Par malheur, le chirurgien menait des expérimentations sur les vieillards et il a tenté une greffe, mais sans moyens suffisants pour le suivi. Cela a mal tourné et nous avons voulu faire hospitaliser mon père à Paris. Le président Mitterrand m'a dit que c'était possible, si le gouvernement bulgare donnait son accord pour le visa de sortie. On s'est heurté à un refus des autorités médicales : "Non, notre médecine possède tous les moyens nécessaires..." Mon père est mort quelque temps après. On ne pouvait pas inhumer papa, qui était très croyant, parce qu'on n'avait pas acheté de tombe. Je me suis proposée de le faire, et le comble a été atteint lorsqu'on m'a dit : "Madame, vous êtes connue. Si vous mourez, on va vous la donner, votre tombe, et on vous enterrera avec votre papa". A ce moment-là, j'ai eu une vision absolument apocalyptique de ce monde : on inhumait les communistes, mais pas les autres, pour éviter les attroupements religieux... Il a donc fallu incinérer mon père, et ce fut une épreuve pour toute la famille. Je suis rentrée en France catastrophée, très déprimée. Freud affirme qu'un deuil dure deux, trois ans et la seule chose ce que j'ai pu faire pour sortir de ce deuil si pénible a été d'écrire un roman, *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (1991), qui est considéré depuis comme unique en son genre. Après coup, je me suis rendu compte qu'il était très proche des *Métamorphoses* d'Ovide (43 av. J.-C.-17), ce poète latin qui avait écrit la dernière partie de son œuvre au bord de la mer Noire en Roumanie...

QUESTION : Ovide avait été exilé à Tomis par Auguste à cause de son recueil L'Art d'aimer. Il vivait sur les bords du Pont-Euxin, la mer Noire d'aujourd'hui... Ovide est mort là-bas, n'est-ce pas ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Oui. Ce sont des lieux maudits, infestés de mafieux et de tyrans tels Ceaușescu⁵ et sa famille... La *métamorphose* à laquelle j'ai assisté en Bulgarie et que j'ai décrite dans ce roman consistait en ceci que les gens devenaient des bêtes sauvages. En 1989, cela m'avait frappée. La Bulgarie est un pays que j'aime, sa culture est magnifique, j'apprécie cette adhésion enthousiaste au fait de parler et d'écrire sa langue maternelle, l'alphabet y est célébré tous les 24 mai, jour anniversaire des deux saints, Cyrille et Méthode, inventeurs de l'alphabet slave, et nous manifestations – enfants des écoles et toutes les professions culturelles – arborant chacun une lettre de l'alphabet. Je n'oublie jamais ce fait unique au monde, cette fête de l'incarnation de toutes les lettres dans la coprésence de l'individu et de la culture... Tout cela était-il complètement balayé ? À ma visite de Sofia pour l'incinération de mon père, j'ai vu des gens durs, qui s'insultaient dans les tramways, prêts à se battre. Il n'y avait rien à manger, des files d'attente

⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu, né le 26 janvier 1918 est exécuté le 25 décembre 1989 lors de la révolution roumaine de 1989. De 1965 à son arrestation, il a été le principal dirigeant du régime communiste roumain.

épouvantables partout. La mort absurde et criminelle de mon père me rendait sans doute très amère. Un autre genre de narration s'est imposé alors, que j'appelle "le polar métaphysique". Inconsciemment, il s'appuie sur l'idée de Freud selon laquelle toute société est fondée sur un crime commis en commun. Je vous rappelle que dans *Totem et tabou*, l'inventeur de la psychanalyse développe l'hypothèse selon laquelle les frères de la horde primitive tuent le père, puis fondent un pacte pour partager les femmes et finissent par créer l'exogamie. Il en résulte une culpabilité collective inconsciente phylogénétique. Mais de nos jours où chercher ce crime? Il est tellement disséminé qu'on ne peut pas trouver le(s) coupable(s). Le polar métaphysique raconte des histoires politiques et des passions humaines pour exhiber cette criminalité intrinsèque et toujours sous-jacente au lien social. Le "polar métaphysique" me permet donc de raconter une aventure et une expérience intérieure, douloureuse ou extatique, situées en contexte historique, sans me priver de distiller un certain nombre de réflexions sur le monde actuel. Après *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (1991), j'ai poursuivi ce fil dans *Possessions* (1996), où j'évoque, à travers Gloria, la femme tuée et décapitée par une amie rivale de sa passion pour son fils malade, une manière d'aborder cette face cachée de la détresse de la féminité d'aujourd'hui que les féministes n'abordent pas et que les humains en général ont tendance à ignorer : la passion maternelle. Les sociétés, malgré les grandes avancées obtenues par les luttes féministes, continuent, me semble-t-il, à toujours faire porter le poids de l'existence sur les femmes...et surtout sur les mères. Dans *Meurtre à Byzance* (2004), j'élargis mon propos, il s'agissait de parler et de faire parler du monde byzantin : je veux dire essentiellement les peuples orthodoxes qui, la Russie mise à part, font partie du continent européen, et qui sont en souffrance, qui ne trouvent pas facilement leur place en Europe. Les pays de l'Est sont des parents pauvres de l'Europe et de la globalisation, et j'ai voulu le dire en roman et en faire peut-être un film un jour. Mais qui peut s'y intéresser ? La censure sur cette culture risque de durer longtemps...

Mes romans sont-ils classables ? Est-ce bien nécessaire ? C'est mon histoire, et elle s'inscrit dans cette forme polygonale, polyphonique qu'est le roman métaphysique, au sens où les aventures que je construis sont liées à la mortalité des civilisations, à la violence politique et à la pensée des hommes et des femmes. Un article paru dans *Le Monde* disait que *Meurtre à Byzance* était "un roman total"⁶ et le comparait aux romans du XVIII^e siècle.

QUESTION. On aurait pu évoquer également Le voyage souterrain de Nils Klim (1741), de Ludvig Holberg, un roman vraiment total, mais aussi Le voyage au centre de la Terre (1864) de Jules Verne...

⁶ Christine Rousseau. "Julia Kristeva, la Byzantine" [sur *Meurtre à Byzance*]. *Le Monde des livres*, article publié le 6 février 2004.

JULIA KRISTEVA : C'est à partir du XVIII^e siècle puis au long du XIX^e siècle que la littérature européenne s'aventure dans la découverte de lieux souterrains, souvent odieux, de territoires imaginaires, souvent inquiétants; en décrivant des espaces inconnus, le roman fait de la philosophie en tissant des narrations, car c'est bien une réflexion sur l'état du monde et de la pensée qui sous-tend la fiction.

QUESTION : Si l'on voulait situer votre œuvre littéraire, comment, selon vous, devrait-on le faire ? Est-ce dans le courant de la "Welt Literature" (Goethe), ou dans celui de "la littérature mineure", dans l'acception de Deleuze et de Guattari quand ils commentent Kafka, à savoir la révolte ? Votre œuvre s'inscrit-elle dans le domaine de la "littérature mineure" ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Parce que je ne suis pas de langue française, on peut dire que c'est une littérature mineure. Et au sens aussi où je me révolte, je me voyage, je me réinvente en français. Je n'écrirai jamais comme Colette ou comme Marguerite Duras. Je fais différemment. Mais je n'aime pas ce terme "mineur". Il infantilise, et pourquoi dois-je me classer dans des cadres qui ne tiennent pas compte de mon expérience ? Dites plutôt que je pense en récit et pas seulement en concepts.

QUESTION : Dans ce cadre de réflexion sur la réinvention de soi en français, que pensez-vous de la francophonie : historiquement, mais aussi dans le contexte d'aujourd'hui ? Par ailleurs, comment vous situez-vous par rapport à la notion récemment apparue dans l'espace public de "littérature-monde en français"⁷, notion qui essaie de saisir et de redéfinir les œuvres d'écrivains de langue française par la rhétorique de la décolonisation littéraire ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : L'idée de francophonie, comme vous le savez, est une idée postcoloniale. Au début des années 1960, des intellectuels comme Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Diori Hamani, Norodom Sihanouk, Habib Bourguiba, qui sont issus des anciennes colonies françaises d'Afrique, du Sud-Est asiatique, et qui ont fait leurs études en France, suggèrent ce projet de francophonie. Ces fondateurs de la francophonie se sont reconnus héritiers des Lumières françaises, de l'humanisme français qui ne pouvait pas ne pas être pour eux intrinsèquement lié à la langue française, à la culture littéraire française, au goût français, au modèle social français. La

⁷ "Pour une 'littérature-monde' en français". *Le Monde des livres*, article publié le 16 mars 2007, signé par Muriel Barbery, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Alain Borer, Roland Brival, Maryse Condé, Didier Daeninckx, Ananda Devi, Alain Dugrand, Édouard Glissant, Jacques Godbout, Nancy Huston, Koffi Kwahulé, Dany Laferrière, Gilles Lapouge, Jean-Marie Laclavetine, Michel Layaz, Michel Le Bris, J.-M. G. Le Clézio, Yvon Le Men, Amin Maalouf, Alain Mabanckou, Anna Moï, Wajdi Mouawad, Nimrod, Wilfried N'Sondé, Esther Orner, Erik Orsenna, Benoît Peeters, Patrick Rambaud, Gisèle Pineau, Jean-Claude Pirotte, Grégoire Polet, Patrick Raynal, Jean-Luc V. Raharimanana, Jean Rouaud, Boualem Sansal, Dai Sitje, Brina Svit, Lyonel Trouillot, Anne Vallaeys, Jean Vautrin, André Velter, Gary Victor, Abdourahman A. Waberi.

francophonie est née ainsi, pour être exportée ensuite dans les anciennes colonies, et enfin dans le monde qui s'y reconnaît tout en n'ayant pas "le français en partage" (pour reprendre la formule consacrée). Il s'agissait – très généreusement – de faire vivre les idées de liberté, d'égalité, et de fraternité et de redonner leur dignité à ces cultures qui étaient jusqu'alors dévalorisées. Deux mouvements extrêmement regrettables se sont produits ensuite. D'une part, la francophonie est devenue un lieu d'affairisme et de manipulations postcoloniales diverses qui ont beaucoup discrédité la francophonie tant politique que culturelle. D'autre part, et pour répondre à votre question, beaucoup d'écrivains issus de ces ex-colonies et qui s'expriment en français ont considéré le terme "francophone" comme dévalorisant, les renvoyant à une écriture de seconde zone : vous n'êtes pas français, vous êtes francophone. Il y a eu de vigoureuses protestations contre l'idée de la francophonie dont ce manifeste publié par *Le Monde*.

