

L'éclatement du sujet: the work of Julia Kristeva.

How could he say 'I' when he was something new and unknown, not himself at all? This I, this old formula of the age, was a dead letter.

- Women in Love

As Plato tells us in the Cratylus (1), the Sophist (2) and in Letter VII (3), there is no logos which does not presuppose the interlacing of names with verbs: syntax is the condition of coherence of rationality. Any disturbance of syntactic order or its elements destabilizes the relations of reason and calls into question the fixed boundaries of subject and object, cause and condition. It is on this account that the loss of syntactic coherence has been taken as an indication of insanity (4). The inability to fix pronouns in place and to keep their designation constant, the inability to follow the grammatical rules for negating, making a phrase passive or conditional, or ordering the unities of subject and object in a sentence, these incapacities token the collapse of mental order and of symbolic control. For our purposes, they also token something more general which pertains even in cases when agrammaticality is not so drastic: any modifications in language, particularly infractions of syntactic laws, are a modification of the status of the subject (5).

To invoke Plato at the outset is not conventional piety: the philosophic rationalism which begins with Plato and which continues with uneven but massive force through to the present day, has been a dominant and incisive model of what constitutes 'being human', anthropos as logos. It is the tradition which, present in Aquinas and central in Bacon, Descartes, Locke and Kant, leads through to the philosophic concern of our century with the relation between language and logic. An acceptance of the notion that human understanding and the understanding of the human, must focus its analysis on the interlacing of names with verbs - on language as the bearer of logical relations and hence the articulation of the structure of mind - an acceptance of this notion is the grounding supposition of modern philosophy, particularly logical positivism and its offshoots, but also the phenomenology of Brentano.

The position ascribed to the subject in this tradition, though often left unspoken, is clearly that of a singular, transcendental unity. Its clearest expression is perhaps in Kant's Critique of Pure Reason when Kant considers the unity of apperception:

To know anything in space (for instance, a line), I must draw it, and thus synthetically bring into being a determinate combination of the given manifold, so that the unity of this act is at the same time the unity of consciousness (as in the concept of a line); and it is through this unity of consciousness that an object (a determinate space) is first known. The synthetic

afterlife, all laments and unjust misery, all laughter, lies, and intemperate desire for the pleasures of eating, drinking and sex. Madness and the representation of madness were also forbidden, and in music all the modes except two, which represent 'courage and moderation in good fortune or in bad', were likewise forbidden in the kingdom of philosophy. In other words, Plato feels his rational and unified Republic threatened from within by forces, desires and activities which must be censored or ostracized if the rational state is to be maintained. A closer look at the nature of these threatening forces reveals that what Plato has to exclude as dangerous are the desire for sensual pleasure, laughter, the representative of death and of madness, and those two art forms, music and literature, which may express or incite these subversive powers. What are excluded then, are precisely those aspects of human activity which were to become the great themes of freudian psychoanalysis\*.

The correspondence is not accidental. The schism which Plato introduced between a harmonious rationality on the one hand, and disruptive forces of passion, wit, death and pleasure on the other hand, has marked every major western conception of the human. Nietzsche, by borrowing the terms Apollonian and Dionysiac, puts the origin of the representation of the schism even further back than Plato, but it is Plato who first begins to theorize the disjunction between them by favouring a dominant rationalism at the expense of these other, potentially disruptive powers. The problem for any thinker who does not merely champion one of these sides in a simple minded way, is to attempt to think the relations between them, to comprehend (in both its senses) the rational and the irrational, the sentence and the song.

It is this massive project which Julia Kristeva attempts in La révolution du langage poétique (1974). Her work is situated in the dialectic between formalist, passive, 'objective' theories of language and mind on the one hand, and active, psychoanalytical theories of subjectivity on the other, which together are attacked, synthesized and transposed to produce a new concept of subjectivity and its place in language and poetic literature. Poetry is the focus of the work because the space occupied by poetry is poised directly over the schism which Plato opened up, the deep fissure between the thetic and those practices and impulses which threaten the thetic. Literature is the lieu privilégié of analysis because it has revealed at certain times, in the practice of its writing, the destruction which is wrought upon the thetic by a number of extra-rational phenomena - the disposition of basic impulses, desires and fears which can be seen only in the degree to which they alter the logical, propositional nature of normal communication.

This tension between the thetic and what for the moment I will term simply the non-thetic, is not an eternal war waged in a vacuum. It has determinate historical and social forms which arise from the particular ways in which the activity of writers, caught up in the network of social meaning systems, transforms and challenges the tradition which fails to contain that subjective activity. Literature, Kristeva argues (11), not only shows us how language works in disposing

\* Though it must be added that Freud's well known dislike of music led to it being under-represented in his theoretical writings.

19-1708P  
 unity of consciousness is, therefore, an objective condition of all knowledge. It is not merely a condition that I myself require in knowing an object, but is a condition under which every intuition must stand in order to become an object for me. For otherwise, in the absence of this synthesis, the manifold would not be united in one consciousness. (6)



The identification of consciousness with a synthetic unity of mental action means that the ego constitutes itself as a whole, as a self, which stabilizes the otherwise dispersed and contradictory perspectives of a being which has no fixed or unified position. Modern linguistic philosophy (Frege, Carnap, Russell, Wittgenstein through to Quine and Strawson) explores this concatenation of syntax, logic and reference which unifies, and yet is made possible by, an homogeneous, singular subject. Wittgenstein's double assertion in the Tractatus - Die Grenzen meiner Sprache bedeuten die Grenzen meiner Welt: Die Logik erfüllt die Welt; die Grenzen der Welt sind auch ihre Grenzen (7) - makes language, logic and the world co-terminous. The limits of my world, of what is for me, are made identical to the limits imposed by linguistic and rational order.

