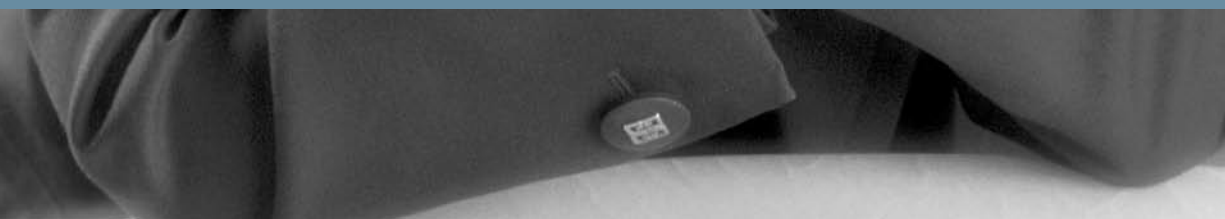




The Holberg Prize Seminar 2004,  
Holberg Prize Laureate Professor Julia Kristeva

**"Thinking about liberty in dark times"**



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## Award announcement

"The recipient of the Holberg International Memorial Prize for 2004 is Professor Julia Kristeva, Director of the Institute for the Study of Texts and Documents at the University of Paris 7 - Denis Diderot.

In her path breaking book *La Révolution du langage poétique* (1974; *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 1985) Julia Kristeva first advanced the theory that the process of signification in language is constituted by two different but interacting elements, the symbolic and the semiotic, thus bringing the living body back into language. Her trilogy *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (1980; *Powers of Horror*, 1982), *Histoires d'amour* (1983; *Tales of Love*, 1987), and *Soleil noir* (1987; *Black Sun*, 1989) offers original and powerful theories of abjection, love and depression. In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988; *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1991) her psychoanalytic approach provides crucial insights into the problems of migration, exile and otherness. Julia Kristeva has published more than 20 books and continues to be remarkably productive. Recently she has been particularly interested in the lives of women writers and intellectuals.

Julia Kristeva's innovative explorations of questions on the intersection of language, culture and literature have inspired research across the humanities and the social sciences throughout the world and have also had a significant impact on feminist theory."

## About the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

The Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund was established by the Norwegian Government for the purpose of annually awarding the Holberg International Memorial Prize for outstanding scholarly work in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law or theology. The prize is worth NOK 4. 5 million (about 520,000 Euro) and was awarded for the first time on 3 December 2004 to Professor Julia Kristeva.

The Holberg Prize aims to increase society's awareness of the value of research in these fields. The prize is also intended to stimulate young people to become more interested in these academic fields. Scholars holding senior positions at universities and other research institutions in the above-mentioned academic fields are entitled to nominate candidates for the Holberg prize.

The prize is named after the Norwegian/Danish scholar and playwright Ludvig Holberg. Holberg was born in Bergen in 1684 and held the Chair of Metaphysics and Logic, Latin Rhetoric and History at the University of Copenhagen. Holberg was an important modernising influence in Norwegian and Danish society and academic life. Through his interdisciplinary and internationally oriented efforts, Holberg endeavoured to modernise subjects and teaching methods at the university of his day. His work has been widely published and has had a broad appeal outside academia.

The prize is administered by the University of Bergen, which has appointed a Holberg Board for this purpose. The Board has appointed an academic committee (the Holberg Committee) consisting of four scholars from the relevant fields of study, which reviews the nominees for the prize, and recommend a worthy Holberg laureate. The members of the Committee for the Holberg Prize 2005 are: Professor Henning Koch, Professor Stein Kuhnle, Professor Toril Moi and Professor Turid Karlsen Seim.

The Memorial Fund also awards the Nils Klim Prize to young Nordic researchers in the fields of the arts and humanities, social sciences, law or theology. To be eligible to receive the Prize, which is worth NOK 250,000 (about 29,000 Euro), candidates must be younger than 35. Last year's prizewinner, Claes de Vreese, is from Denmark and holds the post of Associate Professor at the Department of Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam.



## Greetings from the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

Today, it is still a common conception that science is basically identical with the mathematical and natural sciences, both as regards theme and the definition of what constitutes proper scientific method. During the last part of the twentieth century, however, we have seen the emergence of a renewed understanding of the distinctive character and social importance of cultural and humanistic scientific disciplines.

One important basis for this renaissance of cultural and humanistic scholarship is the realization that sciences dealing with interpersonal relations and the organization of society have several important features in common, and that they are closely related in several respects, not only in their field of study, but also in their method. This is the basis for an alternative, or rather complementary, conception of science in which the subject of inquiry is shifted from physical phenomena that can be observed and described as such, to human thinking and relationships, with its focus on meaning as perceived by and communicated between individual persons.

Jurisprudence, theology, social sciences, and the arts and humanities all study the interaction between human beings as the basis for the formation of opinion and understanding. Imparting knowledge about and understanding of the distinctive character and importance of these subjects is an important task. The main goal of the Holberg Prize is to contribute to this. By drawing attention to and rewarding outstanding scholars, we hope to enhance the prestige of these fields of study, in universities, in the political domain and among the general public.

With her outstanding academic excellence, her intellectual courage, and her remarkable interdisciplinary research and influence, Julia Kristeva embodies the very qualities the Holberg prize wishes to reward and draw attention to.

**Professor Jan Fridthjof Bernt**  
Chair Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund

## In honour of Julia Kristeva

There was a pressing need that for research of the highest quality in the field of the humanities and social sciences should to be acknowledged as such, through an international mark of honouraward, besides on a par with the so-called " scientific " branches of knowledge.

By conferring its first award on Julia Kristeva, the Holberg Foundation Memorial Fund has chosen to highlight her powerful contribution to the fields of research which she has approachedaddressed, revisited and connected anew : linguistics, semiotics, literature and, psychoanalysis. In this respect, the Conference organized in Paris on May 10, 2005, in homage to Julia Kristeva, will illustrate the outstanding range and depth of her work.

The University Paris 7-Denis Diderot, which houses Professor Kristeva's teaching and research activities, can be proud of her lasting friendship.

**Professor Benoît Eurin**  
President of the University Paris 7-Denis Diderot

UNIVERSITÉ  
PARIS 7 - DENIS DIDEROT





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## Julia Kristeva's acceptance speech at the state banquet on 3 December 2004

### **Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Your Royal Highnesses,

Please allow me to express the sincere gratitude, and the emotion I feel on the occasion of my acceptance of the Holberg Prize, all the more so after your kind words. I would also like to express my thanks to the Norwegian Parliament which created this prize, as well as to the members of the jury who have bestowed this honour on me.

The Holberg Prize recognizes, in my person, a European citizen of French nationality, Bulgarian origins, and American by adoption. I like to think of my choice of this lifestyle, which I would happily call that of a nomad, as being in harmony with the spirit of Ludvig Holberg, the 18th century Danish-Norwegian writer, traveller and playwright, who was also a historian of political and religious life. I have no doubt that he would have agreed with Hans Christian Andersen, that other Scandinavian writer whose tales we loved so much in our childhood, that "to travel is to live".

My own cosmopolitan destiny mirrors the evolution of European history since the Second World War; and in my work, I have indeed crossed the frontiers between disciplines, as the Holberg Prize jury has remarked.

In my native Bulgaria, situated at the crossroads of the Balkans, under the communist regime - and in spite of it - Byzantine spirituality combined with a cult of the Russian novel, German philosophy and the Enlightenment. It was there that my thought and my writing were initially formed. But it is in France, in the Encyclopaedist garden of French culture and language, that I have attempted to graft this thought. And accordingly, I would like to thank this country which has taken me in, this France which is never more French than when it is involved in self-questioning, sometimes to the extent of laughing about itself - with all the vitality that Holberg admired so much in Molière - which facilitates the task of creating ties with others. As I wrote in my book *Strangers to Ourselves*, this is what explains the fact that, as I see it, "nowhere is one more of a foreigner than in France, but nowhere is it better to be a foreigner": the honour which I am here to receive today bears witness to this fact.

Several of those who have welcomed me and aided me in my life and in my thought come to mind on this occasion: my parents Kristine and Stoyan Kristev who repose in Bulgaria, Philippe Sollers who I married in Paris and our son David, but also my friends and collaborators at the CNRS, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, the Université de Paris 7 - Denis Diderot, the Institut Universitaire de France, the Société Psychanalytique de Paris. And I haven't forgotten the publishers who have supported my work, after the journals *Tel Quel* and *L'Infini*, such as Seuil, Gallimard, and especially Fayard.

I am however aware that it is primarily due to the publication of my entire body of work in English that I am here to receive this honour today; I would therefore like to take this occasion to thank

the American Universities which have supported my research, and to give special thanks to the Columbia University Press whose director of humanities is here with me today: in these times of "endless war", it is important to show that the "Old Europe", the "New Europe" and America are capable of working and thinking together.

I won't go into more detail concerning my own intellectual career, nor will I attempt to summarise my books: I was invited to do this at a conference at the University of Bergen. I would only like to make three confessions, but don't worry, they will be filtered through the writings of two great French writers, to whom I have devoted a great deal of my research.

First of all then, these words of Proust, "Ideas are substitutes for sorrows." I hear these words resonating this evening, with my own story, as an exile and as a woman, but also with the civilisational conflict which our world is going through today. We may continue to wonder just how it is possible that these sorrows don't lead us into melancholy and death, but towards the enigmatic life of the mind. This process is endless, and fortunately so.

My second quotation is from Colette. "To be reborn has never been beyond my powers." This claim might appear over-pretentious, but is it not a specific capacity, which tends to be feminine, and which, rather than adaptation, prefers rebirth, renewal? If this is so, what conditions are required for such a renewal?

Finally, let me mention this motto of the heroine of my last novel, *Murder in Byzantium*, Stéphanie Delacour, "Je me voyage/I travel myself." You can see that she expresses herself in neologisms, as Julia Kristeva did at the beginning of her career. And since this journalist is an educated woman, saying "I travel myself" is, in the end, her way of resuming a fundamental thread of our European culture: from Saint Augustine, who only recognized one native land, that of the traveller; as he put it "In via, in patria", to Freud, who specified "There where it was, I will be." In other words, for my heroine, as for myself, the crossing of frontiers - whether geographical, those between disciplines or modes of discourse - is only possible on the condition that the traveller is capable of calling into question their own internal frontiers: "I travel myself." It is only on this condition that ideas can be substituted for sorrows, and rebirth and renewal become possible.

You can see that the key to my nomadism, and my questioning of established forms of knowledge, is none other than psychoanalysis itself, understood as a journey in which the psychic identity itself is reconstituted. So I am very happy to observe that the creators of the Holberg Prize, in referring to the human and social sciences, made particular mention of Freud's great discovery.

I must, before finishing, say a word about Ludvig Holberg (1684-1754). This "Nordic Molière", who was a reader of Voltaire and of Montesquieu, was a moderate man, but was radical in his way, and scathing about all kinds of excessive enthusiasm. He preferred laughter to religious fanaticism, writing several comedies, as well as a History of the Kingdom of Denmark and of Norway, a History of Religion, a History of the Jews, a History of Women (indeed, he is considered as "the first Scandinavian feminist"). This constant movement between genres and between disciplines nevertheless attained its polyphonic, intertextual unity, the sort of unity which is brought about by the conductor of an orchestra, only in his works of fiction. How could I fail to identify with such a figure! His philosophical novel, Niels Klim's Subterranean Journey, mixes political satire and utopianism in such a way that the satire dissolves into the fantasy, and the facetious remarks triumph over the moral message. The result is that, today, we read this novel as a defence of the purely imaginary. As Holberg himself wrote in his Memoirs, "There's no doubt that this work is trivial, but that does not mean that it is useless; for this is the only way that such teachings may work their way into the minds of many readers who are repulsed by formal treatises; as that ancient hero who had his epitaph inscribed on a sundial so that all who consulted it were able to read it, a joke can be a way of educating oneself whilst having fun. The fisherman must bait his hook in accordance with the taste of the smaller fish, if he wishes to catch them; in the same way, the greatest philosophers of the greatest music have, from time to time, known just how to help get the message across with the help of amusing stories."

Although Baron Holberg described himself as an ascetic, and something of a hypochondriac, whilst managing to remain a comical figure, the first to acknowledge his importance after his death was none other than the libertine philosopher Giovanni Giacomo Casanova, in the Preface to his own subterranean utopia, *The Icosameron* of 1788. He writes: "Plato, Erasmus, the Chancellor Bacon, Thomas More, Campanella and Niels Klim are those who have given me the desire to write this story, or this novel".