QUESTION : Dans ce manifeste, les signataires parlent de littérature-monde et non pas de francophonie ... Est-ce un changement paradigmatique que ces écrivains essaient de provoquer parce qu'il doit être repensé ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Plutôt que de parler de littérature-monde – une expression qui annule la langue française et banalise la globalisation comme si ça ne parlait dans aucune langue spécifique, mais dans quoi, le *globish* ???, je préférerais dire "littérature de langue française". En Grande-Bretagne, nombre d'écrivains nés en Inde ou issus d'autres ex-colonies de l'Empire écrivent en anglais. Personne ne dit qu'ils sont de littérature-monde, ni même anglophones : ce sont des "écrivains de langue anglaise". En tant que membre de la section des Relations extérieures du Conseil économique et social, j'ai été chargée d'un Avis sur "Le message culturel de la France et la vocation interculturelle de la francophonie" (2009)⁸. Comme je l'ai écrit dans ce rapport, je suis convaincue qu'il est nécessaire d'utiliser le terme "francophonie" avec beaucoup de précautions et en faisant état de toutes les critiques qui s'imposent. Il faut absolument éviter de parquer les écrivains francophones dans une catégorie annexe, et donc dévalorisée, de la littérature française. Il serait plus judicieux, je le répète, de les considérer comme des "écrivains de langue française". Ce serait une manière de mieux les associer au français... L'aspect négatif de cette proposition serait de penser qu'on les ramène dans le giron de l'Hexagone, mais on peut objecter qu'une fois cette réintroduction dans la Citadelle accomplie, les Français "de souche" se sentiront invités à accorder plus d'attention à tout ce qui est perçu comme mentalité et culture étrangères et qui trouve dorénavant droit de cité dans la langue et la littérature françaises grâce à ces œuvres littéraires

⁸ Julia Kristeva-Joyaux. "Le message culturel de la France et la vocation interculturelle de la francophonie." Avis du Conseil économique, social et environnemental, présenté par Mme Julia Kristeva-Joyaux, rapporteur au nom de la section des Relations extérieures. Séance des 23 et 24 juin 2009. Année 2009, N° 19.

innovantes. Ce qui revient à internationaliser la culture française de souche, et c'est peut-être cela qui est à rechercher : jouer la perméabilité entre nos cultures et ouvrir un vaste champ à l'interculturalité, en renonçant à ces distinctions lourdes de discriminations diverses entre Francophones et Français.

QUESTION : Dans les années 1960 et 70 jusqu'aux années 80, on parlait de littérature d'expression française.

JULIA KRISTEVA : Et, si on prend Jean-Marie Le Clézio, qui est né à Nice et qui a la double nationalité française et mauricienne, est-ce qu'on aurait dit à l'époque qu'il était d'expression française ?

QUESTION : "On" ne parle d'écrivains "francophones" que pour les écrivains "autres" ...

JULIA KRISTEVA : Certains s'en satisfont, mais d'autres ne sont pas dupes : "Pourquoi nous désigner comme écrivains francophones ? Quand on cherche nos livres dans les librairies françaises, on ne les trouve pas en littérature, mais relégués dans une étagère différente et mal définie...". Est-ce dû à la frilosité des éditeurs, à l'ignorance des libraires, à l'indifférence du public hexagonal ? La France a du mal avec son passé colonialiste et avec le métissage, sauf lors de la Coupe du monde de football gagnée en 1998, où l'on chantait "black, blanc, beur"... Tout le problème est là. Et il est politique. "On" trouve des euphémismes pour distinguer, et cette distinction implique une dévalorisation sous-jacente ou un racisme à peine feutré... Et si on disait tout simplement que ces écrivains écrivent en français. Qu'ils viennent de Bulgarie ou de Tombouctou ou du Sénégal, ce sont des écrivains de langue française.

QUESTION : Vous n'êtes pas considérée comme écrivain francophone comme le sont Milan Kundera ou Samuel Beckett, mais comme un écrivain français. Pourquoi cette différence en fait ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : C'est assez curieux en effet. Est-ce parce que je suis universitaire, que j'ai conquis ma noblesse d'être française comme universitaire et que (c'est l'envers de la médaille), "on" néglige les romans sous les poids des essais ? Non, ce n'est pas suffisant. Concernant les écrivains que vous évoquez : est-ce que c'est leur façon d'écrire en français ou leur imaginaire qui déroutent le public français ? Beckett a écrit dans une langue très spécifique qui, pendant très longtemps, est passée pour être celle du "nouveau roman", dénomination assez vague qui a fait admettre, après-guerre, dans le champ littéraire des expérimentations très diverses en matière de narration... Cela dit, Beckett est franco-anglais parce qu'il a écrit également en anglais. Mais il n'est pas de nationalité française. Si la France a beaucoup de difficulté pour adopter des écrivains de langue française, cela tient, me semble-t-il, à ce que le français est devenu le substitut de la religion en France. Les Français ne croient peut-être pas en Dieu – ne sont-ils pas

cartésiens ? – mais ils croient dur comme fer dans l'expression de la langue française comme horizon ultime de l'identité. Et ils n'ont pas tort, d'autant que par le biais de l'interrogation littéraire, stylistique, formelle, l'identité ainsi construite ne se fige pas en "culte" mais reste une question – dans le meilleur des cas. Les Français perçoivent-ils ceci, plus ou moins inconsciemment ? La France, en tout cas, est le seul pays, me semble-t-il, où les hommes politiques se targuent d'écrire, et ce goût pour la langue, quasi sacrée, est partagé par toutes les classes sociales, jusqu'à la plus humble paysanne... Proust l'avait déjà noté. Du fait de la globalisation, le nombre de locuteurs étrangers parlant français augmentent, et l'émergence d'écrivains venus de tous les horizons écrivant en français change le paysage de la littérature française. La langue française est devenue un immense continent, et les Français de souche s'aperçoivent – certains ont du mal à l'accepter – qu'ils ne sont plus les seuls à participer à ce sacré... Les écrivains français de souche, en tout premier lieu. Sous forme de boutade, je dirais que les Français doivent devenir polythéistes... accepter que leur sacré s'ouvre à la polyphonie des mentalités et des styles que portent les nouveaux arrivants... Donc, mieux vaut parler d'écrivains et de littérature de langue française.

QUESTION : Selon cette optique alors, la distinction entre "nous" et "les autres", où "nous" implique "nous les Français", pourrait se transformer en simple "nous qui parlons français" ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : La littérature d'expression de langue française doit se diversifier, évoluer, s'enrichir et se renouveler, et accepter toutes sortes d'inventions linguistiques, littéraires, artistiques qui émergent hors de la Citadelle... Edouard Glissant parle de "créolisation" pour signifier que le français se renouvelle avec l'apport des écrivains "autres". Il n'y a pas à se méfier du fait de revendiquer une langue qui, forcément et historiquement, est une construction nationale, aujourd'hui en cours de modification, mais qui reste et restera longuement nationale. Je pense au contraire que la langue nationale est un puissant antidépresseur et qu'il faut la recréer en s'appropriant aussi bien son histoire que son avenir.

QUESTION : Il semble que les Français honorent une longue tradition de résistance, voire de rejet, aux apports de l'extérieur et aux étrangers.

JULIA KRISTEVA : Non, pas tous, je l'ai écrit dans *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988) : "Nulle part on n'est plus étranger qu'en France, mais aussi nulle part on n'est mieux étranger qu'en France." Pourquoi cette deuxième situation ? Parce que le débat public est aussi une socio-réalité française, comme le champagne et le foie gras. Et ce débat est vigoureux, ouvrant, innovant. Évidemment, beaucoup résistent, se crispent, tentent de freiner le changement qui va dans le sens de l'interculturalité. Ce qui se crée dans les banlieues se fera bientôt partout; déjà les arts plastiques doivent beaucoup à la culture de rue, aux graffiti. Bien sûr la mode, la publicité ont récupéré massivement ces

nouveautés, mais elles continuent à bousculer les conventions. Sans parler du rap, avec des textes rimés, de la *world music*, de la *break dance* qui ne sont pas des phénomènes passagers, comme on le prétendait, et qui apportent des nouveautés dans la musique et la danse contemporaines. Dans l'édition, on parle de plus en plus du livre-papier comme d'une espèce en voie de disparition et qui va être transformé en livre numérique, une révolution technologique aussi importante que l'imprimerie du XVI^e siècle... Je crois pour ma part au livre, mais il va sans doute aussi se moduler au voisinage des SMS et de l'hyperconnectivité des I-Phones... Tous ces changements vont s'accélérer.

QUESTION : Vous enseignez depuis 1974 comme Permanent Visiting Professor à Columbia University aux États-Unis. Avez-vous certaines observations sur la façon dont on aborde la francophonie aux États-Unis en comparaison avec la France ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Je ne suis pas spécialiste comme vous de la littérature francophone, et je constate en effet qu'aux USA on s'intéresse de plus en plus à celle-ci et de moins en moins à la littérature française. D'où la question que j'aurais pu vous adresser : pourquoi ? Mais ce serait un autre entretien... Vous le savez puisque vous vivez aux États-Unis qu'on fait beaucoup plus d'études francophones aux États-Unis que de littérature française – ce qui n'est pas le cas en France d'ailleurs. Il me semble que les Américains ne savent plus qui est Rimbaud ou Balzac et que les Français n'ont jamais entendu parler des auteurs francophones, ou du moins très peu... Il faut trouver comment résoudre ces déséquilibres des deux côtés.

QUESTION : Passons si vous le voulez bien au “sémiotique”, au sens kristevien, c'est-à-dire la vie pulsionnelle affleurant dans le langage (écholalies, rimes, jeux de sons et de sens, métaphores, etc.) et à son rapport au symbolique... Quels sont les lieux d'irruption du sémiotique dans votre français ? Vous avez touché au vif du sujet, nous semble-t-il, dans l'essai “L'amour de l'autre langue” en disant catégoriquement : “... à mon avis, parler une autre langue est tout simplement la condition minimale et première pour être en vie” parce que “si nous n'étions pas tous des traducteurs, si nous ne mettions pas sans cesse à vif l'étrangeté de notre vie intime – ses dérogations aux codes stéréotypés qu'on appelle des langues nationales – pour la transposer à nouveau dans d'autres signes, aurions-nous une vie psychique, serions-nous des êtres vivants ?” (L'avenir d'une révolte, Paris : Calmann Lévy, 1998, p. 85)