This rationalist project, with its attendant notion of the subject as a synthesizing unity, as the unique guarantee of being, is as dominant in modern linguistics as it is in philosophy. Nicely marked in Chomsky's Cartesian Linguistics (8) by the title of the book itself, Chomsky argues that the supporting subject of syntactic order is in the Cartesian tradition of a unified cogito. Again, in post-Saussurian linguistics, Benveniste, writing on the pronominal opposition of Je/Vous, puts it thus:-

"Cette polarité ne signifie ni égalité ni symétrie: l'"ego" a toujours une position de transcendance à l'égard de tu". (9)

Thus both the Chomskian and Saussurian conceptions of the subject in language accept the rationalist description of a transcendental ego, and thus both belong in this respect at least, to that philosophic tradition which goes back via Kant and Descartes to Plato. Kristeva calls this conception of the subject thetic, since it is characterized by the laying down or setting forth (-Gk. 'such as is placed') of positive statements or propositions. The thetic conception considers subjectivity as a unified consciousness able to produce reason through the propositional structures embedded in syntactic order.

free & arbitrary  
 prescriptive

But for at least as long as it has existed, this thetic tradition of high rationalism has been mocked and haunted by alien spirits. From the outset, Plato had to exclude most of music and literature from the realms of The Republic (10), deleting from literature all horrifying and frightening names in the underworld, all gloomy accounts of the

of the particular pattern of thetic against non-thetic in a text, it is also an activity which brings the laws of established discourse into question, and thereby present itself as a terrain where new sorts of discourse may be engendered. And since, as I argued in my first paragraph, a change in discourse is a change in the status of the subject, a radical new poetic discourse may produce a radical new status for the subject. But we must first recover much more of Kristeva's argument before such a statement becomes clear.

Kristeva's first object of attack is the thetic tradition of a single unified subject, embodied in philosophy, linguistics, and also in those types of literature centred on memetic and narrative representation (which not unnaturally turns out to be most of literature). Of course Kristeva's is only the last in a long line of such attacks, and substantially she is in agreement with both the sociological critique of the thetic (particularly as argued by Marx and Durkheim) and with the psychological critique (as argued by Freud, Lacan, and in some qualified respects, by Marcuse and Reich). In a way it would not be inaccurate to see Kristeva's project as a reworking of both the freudian and marxist notions of an active subject, as revealed in the modernist poetic activity, and mediated by a considerably revised version of modern linguistics.

The sociological critique of the thetic has become an intellectual reflex of our century. Meaning is not produced within a subject, but between subjects, in group, class and society. And meaning is not simply given, everywhere and always, in the singular bond between one mind and the world of objects: it is produced, it has a history in the forms of modes of its production, both in the socialization of the child and in the transformations of culture. The cognition go back at least to Hamann's Vermischte Anmerkungen (12) (Miscellaneous Observations) of 1761, in which the kinship of linguistic and economic systems of exchange is proposed as a way of explaining both. Production, whether of objects or meanings is social, a mode of production, and Kristeva agrees that it was necessary for Marx to emphasize this in iconoclastic opposition to the bourgeois concept of work as purely individual and personal. (13). She quotes Derrida with approval when he writes that (14) -

L'argent remplace les choses par leurs signes. Non seulement à l'intérieur d'une société mais d'une culture à l'autre, ou d'une organisation économique à l'autre. C'est pourquoi l'alphabet est commerçant. Il doit être compris dans le moment monétaire de la rationalité économique. La description critique de l'argent est la réflexion fidèle du discours sur l'écriture.

For Marx, work could only be grasped in the values - of use or exchange - into which it was crystallized. Work represents nothing outside of the values in which it is stored up, for it is only in these values that it can be measured and hence enter into society and

into theory. Work takes on a determinate form, and thus takes on meaning, only when it has already entered the system of exchange as a particular amount of production. Labour itself, anterior to exchange, remains in Marx the foundation of his theory, but unthinkable except as an infinite potential of available physical and mental expenditure. But, Kristeva says, labour itself has become thinkable as a concept, even when it is anterior to exchange. For Kristeva, this pure activity of the human body is 'mute' - for it is logically antecedent to exchange and cannot therefore embody value - but must exist as the subject's praxis and expenditure which/<sup>is</sup>taken up by communication, by exchange, by determinate production, by meaning. Work cannot simply be a mode of production, but it must also be, simultaneously, subjective expenditure of effort, working itself through the mode of production. The two aspects have to be thought at once if the subject is not to be left as a blank, a passive, empty bearer of the social processes.

practical side

According to Kristeva, it is Freud's concept of work in the Traumarbeit which fills this blank and gives us the method to think through this 'production anterior to production', the disposition of subjective expenditure. Freud uncovers production itself as a process (15), and as a particular semiotic system, a permutation of elements which models production and which is distinct from that of exchange. Kristeva thus wants to take account of Marxist, Logical-Philosophical and Freudian theories of the subject - the sociological, rationalist and psychological - but without collapsing the subject into any one of them. Her description of the subject thus draws on all three, but the central place is undoubtedly that of Freudiansim recast in the light of Lacan. She conceives this human subjectivity as follows. (All page references to La Révolution du Langage Poétique are in brackets).