More than two centuries later, I would like to thank Ludvig Holberg for having given the jury which takes his name the desire to bring us together this evening. Thank you for your patience and for your warm welcome. And may I thank His Royal Highness, Crown Prince Haakon, and the Norwegian parliament for this high distinction with which I have been honoured.

## Julia Kristeva

## In Honor of Julia Kristeva, Holberg Prize Laureate

**Kelly Oliver, Vanderbilt University**

I would like to congratulate Julia Kristeva, the first Holberg Laureate, on this prestigious and much deserved award. I would also like to congratulate the Holberg Prize jury for their wisdom in selecting Julia Kristeva, whose writings over the past three decades have inspired and continue to inspire so many of us. Given that the Ludvig Holberg Memorial Fund was established by the Norwegian Parliament to increase awareness of the value of research in the human sciences, I cannot think of a more worthy recipient than Julia Kristeva, particularly because her writings so powerfully demonstrate and argue for the importance of interpretation to our experience, not just in the academy but in our experience as human beings.

What some have called a “crisis” in the humanities reflects and deflects a larger crisis of meaning in contemporary culture, a crisis of imagination powerfully diagnosed by Julia Kristeva. The Humanities seem to be suffering from a form of anorexia that, rather than prompting nourishment from outside sources (the Norwegian government excepted), in some places leads to their starvation. In fact, this thinning of the human sciences has contributed to contemporary cultures’ hunger for meaning.

With the scientific revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries, religion lost its ability to provide life with meaning. Once the natural sciences split off from the human sciences with the advent of technology (especially the microscope), it didn’t take long before truth stood on the side of nature versus culture. “Dogmatic slumber” gave way to critique that has gradually led the humanities to call into question its own foundations. And, if humanism became a way to regain truth on the side of the human, then humanity’s ability to destroy itself and the entire planet with it, has overshadowed human creativity. Aristotle’s notion that man is the measure of all things, or Jean-Paul Sartre’s suggestion that man must create himself ex-nihilo, can begin to sound like so much hubris. If man is destroying himself and the earth with him, perhaps it is not a good idea to put him at the center of the universe, to put the human in the place of Creator.

So the truth of the humanities appears to dissolve with the bitter resignation that humanism can be fatal. Philosophy and literature seem to turn against themselves in the forms of nihilism, deconstruction, and anti-foundationalisms on the one hand, and dogmatic Marxism, political correctness, and identity politics on the other. The humanities turn their critical gaze inward and by so doing undermines their own legitimacy. As Friedrich Nietzsche says, logic ends up biting its own tail. If the professors of philosophy and literature either have given up the canon as racist and sexist, so much political propaganda, (as in Universities in the United States) or have proclaimed their own death – the death of the author, the end of history etc. (as in Universities in France) – then how can their suicidal tendencies justify sustaining their lives, even

if these tendencies are attempts to avoid killing the other? And, when these suicidal tendencies do provoke the attention of the powers that be (namely those who hold the purse strings), don't they also put the humanities under constant surveillance, on suicide watch, as it were?

But, the critique of reason has not just affected the human sciences, it has also affected the natural sciences. Witness the tremendous increase in alternative medicines, the booming demand for herbal formulas, and the tendency toward self-medication that suggest that we no longer trust doctors or medical science, which after all changes its prescriptions for our health and diet like the latest fashions. Science too is losing weight and starting to look a little too thin to support our search for meaning and truth. The scientific revolution may have displaced the authority of religion, but now the tables are turning with the return to religion, in the form of new age religions and dangerous fundamentalisms.

Julia Kristeva's writings not only diagnose this crisis in meaning that results from the inability of science – human or natural – to fill the void left when the scientific revolution displaced the authority of religion, but also suggest ways to feed our hunger for meaning without suicide or murder. Her writings provide nourishment for human sciences starving as a result of their own death drive in an economy that values products over process, doing over thinking, efficiency over imagination. She proposes a rebirth through the imagination, through art, literature and psychoanalysis, as a counterweight to born-again religions that take holy war to be their birthright.

Where others have seen an abyss, she has imagined meaning as an adventurous journey, though not without its dangers and pitfalls. In an age of theoretical pessimism about the possibility of meaning and truth, not just in the human sciences, but all around us, she provides hopeful, if cautionary, evaluations that are more than mere academic exercises. Her writings speak to the crisis of meaning in revolutionary ways, opening pathways rather than resigning us to an impasse.

In the humanities, the problem of meaning has been articulated as a problem of representation. Since Plato, philosophers have wondered over the relationship between language and the world. Two thousand four hundred years later, they continue to ask how (and if) words refer to things. In fact, this question has become more profitable, if therefore also more subliminal, in our modern attempts to translate so-called natural languages into artificial ones, in other words, to make computers speak.

By insisting that language expresses bodily drives through what she calls its semiotic element, Julia Kristeva's articulation of the relationship between language and experience circumvents traditional problems of representation. Her writing is an intersection between philosophy, psychoanalysis, linguistics and cultural and literary theory. She developed the science of what she calls "semanalysis," which is a combination of psychoanalysis and semiology. With this new science, Kristeva challenges traditional psychoanalytic theory, linguistic theory and philosophy. Taking up the question of "Why do we speak?" in all of its ambiguities, she addresses the issues of the relationship

of meaning to language, the relationship of meaning to life, and the relationship of language to life, in revolutionary ways. One of her most important contributions to the philosophy of language and linguistics is her theory that all signification is composed of two elements, the symbolic and the semiotic. In what remains one of her most influential books, *The revolution in poetic language* published in 1974, she proposes that bodily drives are discharged through the semiotic element of language, or its rhythms and tones. Against philosophies of language that focus on the structure of language as a logical system that can be translated into computer code, Kristeva emphasizes the non-referential or semiotic element of signification that cannot be reduced to symbols. Throughout her writings, she shows that while the symbolic element gives language its meaning in the strict linguistic sense of reference, the semiotic element gives language its meaning in a broader philosophical and experiential sense.

Husserlian phenomenology describes words as windows onto the meaning constituted by the transcendental subject. Structuralism describes words as elements operating within systems that constitute their meanings. And, post-structuralism describes words as traces of the processes of difference and deferral that constitute the illusion of their stable meaning and determinant references. Engaging with, but ultimately breaking away from, these traditions, Julia Kristeva describes the meaning of words as combinations of dynamic bodily drive force or affect, on the one hand, and stable symbolic grammar, on the other. By discharging drives through representation, the semiotic makes symbols matter. The dynamic between the symbolic and semiotic elements of language gives words not just their referential meaning but, more importantly, their meaning for life. Like a transfusion of the living body into language, representation makes our lives meaningful, in the sense of both signifying something and having significance for us.

Julia Kristeva's notion of the semiotic is itself like a transfusion, giving reviving fluids to a suffering humanities. For, instead of merely lamenting what is lost, absent, or impossible in language, her writings allow us to marvel at the ways in which life is transferred into language, and give us hope of more robust forms of representation. From her first book, *Semiotike*, published in 1969, to the last volume of her *Feminine Genius* trilogy published in 2002, Kristeva shows us how flesh becomes word so that life can triumph over death through the sublimation of the death drive; that is to say, by representing our violent, suicidal, and murderous impulses rather than by acting on them. But she also issues a warning that without the ability to represent, to turn our violence into art, to use our imaginations instead of (or as) our weapons, we risk killing of all kinds.

Her warnings and hope could not be more relevant today as we see fundamentalists engaging in holy wars from Washington to Baghdad, from Gaza to Amsterdam. In what Kristeva calls the "regime of the spectacle," we have lost the ability to tell art from reality, the world of ideas from the real world: A filmmaker's or novelist's depiction of violence is taken as justification for literal violence; think of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh who was brutally murdered for making movies critical of Islamic fundamentalism,

or the death threats against Salman Rushdie after the publication of his novel, *Satanic Verses*. As reality becomes spectacle, we are losing our ability to distinguish between the depiction of violence and the real thing. Images of war – so many videotapes of beheadings, of prisoner abuses, or computer generated images of high-tech warfare – turn war into a form of reality TV. Modern culture confuses images with reality and therefore cannot maintain the distance from violent impulses necessary to sublimate them into some form of representation. “Violence, addiction, criminality, or psychosomatic suffering, “the “new maladies of the soul,” as Kristeva calls them, are sicknesses of the imagination (TB). We have lost the ability to imagine, most importantly the ability to imagine the meaning of our own lives. Distracted by media images, we lose our ability to wonder and our patience with those who do. That is to say, wandering from one distraction to another, we don’t have the time to stop and wonder. And those who do take the time are seen as wasting it.

The uncanny strangeness of difference that sparks creativity is being assimilated into normative media images of difference as commodity. Strangeness and difference themselves become marketable as spectacles that circumscribe them as either abject or exotic and thereby reinforce the proper boundaries of the self without a true encounter. Rather than open the self, these commodifications of difference merely protect it against otherness. The global economy produces people and cultures all over the world that are both markets and marketable, as evidenced by billboards for Benetton where, like Benetton sweaters, faces come in different colors that all look alike, or in television commercials for Global Federal Express where people all over the world dress differently and speak different languages but all wait for Fed Ex packages with the same excited anticipation.

In *New Maladies of the Soul* published in 1993, Kristeva explains how media images that flatten difference and emotions also produce a flattening of the soul or psyche. There, she argues that media commodity culture replaces meaning and representation with drugs and valueless objects. Rather than interpret experience in order to make it meaningful, we take Prozac, we watch TV, or we go shopping. She says that “today’s men and women – stress-ridden and eager to achieve, to spend money and have fun and die – dispense with the representation of their experience that we call psychic life....Modern man is losing his soul, but he does not know it, for the psychic apparatus is what registers representations and their meaningful values for the subject” (206, 207). The result is that, again quoting Kristeva, “the psychic life of modern individuals wavers between somatic symptoms (getting sick and going to the hospital) and the visual depiction of their desires (daydreaming in front of the TV). In such a situation, psychic life is blocked, inhibited, destroyed” (207). Drugs and media images give us artificial or false selves that make us feel empty or mechanical and lead to a sense that everything is either meaningless or has the same meaning. We lose touch with our emotions or desires because they are fed to us by consumer culture in prepackaged, predigested bits that have lost all of the flavor of life. Antidepressants and media images make everyone the same; even difference becomes the same. And, as a result, the singular individual and meaning itself are lost.

The critical distance necessary to create meaning and psychic space is closed off. Rather than think about things, we are told to “Just Do It!” As Kristeva says, “actions and their imminent abandonment have replaced the interpretation of meaning” (206). Self-reflection and interpretation are luxuries that the motivated businessman cannot afford. Time is money and time spent thinking is time/money wasted. The logic of consumerism becomes the modern version of the repetition compulsion, which necessarily leads to alienation and despair: we must repeatedly and compulsively buy and shop and consume because the media tells us that without consumption we are nothing but ugly, unpopular, misfits with bad breath and body odor.

In the last decade, Julia Kristeva has diagnosed our obsession with spectacle and media culture, which, she says, results from a “relativism of images” in a “culture of distraction” that produces a “rootless humanity” and the meaninglessness or emptiness of life experienced by modern man (433). In media driven consumer culture that encourages channel and internet surfing, is it surprising that our children are diagnosed and medicated for so-called Attention Deficit Disorder? The abundance of media images makes it difficult to distinguish between them or to discern their importance for our everyday lives, especially punctuated as they are by commercials and pop-up windows that distract our attention. And, the layers of media become more confusing when we can view videotaped footage on our computers or televisions, footage that documents reality by turning it into an image that comes to us many times removed. Even as I am writing this presentation, the headline news is about two videotapes: one videotape of a U.S. Marine shooting an unarmed wounded Iraqi in a mosque and another videotape delivered to Al Jazeera of CARE director Margaret Hassan’s execution at the hands of her kidnappers. The technologies of media are used in the service of war on all sides. And terror is distributed if not produced through the spectacularization of violence. We are both fascinated and horrified by this violence become spectacle, that is to say, until we get bored and change the channel, fall asleep, or go to the kitchen for a snack.