JULIA KRISTEVA : Juste avant de partir pour Berlin, j'ai reçu la lettre d'un ami qui est professeur de langue arabe au Collège de France et qui a édité une nouvelle traduction des *Mille et une nuits*, le Professeur André Miquel. Il venait de lire *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (1991) : il avait décrypté bien sûr mon dessein “philosophique” de parler d'un monde qui s'écroule, de la métamorphose des individus en bêtes féroces. Mais il a aussi relevé des phrases avec des trouvailles sémiotiques que bien peu avaient remarquées lors de la parution du roman. Avec le temps et loin de la fièvre parisianiste, des lecteurs

peuvent saisir dans mes écrits des champs plus intimes, et cela me touche beaucoup. Le bulgare, que j'ai quasiment perdu, reste une langue de l'enfance, tendre, simple, évidente, mais pas assez créative. En français, la quête de la sensation, de la pulsion dans le verbe est plus aisée et, par moments, se produit ce genre d'étincelles qui me donnent une grande joie, même si ce n'est pas le feu d'artifice d'une Colette ou d'un Baudelaire. De telles trouvailles valent pour moi comme des signes de résurrection. Récemment, dans une émission à la radio où on me demandait comment j'avais vécu l'exil, l'étrangeté, j'ai évoqué les moments souvent difficiles du début, et mes interrogations : allais-je réussir à vivre dans ce monde si différent, si éloigné de ce que j'étais, et où je ne connaissais personne ? Avec le temps, je me suis aperçue que chacun est différent, singulier... Les Français qui m'entouraient me paraissaient comme des paquets-cadeaux qui se présentaient enveloppés, sans qu'on sache ce qu'il y a dedans, et je les ai décrits ainsi dans *Les Samouraïs* (1990) : très beaux, mais très déroutants. Je me souviens aussi de mes deux premiers articles, "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman"⁹ et "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes"¹⁰. J'étais enrhumée, comme aujourd'hui, c'était l'hiver, je voyais ma main écrire et j'ai eu l'impression que j'écrivais une langue morte et que quelqu'un en moi aussi était morte. En fait, quelque chose d'autre mourait en moi : c'était le bulgare. Aussitôt, une certitude m'envahit : "mais je me réincarne en français". Ce sentiment de passage d'une langue à l'autre a été très douloureux. Maintenant quand j'écris des romans, moins lorsque je rédige des textes théoriques, j'éprouve ce même sentiment de renaissance... Tel le serpent qui change de peau, telle la chenille qui sort de sa chrysalide et se mue en papillon, c'est un recommencement, une éclosion. Ce sont des moments de joie. D'où mon désir de continuer à écrire. Et puisque je vais devoir bientôt arrêter d'enseigner à l'université, j'espère que les futurs colloques, conférences ou rapports divers auxquels on ne cesse de m'inviter à parler me laisseront tout de même du temps pour me consacrer à l'écriture romanesque.

QUESTION: Votre parcours d'écrivain, de théoricien, d'être humain, peut-on le lire à travers l'optique de l'oxymore? L'oxymore est un procédé de pensée que le philosophe Slavoj Žižek (qui comme vous repense l'aventure lacanienne) considère comme fondamentale. Nous utilisons ce terme "oxymore" de façon figurée pour renvoyer à l'effet de surprise, à l'inattendu, de l'alliance, nouvelle, de vos origines, de votre éducation bulgares et du choix du français comme votre langue de travail, de pensée, d'écriture puisque linguiste, philosophe, écrivain, féministe, psychanalyste, vous vous exprimez en français.

JULIA KRISTEVA : À trop valoriser un mot, un concept, on risque de perdre en diversité. Dans l'oxymore, il y a dualité, inversion, contradiction, paradoxe, et on reste

⁹ Julia Kristeva. "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue et le roman", *Critique*, XXIII, 239, avril 1967, pp. 438-65.

¹⁰ Julia Kristeva. "Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes", *Tel Quel*, 29, Printemps 1967, pp. 53-75.

plutôt dans le binaire. Je ne suis pas sûre de ce que Žižek entend exactement dans ce terme “oxymore”. Lui, il se sent beaucoup plus homme de l’Est tandis que moi, je suis pleinement cosmopolite et errante. Non pas par décision, mais simplement par conviction, je ne revendique jamais mes origines balkaniques ou un substrat bulgare. Est-ce que c’est une défense, une fuite, ou un déni ? Je l’ignore, je ne l’exclus pas, mais je suis persuadée qu’il y a plus que ça, qu’il y a quelque chose d’autre... Très tôt, mes parents m’ont inscrite à l’école maternelle, tenue par des sœurs dominicaines, et ils m’ont fait apprendre le français vers l’âge de quatre-cinq ans. Ensuite, on a appris le russe, puis j’ai suivi les cours de l’Alliance française en parallèle avec l’école bulgare jusqu’au bac, de telle sorte que le français est restée tout au long de ma vie une langue porteuse de liberté, une invitation à me poser des questions, à penser au singulier. De fait, j’ai appris la *Marseillaise* avant l’hymne bulgare, récité les fables de La Fontaine bien plus tôt que les poèmes de Hristo Botev¹¹... Donc, j’ai été très vite placée dans un contexte pluriculturel, que mes parents ont favorisé.

QUESTION : Vous dites souvent dans vos essais et dans vos romans que vos parents vous ont donné la légèreté. Voudriez-vous expliquer ce que vous voulez dire ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Oui, c’était un couple assez ouvert, multiple en lui-même... Mon père, Stoyan Kristev, était très croyant. Après avoir été séminariste et diplômé en théologie, il avait fait médecine, mais pour ne pas aller travailler à la campagne afin de développer le pays, comme c’était la règle après le 9 septembre 1944, date de la libération de la Bulgarie du fascisme, il n’a pas exercé en tant que médecin. Afin de rester à Sofia, il est devenu fonctionnaire au Saint-Synode,¹² ce qui était assez mal vu. Je n’ai donc pas pu être inscrite à l’école russe, où allaient les meilleures élèves, ni à l’école française, ni à l’école américaine, dans lesquelles on n’acceptait que les enfants de la nomenklatura “rouge”. Mon père n’était donc pas communiste, et quand j’ai voulu faire des études de physique nucléaire en Russie (j’étais assez bonne en maths et je rêvais de devenir astronome), on ne m’a pas laissée partir. Bref, la foi orthodoxe de mon père était dissidente, très secrète, et en même temps elle ouvrait sur quelque chose d’inconnu et qui ne me permettait pas de m’identifier totalement avec l’identité bulgare de l’époque. De son côté, ma mère avait des ascendants juifs évoquant le fameux mystique des Balkans, Sabbataï Zevi, mais elle était areligieuse, darwinienne convaincue, et résolument scientifique. On passait des repas entiers à se bagarrer. J’étais du côté de maman, je contredisais avec virulence mon père que j’estimais beaucoup par ailleurs, car

¹¹ Hristo Botev (en bulgare Христо Ботѐв Петков, 1848-1876) est le plus célèbre poète bulgare. Il est considéré comme un héros national car il est mort dans la lutte du peuple bulgare contre la domination ottomane. C’est pourquoi l’anniversaire de sa mort (le 2 juin) est célébré chaque année.

¹² Dans l’Église orthodoxe, le Saint-Synode ou “concile” permanent est l’institution collégiale au sommet de la hiérarchie religieuse.

c'était un homme de lettres très fin. Parfois il se mettait en colère, parfois il acceptait nos arguments, et dans ce bouillonnement contradictoire, l'"identité" ne se cristallisait pas vraiment. La table familiale a toujours été un lieu de discussions, de recherche et de grande liberté. C'est assez logique que je me définisse maintenant comme un individu kaléidoscopique.

QUESTION. En quoi la pluriculturalité est-elle un avantage, une chance comme vous le disiez ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Je cultive une utopie qui ne correspond pas encore à la réalité, mais je parie que tout va dans ce sens : certains de mes étudiants de l'Union européenne, qui viennent de Pologne, par exemple, parlent plusieurs langues, le polonais, le russe, l'allemand, mais aussi l'anglais, le latin, le grec, voire l'espagnol, l'italien... Ce multilinguisme crée des individus plus souples dans leur appréhension du monde, puisque chaque langue module des formes de pensée différentes – pas dans l'absolu, mais tout de même. La syntaxe, les lexiques, la position des pronoms, la formation des mots, l'existence ou non de certains verbes, etc... diffèrent d'une langue à l'autre et cela influe sur la pensée, la vision du monde, qui devient forcément plus riche, moins dogmatique. Un "sujet européen" est en train d'advenir qui rappelle un portrait à la Picasso : identité multiple transfrontalière et attachante pour la nomade que je suis, forcément... C'est peut-être ça, la réponse à l'actuel débat d'idées qui oppose le libéralisme à l'étatisme solidaire. Le monde n'est pas binaire et une partie de plus en plus grande de la population va être constituée de cette espèce de personnes libres, transfuges, multiples.

QUESTION : N'y a-t-il pas un risque de dispersion ?

JULIA KRISTEVA. La stabilité ou la constance coexistent à cette multiplicité identitaire. On me demande de plus en plus de retracer mon parcours, et je m'aperçois de constantes dans ma réflexion. Par exemple, "la chora sémiotique" de mes travaux du début, qui déconstruisait l'opposition platonicienne du corps et de l'esprit, pour parler bref, on peut la retrouver dans mes analyses des extases de sainte Thérèse d'Avila (*Thérèse mon amour*, Fayard, 2008). C'est un axe de travail qui varie selon le moment où l'œuvre est analysée. Je l'ai retrouvé d'une autre façon dans ce que j'appelle "le temps sensible"... Quand je débusque la sensation dans le temps proustien, ce sont bien sûr toujours des refoulés sexuels, extatiques ou morbides, mais qui ont du mal à se faire reconnaître à la surface de la communication sociale, et qui irriguent la prose somptueuse et délicate de Proust. C'est bien cette traduction possible du trans-langage ou des sensations ou des affects qui me sollicite : je déchiffre les traces partageables en styles singuliers, maîtrisées artistiquement ou dominées intellectuellement, de l'innommable qui nous constitue. Et les formes de cette sublimation des pulsions sont multiples, variées.

QUESTION : C'est une version optimiste qui fait rêver... Est-ce que cela à avoir avec le féminin et sa propre temporalité ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Rêver, si vous voulez. Travailler, certainement. Absolument. Je reste quelqu'un d'extrêmement optimiste malgré le lot de déboires que la vie m'a apportés, comme à tout un chacun. Est-ce que c'est féminin ? Peut-être. Les règles, la fertilité, l'accouchement impliquent une temporalité cyclique du recommencement, comme je l'ai écrit dans "Le temps des femmes" (1979).¹³ Les hommes, en revanche, sont bien trop préoccupés par la castration et la mort – et si nous, les femmes, ne sommes pas optimistes, c'est simple : la vie s'arrête. Il y a comme une obligation à la fois biologique et sociale d'être vitaliste, d'être optimiste parce que les femmes sont les mères de l'espèce humaine – ce qui ne veut pas dire que toutes les femmes doivent devenir des mères, et que c'est là leur seul destin. La maternité est une différence dont nous ne sommes ni assez conscientes ni assez fières, qui est une charge et souvent une chance. Transmettre la vie et le langage, c'est vivre constamment dans l'espoir et pour l'avenir. Il faut le faire, sans naïveté ni complaisance...

QUESTION: En 2004, vous avez publié Meurtre à Byzance. Au-delà de l'empire puissant d'une culture très raffinée au Moyen Âge, Byzance joue pour vous, nous semble-t-il, le rôle d'un lieu entre-deux, sur le bord de deux entités, à la frontière... Dans ce roman croyez-vous être parvenue à représenter dans l'univers de la fiction cette notion d'entre-deux qui porte des traces de la rigueur de votre travail théorique ?