First of all (both in terms of the child and logically) to be human is to be a psycho-biological entity energized by the movements and rhythms of impulses. The impulses are not only bio-energetic charges but also psychic marks (p.23) and their disposition across the mind and body is called a chora (χώρα - space, room, place, locality).

The chora is a non-expressive totality, constituted by the impulses and their stasis in a 'figured movement' which is gradually regulated by the constraints imposed upon the body by family and society. At this rudimentary stage it is hardly anything more than a certain rhythm, and its only analogy is body or vocalic movement. Kristeva follows Melanie Klein (16) in considering the oral and anal impulses the dominant ones, both structured and directed in relation to the body of the mother (pp.26-27), in a pre-oedipal phase in which boys and girls alike view the mother as the receptacle of all that is desirable. The chora is the pre-socialized space of motility which makes gesture, phonic articulation and chromatic identification possible. Gradually, under the constraints of biological growth and family structure, this chora becomes limited and provisionally fixed (p.28) into the different semiotic materials - sound, movement, colour and shape - so that it takes on a sort of economy of functions in relation to its contexts. This discharge of energy, which binds and orients the child to the mother, is always double, always both productive and destructive, (p.26) and in

its doubleness may be likened to the double helix of the DNA molecule. The chora is thus the space of operation of sensory-motor impulses, both positive and negative in the degree to which they settle into a pattern but also destroy the stability of that pattern's new movements (p.27). Because of this constant movement, there is no subject or personality at this stage, merely an unstable and provisional 'beating out' (frayage) of certain pathways and connections, the establishments of differences, parts of the body, the operation of vocal and anal sphincters, the focusing of the eyes and so forth.

All these processes constitute the basis for language, and form a crucial category in Kristeva's work, what she calls (perversely in view of its many other meanings) the semiotic. The semiotic is the production of sounds, rhythms, vocal and gestural modulations (such as intonation) but anterior to meaning, that is to say before lexical and syntactic organization:

Ce type de relations nous paraît susceptible de préciser le semiotique en tant que modalité psychosomatique du procès de la signifiante, c'est-à-dire non symbolique mais articulante (au sens le plus large du terme d'articulation) un continuum....Tous ces processus et relations, pré-signe et pré-syntaxe, viennent d'être placés dans une optique génétique, comme préalables et nécessaires à l'acquisition du langage avec lequel ils ne se confondent pas. (p.28).

The semiotic then is the pre-condition for communication and language proper. It is both the ability of the baby to produce movement and differences in voice and gesture, and, more importantly, the rhythmic and phonic modulations which, though chronologically earlier than speech, always accompany speech as its material and psycho-physical grounding throughout adult life. Even in the highest flights of rational thought, this semiotic basis is the necessary accompaniment and continuo. But in dreams and in certain modern literary texts, it actually becomes dominant and breaks through the thetic part of language:-

Ce n'est pourtant que par la logique du rêve qu'ils ont pu attirer l'attention, et ce n'est que dans certaines pratiques signifiantes, comme celle du texte, qu'ils dominent le procès de la signifiante. (p.28)

Any innate, genetic traits find their place here, in the semiotic, the ordering and disposing of primary processes such as displacement and condensation, absorption and repression, rejection and stasis, all the processes which are the innate pre-conditions in the species for the acquisition of language (p.29). In a sense, this semiotic order is pure musicality. It is rhythm, tonal difference, phonic change,

movement of the body and of the limbs. This semiotic area, characterized as enigmatic, indifferent to language, feminine, a semiotic rhythm, is a sort of orchestration of primary movements and functions, what Mallarme called a "Mystère dans les lettres" (p.29). Since it is anterior to signs and syntax - anterior to conscious communication - it is, quite literally; the unconscious, and it is at this point that the link with Freud becomes visible:-

Notre position du sémiotique est, on le voit, inséparable d'une théorie du sujet qui tient compte de la position freudienne de l'inconscient. Décentrant l'ego transcendantal, le coupant et l'ouvrant à une dialectique dans laquelle son entendement syntaxique et catégoriel n'est que le moment liminaire du procès, lui-même toujours agi par le rapport à l'autre que domine la pulsion de mort et sa réitération productrice de "signifiant"; tel nous apparaît ce sujet dans le langage. (p.30)

The reference to the death instinct (la pulsion de mort) is central in Kristeva's thinking on the nature of the chora and its semiotic expression (even though it must be counted as the most controversial and least supported of Freudian concepts (17)). The chora is described as the place of articulation of the death instinct across primary narcissism and the desire for pleasure of the subject, this transversality disrupting his identity so that new psychic patterns are beaten out. The death instinct is the tendency of the organism to return to a homeostatic state, rest and equilibrium, whilst the desire for pleasure drives against this stasis. But Kristeva gives a priority to the importance of the death instinct by saying that (footnote to p.27) pleasure and narcissism are simply provisional positions against which the death instinct pushes, the resulting pressures creating new mental passages. Narcissism and pleasure are thus the 'inveigling and realization of the death instinct'.

Kristeva also links the Freudian idea of a death instinct with a more philosophical conception which she shares with Jacques Derrida (18). Death is nothing other than a destruction of identity (in both the hegelian and everyday meaning of the word) and is thus negation and difference with relation to a given subject. Kristeva thus writes about 'la pulsion de mort' as negativity or rejection, any force which tends to destroy the constituted identity of the subject, even though this may have only a metaphorical relation to 'death' in the commonly conceived notion of the word.