Julia Kristeva helps us to understand the relationship between our fascinations or horror, and violence, both literal and symbolic. More forcefully and eloquently than anyone since Sigmund Freud, she diagnoses violence, in all its complexities, as the return of repressed bodily drives. She asks, “Since scientific and rational democracies do not themselves possess a discourse for this fateful line of questioning (What is life? What is the meaning of life? What does it mean to love life?), should we be surprised to see religions become the release mechanisms of the death drive?” (TB) In our advanced democracies where, as she says in *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt* published in 1996, “power is at once spectacular and vacant, where the legal oscillates between permissiveness and fragility, where scandals and accusation are mises-en-scène organized for the media, and where it is possible, if not easy, to circumvent the law,” “authority, value and law have become empty, flimsy forms” (SNS 24). Is it any wonder, then, that so many people are turning once again to religion to find authority, value and law?

With the upsurge in various forms of religion, especially dogmatic forms that kill in the name of good versus evil, there is an urgent need for intellectuals to acknowledge and analyze the role of religion in contemporary culture and politics. As Kristeva's writings suggest, if there is to be any hope for peace, we need to understand how and why religion becomes the justification for war. In a world where religious intolerance is growing, and the divide between the secular and the religious seems to be expanding, Julia Kristeva's writings bridge the gap and once again provide a path where others have seen only an impasse. Her approach is unique in its insistent attempt to understand the violence both contained and unleashed by religion. Over the past three decades, her engagements with the question of the relation between religion and violence have made Julia Kristeva the most important post-secular thinker of our era. Where others have not, she has seen the necessity of thinking through the crisis of meaning in relation to religion so that we might understand its deadly power and appeal. And, she rearticulates a notion of the sacred apart from religious dogmatism, a sense of the sacred that is lacking precisely in fundamentalism.

Always careful to avoid the extremes of dogmatism or anarchy, totalitarianism or delirium, Kristeva proposes that questioning can restore value. Questioning need not lead to nihilism or the absence of meaning, but rather should lead to interpretation and elaborations that give meaning to our lives. Insofar as questioning is and must be an on-going process, meaning is always opened to new possibilities. Continued questioning prevents us from becoming dogmatic while our continued interpreting or answering in response prevents us from falling into anarchy or the delirium of absolute relativism.

Religious fundamentalism is dogmatic because it refuses all questions. When questioning our violent impulses is foreclosed, then acting on them becomes a dangerous reality. Instead of engaging in rites of sacrifice that return sacrifice to an imaginary or ideal realm, fundamentalists act out their violent fantasies in the real world, which, as Julia Kristeva warns, leads the members of one religion to sacrifice the members of another (cf. PK 428). We see this today when Theo Van Gogh is killed for questioning Islam, while with support from Christian fundamentalists, George W. Bush is re-elected as President of the United States to continue to wage what he calls his godly "crusade" against terror in Iraq and around the world (cf. NYTM 10-17-04, p. 47). These religious extremes share the unquestioned belief in good versus evil and that God or Allah is on their side. Such extremists see themselves on the side of purity and goodness fighting against impurity and corruption, the holy against the infidels or heathens.

Julia Kristeva's writings suggest that religious fundamentalism is one possible attempt to feel included in a group identity that protects individual identity against impurity or guilt. In her book *Powers of Horror*, published in 1980, she develops a theory of abjection and its relation to identity that helps us understand what sixteen years later she comes to call the archaeology of purity in *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt*. What she calls the abject is what is excluded in order to set up the clean and proper boundaries of the body, the subject, and society or nation; above all, it is ambiguity that must be excluded or prohibited so that identity can be stabilized. This quest for the "pure"

through the violent excising of all "impurity" is clearly seen in so-called ethnic cleansing, racial segregation, and apartheid. The fear of ethnic or racial mixing threatens the clean and proper individual, group, and national identities established through the process of abjecting difference. What is stunning in Kristeva's articulation of abjection is her suggestion that although difference or otherness prompts exclusion, this is not because of the difference per se; but rather it is because otherness is part of the very identity that defines itself against its own ambiguity.

And, when this excluded ambiguity returns, which is bound to happen, then it can either lead to sublimation – through which our fears of ambiguity and otherness are transformed into art, literature, or philosophy, and even into revolutions in thinking about the world and our experience – or, this return of ambiguity can lead to violent attempts to destroy it through various forms of dogmatism, repression and oppression. This violent reaction is an attempt to purify or exonerate the subject or group of its own guilt over the exclusions that it perpetuates in order to set up its identity as whole or unified. So purity and exclusion through a process of abjection are elements of a primary libidinal violence that can either lead to the best in humanity, sublimation or to the worst, murder.

As Julia Kristeva says in *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt*, "It is probably impossible to question the validity of this so-called purity – or to fight the various forms of fundamentalism and violence that appear to be the sorry privilege of th[e] end of the [20th] century – by looking exclusively at its surface and not taking into consideration what produces it, namely, the disgust with taint and the consequent contrition, repentance, and guilt that present themselves as qualities of religion but also profoundly constitute the psychical life of the being capable of symbolicity: the speaking being." [SNS 22] But questioning the validity of this so-called purity is precisely what we must do, and we must do so by investigating its role in contemporary culture, politics, and in our own lives. How do our violent struggles for religious, ethnic, racial and national purity reflect our negotiations with our own ambiguity and guilt?

As important as her warnings against the foreclosure of questioning that leads to acts of violence rather than acts of interpretation, is Julia Kristeva's hope that meaning can be fore-given through loving relations with others. In the face of the dangers of fundamentalisms of all kinds, she suggests that "Nonetheless the capacity for enthusiasm, doubt, and the pleasure of inquiry has perhaps not been entirely lost. This is at the heart of the ultimate defense of human life" (SNS 19). If, as she says, "peace is in crisis...because we are lacking a discourse on life at the beginning of this third millennium," (TB) then Julia Kristeva provides the beginnings of such a discourse, a discourse on the meaning of life and the possibility of love, which returns to us the hope for a love of life over and against the death drive.

TB = "For Teresa," translated by Shannon Hoff, in *"Living Attention: Essays on Teresa Brennan"* edited by Alice Jardine, Shannon Lundeen, and Kelly Oliver, SUNY Press, forthcoming

PK = *"The Portable Kristeva"* edited by Kelly Oliver, Columbia University Press, 2002



## Thinking about liberty in dark times

**Holberg Prize Laureate 2004**

**Julia Kristeva, University of Paris 7 – Denis Diderot**

First of all I would like to thank the Holberg Prize Jury for their generosity in awarding me this first Holberg prize for research in the field of the human and social sciences, law and theology. I would also like to thank you for your presence at this conference, for the interest you have shown in my work, and for your participation in detailed and friendly discussions of my ideas, which I regard as both an honour and highly stimulating. Finally, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk about the intellectual quest which has brought me here today, and how I relate it to the present moment in history.

You have in front of you today a European citizen, of Bulgarian origin and French nationality, who considers herself a cosmopolitan intellectual; this last quality alone would have been enough to merit persecution in the Bulgaria of my childhood. Much has changed since then, and although my country of origin is still struggling with various economic and political problems, the way is now open, not only for Bulgaria to become a member of NATO, but also for her to join the European Union as a full member. All of this would have been impossible to imagine thirty-nine years ago, in 1965. That was the year I left Bulgaria to continue my studies in Paris, thanks to a grant furnished under the policy of that visionary leader, Charles de Gaulle, who had already foreseen a Europe stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals.

Now, in 2004, I still think of that time, in the not-so-distant past, and of all the efforts, sometimes discreet, but sometimes quite risky, made by many intellectuals and others during the communist era. Thanks to such courageous individuals, Bulgaria is today a member of the community of democratic countries. This fact may seem miraculous, until one remembers the suffering, the never-failing hopes and the constant underground work of so many members of the thinking professions, which slowly ate away at the foundations of totalitarianism.

It is customary on occasions such as this to evoke the memory of one's parents, and indeed I think of my father, Stoyan Kristev. This educated member of the Orthodox church wanted me to learn French from an early age, and duly registered me at a primary school run by French nuns, in order that I should absorb some of the critical spirit and taste for freedom for which France is rightly famous. I also think of my mother, Christine Kristeva, who combined a sharp scientific mind and a strong sense of duty with a gentle nature, and passed on to me the kind of rigour which is such a necessary part of one's development, especially for a woman, and even more so for a woman in exile. This is my family background, which was reinforced by the respect for culture and education which had developed in Bulgaria during the course of its turbulent history; it is the foundation on which I subsequently placed what French civilization had to offer me. I have a strong sense of indebtedness to France, and feel proud, in the globalized world in which we live today, to bear the colours of the French Republic in the various countries and continents which I have occasion to visit.

There is a line in my book "Strangers to Ourselves" that I hope you won't mind me taking the liberty to repeat here. I wrote that "One may feel more of a foreigner in



France than in any other country, but at the same time one is better as a foreigner in France than in any other country." The reason is that, although its universalism may be ambiguous, the French tradition of critical questioning, the importance given to political debate, and the role of intellectuals – exemplified by the Enlightenment philosophers who are so emblematic of French culture – are factors which continually revivify public debate, and maintain it at a very high level. This is a real antidote to national depression, and to its manic manifestation in nationalism. I would therefore like to pay tribute to my adoptive culture, which is never more French than when it is engaged in self-criticism. To the degree that it is able to laugh about itself – and what vitality there is in this laughter! – it is able to forge links with other cultures. I have absorbed this French language and this French culture so thoroughly that I am almost taken in by those Americans who welcome me as a French writer and intellectual.

The Holberg Prize rewards my work, which it calls "innovative, and devoted to exploring themes at the frontiers of language, culture and literature", and which you consider to be "of capital importance" in the "numerous disciplines of the human and social sciences", as well as in "feminist theory". Indeed, since I first arrived in France at Christmas 1965, just when the feminist movement was gaining new momentum, I have never stopped thinking about the contribution that women have made to contemporary thought, and this work has crystallized in my recent trilogy on *Feminine Genius*: Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette. You might wonder what the connection is between this trilogy and my origins.

Well, I could speak to you at length about the intelligence and the endurance of the women of my country of origin, many of whom have distinguished themselves in literature, and many others in various struggles for liberation. Nevertheless, I did not devote my work on female genius to them, because I wanted to use examples that were known and accepted everywhere. My aim was to address the following question: "Is there a specifically feminine form of genius?" This question is not a new one, but it still retains much of its mystery. I will return to Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and Colette. But first I would like to reveal to you something that is not in these books.

My research on this topic led me to the discovery that the first female intellectual – and as such, necessarily a European – was neither a saint like Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) or Angela of Foligno (1248-1309), nor even a writer (the writers came later) such as Mme de Sévigné (1626-1696) or Mme de Staël (1766-1817) who, as a theoretician, writer and political thinker, has always been considered the first female intellectual in the strict sense of the word. I discovered that the first female intellectual was in fact a Byzantine, a woman from my native region. Her name was Anne Comnena, and she was the author of a superb history of the crusades and of the reign of her father, the Emperor Alexis I. This was the monumental *Alexiade*, in fifteen volumes. Born in 1083, Anne Comnena began writing this work in 1138 at the age of 55, and completed it ten years later; as the first female historian, she offers us an interpretation of this period which is very different from those of western chroniclers such as William of Tyre or Foucher de Chartres. This devotee of what would later be called orthodox

Christianity, was nevertheless raised on the Greek classics and was a fervent reader of Homer and Plato. She was sensitive, melancholy, and indeed romantic, a girl who was proud of her father; she was a philosopher and a politician, and her writing shows an awareness of the need for European unity, which was such an important issue at that time.

Since I am convinced that a wider Europe will only really come into being if there is a genuine dialogue between the eastern and western churches, and if a bridge can be built across the abyss which still, unfortunately, separates the Orthodox and Catholic churches in particular, I strongly believe that the exceptional work of Anne Comnena, among others, will be essential for thinking about our future Europe. That is why I made her one of the main characters in the novel that I have just published in France! I didn't do this for chauvinistic reasons, since Anne Comnena wasn't Bulgarian, but a Byzantine princess, although her grandmother was a member of the Bulgarian nobility, and there were many marriages between Bulgarian sovereigns and the royal families of the new states which were constantly testing the borders of the Empire. In this region, wars and peace treaties followed each other in rapid succession, making this part of the world famous for its conflicts, but also for the ability of its inhabitants to find ways of coexisting. All of this was present, and prescient, in the work of Anne Comnena, a female genius whom the future Europe would do well to rediscover. Coming as I do from the Balkans, I am pleased to have contributed to this rediscovery. I would therefore like to invite you to read Anne Comnena, in addition to Arendt, Klein and Colette. Europe still has many surprises in store for us.