JULIA KRISTEVA: Je ne compare pas mon travail théorique à mes romans, et je ne vise aucunement à traduire l'un dans l'autre... Je désirais parler de la Bulgarie et de cette partie du monde qui est de religion orthodoxe, car c'est une tache aveugle, aussi bien en Europe que dans le monde en général. Et de le faire avec ma mémoire sensible comme avec mes engagements actuels. En tant qu'Européenne convaincue, je pense qu'une des grandes difficultés de l'Europe c'est de ne pas pouvoir tendre la main de manière sérieuse à cette partie orthodoxe. Historiquement, le Schisme¹⁴ entre Rome et Byzance a été aggravé par la domination ottomane, qui a duré plusieurs siècles, et par les crispations religieuses, et du Vatican, et du Patriarcat. Il n'y a pas eu d'échanges entre eux pendant très longtemps. Pour remailler cette séparation ancienne, il n'y a pas non

¹³ "Le Temps des femmes." *Cahiers de Recherche de Sciences des Textes et Documents* 5, 33.44 (1979): 5-19 ; "Women's Time." *Trans.* A. Jardine and H. Blake. *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 13-15.

¹⁴ Le Schisme de 1054 est appelé soit le grand schisme d'Orient ou le schisme orthodoxe (du point de vue occidental), soit le schisme de Rome ou encore le schisme des Latins ou le schisme catholique (du point de vue oriental). Il marque la séparation entre l'Église d'Occident (l'Église catholique) et l'Église d'Orient (l'Église orthodoxe). C'est l'aboutissement de nombreuses décennies de conflits et de réconciliations entre les deux Églises.

plus de lobbies bulgares ou grecs, qui pourraient traduire les aspirations des peuples de religion orthodoxe – comme il en existe, par exemple, pour les Polonais catholiques, dont les groupes de pression œuvrent un peu partout dans le monde. On l'a vu lors de l'établissement de la Constitution européenne, quand ils ont voulu imposer la référence à la Chrétienté – sans y parvenir, d'ailleurs.

QUESTION: Et les orthodoxes grecs ont-ils une présence politique plus directe?

JULIA KRISTEVA: Non plus. Les Grecs ont une présence économique, c'est une nation maritime, un pays d'armateurs, mais ils n'ont pas de lobby intellectuel influent. D'autre part, la religion orthodoxe, dans laquelle j'admire beaucoup la capacité de prendre à cœur les états limites de la mélancolie et de l'exaltation euphorique, éprouve en revanche beaucoup de mal à soutenir l'individu autonome et à favoriser l'entraide de ses membres. Fin septembre 2009, j'étais à Oslo¹⁵ et un Bulgare qui vit au pays avec sa famille m'a dit : "Nous n'avons pas d'églises qui nous aident dans des œuvres sociales. Et même si on en avait, ces églises n'auraient pas vraiment la culture des œuvres caritatives qu'on trouve dans les autres branches du christianisme. J'envoie mes petits enfants dans les classes de protestants pour apprendre à être solidaires, parce qu'en Bulgarie personne ne le leur apprend." En orthodoxie, il y a, me semble-t-il, une espèce d'arrêt du développement spirituel avant la Renaissance – peut-être entre autre à cause de l'occupation ottomane, et cela joue un grand rôle dans cette exclusion des pays de l'Est de l'ensemble du monde européen, sinon davantage. Les sentiments religieux n'ont pas évolué de façon à permettre aux individus de souhaiter se libérer et du contexte ambiant et de Dieu, comme on peut le constater chez Maître Eckhart¹⁶ : "Je demande à Dieu de me faire libre de Dieu" ou encore chez Thérèse d'Avila qui dit : "Je vais faire échec et mat à Dieu". Mais ce n'est pas tout. L'Europe et le monde négligent cette région peut-être aussi parce qu'ils n'y voient pas d'intérêt politique immédiat : pas de pétrole, pas assez de proximité avec le monde arabe. Ou encore, stratégiquement, est-ce que la région est russe ou n'est pas russe ? Personne ne peut le dire. Toutes sortes de variables historiques, géopolitiques et culturelles se conjuguent pour minorer l'intérêt et l'importance de ces pays. *Last but not least*, malgré la très bonne Convention sur la diversité culturelle de l'Unesco, que je soutiens, la culture n'est pas une priorité en ces temps de crise. S'intéresser à la culture de ces petits peuples, favoriser leur fierté nationale par tous les moyens et les aider à se prendre en mains, n'est donc pas une urgence. Et se contenter de donner de l'argent, qui va enrichir quelques mafieux bien

¹⁵ "Journées Kristeva 2009", organisées par l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences sociales (*Høgskole*) d'Oslo (24-26 septembre 2009).

¹⁶ Eckhart von Hochheim, dit Maître Eckhart (1260-1327) est un mystique, théologien et philosophe dominicain. Il a étudié la théologie à Erfurt, puis à Cologne et à Paris. Il a enseigné à Paris, prêché à Cologne et à Strasbourg et a administré la province dominicaine de Teutonie depuis Erfurt.

placés, ce n'est pas vraiment une politique de diversité culturelle. Aussi, face à ce désintérêt général, j'ai eu envie de rendre visible, intéressante, voire même attrayante, cette partie du monde qui se trouve être de surcroît celle de ma naissance et de mon enfance. En même temps, j'ai voulu relier les croisades du passé aux croisades d'aujourd'hui, comme la guerre en Serbie, la guerre en Irak... Ai-je réussi ? J'en doute, puisque *Meurtre à Byzance* reste une curiosité en Occident. Et dans les pays orthodoxes, soit ils n'ont pas de fierté culturelle, soit elle dégénère en nationalisme... Vous voyez, nous sommes loin de ma vision...

QUESTION : Pourtant, le roman Meurtre à Byzance a été bien reçu et a été traduit en plusieurs langues, y compris en anglais et en bulgare.

JULIA KRISTEVA : Comme écrivain, je suis satisfaite d'être lue et traduite, et je ne peux pas faire mieux. Mais je m'attendais à ce que plus de monde s'intéresse à ce qui se passe en Bulgarie, en Grèce, en Turquie. Évidemment, une hirondelle ne fait pas le printemps... L'idéal serait de faire un film afin que plus de gens découvrent ce monde byzantin, qui n'est pas une province, au sens politique, et voient que ces trois nations ont une culture superbe à l'unisson des grands problèmes d'aujourd'hui. C'est aussi pour ça que je me suis aussi impliquée, très modestement, dans l'élection de Mme Irina Bokova,¹⁷ malgré tous les problèmes que sa candidature posait. Peut-être que, en tant que directrice de l'UNESCO, cette femme Bulgare saura réveiller ce monde endormi et attirer l'attention sur lui.

QUESTION : Est-ce qu'il est possible de lire Meurtre à Byzance comme un acte de réunification imaginaire entre vous et la Bulgarie qui faisait partie de l'Empire byzantin?

JULIA KRISTEVA : C'était une manière aussi de payer une dette, de dire que je n'ai pas oublié, de manifester que c'est présent en moi. Mais je voudrais pouvoir agir sur un plan plus général, et non pas en nationaliste, car il n'y a pas plus de cause bulgare que de cause française : en fait, il y a une cause européenne. Dans ce roman, Byzance est la métaphore de l'Europe aujourd'hui, un monde composite qui est en train de se créer, et qui s'étend de la mer Noire à l'océan Atlantique, de l'île de Ré... à la Sibérie si l'on compte les partenaires privilégiés de l'Europe que sont et seraient la Russie et la Turquie. Et si ce monde arrive à se construire, il pourra jouer peut-être un rôle de contrepois entre, d'une part, les puissances émergentes (Chine, Inde, Brésil), qui seront

¹⁷ Irina Bokova (1952-), directrice générale de l'UNESCO, élue pour quatre ans, a été ambassadrice de Bulgarie en France et auprès de Monaco et Représentante personnelle du Président bulgare à l'Organisation internationale de la francophonie et Déléguée permanente auprès de l'UNESCO de 2005 à 2009. Elle a obtenu sa maîtrise à l'Institut d'État des Relations internationales de Moscou et a étudié dans les universités de Maryland et de Harvard, aux États-Unis. Au cours de sa carrière, elle a représenté la Bulgarie aux Nations unies. (<http://www.unesco.org/fr/director-general/biography/>)

de plus en plus en difficulté, et par conséquent de plus en plus agressivement nationalistes, et, d'autre part, la grande puissance des Etats-Unis, pays extrêmement attrayant mais dont les contradictions ne cesseront de le fragiliser, et auquel je dois beaucoup. Que ce soit l'unilatéralisme dur avec Mr. Bush, ou *soft* avec Mr. Obama, cela reste de l'unilatéralisme, n'est-ce pas, tandis que le monde ne sera monde que s'il arrive à être multipolaire. L'Europe, au contraire, a la chance d'être un lieu kaléidoscopique. Elle a survécu à beaucoup de guerres et de conflits. Elle s'est rendue coupable de beaucoup de crimes dont elle n'a pas fini de faire l'anamnèse, nous le savons, et pourrait se positionner en arbitre pour apaiser les tensions qui ne manqueront pas de survenir dans l'avenir.

QUESTION : Dans votre entretien avec Pierre-Louis Fort,¹⁸ vous comparez sur plusieurs points le catholicisme à l'orthodoxie qui vous a touchée, "imprégnée", pendant votre enfance, avant vos études de philosophie. Singularisant l'importance du mystère de l'incarnation dans la foi orthodoxe et l'appel constant des fidèles "au carrefour mélancolique ou extatique, selon, entre le corps et le verbe, les sens et le sensible", vous avouez avoir remarqué que votre "cheminement dans la Recherche de Proust" - cheminement qui a produit Le Temps sensible. Proust et l'expérience littéraire (1994) - avait mobilisé tout [votre] corps et que vous vous étiez "réincarnée" dans le texte que vous étudiez. Vous concluez en suggérant que votre lecture sensible vient peut-être de la tradition byzantine : "Peut-être [...] un philosophe ou un essayiste sortant de la Sorbonne, de la rue d'Ulm ou de Sèvres ne se sent pas obligé et encore moins autorisé à s'incarner ainsi dans une 'interprétation'. Je ne demande pas d'autorisation. M'est-elle déjà donnée par mon père orthodoxe, par cette tradition byzantine que j'essaie de réhabiliter au moment où l'Europe s'ouvre à l'Est, avec tant de mal, tant de réticences, même si cela se fera un jour à l'autre... ?" (pp. 650-51). Avons-nous affaire à deux approches critiques distinctes : l'approche philosophique française et l'approche kristevienne à tradition byzantine que vous avez d'abord empruntée à votre insu et que vous faites advenir dans Meurtre à Byzance et Thérèse, mon amour ? Vous avez aussi évoqué dans votre essai "L'Europe divisée" la "force de résistance qui sommeille dans la foi orthodoxe" que votre père vous a fait connaître.