The chora then is the 'space of motility' which engenders the semiotic, the grounding of signification in vocalic and corporal movement before it can make signs and sentences. Its nearest representations are the babble of the child and the rhythms of music.

This semiotic layer does not disappear when the child learns to speak, but on the contrary remains as the necessary basis of articulation and sense, it is what drives language on and makes it possible. Language can never be simply a passive set of protocols and structures - though this is usually the way it is envisaged by modern linguistics - but it must be a *praxis*, an activity and process which is motivated by the psychobiological disposition of the speaking subject.

The next question to which Kristeva addresses herself is how, on the basis of this semiotic chora, the thetic (logical, judging, naming) part of subjectivity may be produced. Kristeva subsumes all the logical, predicative, syntactic aspects of language under one term which, again demonstrating a wilful perversity in the face of accepted usage she terms the symbolic. The symbolic is an extension of the thetic discussed above, it is that major part of language which names and relates things, it is that unity of semantic and syntactic competence which allows communication and rationality to appear, Kristeva has thus divided language into two vast realms, the semiotic - sound, rhythm and movement anterior to sense and linked closely to the impulses (Triebe) - and the symbolic - the semantico-syntactic function of language necessary to all rational communication about the world. The latter, the symbolic, usually 'takes charge of' the semiotic and binds it into syntax and phonemes, but it can only do so on the basis of the sounds and movements presented to it by the semiotic. The dialectic of the two parts of language form the mise en scène of Kristeva's description of poetics, subjectivity, and revolution.

To even ask the question 'how is the symbolic produced?', one has already delivered a direct challenge to much rationalist-based philosophy. Instead of accepting the thetic notion of subjectivity as a given, defining what may be judged as subjectivity by remaining exclusively in the realm of predication, and analysing its structure, Kristeva displaces it from its accepted centrality, to show that it is a produced stage in the development of subjectivity, bound to, and articulated upon, another stage which makes it possible, and which is neither the realm of objects nor the directly social, but also a part of subjectivity. The transcendental ego of Kant and modern logic suddenly finds that it is not alone, nor sovereign, as it had always thought. But this is emphatically not to say that the notion of a transcendental ego may now be jettisoned in favour of an heterogeneous concept of mind. What was wrong was not the argument that a unified subject was necessary to the unity of apperception and hence to the logic of predication: such an argument must necessarily hold true. But it is wrong to make this transcendental ego co-extensive with subjectivity as such, rather than a produced stage within it. Kristeva does not seek to destroy the philosophic concept of the thetic, nor the weight of logical and linguistic philosophy based upon it, but she seeks to decentre the concept by accommodating it within a subjectivity which has an unconscious, psychobiological drives, and a history:-

'La philosophie moderne est d'accord pour reconnaître que c'est à l'ego transcendental que revient le droit de représenter la thèse instauratrice de la signification (signe et/ou proposition). Mais c'est seulement à partir de Freud que la question peut être

posée non pas sur l'origine de cette thèse, mais sur le procès de sa production. A stigmatiser dans le thétique le fondement de la métaphysique, on s'expose à être son anti-chambre; à moins de spécifier les conditions de production de cette thèse. La théorie freudienne de l'inconscient et son développement lacanien nous paraissent, être précisément une mise à jour du fait que la signification thétique est un stade productible dans certaines conditions précises lors du procès de la signification, qu'elle constitue le sujet sans se réduire à son procès, puisqu'elle est le seuil du langage.' (p.43)

Kristeva distinguishes therefore between the semiotic (the impulses and their articulation, p.41) and the domaine of signification, the symbolic, which is always a domaine of propositions or judgements, that is to say, a domaine of positions. This positionality, the ability to take up a point of view, (explored by Husserl in his phenomenological reduction) is what installs the identity of the subject and of his objects, identity being a separation which the subject achieves between the image of himself and the image of the world. He becomes conscious of himself as a self, and of the world as a world of objects and of other subjects separate from himself. This coming-to-consciousness is actually an identifiable period in the growth of the child, and is signalled by his ability to produce holophrastic utterances, which are probably not always fully formed sentences (NP-VP) as conceived by generative grammar, but differ from the babble of an earlier phase in that they separate out a subject from an object and attribute to it some fragment of meaning (as for example, when the cat goes "miaow" and all animals are then designated "miaows").

The mechanisms which produce this symbolic, and hence thetic level of identity and signification, are the mirror phase (19) and the castration complex.

It is the mirror phase which produces the child's "spatial intuition" which is at the heart of signification (and which accounts for the fact that the spatial metaphor is the dominant organizing metaphor in language). The mirror phase, taken from Lacan, designates, in a way that is partly literal and partly metaphorical, the point in a child's development when fascinated by its own image in a mirror, it recognizes the reversed image of a self. This visual image of himself is the first time that the child conceives of himself in his imagination as a totality separated from the rest of the world. It is the necessary precondition for the child to be able to say "me" or "I", as well as being the visual image which stands as the prototype for the world of objects.(20). The mirror phase inaugurates the position-separation-identification which permits the formation of sentences and propositions.