Nevertheless, without isolating women's experience as a separate "object" of study, I would like to place this experience in the context of the various political, philosophical and literary debates which have nourished women's – and men's – liberation in recent times. In other words I only accept the "feminist" label on the condition that my thinking on the themes of writing, and of feminine sexuality, is seen within the general framework indicated by the title of my presentation to day: "Thinking about liberty in dark times". With hindsight, I think that this title could apply more generally to what, outside France, is often referred to as "French Theory". This expression was coined in American universities, and my name is often associated with it. If I emphasize the American reception of my work today, here in Norway, it is because I believe that without the English translations of my books, and without the recognition that I have received in the United States, my work would not have been accessible to readers in your country and all over the world, and it is in this context that my work has been recognized and honoured by the Holberg Prize. I hope, in what follows, to be able to place my own work in the context of this "French Theory" movement, and further, to shed light on the difficult, and sometimes conflictual, dialogue between two different conceptions of liberty at work today.

When I arrived in Paris, the war in Vietnam was at its climax and we often protested against the American bombing. It was then that René Girard, having attended one of my first presentations of Bakhtine in Roland Barthes' seminar, invited me to teach

at the University of Baltimore. I could not see myself collaborating with the “world’s policeman”, as we used to say at that time and, in spite of the dialectical advice that I was given by my Professor, Lucien Goldmann, who used to say, “My dear, American imperialism has to be conquered from the inside”, I honestly did not feel that I had the strength for such a challenge. So I remained in France. It was 1966. Several years later, in 1972, I met Professor Leon Roudiez from the University of Columbia, at the Cérisy conference on Artaud and Bataille. That is how I made my first trip to New York in 1973, and ever since I have been a Visiting Professor at the Department of French at Columbia, which, without improving the quality of my English, has at least helped me make many friends and find accomplices in the very unique context of American Academia. At present, I have the honour of teaching in the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research - the university which welcomed Levi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson and Hannah Arendt during and after the Second World War.

Of all these experiences, which I cannot summarise here tonight, and about which I wrote in my first book, *Les Samourais* (Fayard, 1990), I would simply like to mention two symbolic images that have become inseparable from my psyche and which, I hope, may give you a sense of what my attachment to the United States means.

The first one is a tiny amateur photograph, in black and white, that Leon Roudiez took of me, and which shows me with my long student hair on the ferry that took me to the skyscrapers of Manhattan. Since I do not have a picture of my arrival in Paris, this one is for me the only and the best proof of my re-naisance in the “free world”. You can see this picture in *Kristeva Interviews*, a book published by Columbia University Press. I would like, once again, to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my collaborators at Columbia University Press for their loyalty and friendship. It is thanks to their efforts that my work has become accessible to an English-speaking public all over the world, as I have already said.

The second image that I have in mind is that of my apartment on Morningside Drive, which overlooks Harlem Park, close to Edward Said’s apartment and to the flat where Arendt used to live. It is where I usually stay when I teach at Columbia, a place flooded with that unusual American light, dazzling and inviting at the same time. Here I wrote pages that are dear to me from *Histoires d’amour/Tales of Love* (1983) and *Soleil Noir/Black Sun* (1987) or *Female Genius*, a place which remains, in my personal mythology, a space of happy solitude.

Many people were surprised when Philippe Sollers and I decided to devote a whole issue of *Tel Quel* (71/73, Fall, 1977) to New York. What came across in that issue was praise of American democracy, as opposed to French centralization, which appears so hierarchical and Jacobin by contrast. It was actually an acknowledgment of what seems to me to be the most important quality of American civilization, and which also explains my attachment to American academia, namely its hospitality. To be precise, in the designation “American”, I should include the USA’s neighbours to the North: Canada and the Canadian universities.

By hospitality I mean the ability that some people have to offer a home to those who do not have one, or lack one temporarily. Fleeing communism to go to France, I did not encounter that kind of hospitality, although France has given me my French nationality, for which I will always be grateful. My adoptive country is grounded in its administrative and cultural history, although it is also famous for the radically innovative spirit of many of its citizens, such as the artistic, philosophical and theoretical avant-gardes that have seduced me, and have ensured its glory abroad. Such innovations often engender violent rejection, if not active hatred. America, on the other hand, seems to me to be a country that welcomes grafts and even encourages them.

It is, however, a profoundly French woman that you are welcoming today, whether you consider me as a Gallicised European, or as the very “essence” of francité/Frenchness. This often comes as a surprise to the French themselves who, obviously, do not see me as one of them. Sometimes, after returning from New York, while passionately discussing my work as part of “French theory”, I am even tempted to take myself for a French intellectual. At other times I actively consider settling abroad for good, all the more so when I feel hurt by the xenophobia of that old country which is France.

In this modern world of ours, in this “New World Order”, we seem to lack a positive definition of humanity (not in the sense of the “human species”, but rather in that of the quality of being human). We sometimes have to ask ourselves what “humanity”, or “humanism” is all about when we have to confront “crimes against humanity”. My own experience, though, makes me think that the minimal definition of humanity, the zero degree of humanity, to borrow an expression from Barthes, is precisely hospitality. The Greeks were right when they chose the word “ethos” to designate the most radically human capacity, which from then on is referred to as the ethical capacity and which consists in the ability to make choices, the choice between good and evil - and all the other possible “choices”. It’s interesting to note that the word “ethos” originally meant a “regular sleeping place or animal shelter”. By derivation it came to mean “habit” and “character” and what is characteristic of an individual and of a social group.

I found this sense of hospitality in the United States, which, despite the numerous faults of the “American way of life”, for many still represents a future in which we will live in a globalized society where foreigners share their lives with other foreigners.

This hospitality, which I am so happy to experience again today, here in Norway, was first and foremost hospitality towards my ideas and my work. When I travel I take with me a French and European cultural heritage, in which there is a mixture of German, Russian and French traditions: Hegel and Freud, Russian formalism, French structuralism, the avant-gardes of the “nouveau roman”, and *Tel Quel*. I hope that Americans, and now you here in Bergen, will feel that my “migrant personality” is less “French” in the sense of being somewhat arrogant and haughty. As a foreigner, I have managed to appropriate this culture and I hope that the elements of this French and “old” European culture, often so inaccessible and jealous of its own purity, which I will present to you today will be accessible to you as English-speaking foreigners. Certainly part

of my work has resonated in a special way in American universities and has further developed in a direction that I am most pleased with, and which encouraged me to continue. Sometimes, however, I am surprised by the images of myself and my work that are reflected back to me, and I have difficulty recognizing myself. I have never had, and will never acquire, a taste for polemics, partly because I am convinced of at least one thing: either these interpretations go against me in a useless way, and will consequently exhaust themselves in the process (for example some militant, and “politically correct” comments), or they are part of a more personal quest of American men and women, original and innovative, who assimilate my work into theirs at their own risk, which may well be, after all, just a wonderful way of practicing this hospitality that I have been talking about. Isn’t the whole idea of “transplant” or “graft” meant to generate unexpected consequences, the very opposite of cloning? However, as regards the politically correct interpretations, I have never had the impression that they were widespread in European universities, whether of Latin, Germanic, English or Scandinavian language, no doubt because these institutions are more attuned to the European sensibility which underlies my work, and to which I will return in a moment.

## Some themes of our interface

I will now revisit some of the main themes of my work which have given rise to much discussion. They are: intertextuality, the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, the concepts of the abject and abjection, and my emphasis on the themes of the foreigner and foreignness.

1. The concept of intertextuality has enjoyed a certain degree of success internationally. This idea, which I developed from Bakhtine, invites the reader to interpret a text as a crossing of texts. Very often, in formalist or structuralist approaches this has been perceived as a return to “quotations” or to “sources”. For me it is principally a way of introducing history into structuralism: the texts that Mallarmé and Proust read, and which nourish the *Coup de Dés* and *A la Recherche du temps perdu* allow us to introduce history into the laboratory of writing. Mallarmé’s interest in anarchism, for example, and Proust’s interest in Zohar’s Jewish mysticism and the *Affaire Dreyfus* are useful material in this kind of approach. Also, by showing the extent to which the internal dimension of the text is connected to the external context, such interpretations can reveal the inauthenticity of the writing subject. The writer becomes “le sujet en procès”: this French expression means both a “subject in process” and a “subject on trial”. As such, the speaking subject is a carnival, a polyphony, forever contradictory and rebellious. The post-structuralist theme of intertextuality also gave birth to an idea that I have been trying to work on ever since, especially in my books from 1996 and 1997, namely that of the connection between “culture” and “revolt”.

2. The distinction that I have established between the semiotic and the symbolic has no political or feminist connotation. It is simply an attempt to think of “meaning”, not only as “structure”, but also as “process” or “trial” in the sense I have already mentioned, by looking at the same time at syntax, logic, and what transgresses them, or the trans-verbal. I refer to this other side of “meaning” as trans-verbal because calling it

pre-verbal could give rise to certain difficulties. The semiotic is not independent of language, but underpins language and, under the control of language, it articulates other aspects of “meaning” which are more than mere “significations”, such as rhythmical and melodic inflections. Under the influence of Freudian distinctions between the representations of things and the representations of words, I try to take into consideration this dual nature of the human mind, and especially the constraints of biology and of instinctual drives that sustain and influence meaning and signification. This is because we may indeed affirm that in the beginning was the word, but before the beginning there was the unconscious with its repressed content.

I am personally convinced that the future of psychoanalysis lies in this direction, that is between the translinguistic logic of the unconscious, and biological and neurobiological constraints. At the Institute for Contemporary Thought at the University of Paris 7, we try to bring biologists and psychoanalysts together in their work. Our basic preoccupation is the opening up of psychoanalysis to biology as well as to a more active involvement in social politics. In this connection I fully support and indeed am actively involved in President Chirac’s campaign for the integration of handicapped citizens into French society. We hope that this approach, along with a close rereading of Freud’s texts, will revitalize contemporary psychoanalysis in the long run.

This “semiotic” trans-verbal aspect of our research is connected to the archaic relation between mother and child and allows me to investigate certain aspects of the feminine and the maternal in language, of what Freud used to call “the black continent” or Minoan-Mycenaean (after the name of the Greek civilization that preceded the civilization of classical Greece.) This “other logic” of the feminine and the maternal which works against normative representation and opposes phallic representation, both masculine and feminine, is perhaps my own contribution to the endeavours to understand the feminine as connected to the political via the sacred.

I am convinced that this new 21st century, which seems to be in such need of religion, is actually in need of the sacred. I understand the sacred as the desire of human beings to think, not in the sense of calculation, but rather in the sense of a need for fundamental questioning, which distinguishes us from other species and, a contrario, brings us closer to them. As a writer, psychoanalyst and semiotician I believe that the human characteristic that we call the sense of the divine and of the sacred arises at the very point of emergence of language. “The semiotic” with its maternal ties seems to be the farthest we can reach when we try to imagine and understand the frontiers between nature, or “phusis”, and meaning. By understanding the “semiotic” as “emergence of meaning” we can overcome the dichotomies of metaphysics (soul/body, physical/psychical). My preoccupation with the sacred is, in fact, anti-metaphysical, and only feminist in a derivative sense. If I am indeed passionately attached to the recognition of women in social, intellectual, and political life, this is only to the extent that women can bring a different attitude to the ideas of “power” and “meaning”. This would be an attitude that takes into consideration the need for the survival of our species, and our need for the sacred. Women are positioned at the intersection of these two demands.

3. The abject and abjection are concepts that I developed on the basis of my clinical experience when facing the symptoms which I also call New Maladies of the Soul (Columbia University Press), in which the distinction between “subject” and “object” is not clear, and in which these two pseudo-entities exhaust themselves in a dialectic of attraction and repulsion. Borderline personalities, as well as some depressive personalities, can be described from this psychical basis, which is also reminiscent of an archaic state, of the communion which exists in the act of maternal holding. The mother object is the first result of the process of expulsion of what is disagreeable in this archaic state. In this process, which I have called abjection, the mother becomes the first “abject” rather than object. Artists such as Picasso and de Kooning clearly understood something of this process.