JULIA KRISTEVA : L'orthodoxie chrétienne m'a imprégnée d'une façon très sensorielle, et non pas de façon dogmatique ou religieuse, *stricto sensu*. Elle constitue pour moi plutôt un climat spirituel et assez fugace, parce que mon père a très vite compris que je n'étais pas et ne serais pas croyante. Mais, entre six et dix ans, il nous emmenait ma sœur et moi communier... à six heures du matin, afin que personne ne nous voie. Au bout d'un certain temps, on s'est rebellées et il nous a laissées en paix. Comme il allait chanter dans les églises, on allait le chercher après les offices, et je sens encore l'encens, je revois la profusion des fleurs sur les autels, le jour des Rameaux... Il nous parlait beaucoup de Dostoïevski et de Nikolai Leskov,¹⁹ un écrivain russe moins

¹⁸ Pierre-Louis Fort, "Meurtre à Byzance, ou Pourquoi 'je me voyage' en roman" [entretien avec Julia Kristeva] : voir Julia Kristeva. *La Haine et le Pardon*, Fayard: 2005, 609-655.

¹⁹ Nikolai Semionovitch Leskov (en russe : Николай Семёнович Лесков, né le 16 février 1831 -

connu dont mon père appréciait la tendresse de la foi. Dans le catholicisme, contrairement à ce qu'on pense, il existe beaucoup de richesses sensorielles. Qu'il s'agisse des dogmes officiels ou de la mystique ou de l'art, ces richesses sensorielles évoluent, se métamorphosent. Certains dogmes seront représentés dans ce qui est maintenant l'héritage culturel européen : telle institution inquisitoriale verra le jour, ou des bulles de Vatican qui font la pluie et le beau temps vont se succéder... À ce vaste continent s'ajoute l'extraordinaire littérature mystique où des femmes, notamment, réussissent une auto-analyse sans précédent de l'expérience sensible et qui n'a pas d'équivalent dans le monde du christianisme orthodoxe. Relisez Angèle de Foligno²⁰ ou Thérèse d'Avila²¹ : personne n'est allé aussi profondément au cœur de la chair féminine éprouvant plaisir ou déplaisir... Chez les orthodoxes, tout cela se vit, on le voit, on l'imagine, mais n'est jamais formulé aussi précisément et avec une lucidité autocritique aussi aiguë. Dans le catholicisme, cette façon de lier le *logos* aux expériences limites a donné lieu à un dépassement de la tradition figée des icônes. Elle a permis la naissance de l'art, de la peinture et la musique, diversifiés déjà au Moyen Âge, puis la floraison de la Renaissance, et ensuite le baroque aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles. L'art a fleuri d'abord dans les églises et dans les monastères, et le plus souvent en dissidence avec les dogmes. Je cite dans mon étude le très beau livre d'une amie anglaise, Marina Warner,²² qui montre comment les peintres de la Renaissance ont été les précurseurs de l'invention de la Vierge. Très peu de textes évangéliques évoquent la Vierge, mais ces artistes, de par leur sensibilité, leur foi, leur goût de vivre à proximité du maternel, et leurs connaissances des civilisations gréco-romaines, se sont tellement imbibés de cet univers maternel et de plus en plus féminin, qu'ils ont rendu la Vierge-mère à l'Église, qui l'a finalement acceptée.

Nous, les athées, avons trop sous-estimé cette richesse sensible, et c'est l'une des critiques que j'adresse, dans mon livre sur Thérèse, à la conception et à la pratique de la laïcité. Certes, il faut continuer à "cibler", comme on dit maintenant, les abus de toutes les religions et de la religion catholique, en particulier. Je dis de "toutes les religions"

mort le 5 mars 1895 à Saint-Petersbourg) est un écrivain russe que beaucoup de Russes considèrent comme "le plus russe de tous les écrivains russes". Ses œuvres principales sont *Chroniques*, *Gens d'Église* et *Lady Macbeth du district de Mtsensk*, œuvre dont Dmitri Chostakovitch a tiré un opéra.

²⁰ Angèle de Foligno (1248-1309) est une religieuse franciscaine du XIII^e siècle, l'une des premières grandes mystiques reconnues par l'Église catholique romaine.

²¹ Thérèse d'Ávila (1515-1582) est une sainte catholique et une réformatrice monastique du XVI^e siècle. Avocate du retour à la pauvreté et à l'austérité de l'esprit carmélite authentique, elle s'est imposée comme maître à penser de la spiritualité chrétienne. Animée par son enthousiasme, Thérèse a su rendre sa foi par écrit à travers des poèmes aux vers faciles. Le style ardent et passionné est témoin de cet idéal d'amour qu'embrasse le choix de la vie monastique. Elle a laissé plusieurs écrits traitant de spiritualité : *Chemins de perfection* (*Camino de perfección*, 1569-1576), *Pensées sur l'amour de Dieu* (*Conceptos del amor de Dios*), et *Le château intérieur* (*Castillo interior* ou *las Moradas*, 1577).

²² Marina Sarah Warner (1946 -). Le livre dont Julia Kristeva parle s'intitule *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1976.

parce qu'il y a également des abus dans le judaïsme et dans l'islam, qui est, de nos jours, dénaturé avec le fondamentalisme des groupes fanatiques... Après avoir ciblé donc les méfaits des croisades, de l'Inquisition, des guerres de religion, il s'agit de montrer aussi comment notre culture contemporaine s'est arrachée du dogmatisme pour se construire avec et à travers le christianisme... Diderot était un religieux, Descartes aussi. Ce sont des ruptures faites avec et à travers le catholicisme qui nous ont conduits à la libre pensée. Quoi qu'on en ait, le religieux est une dimension fondamentale des sociétés, et le besoin de croire le disque dur de l'être humain. Au forum qui se tenait à Vienne ("The Force of Monotheism"²³), j'ai soutenu qu'une des forces du monothéisme est de pouvoir se renouveler de rupture en rupture, et que nous, les laïcs, les athées, sommes en rupture *de cela*... Et non pas du taoïsme ou de l'islam, ou de toute autre religion. Pour ne pas sombrer dans un athéisme mécaniste, il me paraît indispensable de revisiter et de réévaluer cet héritage religieux, de nous y ressourcer, de prendre ce qui est à prendre, de critiquer ce qui est à critiquer, afin de permettre aux habitants du troisième millénaire d'ajuster leur sensibilité, leur pensée. D'ailleurs, comme je vous l'ai dit tout à l'heure, je crois très profondément que l'Europe a un rôle à jouer entre deux grandes forces (pays émergents/Etats-Unis) qui menacent par leur dogmatisme et leur puissance les libertés singulières. Si l'Europe doit exister, il faudrait qu'elle puisse faire aussi une sorte d'anamnèse (je ne parle de réconciliation parce que cela n'est pas possible) qui favoriserait l'harmonie entre les deux grandes branches du monothéisme, d'abord les juifs et les chrétiens – au-delà de la repentance à propos de la Shoah – pour se comprendre mieux, et ensuite poursuivre ce dialogue apaisé avec les musulmans, s'ils le veulent bien. Pour l'instant, l'amertume et l'incompréhension prédominent, et beaucoup trop de violences de part et d'autre. L'Europe, cette nouvelle Byzance en devenir, pourrait offrir un modèle universel de liberté au monde, mais si l'on échoue à sa construction, je crains que cela n'ait pas lieu. D'où mon intérêt pour les expériences mystiques ou religieuses qui participent de l'identité européenne. La connaissance de la psychanalyse, mais aussi la fréquentation assidue de la littérature me permettent peut-être de mieux évaluer les richesses de la vie psychique humaine que recèlent ces formations spirituelles, malgré et par-delà les dogmatismes.

QUESTION : Peut-être allons-nous faire une affirmation que nous ne pouvons pas soutenir mais il nous semble que presque toutes les formes de mysticisme dans la religion catholique et dans l'islam (le soufisme est souvent ciblé) sont persécutées par les autorités qui détiennent le pouvoir parce qu'elles sont dangereuses.

JULIA KRISTEVA : Auparavant, je pensais comme vous... Mais l'histoire du mysticisme, entre autre, montre que l'émergence de la personne singulière, de ses droits

²³ Voir note 2 : "The Force of Monotheism: Psychoanalysis and Religions" International Conference...

et devoirs, est un événement du judéo-christianisme, et c'est sur cette base que se sont constituées – laïcisées – la notion et la pratique des droits de l'homme. Hegel qui connaissait bien l'histoire des religions l'avait dit à sa façon. Ma lecture, à partir de l'appui que je prends dans la théorie freudienne, me permet de réaffirmer mais aussi d'interroger cet événement sans précédent. Essayons de ne pas nous laisser aveugler par les abus de christianisme et de "transvaluer" (comme le voulait Nietzsche) cette tradition avec objectivité. Les théologiens catholiques étaient de fabuleux dialecticiens. Dans un premier temps, ils commencent par excommunier, persécuter, et les bûchers flambent. Puis ils trient deux ou trois de ces mystiques, qui sont les meilleurs, et au bout de trente ans ceux-ci deviennent des saints. Les mystiques sont en "exclusion interne" du dogme officiel, ils sont contre mais ils sont dedans. Et ils modifient le système subrepticement, à long terme...

QUESTION : Le catholicisme ne veut pas encourager le mysticisme, n'est-ce pas ?...

JULIA KRISTEVA: C'est beaucoup plus retors ! D'un côté, on ne va pas offrir l'expérience des mystiques à tout le monde, ces gens sont des dissidents sinon des hérétiques potentiels. Mais si et quand le chemin qu'ils ouvrent s'avère fécond, ils deviennent des saints et des saintes. Des exemples... inaccessibles... mais à méditer et à suivre, si possible. Tout le monde n'est pas saint, mais on peut excuser les extravagances quasi hérétiques de ce mystique-là pour viser une perfection extrême des esprits, et parfois même de la sensualité (c'est le cas des extases de Thérèse d'Avila). C'est un équilibre, une récupération si l'on veut assez retorse mais très efficace, et qui ouvre une respiration du dogme, une évolution de l'idée même de liberté au singulier. Alors que dans d'autres religions les mystiques sont purement et simplement bannis. On aurait bien du mal aujourd'hui dans l'islam à produire une théologie interprétative de l'islam qui réunirait autour d'une table de réflexion sunnites, chiites et soufis.

QUESTION : N'y aurait-il pas des formes d'accord entre les mystiques chrétiens et, par exemple, les soufistes dans l'islam²⁴ à travers la poésie ? On peut penser à l'influence de la pensée du poète mystique persan musulman Djâlal ad-Dîn Râmî (1207-1273).

JULIA KRISTEVA : Avec des poètes, cet accord est possible. Ainsi, il y a deux ans, quand j'ai fondé à Jérusalem le groupe de recherche "Standing Forum on Religions",²⁵

²⁴ *Le soufisme* est un mouvement spirituel, mystique et ascétique de l'islam, qui est apparu au VII^e siècle. Doctrine ésotérique, il a pris ses racines dans l'orthodoxie sunnite, mais il s'est rapidement transformé, dans certains de ses courants tout au moins, et influence, et a influencé des dissidences chiites.