The mirror phase may be decomposed into three separate moments. At first, the child perceives the image in the mirror as a real being whom he tries to grasp or approach. He reacts to this image by jubilatory

mimicry, and what is indicated at this stage is the recognition of the body-image of another as a whole. Lacan writes:-

C'est que la forme totale du corps par quoi le sujet devance dans un mirage la maturation de sa puissance, ne lui est donnée que comme Gestalt, c'est-à-dire dans une extériorité, où certes cette forme est-elle plus constituante que constituée, mais où surtout elle lui apparaît dans un relief de stature qui la fige et sous une symétrie qui l'inverse, en opposition à la turbulence de mouvement dont il s'éprouve l'animer.

At first the <sup>whole</sup> gestalt offers an image of the body which is quite opposed to the 'turbulent movement' which the child himself feels. But before very long the child discovers that the image is nothing but an image. He no longer seeks to seize it, nor does he search for the other behind the mirror, because he realizes that there is no - body. Thirdly, the child recognizes, not simply an image but his image in the specular reflection of himself. In this moment of recognition he has to a degree which is close to being literal, realized an image of himself, he has grasped his own appearance, the image that he makes for/of himself, as a produced identity, a conquest of his body as a unity and as an image. It is this identification and unification of a self as a self's image, which is important for the generation of a unified consciousness capable of producing speech. Anthony Wilden writes:-

The central concept of the mirror phase is clear: this primordial experience is symptomatic of what makes the moi an imaginary construct. The ego is an Idealich, another self, and the stade du miroir is the source of all later identifications. (22)

The total image of the body, set over against a realm of otherness, is thus the moment of production and structuration of an identity through the mediation of the body-image. The transcendental ego necessary to logical and rational communication and action comes into play during the mirror phase. Confirmation of this comes from another source, and lends considerable support to Lacan's theory.

The image of the body in bits and pieces, le corps morcelé, is one of the most common of dreams, fantasies, certain types of schizophrenia, experience of drugs, art and literature. The works of Hieronymus Bosch, Salvador Dali and Artaud express the notion clearly. This corporal disintegration is the reverse of the constitution of the body during the mirror phase, and it occurs only at those times when the unified and transcendent ego is threatened with dissolution. The way in which the fantasy of the fragmented body accompanies the breakdown of rational sovereignty is the clear complement of Lacan's idea that the image of the total body is necessary to the creation of rational unity. In each

case, the image of the body, of the self, mediates thetic unity and disintegration.

For Kristeva, the fear of castration finished off (parachève) this process (p.44). The argument becomes a little murky at this point (p.45-50) but as I read it, the castration complex has two effects which further the installation of the symbolic. Firstly, the mother, hitherto the receptacle and receiver of every demand from the child, is separated from the child (by (a) the gradual cessation of weaning and (b) the gradual intervention of the father) which has the effect of detaching the child from its dependence and identity with the mother, thus opening up a lack, an absence of that-which-is-desired which can only be represented by a figurative substitute, an image or representation. Speech arises as an attempt to fill this lack, this béance towards the absent object (in this case the mother). At the epistemological level, the "lack of an object" is the gap in the signifying chain which the subject seeks to fill at the level of the signifier.

Secondly, the separation from the mother now makes her into an 'other', someone for whom, and to whom, the speech is made and addressed. The speech is made for her and not for me, and it is thus that the other is established as possessor of, or space of, the signifier:-

La béance entre l'ego imagé et la motilité pulsionnelle, entre la mère et la demande qui lui est adressée, est la coupure même qui instaure ce que Lacan appelle le lieu de l'Autre comme lieu du "signifiant". Le sujet est occulté "par un signifiant toujours plus pur", mais ce manque à y être confère à un autre le rôle de tenir la possibilité de la signification. (23)

This moment of separation from the mother is a part of the castration complex because Kristeva, following Lacan, makes the mother an identification with the phallus ('c'est dire qu'elle est le phallus' p.45). The child is "cut off" from the immediate nurturing contact with the mother hitherto enjoyed with such close physical and mental bonding that there was neither need nor space for the establishment of communication about things. At the same time this period is when the sexuality of the child ceases to be "polymorphous perverse" (the child as demanding sexual contact and pleasure for all parts of the body and irrespective of incest laws) and becomes specifically genital, the laws of incest, (The Laws) always linguistically structured, are imposed at the same time (p.45). It is this reference to incest prohibition which completes the oedipal triangle and completes the castration complex. The installation of symbolic language (thetic, naming, propositional) is what allows the imposition of The Law, the interdiction of the Mother as a focus of love through the 'apprehension' (as both fear and learning) of the Paternal order. Lacan writes in his Rome Discourse:-

'The primordial Law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of nature abandoned

to the law of copulation. The interdiction of incest is only its subjective pivot, revealed by the modern tendency to reduce to the mother and the sister the objects forbidden to the subject's choice, although full licence outside of there is not yet entirely open.