Using the concepts of “abject” and “abjection”, I first tried to understand the complex universe of the French writer Céline, master of popular fiction, and of Parisian slang, the argot, a carrier of exceptional emotion. Instead of taking the cathartic road of abjection as religions do (and I believe any religion is in fact a way of purifying the abject), Céline insists on following imaginary abjections, which he then transfers to political realities. His anti-Semitism and his despicable compromises with Nazi ideology are expressed in his pamphlets, which I attempted to read objectively, as an analyst, without giving in to the feelings that they inevitably arouse.

My adventures in the very dangerous territory of abjection have nevertheless resulted in many alliances. Many artists from all over the world have recognized themselves in the experience of the abject, which is close to the psychotic states that they encounter in the process of artistic creation. But my research has also given rise to a sharp reaction in some academic circles and certain journals, which affirmed that if I chose to analyse Céline, it was only to excuse him, as if trying to understand necessarily means trying to forgive. That was one of the most radical rejections of my work, due to a misreading. I personally perceived it as a form of partisan excommunication that amounted to an attack on thinking itself.

That “excommunication” now seems to me to be the tragic precursor of a more recent event, more comic than tragic, in which two ambitious academics set out to unmask French “impostors” (this was the name they gave to French Theorists), by rejecting our “pseudo-scientific models”, when in fact, we never tried to create scientific models, only metaphorical transfers.

4. The concept of strangeness or foreignness, is also, as you may know, close to my heart. Writing my book *Strangers to Ourselves*, for which I received the Hertz prize from the Academy of Paris, gave me an opportunity to outline a history of foreigners, their actual destiny, and the way in which they are perceived in the West, and also to state my own position in this debate, a position which again seems to be accepted with some difficulty. First of all, I believe that in order to fight the state of national depression that we are experiencing in France (but not only in France) as a result of globalization and of the influx of immigrants, and also in order to oppose maniacal re-

actions to this depression (such as that of the Front National), it is important to restore national confidence. This has to be done in the same way in which we sometimes have to restore the narcissism or the ideal “ego” in a depressed patient, before proceeding to the actual “analysis”, i.e. to the dissolution of his system of defence and resistance.

I am convinced that, in the next century, the cosmopolitan society that we have been dreaming of ever since the Stoics and throughout the Enlightenment, will not be possible in the utopian shape of the “melting pot”, universalized and standardized by the market, the media and the internet. At most, this will lead to a more or less conflictual cohabitation of nations and of various “social groups” which will live with and against each other. Combining a certain amount of respect for “national identity” and support for the idea of the “common good” (l’intérêt général as Montesquieu called it), this approach will have to replace the excesses of contemporary globalization.

## Two types of civilization

You will no doubt have identified, as I have outlined these four themes – and I could have chosen others – areas of agreement and disagreement between us. Without going deeper into this research, I would like to take the opportunity that you have granted me to distance myself from this personal research in order to consider the wider cultural and political context in which we work, and in which this collective research has been elaborated.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 brought to light the difference between two types of culture, a European culture and a North American culture. In order to avoid any misunderstanding, I want to make it clear from the start that I am referring to two visions of freedom or liberty that all democratic societies without exception have elaborated and of which, unfortunately, we are not sufficiently proud. I am speaking of two visions of freedom, which both rely on the Greek, Jewish and Christian traditions, and which, in spite of shameful as well as glorious episodes, remain our most important achievement. These two visions of freedom are, nevertheless, both essential. They are sometimes, as is now the case, opposed. Fundamentally, however, these two versions of freedom are complementary, and indeed I believe that they are both present in each of us, whichever side of the Atlantic we find ourselves on. If I continue to oppose them in what follows, this is only for the sake of the clarity of my exposition.

Emmanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1789), defined for the first time something that other people also must have experienced, but were unable to articulate, namely the fact that freedom is not, negatively speaking, an “absence of constraint”, but positively speaking, the possibility of “self-beginning”, *Selbstanfang*. Thus, by identifying “freedom” with the capacity for spontaneously beginning, Kant opens the way for praise of the enterprising individual, for the initiative of the “self”, if I may transfer his cosmological considerations to a more personal level. At the same time, he subordinates the freedom of Reason, be it pure or practical, to a cause, divine or moral.

I will extrapolate by saying that, in a world more and more dominated by technology, freedom becomes the capacity to adapt to a "cause" always outside the "self", and which is less and less a moral cause, and more and more an economic one. In an ideal situation the two operate at the same time. In this line of thought, which is favoured by Protestantism (I'm referring here to Max Weber's work on the connection between capitalism and Protestantism), freedom becomes the freedom to adapt to the logic of cause and effect, Hannah Arendt would say "to the calculus of consequences", i.e. the logic of production, of science, and of the economy. To be free in this sense would be to profit from adaptations to this logic of causes and effects, and to the economic market.

This kind of freedom culminates in the logic of globalization and of the unrestrained free-market. The Supreme Cause (God) and the Technical Cause (the Dollar) are its two coexisting variants which guarantee the functioning of our freedom within this logic of "instrumentalisation". I am not denying here the benefits of this kind of freedom. It has the advantage of being able to adapt to the logic of "causes and effects" that culminates in a specific way of thinking, which is "thinking-as-calculus", and scientific thinking. I believe this vision to be crucial for our access to technology and automation. American society seems to be better adapted to this kind of freedom. I am merely saying that this is not the only kind of freedom.

There is also another vision of freedom which emerged in the Greek world, at the very heart of its philosophy, with the pre-Socratics, and which developed in the Socratic dialogue. This fundamental variety of freedom is not subordinate to a cause, which means that it is prior to the concatenation of Aristotelian "categories" that are a premise for scientific and technical thinking. This fundamental variety of freedom is in Being and moreover, in the Being of Language Which is Being Delivered/ I/'Etre de la Parole Qui se Livre, a Being which delivers, gives, or presents itself to itself and to the other, and liberates itself in the process. This liberation of the Language-Being that occurs in the encounter between the Self and the Other, was emphasized in Heidegger's discussion of Kant (in a 1930 seminar "The Essence of Human Freedom", published in 1982). This approach inscribes freedom into the very essence of philosophy, as eternal questioning, before allowing it to become fixed - only subsequently to this original freedom - in the succession of causes and effects and the ability to master them.

Don't worry, I would like to assure you that I will not go any further in this debate. I have already over-simplified the two conceptions of freedom in Kant and Heidegger. What I am interested in discussing, in the context of the modern world, is this second conception of freedom. This second kind of freedom is very different from the kind of calculating logic that leads to unbridled consumerism; it is a conception that is evident in the Speech-Being, in the Presencing of the Self to the Other.

I hope you understand that it is the psychological and social connotations of this kind of freedom that constitute the essential themes of French Theory. The poet is its main custodian, together with the libertine who defies the conventions of social causes and

effects in order to bring out and formulate a desire for dissidence. Not to mention the analyst in the experience of transference and counter-transference. But we mustn't forget the revolutionary who put the privileges of the individual above all other conventions; this is the foundation of Human Rights, and the slogan of the French Revolution, Liberty-Equality-Fraternity which at the time reinforced the ideas of English Habeas Corpus. If we are able to hear and to interpret these various figures, we will be better equipped to liberate ourselves from a certain vision of the 18th century which has become dominant, and which mistakenly takes the legacy of the Enlightenment to be a kind of abstract universalism.

But I would like to return to our present reality. In spite of all the difficulties, we are on our way towards building a European Community that cannot be ignored. In this often chaotic European assembly, the voice of France, which sometimes has difficulty making itself heard when it calls for the construction of a "social Europe", still finds allies in other governments and in the public opinion of various countries. Whilst all of them are deeply attached to their particular cultural traditions, they all implicitly or explicitly share our notion of freedom. We are trying to promote a "social model" which is not exclusively that of laissez-faire capitalism, often identified as "the American model". Our emphasis on this cultural difference is not only due to the fact that we belong to a tradition and possess a memory which may be older, "more refined" and "more sophisticated" and so on, because it originates in the "Old World". Rather, it is due to the fact that we have a different vision of freedom, namely one which ranks the uniqueness of the individual over economic and scientific factors. When the French government, whether it be of the left or of the Gaullist right, insists on our "solidarity" in opposition to "liberalism" in the classic sense of unregulated economic and social competition, this should be understood as being nothing other than a defence of this conception of freedom.

We are fully aware, of course, of the risks that may come with such an attitude: those of ignoring contemporary economic realities, submitting to excessive corporatist demands, an inability to take part in international competition, idleness, backwardness. This is why we need to be alert and always remember the new constraints of our technological world, of the domain of "causes and effects". At the same time, however, it is not difficult to see the advantages of this other type of freedom, which is supported in many European countries. This is an aspiration rather than a fixed project, driven by a real concern for the uniqueness and fragility of each and every human life, including those of the poor, the disabled, the retired, and those who rely on social benefits. It also requires special attention to gender and ethnic differences, to men and women considered in their unique intimacy rather than as simple groups of consumers.

The basis for this convergence at the European level, then, is that there is another kind of freedom which needs to be defended. That, in the post-modern era, it is not the best economic and technical performance which is most important from the point of view of human liberation – although this was indeed the case in the previous period of capitalism. From this perspective what matters is the particular, the art of living, taste,

leisure, the so-called "idle" pleasures, grace, pure chance, playfulness, wastefulness, our "darker side" even, or, to put it in a nutshell, freedom as the essence of "Being-in-the-World" prior to any "Cause". These are the elements which characterize European culture, and, one may hope, offer an alternative to the globalized world in which we live.

I recently tried to describe this aspect of human uniqueness when I discussed "Feminine Genius" in a trilogy on the life and work of Arendt, Klein and Colette. The notion of individual feminine genius can take us beyond mass feminism, in which the uniqueness of each woman risks being submerged, although clearly this notion of genius can be extended to both sexes.

Can we preserve this understanding of freedom as a general human value? This is by no means certain, since all the indications are that we are being carried away by the maelstrom of our calculus thinking and by our consumerism. The only counterpoint to this seems to be the rebirth of religious sects for which the sacred is no longer "a permanent questioning", as the very concept of human dignity would require, but a subordination to exactly the same logic of causes and effects, only taken to extremes - in this case under the authority of sects and fundamentalist groups. This means that today's religious alternative, to the extent that it degenerates into a clash between fundamentalisms, is not only an unreliable counterpoint to technological mastery, but actually mirrors its logic of competition and conflict, which it only serves to reinforce.

We cannot, of course, be sure that this alternative vision of freedom that I am trying to rehabilitate today can become more than an aspiration, but the future remains open.

Of course, Europe is far from being homogeneous and united. In the context of the crisis in Iraq and faced with the terrorist threat, some people have claimed that a rift has opened up between the countries of (to use their terminology) the "Old Europe" and those of the "New Europe". Without going too deeply into this complex set of problems, I would like to express two, highly personal, opinions on this issue. Firstly, I believe that it is important that the "Old Europe", and France in particular, take very seriously the economic difficulties encountered by the "New Europe" which result in these countries depending to a large degree on the United States. But we must also recognize the cultural, and in particular, religious differences which separate us from these countries, and we must respect these differences. Our famous "French arrogance" does not equip us very well for this task, and the Orthodox Christian countries in particular feel somewhat bitter about this. My second point is this: the knowledge that we in Europe have of the Arab world, after so many years of colonialism, has made us very sensitive to Islamic culture and rendered us capable of softening, if not entirely avoiding, the "clash of civilizations" to which I have referred. In this situation, what is at stake is our ability to offer our active support to those in the Muslim world who are now seeking to modernize Islam. At the same time, however, the insidious anti-Semitism in our countries should make us vigilant faced with the rise of new forms of anti-Semitism today.