²⁵ *Standing Interdisciplinary Forum: Psychoanalysis, Belief, and Religious Conflicts*. La première réunion scientifique de ce forum s'est intitulée "The Unbelievable Need to Believe" et a eu lieu en novembre 2008. Julia Kristeva a donné la conférence d'ouverture du colloque le 20 novembre 2008. Le colloque a

nous avons invité Abdelwahad Meddeb,²⁶ un poète français d'origine tunisienne. Il nous a parlé de Rûmî,²⁷ d'Ibn Arabî²⁸ et d'autres auteurs, mais ce sont des poètes que les autorités religieuses musulmanes ne reconnaissent pas, et dont elles ne veulent pas. Eux non plus d'ailleurs, il me semble.

QUESTION : Vous avez écrit sur Jean-Paul II²⁹ dans votre livre Cet incroyable besoin de croire.³⁰ Pourquoi ?

été organisé par le Freud Center for Psychoanalytic Studies and Research of the Israel Psychoanalytic Society.

²⁶ Abdelwahab Meddeb (1946 -) est un essayiste, poète et romancier franco-tunisien, spécialiste du soufisme, des cultures arabe et persane, et directeur de la revue internationale *Dédale*. Il enseigne également la littérature comparée. Dans sa thèse de doctorat "Écriture et double généalogie", il défend un rapprochement entre l'Europe des Lumières et le monde arabo-islamique. En 2007, il a reçu le Prix international de littérature francophone Benjamin-Fondane.

²⁷ Djalâl ad-Dîn Rûmî (1207-1273) est un poète persan né à Balkh et mort à Konya où son père, théologien éminent, dirigeait une *madrassa*. Après plusieurs années d'études à Alep et à Damas, il s'installe à Konya, où il enseigne la jurisprudence et la loi canonique. En 1244 il rencontre Shams de Tabriz, un derviche errant qui devient son maître spirituel. Après la disparition tragique de Shams, il institue la *sama'*, cérémonie d'écoute spirituelle accompagnée de circumambulation des mystiques connus en Occident sous le nom de derviches tourneurs. Dans son recueil de plus de 25 000 distiques allégoriques et mystiques, le *Mathnawî*, Rûmî aborde beaucoup de problèmes moraux et de questions d'exégèse et de métaphysique dérivées de la lecture du Coran et des *hadiths*. Rûmî est l'un des rares intellectuels et mystiques dont la pensée a profondément affecté le monde islamique. Ses trois autres œuvres les plus célèbres sont *Dîwân-e Shams* ou *Dîwân-e kebir* (un recueil de couplets et de quatrains mystiques), *Madjâlîs-e Sab'ab* (*Sept sermons*), *Fîhi-mâ-fîhî* (une compilation de discours).

²⁸ Ibn 'Arabî (1165-1240) est né à Murcie, dans le pays d'al-Andalûs, et mort à Damas. Également appelé "Cheikh al-Akbar" ("le plus grand maître", en arabe), c'est un poète, philosophe et mystique arabe, auteur de 846 titres. Son ouvrage métaphysique majeure, les *Illuminations de la Mecque* (ou *Illuminations mecquoises : "Al Futûhât al Makkiyyâ"*) décrit les aspects spirituels et métaphysiques du soufisme. En raison de sa rigueur, on lui a donné le surnom de "fils de Platon". Certains considèrent que son œuvre aurait influencé Dante, voire Jean de la Croix.

²⁹ Jean-Paul II (Karol Józef Wojtyła, 1920-2005) est un prêtre catholique polonais qui a été élu pape de l'Église catholique le 16 octobre 1978 sous le nom de Jean-Paul II. Sa volonté de rapprocher les religions a amélioré les relations de l'Église catholique avec les Juifs, les Églises orthodoxes, et les Anglicans. En 1999 Jean-Paul II est devenu le premier pape à se rendre dans un pays à majorité orthodoxe (la Roumanie) depuis le schisme de 1054. Au cours de ce voyage, il a demandé pardon au nom des catholiques pour le sac de Constantinople. En voyage officiel en Bulgarie du 23 au 26 mai 2002, il a célébré le 24 mai l'une de plus importantes fêtes bulgares, dédiée aux frères Saints Cyrille et Méthode (*Sveti Kiril i Metodii*) qui ont créé l'alphabet cyrillique. On y fête l'écriture cyrillique, l'éducation et la culture bulgares.

Julia Kristeva se trouvait alors en Bulgarie pour recevoir le titre de *Doctor Honoris causa* de l'Université de Sofia St. Kliment Ohridski, la plus ancienne et la plus prestigieuse université de Bulgarie.

Dans l'article "Foi et raison : pour quelle inculturation ?" dans lequel Julia Kristeva réfléchit à sa rencontre avec Jean-Paul II en Bulgarie en 2002, elle note : "Il m'a été donné de l'approcher en mai 2002, à Sofia, dans mon pays natal, sa visite coïncidant avec la célébration de l'alphabet cyrillique et mon obtention du titre de *Docteur Honoris Causa* de mon université Saint Clément d'Ohrid à Sofia. Je savais que

JULIA KRISTEVA : En 2002, j'ai été invitée à Sofia pour recevoir un doctorat *honoris causa* de l'Université de Sofia. Ce qui aurait dû être une fête a tourné au drame, puisque maman est morte d'une méningite foudroyante à ce moment-là. Et à Sofia, Jean Paul II était présent : c'était la fête de l'alphabet, des deux saints Cyrille et Méthode devenus "patrons de l'Europe". Très atteint par la maladie de Parkinson, le pape s'est exprimé en bulgare, langue qu'il avait apprise, malgré sa maladie et les difficultés qu'il avait à parler. Un prêtre a fini son intervention dans laquelle deux choses m'ont frappée, et je n'imagine pas un dignitaire d'une autre religion pouvant tenir un tel discours. Parce que les catholiques ont développé une culture à la fois politique et littéraire, et que Jean Paul II était non seulement un poète mais aussi un philosophe phénoménologue... D'abord, il a dit en substance qu'il était venu en Bulgarie (ce sont des agents bulgares qui avaient, paraît-il, tiré sur lui lors de l'attentat de la place Saint-Pierre qui l'a gravement handicapé) parce que la Bulgarie a réussi une cohabitation exemplaire entre chrétiens, juifs et musulmans [ce qui va dans le sens de ma vision de Byzance] et qu'elle a empêché la déportation des juifs pendant la deuxième guerre mondiale". Ensuite, il a rendu hommage à la culture bulgare qui a donné au monde l'alphabet slave, l'écriture, car c'est par l'écriture que s'exprime la liberté de chacun. Alors que je pensais qu'il faisait allusion à la Sainte Ecriture, il a lui-même précisé qu'il s'agissait évidemment d'elle mais aussi du fait que, par le truchement de l'écriture, chaque homme et chaque femme obtient la possibilité de s'exprimer en son nom propre". C'était très impressionnant.

On ne peut pas considérer l'histoire du christianisme sans se rendre compte qu'il a généré l'idée de sujet, de sujet singulier. Et cela, dès saint Paul. Plus explicitement encore, c'est Duns Scott³¹ qui a développé le concept d'*haecceitas* : c'est cet homme-ci, cette femme-là ; chacun est une singularité. En anglais, on dit "*thisness*"... La "vérité", ce n'est ni l'idée générale, ni la matière, mais le "ceci" et le "cela". Il fallait oser le penser ! Les catholiques ont compris qu'il n'y a de liberté qu'individuelle, que l'homme abstrait

le 31 décembre 1980 le pape avait nommé les deux frères Cyrille et Méthode, créateurs de cet alphabet, saints patrons d'Europe. *Solidarnosc* était alors en pleine expansion. Six mois après, le 13 mai 1981, Mehmet Ali Agca a commis l'attentat contre le pape, avec la participation des services secrets bulgares et du KGB. Je pensais à ces événements, en écoutant Jean-Paul II formuler ce qui m'a toujours paru une nécessité urgente, qu'aucun politique n'avait entrevue : l'Europe élargie ne se ferait pas sans une réconciliation entre les Églises d'Occident et l'Orthodoxie. Historien subtil et stratège optimiste, Jean-Paul II rappela que la Bulgarie s'était opposée à la déportation des juifs exigée par les nazis pendant la Shoah, et que l'entente qui s'était établie dans ce pays entre juifs, chrétiens et musulmans pourrait servir d'exemple au monde entier" (http://www.kristeva.fr/fides_et_ratio.html).

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, "N'ayez pas peur de la culture européenne." *Cet incroyable besoin de croire*, Paris : Bayard, 2007.

³¹ Jean Duns Scot (*ca.* 1266-1308) est un théologien et philosophe écossais de l'ordre des franciscains qui a fondé l'école scolastique dite scotiste. L'école scotiste s'oppose à la doctrine thomiste définie un peu plus tôt par le théologien dominicain Thomas d'Aquin (*ca.* 1225-1274). Jean Duns Scot, le "Docteur subtil", invente le concept d'*haecceitas* ou de singularité basée sur le concept d'individuation : individualité d'une personne, d'une journée.

n'existe pas, et que les communautés sont toujours des redoutables adhérences qui entraînent l'écrasement de toute individualité. Nous touchons ici, une fois de plus, une différence fondamentale avec l'islam, me semble-t-il, dans lequel c'est l'obéissance qui prédomine. N'est-ce pas une raison de plus de travailler avec eux l'idée de libérer l'individu... Et de ne pas se "soumettre" ? Les féministes américaines m'agacent quand elles disent qu'il faut respecter les cultures nationales, et que si des musulmanes veulent porter le tchador, le voile ou le hijab, il faut respecter leur choix. Est-on en train de remplacer, aux USA, l'idée de liberté par celle de choix ? Il faudrait dans ce cas relire Simone de Beauvoir... Même chose avec les excisions dans certains pays d'Afrique. Je me demande où est le libre choix de ces fillettes, mutilées sexuellement ? Là où on excise les fillettes, le reste du monde devrait se taire puisque cela a à voir avec la culture du pays ? Et laisser se perpétuer une domination qui doit souvent beaucoup plus aux habitudes sociales archaïques qu'aux prescriptions religieuses, si tant est qu'elles existent en matière d'excision... Une femme éduquée, qui travaille, qui crée, disposant de son corps, indépendante financièrement, et pouvant être mère sans s'y confiner, reste partout dans notre monde toujours patriarcal encore un idéal à atteindre. L'instrumentalisation des croyances religieuses, quelles qu'elles soient, pour fonder une discrimination asservissante des femmes est à dénoncer et à combattre.