This law, therefore is revealed clearly enough as identical to an order of language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos which bind and weave the yarn of lineage down through succeeding generations.....It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history has identified his person with the figure of the law'. (24)

The mirror phase and the castration complex thus set up the second layer of language, the symbolic, which is language as communication proper, which names objects and expresses their relation to one another in the laws of syntax. The symbolic is thus generated by the birth of desire as it replaces the simple demand of the child and by the birth of repression (The Primary Repression of the Oedipal interdiction which prefigures all later repressions) as it replaces simple rejection. The two levels of signification therefore, the semiotic and the symbolic, "correspond" as forms of meaning, to the maternal and paternal functions in the oedipal relation which the child lives through as a condition of his growth. And just as an adult's sexual behaviour is rooted in his own particular experience of the oedipal, his own produced configuration of identification and rejection of the figures of father and mother, so too the adult's particular subjectivity will be rooted in the specific intermixing of the semiotic and the symbolic, the rejection and acceptance of law incessantly weaving the particular dialectic of his personality. Active and passive, submission and aggression, rationality and passion spin out a pattern of loose and now tighter threads which, in their recurrence and repetitions, are the pattern of subjectivity. In other words, it is the way in which the semiotic relates to and disfigures the symbolic, as well as the way in which the symbolic reasserts its unifying control of the semiotic, which gives us the basis of subjectivity as a process. From the mirror phase onwards the semiotic and the symbolic involve each other in a shifting process of dependence and rejection, the spreading reticulation of syntactic and nominal order are informed and sometimes broken, by the power of the semiotic; the signifying power of desire, aggression and pleasure are disposed according to the way the particular person has lived through the oedipal complex and that experience is compulsively repeated in all his later psychic processes.

Kristeva thus reverses the normal way of thinking about the thetic consciousness. It is not some already constituted "I" which produces coherent sentences about the world: on the contrary, it is the

introduction of the child into the world of syntax which permits the development of that child as a unified subject, as a conscious "I". The thetic and the syntactic are inseparable and the production of subject and predicate, name and verb, or to take up the terms of Strawson, 'feature concepts' and 'feature-placing statements', the production of the two major syntactic unities (the placed and the placing, the bound and the binding, the modified and the modifier are three ways in which these nominal and predicative functions have been described) enables the subject to achieve a stable position over against the world. The most significant result of this reversal is that it is only in language that the "I" exists, but this "I" is not exhaustive of the subject who is producing the language. There is always a difference between the subject as expressed in a sentence and the subject who produces the sentence, the former being a temporary position adopted within the process of the latter.

This distinction, drawing as it does on the familiar linguistic difference between the subject who speaks (le sujet de l'énonciation) and the subject of what is said (le sujet de l'énoncé) is an elegant solution to the dichotomy posed at the outset. These two different subjects correspond to the active, heterogeneous subject and the unified, thetic subject respectively, and together make up the process of self-production of subjectivity:-

Productrice du sujet parlant, cette altération se réalise à condition de laisser hors d'elle, dans l'hétérogène, ce même sujet parlant. (p.55)

And again, further on in her exposition, Kristeva writes that

Le sujet n'est jamais, le sujet n'est que le procès de la signifiante et ne se présente que comme pratique signifiante c'est-à-dire lorsqu'il s'absente dans la position à partir de laquelle se déploie l'activité sociale-historique-signifiante. (p.188)

If I write "I sing the sofa", the "I" of that sentence is not the same as the "I" who produced the sentence even though it attempts to be so. It is logically impossible that the "I" who sing the sofa may be coincident with and exhaustive of, the supposedly same "I" that writes ' "I" sing the sofa'. It must be some other self who is grasping the self as an object to write about, and Kristeva endorses and extends this familiar philosophical paradox by theorizing the mode of production of the first "I" (the subject of what is said) by the second "I" (the subject who speaks). The history of subjectivity is never the history of a subject always present to himself, but on the contrary, history of a process of capture and escape, stability and dissolution, an heterogeneous subject which is perpetually displacing its own established positions. The subject which supports syntax and makes it possible is necessarily absent from it, but when it does re-emerge it tends to perturb thetic calm by redistributing the signifying order, by altering syntax and by disrupting nominal groups. This is not to say that the sentence structure is destroyed, but it is pushed into an infinite variety of new forms,

forms which Mallarmé, Lautréamont and James Joyce were the first to produce and enjoy. These revolutionary textual forms effected a revolutionary conception of subjectivity which, according to Kristeva (p.592) embodies a degree of freedom which will require "at the best several centuries" to be fully realized in practical social terms:-

Que dans l'art en général, et dans le texte plus particulièrement à partir de la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, se constitue un langage qui parle ces lieux de rupture que la conscience de classe économiste refoule, lieux de rupture propres au désir des masses mais inexprimés et peut-être même inexprimables par elles dans la société capitaliste productiviste en état d'industrialisation, lieux de rupture donc retirés dans l'expérience des élites culturelles et, au sein de ces élites accessibles à de rares sujets chez qui ces ruptures courent le risque et l'avantage de se radicaliser jusqu'à la folie ou l'esthétisme et de perdre ainsi leurs attaches avec la chaîne sociale, - voilà ce que nous voudrions suggérer". (25)

This claim evidently needs close scrutiny.

The relation of the semiotic to the symbolic is neither facile opposition nor simple dependence, and Kristeva never champions the one at the expense of the other. Though it is the energy, sound rhythm and movement of the semiotic which grounds the word-foundation of the symbolic, the latter is nevertheless the condition of heterogeneity which continues to assure the stable position of the subject and, in deploying his semiotic 'musicality', assures the continuance of the subject as a source of meanings (pp.62-83). The thetic is the threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic, and the essential point of Kristeva's theoretical position in La Révolution du Langage Poétique resides in this: that the modes of infusion between semiotic and symbolic across the thetic give us the forms of subjectivity, and whatever modes these may be, they become particularized and harden out into specific patterns of individuality through the psychic processes discovered by Freud and reformulated by Lacan. The relation to one's mother and father in the realm of the imaginary, fetishism, anal obsession, identification with the law (hysteria p.329) and rejection of all law (psychosis p.329) these are all modes through which the thetic may be transgressed to give a distinctive and recognisable type of subjectivity. The mode of transgression, or what Kristeva calls 'forclusion' following Lacan's translation of Verwerfung (rejection), is what distinguishes Mallarmé from Lautréamont and determines a particular type of subjectivity. The manifold processes whereby the semiotic may break through the symbolic, or whereby the symbolic assumes control of the semiotic, is transfixed by the forms of movement and displacement which take place across them both.