Let me return now to academic life, and in particular to the question of French Theory with which my work is often associated. I have spoken at length, although too briefly for such important questions, about the political implications of this European vision of freedom. This vision is deeply ingrained in our social experience as well as in our way of thinking. This might explain the enthusiastic welcome that my work has received in some American universities, here in Norway, and elsewhere in the world. You will have observed that this "French" research, in confronting the American economic, political and academic establishment, in its demand for liberty, often takes the form of political contestation. Nevertheless it is fundamentally concerned with a way of being, which reveals itself in the act of re-volt, in other words in turning back on itself, in accomplishing its anamnesis, in renewing itself continually through a process of self-questioning. Those who forget this mode of thinking and being limit themselves to the activity of politics in the strict sense of the word, which then becomes a betrayal of the freedom of thought. This is why, in my last two books on the culture of revolt (*Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt and Intimate Revolt*), I discuss the idea that "political revolution" (the French Terror of 1793 and the Russian Revolution of 1917) can be seen as the stifling of re-volt in the sense of free questioning and permanent restlessness. Totalitarianism, in all its horror, appropriated the idea of revolt only to transform it into a deadly dogma. Nevertheless, the attitude of vigilance which we now display in the face of various nihilistic political demands, which are marginalized by the "society of the spectacle", does not rule out forever the possibility of the kind of liberty of revolt of which I have been speaking from establishing itself in the political domain, provided that it first develops in the domain of thought. This, at least, is the hypothesis which I would like to submit to you today.

As a way of protesting against the limitations of consumerism and positivist reasoning, many of you have based your reflection on our research, and have paid attention to the ethical, as well as the theoretical dimension: "French Theory" and "continental philosophy" have become forms of protest in many countries all around the world. However, some interpretations of our thought, influenced by the ideology of political correctness, have radicalized its political implications. This is not to say that our research does not have a political content, because of course it does, but this political position is implicit: it underlies and informs a particular way of thinking. In the final analysis, a fundamental characteristic of our approach has been forgotten. This is that, as I see it from my own experience, our research cannot be reduced to the production of "theory"; it is more than this, and it is something else besides. I would say that it is a process of "thinking through" or "working through" in the sense that Freud used to speak of the dreamwork. It is thinking as "disclosure", in a way which Heidegger, and in another way Arendt, expressed it, opposing it to thought-as-calculation. It involves a replenishing of thought in fiction, and for this reason in the sensitive body, which evokes Spinoza's "third kind of knowledge", but also the sort of rationality which belongs to "free association" and "transference" as they are manifested in the psycho-analytic experience.

I could observe that this thought and this liberty continue to develop in France, that intellectual life is neither in decline nor stagnating in that country, as is sometimes claimed. The proof can be seen if we look at some recent trends, which I will now outline briefly.

First of all, the insistence on the speaking subject in research in human sciences – history, anthropology, sociology and so on – is becoming more and more pronounced; this does not mean that objective facts are underestimated or ignored, but that, by taking them into consideration, the researcher is much more subjectively involved in their interpretation. In France, we will soon initiate a national debate on the role of human sciences organized around this general theme of “fact and interpretation”. It goes without saying that the part played by psychoanalysis in this is crucial.

Also, and this is undoubtedly the result of the psychoanalytical perspective on human beings, the imaginary is more and more perceived as an essential component of our psyche, but also and primarily as the realm of the kind of freedom which I am defending here today. We are alive precisely because we have a psychic life. This is the intimate dimension of our existence (what we call in French our *for intérieur*) which allows us to shield ourselves from internal and external attacks on our being, i.e. psychological and biological traumas, as well as external social and political aggression. The imaginary metabolizes them, transforms them, sublimates them, works-through them and in this way keeps us alive. What am I referring to when I speak of the imaginary? Well, for example, the fantasies that psychoanalysis works with. Literature, for its part, offers a refuge for our loves and insomnia, our states of grace and crises. Religion opposes laissez-faire capitalism and its logic of causes and effects by bringing something more to the “human soul”. Human sciences and human thought are now ready for a fruitful and critical encounter with this religious imaginary, an encounter which neither condemns nor ignores it. The religious experience also becomes analysable under this approach; it is possible to unveil its logic, and its benefits as well as its failings. Here too, I believe, French Theory can make an important contribution. Along with colleagues in Paris, I recently created the Institute for Contemporary Thought, the core of which is the Roland Barthes Interdisciplinary Centre, which deals with themes situated at the interface between literature, philosophy, psychoanalysis, ethics, and religion. We are trying to develop the exercise of liberty-as-thinking on a larger scale, with the aim of re-thinking the traditional boundaries between disciplines, and this in spite of the differences between the different researchers who are involved in this project.

I would like to conclude these thoughts, which, given the gratitude which I feel on this occasion, have perhaps been a little too centred on myself and my own research, with some wider considerations.

I have deliberately emphasized the European origin of this type of freedom, which, in my opinion, underpins what has been called “French Theory”. I must emphasize that nobody has a monopoly on this conception, and that the Catholic and Protestant worlds have a rich potential in terms of this variety of liberty. Of course, the idea of “being chosen” in Judaism, although different from the idea of freedom that I have

tried to outline here, makes a person coming from this tradition particularly capable of restoring what we lack so much, i.e. an interaction of these two versions of freedom: economic neo-liberalism and fraternal and poetic freedom, causal and “disclosing” versions of freedom.

Earlier, when criticizing the resurgence of French nationalism, I pointed out the fact that this intimate and fraternal type of freedom is indeed a difficult, and perhaps an impossible choice. Still, this is the challenge that France is ready to face, and, in the long run, the challenge that Europe as a whole must be willing to take. Personally, I am strongly committed to this vision, and I am doing what I can to contribute to its realization.

In this context, America, the America that I love, an America which no longer has any enemies and which would like to silence its opponents, risks becoming a fourth Rome, after Byzantium and Moscow. In this “New World Order”, America has imposed a financial, economic and cultural oligarchy which is liberal in its inspiration but which risks excluding an important dimension of human liberty. Other civilizations have other visions of human freedom. They also need to be heard in this globalized world and to be allowed to add their own corrections, through diversity, to this new global vision of human destiny. The diversity of cultural models is the only guarantee for the respect of the “humanity” that I referred to earlier in my lecture, a humanity that we described in terms of “hospitality” for lack of a better definition. At present, instead of this liberty, humanity is betraying itself in a process of increasing technical and robotic uniformization. Hospitality is not just the simple juxtaposition of differences, with one model dominating all the others, and feigning respect for others whilst in reality being indifferent towards them. On the contrary, hospitality is a genuine attempt to understand other kinds of freedom in order to make every “way of being” more multiple, more complex. The definition of humanity that I was looking for is perhaps just this process of complexification.

In this sense, understanding (or lack of understanding) on the part of Americans for a European alternative could turn out to be a decisive step. The old saying of the French moralists is well-known: if God did not exist, we would have to invent Him. I would paraphrase this by saying: if Europe did not exist, the world would have to invent her. This is in the interest of our plural world, and also in America’s interest. Whatever the economic and diplomatic competition between the Old and the New parts of Europe, our “old” Europe needs to make her voice heard in the “new” countries. European intellectuals have a particular responsibility here.

At the end of the day, my own intellectual journey could have no higher ambition than to draw attention to the diversity of the human experience of freedom. I dare say that this vocation is not so far from that of Ludvig Holberg, in whose name we are gathered here today. At the frontiers of “old” Europe and the new world, Norway has the political and cultural advantage of being in a position to work for the extension of these various freedoms in these dark times. Far from being a foregone conclusion, this project is an ongoing struggle.

## Holberg Today

I would naturally be pleased if our work together, and in particular the exchanges which will result from this conference, organized in connection with the awarding of the Holberg Prize, were to lead to a better balance between these two kinds of freedom. I believe that Ludvig Holberg's work was not so far removed from such considerations. To conclude, I would like, at least, to try to persuade you that this is indeed the case.

As an author of comedies, a historian and a novelist, Ludvig Holberg was an incisive writer whose humour did not spare his own person: "...when my illness attains the region of the heart", he writes in his Second Autobiographical Letter, "I am usually gripped by an irrational desire to start reforming, and I begin launching vehement attacks on depraved humanity. But the pain only needs to move to a different part of the body, and at once there is nobody more indulgent than I of human weaknesses. That is why, as soon as I feel the desire to reform, experience has shown me that, rather than launching attacks upon humanity, I would do better to launch an offensive upon my intestines, as I generally find that my enthusiasm subsides after taking a few laxative pills: as soon as they have taken their effect, the world seems perfectly bearable /.../ Often I have found myself obliged to leave my companions in disgust and to seek remedy in solitude. I admire nothing more than brevity, as a result of which I despise above all else these incorrigible poseurs who assassinate their victims with interminable story-telling."

In order to avoid "assassinating" you with my interminable story-telling, I would only like to remind you that this "Nordic Molière", who was a reader of Voltaire and of Montesquieu, was a moderate man, but was radical in his way, was scathing about all kinds of excessive enthusiasm, and preferred laughter to religious fanaticism, writing several comedies, as well as a History of the Kingdom of Denmark and of Norway, a History of Religion, a History of the Jews, a History of Women (indeed, he is considered "the first Scandinavian feminist"). This constant movement between genres and between disciplines nevertheless attained its polyphonic, intertextual unity, the kind of unity which is brought about by the Diderot's "homme orchestre", only in his works of fiction. How could I fail to identify with such a figure! Holberg's philosophical novel, Niels Klim's subterranean journey, mixes political satire and utopianism in such a way that the satire dissolves into the fantasy, and the facetious remarks triumph over the moral message, with the result that, today, we read this novel as a defence of the pure imaginary.

Although Baron Holberg described himself as an ascetic, and something of a hypochondriac, whilst managing to remain a comical figure, the first to acknowledge his importance after his death was none other than the libertine philosopher Giovanni Giacomo Casanova, in the Preface to his own subterranean utopia, The Icosameron of 1788. He writes: "Plato, Erasmus, the Chancellor Bacon, Thomas More, Campanella and Niels Klim are those who have given me the desire to write this story, or this novel."

More than two centuries later, I would like to thank Ludvig Holberg for having given the Jury which takes his name the desire to bring us together this evening. Thank you for your patience and for your friendship.



## Freedom and Ethical Value

Sara Beardsworth, Southern Illinois University

I want here to address the two versions of freedom which you suggest have been elaborated in all democratic societies but, in a manner especially accentuated by the Atlantic divide, stand opposed today. These are the so-called causal and disclosing versions of freedom. You address the potential for restoring their complementarity. This, of course, presumes that each has a value warranting its preservation and elaboration in a complementary structure. True complementarity can be neither absolute opposition nor subordination of one motif to another. Thus each version must be given that function to which it legitimately lays claim in the hope that its promise not go unrealized. Looking more closely at the two options, however, I am struck by a certain valuational asymmetry owing to what seems to be an advantage possessed by the disclosing version in relation to the causal one. The freedom that discloses brings uniquely into play the *ethical* capacity. Furthermore, since you suggest that explorations at the intersections of psychoanalysis, biology, and social politics are relevant here, these deeply human concerns lead in a rather direct and compelling way into the stakes of your own thought. By contrast, with the causal version of freedom, where the subject adapts most directly to external economic factors, that is to say, the logic of cause and effect, it seems that questions of value-generation are at the very least problematically displaced. It is less clear in the second case that we are, in a moral sense, dealing with anything other than a negative freedom – freedom from constraint. The causal version, therefore, precisely to the extent that it remains aloof from these considerations, would seem to carry some grave risks, ones that are highly germane to the very advantages that the model brings with it. Adaptation to the logic of cause and effect situates us in terms of economy and access to technology and automation. Although the failure to acknowledge the centrality of these factors in our world would make our thought irrelevant to it, we are in effect here in confrontation with the dangers of the unrestrained free market. A tradition of European thought attentive to this danger – that being Hegelian Marxism – has long criticized the capacity for adaptation to an economic cause *outside oneself*, presenting a critique of commodity fetishism, the personification of relations between things and the reification of relations between persons. In this tradition adaptation to external economic cause is treated under the rubric of *alienation*. But alienation is nothing other than the loss of effective power to direct the destiny of our lives. Put otherwise, this causal model discloses itself as *unfreedom*. I am not trying gratuitously to revive these notions here but, rather, to note that they focus on a tendency that inhabits the causal version of freedom. For the experience of adaptation to economic cause outside oneself tends to situate us, if not in open competition with one another, at least in *mutual indifference* and indifference to the social good. This brings with it an inevitable weakening of the social fabric.

The disclosing version of freedom can be viewed as a counter-tendency to mutual indifference because of its connection with ethical capacity. It does not only underline the

concept of human dignity but understands the concept in terms of permanent questioning. This enables a deeper kind of social experience. Without this social dimension, freedom is at best an abstract concept and, at worst, a self-contradiction.