QUESTION : Votre dernier livre Thérèse, mon amour (2008) est consacré à Thérèse d'Avila. Quels sont les liens qui conditionnent votre prédilection créative pour des femmes exceptionnelles de l'Europe du Moyen-Âge, donc pré-moderne comme Anne Comnène (Meurtre à Byzance) et Thérèse d'Avila (Thérèse, mon amour) ? Deux femmes qui choisissent d'écrire, l'une orthodoxe et byzantine, l'autre catholique et espagnole. Comment définiriez-vous ce que sont l'écriture et la langue pour l'une, Anne Comnène,³² et pour l'autre, Thérèse d'Avila ? Est-ce que pour Thérèse, l'écriture a une fonction thérapeutique tandis que chez Anne Comnène elle reflète plutôt un choix politique, celui de passer à la postérité sa version du gouvernement de son père, Alexis Comnène (1058-1118) ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : L'histoire de Thérèse est apparue dans ma vie par hasard, je connaissais très peu de choses d'elle, sinon qu'elle figurait en couverture du livre de Lacan, *Encore*, consacré à la jouissance féminine... Frédéric Boyer,³³ un de mes anciens

³² Anne Comnène (1083-1148) est la fille de l'empereur Alexis Comnène et d'Irène Doukas, sœur de Jean II Comnène. Épouse de l'historien Nicéphore Bryenne, elle compose l'histoire du règne de son père, l'*Alexiade*. Anne se distingue par sa formation intellectuelle. Elle a bénéficié d'un enseignement soigné en philosophie et en belles-lettres. Dans sa préface, elle indique qu'elle maîtrise aussi la rhétorique et les mathématiques. Elle anime un cercle intellectuel à Constantinople et commande des commentaires sur l'œuvre d'Aristote.

³³ Frédéric Boyer (1961-) est un écrivain. Il a aussi enseigné la littérature comparée aux universités de Lyon III et de Paris VII et également à la prison de la Santé à Paris. Il a dirigé le chantier de la nouvelle traduction de la Bible, à laquelle ont collaboré de nombreux écrivains contemporains (parmi lesquels François Bon, Emmanuel Carrère, Marie NDiaye, Valère Novarina, Jacques Roubaud), publiée en 2001 par les éditions Bayard où il est directeur éditorial en sciences humaines et religion.

étudiants, qui est devenu depuis directeur de Bayard Presse, avait préparé sous ma direction une thèse sur l'expérience spirituelle chez Dostoïevski, Proust et Kafka. Il m'a proposé de faire un petit livre sur un grand guide spirituel de l'Occident, "avec une interprétation anthropologique psychanalytique". J'étais en train d'écrire *Meurtre à Byzance*, j'ai proposé Anne Comnène. Il a préféré Thérèse d'Avila, "plus connue, voire célèbre". Je ne la connaissais presque pas. "Lisez-la et vous me direz." Et j'ai lu pendant six ans. Je me suis plongée dans son œuvre, sa vie, j'ai vécu avec elle et les féministes qui avaient écrit sur elle, américaines, italiennes, etc. J'étais fascinée par la richesse, par la justesse, par la complexité de cette mystique. Plus qu'un roman, c'est une histoire, c'est une philosophie, c'est une Église et une guerre contre l'Église. C'est une femme qui n'est pas qu'une femme... C'est un événement mondial !

QUESTION. Qu'en est-il du projet d'en faire une pièce de théâtre ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Avec Olivier Py, le directeur de l'Odéon, on travaille sur la fin de mon roman, déjà écrite sous forme de dialogues; Thérèse est à l'agonie et revoit les êtres marquants de sa vie, surtout des femmes. Je suis en train d'adapter pour la scène ces dialogues afin de les rendre plus percutants.

QUESTION : Tout à l'heure, vous nous avez fait penser au travail de Michel de Certeau³⁴ qui a travaillé sur saint Jean de la Croix, un contemporain de Thérèse. Il aborde les choses en historien des idées et en ethnologue mais avec une formation théologique jésuite.

JULIA KRISTEVA : Je l'ai bien connu, et je me réfère souvent à son travail. Nous avons fait ensemble un séminaire à l'hôpital de la Cité universitaire sur "Psychose et vérité". Ça a donné lieu à un petit livre (qui n'a pas été réédité), dans la collection *Tel Quel*, qui s'appelle *Folle Vérité*.³⁵ Michel de Certeau est venu présenter Jean-Joseph Serein, son mystique adoré. J'avais invité aussi Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch,³⁶ une spécialiste du poète Rûmî, et François Cheng³⁷ nous a parlé de la Chine. Je m'intéressais déjà à l'histoire des spiritualités et aux récits de ces états limites, sous un angle

³⁴ Michel de Certeau (1925-1986) est un intellectuel jésuite français. Philosophe et historien des religions, il a publié *La fable mystique* (1982) et des ouvrages de réflexion plus généraux sur l'histoire, la psychanalyse, et le statut de la religion dans le monde moderne.

³⁵ Julia Kristeva, dir. et Jean-Michel Ribettes, ed. *Folle vérité. Vérité et vraisemblance du texte psychotique*. Paris : Seuil, collection *Tel Quel*, 1979.

³⁶ Eva de Vitray-Meyerovitch (1909-1999) est traductrice, écrivain et docteur en islamologie. Chercheuse au CNRS (Centre national de la recherche scientifique), elle a dirigé le service des sciences humaines.

³⁷ François Cheng (1929-) est un écrivain, poète et calligraphe chinois, naturalisé français en 1971. Il a été élu à l'Académie française le 13 juin 2002, au fauteuil de Jacques de Bourbon Busset (34^e fauteuil).

d'approche psychanalytique, et pas du tout religieux. Michel, qui était anthropologue et psy également, a très bien joué le jeu. Ensuite, il est parti aux États-Unis. Et lorsqu'il est mort, beaucoup trop tôt, j'ai été bouleversée. Un certain nombre des personnes qui l'ont connu avaient été conviées à une messe à Saint-Ignace, une petite église à peine visible, cachée derrière les façades des magasins dans la rue de Sèvres. Quarante jésuites ont célébré la messe, avec des chants, devant une foule d'intellectuels et quelques paroissiens du quartier. Cinq ou six discours ont été prononcés en son honneur. L'un d'entre eux a évoqué son travail de philosophe, et un autre l'apport de sa réflexion de théologien : "C'était un vrai jésuite, parce qu'être jésuite c'est être contre : un révolté".

QUESTION : Est-ce aussi être libre de ne pas être croyant, au sens courant ?

JULIA KRISTEVA: A vrai dire, je ne suis pas sûre qu'on puisse parler d'un "sens courant" de la foi : c'est forcément une expérience singulière, et à plus forte raison chez un homme exigeant comme Michel de Certeau. Enfin, un dernier souvenir, le prêtre qui lui avait donné l'extrême-onction nous a fait entendre la chanson que Michel de Certeau souhaitait pour accompagner la messe de son enterrement... C'était "Non, rien de rien, je ne regrette rien..." d'Edith Piaf. J'étais émue aux larmes, au point de dire au père Vallat, le supérieur de l'Ordre, que j'étais prête à entrer chez les jésuites s'ils acceptaient des femmes... Une boutade, évidemment. Un autre souvenir : Michel de Certeau m'avait envoyé des étudiants du Mexique qui étudiaient leur théologie à Paris, pour suivre mon cours sur la sémiologie qui était consacré pendant ce semestre au signe et au langage chez saint Augustin. Ils ont fait des exposés très, très brillants... Beaucoup faisaient partie du courant de la théologie de la libération, celui des prêtres défendant les paysans, les illettrés, les plus pauvres... un mouvement spirituel très politique qui a beaucoup secoué l'Amérique latine, et qui a connu des excès actuellement critiqués... Mais il me semble qu'un de ces étudiants est cependant arrivé à un poste hiérarchique important.

QUESTION: Thérèse d'Avila a suscité un certain intérêt chez Jacques Lacan ; Simone de Beauvoir fait son éloge dans Le Deuxième Sexe (1949) et Roland Barthes l'évoque dans son essai "Sur la lecture". Barthes postule "qu'il y a du Désir dans la lecture" : il rapproche l'expérience du lecteur de celle du "sujet mystique" et de celle du "sujet amoureux". Il prend pour exemple, très brièvement, Thérèse d'Avila, qui "faisait nommément de la lecture le substitut de l'oraison mentale" (dans Le Bruissement de la langue, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1984, p. 43). Dans Thérèse mon amour (Fayard, 2008) vous faites une lecture parallèle à celle de Barthes, mais en partant de l'écriture de Thérèse que vous percevez comme une sorte de remède : "Thérèse, telle que je la lisais, parvenait, en s'extasiant et en écrivant ses extases, non seulement à souffrir et à jouir corps et âme, mais aussi à se guérir (ou presque) de ses plus gros symptômes : anorexie, langueur, insomnies, syncopes (desmayos), épilepsie, gota coral et mal de corazon, paralysie, étranges saignements et affreuses migraines". Selon vous, elle parvient à devenir par l'écriture une figure politique : "Mieux encore, elle devait réussir à imposer sa politique à celle de l'Église en réformant l'ordre du Carmel. À fonder dix-sept monastères en

vingt ans... À écrire une œuvre abondante... À se révéler très fine experte en métapsychologie, bien avant Freud... Amoureuse impénitente, agitée par un désir insatiable pour les hommes, les femmes, et naturellement pour l'homme-Dieu Jésus-Christ, elle ne songe pas un instant à voiler sa passion..." (p. 20). Pourriez-vous commenter ce que vous avez écrit ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Thérèse d'Avila lisait beaucoup et s'est mise à écrire par la suite. Elle pratiquait l'oraison mentale qui consiste à lire des textes de la Bible et des Évangiles sans les prononcer à haute voix, donc à s'immerger sensoriellement dans l'écriture... ce qui produit chez l'orant/e des états régressifs, tantôt extrêmement jubilatoires, tantôt catastrophiques qui peuvent déstructurer la personne jusqu'à l'évanouissement. C'est un type d'expérience mystique pratiquée par les *Alumbrados* auxquels appartenaient des dissidents de la synagogue et beaucoup de femmes d'origine juive. Son guide, le franciscain Francisco de Osuna³⁸ qui a beaucoup compté pour Thérèse, représente parfaitement ces courants dissidents qui se développaient en Espagne au XVI^e siècle. À sa suite, Thérèse a largement éprouvé les affres et délices de l'oraison mentale. C'est la mise en parole de ces états inquiétants qui l'ont progressivement éloignée de leurs risques : par la confession d'abord, comme le lui conseillaient ses confesseurs, par l'écriture à la longue. Elle a réussi à la fois la plongée dans une sorte de psychose induite par ce type d'oraison, et la mise en mots de cette décompensation voisine de l'épilepsie voire de la folie. On pourrait dire par conséquent, qu'à son insu Thérèse a pratiqué une sorte de thérapie, parce qu'elle a pu communiquer en langage ses états extrêmes de décompression ou d'extase.