The role of poetic modernism in this process of subjective creation is paramount, since it is the practice of those inner unconscious movements of which psychoanalysis is the theory:-

'Alors, dans cet ordre socio-symbolique ainsi saturé sinon déjà clos, la poésie - disons plus exactement le langage poétique - rappelle ce qui fut depuis toujours sa fonction: introduire, à travers le symbolique, ce qui le travaille, le traverse et le menace. Ce que la théorie de l'inconscient cherche, le langage poétique le pratique à l'intérieur et à l'encontre de l'ordre social: moyen ultime de sa mutation ou de sa subversion, condition de sa survie et de sa révolution'. (p.79)

'Literature' in the writing of Lautréamont, Mallarmé, Artaud Roussel and Joyce, has been the refusal to conceal or repress the signifier, the material operation of language-itself, even though it is the signifier which founds culture and signification. The 'burst unity' (L'unité éclatée) of Chants de Maldoror and the Poésies of Lautréamont confront (or rather 'affront') the world of discourse in its constitutive laws, subverting its 'normal' and 'established' order, and by disrupting it, opening out a revolutionary possibility for subjectivity within the new signifiatory processes. Not surprisingly however, Kristeva remains uncertain about the exact nature of the relation between the disruption of normal fictional and poetic practice on the one hand and the political, revolutionary disruption of social relations on the other. In its strong form, Kristeva claims an active, determining correspondance between the two, the pleasure and violence which breaks the repressive laws of phallogentric logic at the level of the subject, actively promote revolutionary social change by 'overthrowing' the ensemblist logic which underpinned the existing society:-

'.... il y a des textes qui, en introduisant l'infinité du procès dans les éléments constitutifs du systeme linguistique et dans les énoncés finis du code social (c'est-à-dire dans les idéologèmes qui expriment les rapports de production et de reproduction socialement codés) opèrent aux limites où la logique ensembliste du système social est mise en péril ... En ce sens, et tout en restant enfermés dans la maison étatique les "poètes" pour être des "souverains mineurs" ou des "enfants de la maison" n'y ajoutent pas moins un rôle subversif radical qu'aucune autre pratique ne peut assumer'. (p.381)

At other points, Kristeva's description of the role supposedly played by poetry in the transformation of bourgeois ideology is cast differently. She even puts an opposite argument to the one just given and writes that, by an irony of assimilation with which we are all familiar, the avant-garde of the late 19th Century served the needs of the dominant ideology by acting as a substitute for the repressed subjective praxis that the society itself denied:-

'En abdiquant ainsi le processus social en cours, et tout en exhibant un moment refoulé mais repressed constituant pour autant qu'il exhibe le moment

dissolvant toute unité constituée, le texte avant-gardiste du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle sert l'ideologie dominante puisqu'il lui fournit de quoi substituer à ses manques, sans mettre directement en cause le système de sa reproduction dans la représentation (dans la signification)' (p.186)

In another formulation, Lautréamont played a role of passive witness ('témoin') to changes in the subject which 'correspond' (and it is the nature of this correspondence which is precisely in question here) to the social 'éclatement' of the 1871 revolution:-

Ainsi, sans dénier l'unité de la raison (du symbolique et du sujet qu'il pose), mais en l'excentrant, en affirmant le sujet comme une contradiction, Lautréamont-Ducasse donne à ses textes une connotation héroïque, révolutionnaire, qui témoigne pour le sujet de ce que vont essayer à l'échelle sociale les masses révoltées de Paris en 1871. (p.481).

Of the many problems which Kristeva's work raises, the relation between the formal literary 'revolution' of Mallarmé and Lautréamont and social revolutionary practice seems to me by far the most questionable. For Kristeva, the two writers are fundamentally important because they mount attacks, from opposed but complementary directions, on phallogentric logic: Mallarmé, by identification with the mother (and through the form of his verse with the 'maternal', infinite genotext of the semiotic); Lautréamont, by his violent, implacable attack on the father figure, law, and all forms phallogentric domination. Mallarmé subverts, ruptures and finally destroys the laws of syntax which are the guarantee of the laws of reason, the laws of the father and the laws of the state. Lautréamont, by permuting the shifters of the narrative in Chants de Maldoror, breaks up the unity of the subject found in traditional narrative forms with their sustained and clear distinguished actants (the 'coherent' character of folk-tale and realist novel). Thus Lautréamont too, disperses, from a complementary perspective, the unified, transcendent subject which had hitherto always underpinned phallogentric rationality.

However, the step which Kristeva makes from this achieved poetic destruction of masculine rationality to political practice and feminism, seems to me a deft sleight of pen, a merely sophisticated linkage. The space between the formal textual innovations which she describes and the radical political practice (feminism) to which she subscribes, is never satisfactorily filled since the destruction of syntactic order and pronominal stability in a poetic discourse, even when it can be appropriated for political use is always and only, a negative politics, an evanescent disruption, incapable of identifying its own political agent (masculine or feminine).