It would appear, then, that adaptation to economic and technical causation is only a meaningful version of freedom if there is an internal structural relation between it and the freedom that is responsive to disclosive value and therefore connected with real ethical capacity. The vital import of the restoration of the complementarity of the two versions of freedom has, moreover, been revealed by experience of the failure of liberty that you call *humanity betraying itself*. Left to itself, the causal version of freedom appears to leave us exposed to the repetition of this self-betrayal. Mutual indifference provides no bulwark against humanity betraying itself.

If we are to hold to the vision of complementarity, do we not need to consider how one component of its structure is especially infiltrated by the failure of liberty? Moreover, if this is so, doesn't the vision of the complementarity of the two freedoms require a move back in the direction of Hegel's tenuous dynamic of recognition *and* misrecognition, in which recognition is and can only be a movement out of misrecognition? This would mean thinking recognition as the movement out of the failure of liberty in the form of humanity betraying itself.

Now it seems to me that the investigations at the intersections of psychoanalysis, biology, and social politics can and must be brought into relation to this question. These intersections exist because psychoanalysis explores the subject, not as the individual narrowly conceived, but at the limit of the ties between the social and the individual. This is where psychoanalysis found sex and death, often viewed to be its most ineluctable forces. The decisive point is that they are not strictly causal factors. They are not, for example, things reducible to the nexus of causal explanations constituting the science of biology. Psychoanalytic exploration takes us to biology only insofar as it takes us, more precisely, to the deflection of the biological into the psychical register: to desire and the drive. You have made decisive contributions in this field, especially where your consideration of the preverbal life of the drives and affects has drawn attention to the forgotten maternal ties of early infantile life and the preverbal forms of responsiveness that turn on the necessity of losing the maternal mansion. That is to say, you have articulated a complex preverbal, corporeal and affective life of love and loss. Contemporary psychoanalytic experience of buried affect and unsymbolized drive suggests that this nonverbal life cannot be definitively left behind but is carried forward, for good or ill, in the subject's history.

This brings us to the intersection of psychoanalysis with social politics, where psychoanalysis may be deployed for the diagnosis and comprehension of social ills but also goes beyond this. For the psychoanalytic standpoint is *most* compatible with the second version of freedom insofar as psychoanalysis lends itself to the ethical value of permanent questioning. It does this, notably, in presenting to the humanities and sciences a model of the individual that offsets the notion of man as a fixed, valorized

entity. This model, which is drawn out of the exploration of the limit of the ties between the social and the individual as well as the transference relationship peculiar to analytic experience, is offered in lieu of the “optimistic” eighteenth-century notion. The latter notion assumed the *balance* of individuals. It then relied on that assumption both for the assertion that the political state was the site of collectivity and for the view that the relationship of state and civil society was the objective site for the entanglement of private need and political awareness, and so the objective site for our experiencing ourselves as separate and connected. Thus this neutralized projection of the individual becomes the basis for the experience of separateness and connectedness. In contrast to this model of the individual, psychoanalysis presents the speaking being, who is a heterogeneous subject because she is both a being of social and symbolic capacities and subject of drives and desires. This subject is not the individual as fixed, valorized entity but one “in-process/on trial” *because* constituted in and through exposure to otherness, loss, and separateness and, for this reason, both liable to destabilization and capable of innovation. This psychoanalytic conception of the subject acknowledges the uniqueness of the individual – our particularity – and takes in the fragility and innovative capacities of every human life. It can therefore get on a level with the conception of freedom that turns on permanent questioning.

I believe that I am going over another aspect of your thought – notably in *Black Sun* – in adding that twentieth- and twenty-first-century encounters with humanity betraying itself have affected our selfhood and connectedness with others, especially our innovative capacities, because in those encounters we come to find our symbolic resources for negotiating the exposure to loss, death, and the other exhausted. The already verified power of our social and symbolic discourses finds itself emptied out. Psychoanalysis and literature have been vital resources in these conditions, and can be so because they are sublimatory practices.

However, I want to continue with the thought of opening psychoanalysis up to social politics by recalling, now, the idea of the ethics of psychoanalysis proposed in *Strangers to Ourselves*, and specifically the attempt to convey the psychoanalytic standpoint through a reconsideration of the distinction made in the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* between rights of citizen and rights of man. Rights of citizen belong to the rules of political association. Their scope therefore extends to the boundaries of the national. Rights of man has as its content universal human dignity but has tied the latter to a conception of natural man. It then proved to be powerless in the world of Nazism and its aftermath. Your discussion of this problem in *Strangers to Ourselves* draws on the apt statement from Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. “The world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human. ... It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as fellow man.”<sup>1</sup>

I have understood you to be proposing that the conditions that Arendt’s words apply to, and which could be called the most profound moments of humanity betraying itself, have left us nonetheless with the starkly *portrayed* vulnerability of being human. This

can be a trigger for abjection and for melancholy, which reflect and sustain a social and subjective incapacity to bear the explosion of death and the draining of meaning. This further weakens the social fabric. Yet, as you have followed through in various ways, these social and individual ills do not exhaust the aftermath of our encounters with humanity betraying itself. Possibilities for orienting ourselves otherwise in this aftermath have shown up. Is it possible, in this context, that recent public *response* to Abu Ghraib reveals an orientation that is dependent upon twentieth-century experience of humanity betraying itself? Hiroshima, Auschwitz... As they cast a pall over contemporary ethical experience a different shape of ethical capacity itself emerges from those deep shadows. It is not an ethical capacity reliant on guideposts given in advance concerning what attitude to take up in relation to this failure of liberty that is humanity betraying itself. Rather, an ethic forming as rejection of the betrayal (disgust, repulsion) emerges out of the very encounter with humanity betraying itself, which is to say, more properly, out of the starkly portrayed vulnerability of being human. Might the thinking of this formation not be a contribution to the task of restoring what is needful to the real disposition of our freedom? This would seem to hold true whether or not we arrive at a more integrated concept of this freedom or continue to follow your suggestion that complementarity between the causal and disclosing versions of freedom is currently our best option.

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979, pp. 299-300.

## The Semiotic and the Other: a response to Julia Kristeva

John Fletcher, University of Warwick

In her Holberg Prize laureate lecture “Thinking about liberty in dark times”, Julia Kristeva offers us for discussion a rich array of themes which she calls the “themes of our interface” and these themes reflect the innovative and cross-disciplinary nature of the extraordinary body of research she has produced over the last four decades, research that traverses the fields of linguistics, semiotics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, literary criticism and art history. In particular, she specifies the four themes of inter-textuality, the relations between the semiotic and the symbolic, the abject and the processes of abjection, and finally the figure of the foreigner, the internal stranger. In the context of the ‘new world order’ after the end of the Cold War, she addresses rival conceptions of freedom - firstly, that associated with the ‘freedom’ of the ‘free market’, a freedom of economic agents and entities from any state regulation and control that they deem hostile to their interests. However, it is with an alternative conception of the freedom and uniqueness of the individual and of social solidarity against the unregulated competition of the market – associated with the idea of a ‘social Europe’ - that she aligns her research into the speaking subject, the parlêtre who comes into presence with the other through speech.

Freud, of course, aligned psychoanalysis with the legacy of the Enlightenment and in particular with the Copernican revolution. He presented his discovery of the unconscious as the third in a series of blows to human narcissism beginning with Copernicus; a series of decentrings of the human being in relation to the movement of the planets with Copernicus’s challenge to the old geocentric Ptolemaic synthesis; a decentring in relation to the whole of the animal world with Darwin’s theory of evolution and finally a decentring of the individual in relation to himself, for with the discovery of the unconscious the ego was no longer master in its own house.<sup>1</sup> Louis Althusser was later to add as a fourth decentring Marx’s formulation of history as a history of class struggles entailed by successive modes of production.<sup>2</sup> It was Jean Laplanche who, in taking up Freud’s Copernican identification, has argued that if Freud was Copernican, he was also his own Ptolemy: that is, that the Freudian conceptual field is structured and restructured by successive but opposed waves or movements of thought; movements of Copernican decentring of the human subject followed by movements of Ptolemaic recentring on the subject.<sup>3</sup> All the major Freudian concepts are marked by opposing versions of themselves, Laplanche argues: the ego as narcissistic formation and agent of the imaginary or the ego as centred on the perception-consciousness system and guardian of the reality principle; the psychical *Trieb* as pressure towards satisfaction and discharge or the biological *Instinkt* as functional survival mechanism; the disfunctional unconscious as the site of unbinding and disruption constructed by repression as against the primordial id as the site of instinctual functioning that emerges from the depths of the biological being. I’ve often thought that Lacan’s axiom that “the

unconscious is structured as a language”, in housing and domesticating the Freudian unconscious in his rewritten version of the Saussurian linguistic system, is another sophisticated but essentially ‘Ptolemaic’ recentring movement of thought, one that recentres the unconscious on the notion of structure and the secondary processes (for it is here that Freud locates language and its word-presentations not in the unconscious). By contrast Kristeva’s formulation of the semiotic and the trans-verbal is, in effect, an exemplary Copernican disruption of the dominance of the structuralist symbolic in Lacan’s work of the 1950s, so heavily influenced by the structuralism of Levi-Strauss. The Kristevan ‘semiotic’ represents a breaking open of the symbolic and signification to the movement of the drives.

These opposed movements in Freudian thought turn on the perpetual difficulty of articulating the biological and the psychical – for so often what happens is that the psychical is drawn back into and remodelled on the biological, that is, it is characterized by the teleological functioning of the living organism, its feedback mechanisms and homeostatic reflexes, its innate developmental programs. So Freud himself assimilates the pleasure-seeking, non-functional even disfunctional sexual drive or *Trieb*, pressing by the shortest route to discharge, of the *Three Essays* (1905), into the radically different Eros, the life-instinct, the agent of linking, binding and synthesis of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In so many developments of psychoanalytic thought a recentring of the subject on structure or instinctual functioning or the ego means that the otherness of the Freudian discovery of the unconscious and with it the subject’s relation to the other is either lost or put at risk.

Julia Kristeva locates her crucial ‘Copernican’ development of the semiotic and the trans-verbal in this double dimension or double interface, at the cross-roads between the interface of the psychical and the biological and that of the subject and the other. She writes of “an archaic state . . . the communion which exists in the act of maternal holding” (p.9) and which is later to provoke the processes of abjection and expulsion in the infant. She also writes: “the semiotic with its maternal ties seems to be the farthest point we can reach when we try to imagine and understand the frontiers between nature, or ‘phusis’, and meaning” (p.8). It is at this productive interface that Kristeva locates the research programs to be followed at the new Institute for Contemporary Thought whose foundation she has been involved in. It is in relation to this double interface, of the psychical and the biological and the

subject and the other, where she locates what I have called her Copernican, decentring concept of the semiotic and the trans-verbal, that I would like to pose some further questions.

The first question bears on the distinction between the Freudian *Instinkt* and the Freudian *Trieb* and their relation to the ‘semiotic’. We have almost completely lost this distinction in English because Strachey in his monumental Standard Edition has translated Freud’s *Trieb* by the English ‘instinct’. Even when American psychoanalysts substitute ‘drive’ for Strachey’s ‘instinct’, nothing is gained because what they are referring to is

a model of instinctual functioning under a different name. When many ego-psychologists or object relations theorists repudiate what they call 'drive-theory' as being reductive, it is the dominance of instinctual functioning they are rejecting, as the specificity of the Freudian psychical *Trieb* has largely been lost. In France, to protect the specificity of the Freudian *Trieb* Lacan denied that the notion of instinct ever appeared in Freud's texts which is, of course, not the case. For Freud the *Instinkt* is an hereditary behavioural pattern or reflex with fixed aims and pre-given objects, functioning to meet the organism's needs in the interests of self-preservation, while the *Trieb* or drive is a highly individualised often disfunctional complex whose aim is what he calls 'organ-pleasure' or the elimination of tension at the bodily source, and whose object and mode of satisfaction is determined by a series of *vorstellungen* or representations acquired in the course of the subject's history that also come to act as representatives of the drive. It is significant, as Laplanche and Pontalis point out in their entry on 'Instinct/ Drive', that when Freud asks "whether inherited mental formations exist in the human being – something analogous to instinct [*Instinkt*] in animals", he cites not the *Triebe* or drives but the phylogenetically inherited primal fantasies.<sup>4</sup> Freud makes the same comparison in the Wolf Man case between "the far-reaching instinctive [*instinktiv*] knowledge of animals" and "phylogenetically inherited schemata", not with the drives.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that for Freud the *Instinkt* and the *Trieb* are two different concepts implying two different kinds of functioning. It is also clear that the famous vicissitudes of the *Trieb* – repression, sublimation, turning round upon the subject's own self, reversal into its opposite – cannot apply to the self-preservative instincts with their pre-programmed aims and objects.