QUESTION : Dans les Balkans, dans le folklore, nous avons des trenos, des lamentations... Quand quelqu'un meurt, des parentes peuvent entrer en transe et improviser des lamentations funèbres qui évoquent la vie et les souffrances de la morte. La verbalisation prend la forme de lamentation improvisée. Serait-ce du même ordre ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Ce sont des genres qui sont déjà codés, et qui abrégissent l'angoisse mais n'essaient pas de l'élucider. Au contraire, Thérèse s'essaie seule à faire son introspection en l'écrivant. En effet, la jouissance dans laquelle le verbe joue un rôle important est présente, parce que le refoulement chrétien n'est pas un refoulement massif. On demande aux catholiques de maîtriser la pulsion qu'ils ont vécue dans la régression, jusque dans la transe si vous voulez, et de s'apaiser, afin de la traduire le plus possible dans des mots, donc de faire confiance au verbe et à l'écrit. De ce fait, c'est-à-dire de la place maîtresse accordée au langage dès le début, l'expérience devient thérapeutique, au sens moderne du terme. C'est la raison pour laquelle je propose ce

³⁸ Francisco de Osuna (1497-1541) est un auteur espagnol, né à Séville. Son livre *Le Troisième Alphabet spirituel* a influencé Sainte Thérèse d'Avila. Le livre est considéré comme un chef-d'œuvre de la mystique franciscaine.

raccourci hyperbolique : sans Thérèse, sans ces mystiques écrivains, il n'y aurait pas eu la psychanalyse. En effet, en travaillant sur les documents de l'époque, j'ai pu constater que les confesseurs dirigeaient spirituellement les femmes, les écoutaient en confession, et les incitaient à écrire leur vie, à analyser les mouvements les plus intimes de leur âme et de leur corps...

QUESTION : En Espagne ou en France ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : En Espagne et en France aussi... Et ils les incitaient à écrire des "vies" : un genre très prisé à l'époque. Les féministes ont signalé ce phénomène, mais il convient de le reprendre et de détailler comme il s'est transformé dans les salons du XVIII^e et parmi ces femmes cultivées recomposant leur vie par l'écriture, notamment les épistolières. Rappelons-nous Madame de Sévigné. Ses lettres à sa fille, Mme de Grignan, déclinent avec finesse et âpreté la rivalité amoureuse et mortelle entre mère et fille, et comment cette passion arrive à se sublimer dans/par l'écriture. Simone de Beauvoir souligne, dans la trajectoire de Thérèse la mystique, la femme qui essaie de s'émanciper en devenant écrivain. Elle est très admirative du livre que Thérèse a écrit sur sa vie. Dans le chapitre sur les mystiques du *Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir déplore cependant que la sainte ne soit pas arrivée à se libérer de l'Église, ce qui est vrai : Thérèse est restée à l'intérieur de l'Église. Ce faisant, Beauvoir méconnaît le côté politique de Thérèse : constructrice de monastère, Thérèse mène de véritables combats avec la hiérarchie de l'Église pour réformer le Carmel, et pour fonder le Carmel déchaussé.

QUESTION : En écrivant sur ces deux figures de femmes intellectuelles et chercheuses de vérité que sont Anne Comnène et sur Thérèse d'Avila, de laquelle seriez-vous la plus proche ? Dans laquelle vous "réincarnerez-vous" le plus, dans le sens que vous donnez à ce mot ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : On me pose souvent cette question à propos de Hannah Arendt, de Mélanie Klein ou de Colette. En fait, non, je ne me réincarne dans aucune de ces personnalités. On dit que je fais preuve de générosité à leur égard, et c'est le compliment qui me plaît le plus, car si je les critique parfois c'est aussi en les aimant, mais sans m'identifier à elles pour autant. C'est plutôt de l'empathie, de l'admiration. Anne Comnène était trop royale et trop mélancolique : aucun rapport avec moi ! Peut-être que je peux me retrouver dans certains états d'abandon et de solitude de Thérèse, mais c'est vraiment pour vous faire plaisir... Dans son activité intellectuelle, le volet "romanesque" existe. Mais la partie la plus importante de ses textes est une réflexion sur Dieu et son "mariage" avec elle, sur cette passion qu'elle ressent et n'arrête pas d'analyser : ce n'est pas de la théologie savante, mais c'est tout comme, plutôt de la théologie intime. De plus, elle crée un Ordre, fait des fondations, ouvre des monastères. Aucun rapport avec moi !

QUESTION. N'avez-vous pas fondé le Conseil national Handicap (CNH), le Centre Roland Barthes, l'Institut de la pensée contemporaine, le Forum de Jérusalem...

JULIA KRISTEVA. C'est vrai, mais je suis très loin du compte !!! Et la compétition reste ouverte... Thérèse en a fait dix-sept ! D'une certaine manière, je suis une "femme d'affaires", comme Thérèse le disait d'elle-même avec humour. J'ai envie de créer dans la réalité... alors je fais des institutions.

QUESTION : Est-ce que vous voulez préciser comment vous entendez le concept de réincarnation dans le texte ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : C'est juste une boutade de plus. On avait demandé au poète russe Maïakovski,³⁹ s'il croyait... Maïakovski a écrit de la poésie révolutionnaire, futuriste, pas excellente de mon point de vue, mais qui fait date... Avec Roman Jakobson⁴⁰ nous avons souvent parlé de lui, et il m'a montré ce texte dans lequel Maïakovski dit qu'il croit en la réincarnation. Puisqu'il ne délire pas, il est évident que pour lui c'est le texte, le poème, qui le "réincarne". Quand Maïakovski écrit, il met tellement d'intensité de lui-même, du "sémiotique" au sens que je donne plus haut à cette expérience du langage, qu'il revit dans ses textes : non pas que le texte va lui survivre, mais parce que l'écriture du poème lui procure une nouvelle vie. Il m'arrive de constater cela par exemple dans certaines séances de psychanalyse – où la parole obtient un effet de renaissance pour le patient.

QUESTION : Le texte donne-t-il aussi de l'énergie à l'auteur ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Précisément ! Je donne de l'énergie à mon texte et le texte me donne une nouvelle énergie.

QUESTION : Cela a-t-il à voir avec le mysticisme byzantin ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Ce va-et-vient entre le corps et le verbe, et le verbe qui se fait chair, est présent dans toute la chrétienté... Mais nous l'observons aussi dans une

³⁹ Vladimir Vladimirovitch Maïakovski (également orthographié Maïakovsky; en russe: Владимир Владимирович Маяковский, 1893-1930) est un poète, dramaturge et futuriste russe, de grande importance pour l'avant-garde russe.

⁴⁰ Roman Ossipovitch Jakobson (en russe : Роман Осипович Якобсон, 1896-1982) est un penseur russe qui devient l'un des linguistes les plus influents du XX^e siècle. Réfugié à Prague et membre du fameux cercle linguistique de Prague, il pose les premières pierres du développement de l'analyse structurale du langage, de la poésie et de l'art.

séance de psychanalyse réussie, quand nous donnons une interprétation qui fait mouche, le patient, qui est arrivé blême, malheureux, oppressé, ressort de la séance, le teint rose, la démarche dynamique – ce n'est pas de l'extase mais il respire beaucoup mieux ! La circulation sanguine s'est transformée, l'œil est plus vif, le *feedback* de la parole juste et vraie est perceptible dans le corps. Quand on réussit à écrire quelque chose de vrai pour soi, et qui le sera peut-être aussi pour un lecteur sur dix mille, il se produit une rencontre entre le sens et le sensible, "le verbe et la chair", qui donne cette impression de renaissance. Colette en parle aussi, elle l'appelle "éclosion". Elle la cherche dans la nature en regardant les fleurs, les oiseaux, les chats, mais c'est l'écriture qui lui procure cette impression de renaître.

QUESTION : Avec Thérèse, mon amour, avez-vous éprouvé un peu cette relation ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Oui je n'arrivais pas à la quitter, et c'est pour ça que le livre a pris cette forme énorme, à la fois acte d'amour, reconnaissance de dette vis-à-vis de son époque et de son destin, et peut-être aussi une sorte de thérapie personnelle pour moi-même : ma révolte contre mon père, mon athéisme, ma nouvelle façon de "transvaluer" le passé. Je voulais à la fois raconter sa biographie, parce que les gens ne la connaissent pas, citer de larges extraits de ses écrits, la contemporanéiser avec des interprétations d'aujourd'hui, et donner des points de vue personnels. J'espérais que mon éditeur me dirait d'arrêter, mais au contraire, il m'a encouragée : "Formidable !" Aussi je n'ai pas eu à raccourcir, à resserrer, ce qui est toujours fastidieux et pénible. Les presses de l'Université de Columbia sont en train de traduire en anglais *Thérèse*.

Monsieur Stefan Hollstein arrive alors pour accompagner Madame Kristeva à la réception que l'Ambassade de France à Berlin donne en son honneur. Julia Kristeva nous invite à lui poser une dernière question.

QUESTION : Si l'on adopte votre lecture d'Hanna Arendt, est-ce qu'on peut considérer l'interview comme un lieu, un topos, où on partage son récit avec autrui, donc un espace de polis ? Et dans cette perspective, est-ce que la psychanalyse serait une version de l'interview, ou est-ce que l'interview serait le paradigme primordial, primaire de la psychanalyse ?

JULIA KRISTEVA : Oui, l'interview est évidemment un acte politique, au sens large. C'est pourquoi je suis très pointilleuse et que je ne lâche pas facilement mes interviews. J'ai envie de les revoir, de les figoler car je ne les trouve jamais assez bien formulées. Je désire que ce que je dis soit transmis de la manière qui fasse sens et un sens le plus exact possible. C'est peut-être une sorte de survalorisation de la *polis*, de ma part.

Quant à la seconde partie de votre question, même s'il peut exister une maïeutique dans l'interview, l'interview n'est pas comparable au dialogue très particulier qui se construit entre le patient et le psy. C'est d'un transfert/contretransfert qu'il s'agit

dans ce cas et l'échange des paroles est alors asymétrique, le but étant de débusquer le désir refoulé du patient, de l'aider à donner sens aussi au négatif, à élucider les traumatismes, etc. Et cela dans un cadre où les deux subjectivités, de l'analyste et de l'analysant, se rencontre, mais dans une disparité fondatrice – le patient associe, rêve, souffre ; le psy interprète, dénoue, libère.

Peut-être qu'il faut laisser dans l'interview un peu de spontanéité et de décousu...

QUESTION : Oui, nous vous en remercions infiniment. Votre générosité s'y révèle mieux, pleine et accueillante, hospitalière...

JULIA KRISTEVA : Ça, c'est peut-être slave ou... féminin. On me le dit souvent. Même si je rêve de moments solitaires où j'aurais plus de temps pour écrire mes romans, et même si les interviews, les conférences, me fatiguent, je me sens complètement à l'aise dans le dialogue, l'échange. J'ai l'impression d'être dans ces états de grâce dont on a parlé à propos de l'analyse... La relation avec autrui fait "un été dans mon cœur", comme disait Ronsard.

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