In other words, the destruction of actantial position and pro-position in this poetic revolution can never have a positive vector, a political direction (direction is a function of stable identity), it always remains purified

— anarchism in a perpetual state of self-dispersal. And in this respect, it reveals its close material relation to the french left-academic context of its own production. Thus the form of La Révolution du Langage Poétique, a massive work within the philosophic tradition of the doctorat d'état, is evidently in contradiction with the content, a content manifestly hostile to the laws of the discourse in which the argument is cast. This argument is an appeal for an anarchist aesthetics, to displace the traditional sociology of literature across Lacanian psychoanalysis and recognizing in that process the formal novelties of the twentieth century-avant-garde as a crucial shift in our understanding of subjectivity. Upon this theoretical basis, the object of politics in general and feminism in particular, is to follow the lead of this artistic avant-garde and achieve politically the destruction of the old, traditionally unified subject.

Kristeva has recently stated this link between theory and feminist praxis very clearly in an interview which she gave to L'Espresso, the Italian communist journal, in April, 1977:-

"Io credo che il problema de movimento femminile è oggi quello di diventare una forma dell'anarchismo che ritraduce in comportamenti e azione il discorso dell'avanguardia storica: la distruzione del soggetto occidentale.

(I believe that the problem of the feminist movement today is that of inventing a form of anarchism which will express in behaviour and in action the discourse of the historical avant-garde: the destruction of the (traditional) western subject).

L'Espresso, April 1977, p.63.

In this interview Céline and Pound are given as examples of what is here meant by the 'historical avant-garde', both, in their own way, having burst open the settled, unified subject underpinning 'masculine' bourgeois thought. Despite their ostensible fascism, Céline and Pound, were for Kristeva, substantially anti-fascist in their formal comprehension of its (psychological) origins ('I discorsi delle avanguardia artistiche sono stati i soli veri discorsi anti-fascisti con conoscenza (inconscia) di causa'). Feminism, according to Kristeva, thus has its political future mapped out along a route which leads back to The Cantos, a journey 'au bout de la nuit'. It is for feminists to discuss this project for themselves, and its anarchist grounding in the theoretical work outlined above. For myself, Kristeva's project is a brilliant essay in psycho-anarchic aesthetics, but which replace a repressive, phallogocentric logos by something far worse, a 'new' subject, drifting, dispersed, and as politically impotent as it is ever possible to be. An agent without agency, direction or cohesion, neither an-sich or für sich, even more vulnerable to the force of social history than Ezra Pound, tearful, in his ward at St.Elizabeth's asylum.

## NOTES

1. 'Cratylus 425a The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett, edited by R.M. Hare and D.H. Russell (London, 1970) Vol.III, p.176.
2. The 'Sophist' trans. and introduction by A.E. Taylor, edited R. Klibansky and E. Anscombe (London, 1961) pp. 173-174.
3. 'Letter VII', in Plato, Collected Dialogues, edited E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, 1963) pp. 1589-1591.
4. Aphasia is the traditional testing ground for the study of the inter-relation of syntactic selection and mental malfunction. The most celebrated case was that of 'Schneider' analysed by Gelb and Goldstein in the 1920s later interpreted by Merleau-Ponty. See Gelb and Goldstein, Psychologische Analysen hirnpathologischer Fälle (Leipzig, Barth, 1920).
5. J. Kristeva, La Révolution du Langage Poétique, (Paris, 1974) p.13
6. Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London, 1929), reprinted 1973, pp. 156-157.
7. L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, German text with a new edition of the translation by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London, 1961)pp. 114-115, proposition 5.6 and 5.61:-  
5.6 The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.  
5.61 Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits.
8. N. Chomsky, Cartesian Linguistics (New York, 1966)
9. E. Benveniste, 'La subjectivité dans le langage', in Problèmes de linguistique générale (Paris, 1966) p.260.
10. Plato, The Republic translated with an introduction by H.D.P. Lee (London, 1955) pp.113-138 (literature) pp.138-141 (music)
11. J. Kristeva, ΣΗΜΕΙΩΤΙΚΗ Recherches pour une sémalyse (Paris, 1969) pp7-9.
12. See particularly George Steiner, After Babel, Aspects of Language and Translation (Oxford, 1975) p.77.
13. ΣΗΜΕΙΩΤΙΚΗ, pp. 35-37
14. J. Derrida, De la Grammatologie (Paris, 1967) p.424.
15. ΣΗΜΕΙΩΤΙΚΗ P.38.
16. M. Klein, in the French translation used by Kristeva, La Psychanalyse des enfants (Paris, 1969, Payot)
17. The Death Instinct was developed relatively late in the works of Freud and was first introduced in Beyond the Pleasure Principle in 1920. It has not managed to gain the acceptance of his disciples and successors in the way that his other theoretical concepts have. It unites the fundamental tendency of every living being to return to its inorganic state with the destructive tendency (as revealed for example in Sado-masochism) of the subject. It is this latter link of which Kristeva makes use in considering Lautréamont and Mallarmé.
18. Derrida's course of seminars at the Ecole Normale Supérieure for 1975-76 were on the philosophy of life and death, 'La Vie la Mort'. In these seminars Derrida attacked, from a philosophical point of view, the biological writings on the subject, particularly the influential work of the Nobel prizewinner, Francois Jacob. But the linkage of thought on the subject of death between Derrida and Kristeva can best be seen in L'Écriture et la différence (Paris, 1967) p.301.