This tacit but untheorised differentiation between *Instinkt* and *Trieb* in Freud's work suffers a *bouleversement* in his late developments of the Id and the Life and Death 'Instincts'. Here the Unconscious constructed by repression is unhappily assimilated to a biological Id as the seat of instinctual functioning. We have a subsumption rather than the articulation of distinct orders of functioning. The psychical *Trieb* is lost in a massive recourse to the language of biology and a consequent 're-instinctualisation' that reverses the differentiation of libido from the instinct for nutrition that opened the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* of 1905. Indeed, in a strange chiasmus described by Laplanche, sexuality passes over from the side of expenditure, fragmentation and disruption – 'Lucifer Amor' – to that of synthesis, binding and unification, the Eros of the 'Life Instincts', while the re-affirmation of the pressure towards absolute discharge re-assigns it from the sexual drive (formerly the Pleasure Principle) to the newly invented 'Death Instinct'.<sup>6</sup>

As regards the *Trieb* in its specificity there are three problematics of the drive in Freud, which were never articulated in a unified theory.<sup>7</sup> The first is the problematic of spontaneous emergence in which, in an initial moment of 'leaning-on' (Ger. *Anlehnung*, Fr. *étayage*), the drive emerges spontaneously as a co-excitation from the level of instinctual functioning on which it leans and models itself before deviating through a process of displacement. So the infant's suckling at the breast produces a pleasurable stimulus in the lips and mouth that it seeks to repeat in an auto-erotic turn, in the absence of

need and the object of need, in a process of sensual sucking of thumb, toe or other body parts. Through a metaphorization of aims (ingestion becomes incorporation) and a metonymic displacement of objects (from milk as the object of need to the breast as object of excitation and desire), "the child sucking at his mother's breast becomes a prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object [in puberty] has become a refinding of it".<sup>8</sup>

The second problematic is that of the construction of the drive through expulsion or anti-cathexis given in Freud's account of primal repression. Where secondary repression bears on an *already* constituted target, the mental derivatives of the repressed psychical representatives of the drive, Freud infers the pre-existence of an earlier moment where the psychical representative of the drive is denied entry into consciousness: "With this a *fixation* is established; the representative in question persists unaltered from then onwards and the instinct [*Trieb*] remains attached to it."<sup>9</sup> This account of the constitution of the primal repressed is also an account of the permanent fixation or binding of the drive to its representative, in effect, the constitution of the drive as such by the process of primal repression.

The third problematic of the drive in Freud's work is that of maternal seduction. This returns us to my starting point in Kristeva's lecture where she locates "the semiotic with its maternal ties . . . at the frontier between nature or *phusis* and meaning", and it poses for us my first question; how is the level of the drives, with their multiple, fragmented self-expenditures, which Kristeva has famously conceptualised in terms of the semiotic chora, to be articulated with the different order of instinctual schemas and their teleological functioning?

We must look for the answer to this first question of the drive/instinct articulation and its relation to the chora in the other interface posed by Kristeva, that of the subject's relation to the other, and not just in the *generality* of that relation, as in Levinas's famous formula of the 'face to face', but in the particular configuration pointed out by Kristeva: "an archaic state, . . . the communion that exists in the act of maternal holding" (p. 9). For as psychoanalysis has long recognised, instinctual functioning in the

biologically premature human neonate is weak and needs to be supported by parental interventions. Attachment theory and infant observation have elaborated the many subtle forms of attunement between mother and infant that facilitate the mother's meeting of the infant's needs. However, more than the meeting of biological needs is at stake as Freud recognises in a passage from the *Three Essays* which is one of the most eloquent statements of the problematic of maternal seduction:

A child's intercourse with anyone responsible for his care affords him an unending source of sexual excitation and satisfaction from his erotogenic zones. This is especially so since the person in charge of him, who, after all, is as a rule his mother, herself regards him with feelings that are derived from her sexual life: she strokes him, kisses him, rocks him and quite clearly treats him as

a substitute for a complete sexual object. A mother would probably be horrified if she were made aware that all her marks of affection were rousing her child's sexual drive [*trieb*] and preparing for its later intensity. . . . She is only fulfilling her task in teaching the child to love.  
 ("III. Transformations of Puberty", PFL 7, pp.145-6.)

In this brief but eloquent description that is never given its due theoretical place in his metapsychology, cheek-by-jowl with the first problematic of co-excitation and leaning-on Freud recognises the role of the maternal unconscious, of unconscious adult sexuality, in offering the infant certain signs, those "marks of affection", that provoke the sexual drive and teach the child to love. What we get here is a glimpse not of the mother as object, or even the mother as object as Kristeva has explicated it for us, but prior to both these the mother as *subject*, the subject of her own unconscious, a sexual subject. Maternal seduction, explored by Kristeva in "Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini"<sup>10</sup> is as a topos massively defended against culturally – at once censored and idealized. This Copernican recognition of the role of the other, whom Freud calls in one of his letters to Fliess (6.12.'96) "the prehistoric, unforgettable other person who is never equaled by anyone later",<sup>11</sup> is soon displaced in Freud's thinking by a Ptolemaic perspective modelled on biological development; in this perspective the subject is recentred as the protagonist of his own unfolding developmental narrative through ascending oral, anal and phallic stages. Here the drive emerges spontaneously, 'naturally' from the instinctual – the meeting of needs and the performance of functions. The alternative Freudian vision to this is that of the drive split or peeled off from the instinctual function on which it has 'leaned' by the action of the maternal chora, the excess that accompanies the adult gestures of care. Need is met and extinguished but on another level an excitation is transmitted or implanted that remains unquenchable. A seduction takes place and the formation of the drive (exclusion and fixation to its representative) is provoked.

This Copernican recognition, fugitive in Freud, seems to me to be central to the way Julia Kristeva, a thinker with a Copernican commitment to thinking the other (cf. *Strangers to Ourselves*), conceives the semiotic chora. She describes the chora as a womb-like "rhythmic space" or maternal receptacle, citing Plato's formulation of the chora in the *Timaeus* as "the wet-nurse of Becoming."<sup>12</sup> It is both an atmosphere or climate as well as an active agent. As well as the importance of 'maternal holding' (Winnicott) alluded to by Kristeva in her lecture, witness also the role of the maternal voice in the infant's acquisition of the sound material of language that is shared between the mother and infant, of the affect-laden echolalias, babbling, the infant's acquisition of and play with the phonemic scale with its emotional sonorities that the mother brings to the infant. Touch and voice, maternal holding and maternal voicing, the mother-tongue an extension of the maternal body and unconscious, a sonorous envelope that addresses and saturates the infant in excess of any one thing that it might signify, all as Kristeva's work has taught us to see them; these are psychical and signifying actions by the other that target the infant, leaving their marks and traces and a whole 'sound

system' of affects. Can we not then say that it is this seductive action of the other on the subject that deviates the drive from the instinct, drawing the infant into the unconscious pulsations, segmentations, articulatory patterns of the chora, over and above the meeting of needs, as if it were a sonorous body inhabited by two ?

This double conception, of a maternal *medium* or climate that is also an *agent* acting on the subject, receives its great poetic celebration in English in a work by the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe". Here Mary is represented as a transparent ubiquitous atmosphere –  
 Wild air, world-mothering air  
 Nestling me everywhere . . .  
 This needful, never spent,  
 And nursing element;

As maternal receptacle - "womb and breast" - of the Godhead as Christ, she continuously "mothers each new grace/ that does now reach our race" and in a repetition of the mystery of the Incarnation she conceives Christ again – "New Nazareth . . . New Bethlehems" - in each of her supplicants who assume in turn the position of womb and receptacle in which a new subject – "new self and nobler me" – comes into being. As in so much Marian theology in the Catholic tradition, analyzed by Kristeva in "Stabat Mater",<sup>13</sup> Mary as maternal chora takes over the role of universal mediator of the divine that the Gospel of St. John, in particular, had assigned to Christ: "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John.14.6). Mary is both recipient matrix of the divine and transmitter of a new principle of subjectivity in her recipient children;  
 World-mothering air, air wild,  
 Wound with thee, in thee isled,  
 Fold home, fast fold thy child.<sup>14</sup>

However, if the emphasis remains on the chora as all pervasive atmosphere and maternal medium, the infant remains as part-object and permanent inhabitant - 'wound' and 'isled' - within it. Kristeva has made the pathologies and literary symptoms of such seductive entanglement a special object of her analysis (cf *Dark Sun*).

In speaking of these archaic transmissions the Canadian psychoanalyst Dominique Scarfone has recently taken up Laplanche's emphasis on the enigmatic dimension of the parental discourse as compromise-formation, i.e. compromised by the adult unconscious. Scarfone describes the maternal presence and voice as the bearer of 'noise' or interference in the message as posited by information theory. This noise is the index of the other thing in the other, the noise of the drive and its source-object in the other, the music of the chora that makes the other an exciting and seductive other, not just a Winnicottian 'good enough' other.<sup>15</sup> However, there is no direct transfer or implantation of the maternal unconscious in the infant, for this enigmatic noise (Laplanche also speaks of an enigmatic signifier or message), is the result of a productive negation, inhibition or repression in the other; consequently it allows a space for translation and re-symbolisation on the part of the infant recipient, for the interpretation of the blanks,

gaps or excesses in the parental discourse, a space for fantasy, for 'infantile sexual theories'. It is a recognition not only of the chora and its drives in the other but of the negation or compromise in the other's enigmatic transmissions that leads Kristeva to argue that, while the maternal body is connected to the infant's drives that are oriented and structured around it, nevertheless, "the mother's body is therefore what mediates the symbolic law organizing social relations and becomes the ordering principle of the semiotic *chora*, which is on the path of destruction, aggressivity and death."<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, the failure or refusal of this negation or compromise, on the part of the adult, results in what Laplanche calls 'intromission', a violent variant of ordinary seduction / implantation that paralyses the infant's capacity to translate and metabolize the parental transmissions. Scarfone cites the proposition of Piera Aulagnier that "in psychosis, the patient's delusions account for what, for the parent, was never the object of a repression" (p. 73). He adds that, along with the violence of the message without negation, there is a prohibition on translation by the infant recipient; for this to be effective "the forbidden things cannot be identified. A void is created in the subject's thinking soon filled by delusional thoughts" (p. 74).<sup>17</sup> The malign positivity of a discourse without 'noise', without negation or compromise invades the psychic space of the future psychotic driving him to the desperate measures and strategies of expulsion, described by Freud as *Verwerfung* / repudiation, by Lacan as foreclosure and by Klein as projection.

The differentiation of the drive from the instinctual function, the articulation of the biological and the psychical is brought about, takes place via this relay through the action of the other. Consequently, can we not say that Julia Kristeva's enormously productive notion of the semiotic chora entails an asymmetrical structure of intersubjectivity between the dependent nursing and the mother or nurturing carer? that this relation to Freud's prehistorical, unforgettable other of seduction – so different from the Lacanian capitalised Other – is foundational for the formation of human subjectivity? that the primacy of the other and of the seductive chora in the other is the pre-condition for any later developmental logic of emergence in the subject? that this other comes *before the subject*, deposits and implants an internal *foreign body*, both tactile and sonorous, that is the cause, the provocation of the subject's defensive elaboration of what Freud calls the 'apparatus of the soul'? that this internal otherness – Lacan's term *extimité* (not the intimate but the 'extimate') is suggestive in this context – is the gift of the other and the basis of my freedom as a subject to translate, to revise, to fantasise, to think *otherwise*?

<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis" (1917a), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. xvii, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London: The Hogarth Press.

<sup>2</sup> Louis Althusser, "Freud and Lacan", *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster, London: NLB, p.200-1.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Laplanche, "The Unfinished Copernican Revolution", *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher, London: Routledge, 1999 (*La révolution copernicienne inachevée*, Paris: Aubier, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, London: The Hogarth Press, p. 214.

<sup>5</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious" (1915e), *SE XIV*, p. 195; *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918b), *SE XVII*, p. 120-1.

<sup>6</sup> Jean Laplanche, "Why the Death Drive?", *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> See however, Laplanche's articulation of them in a new theory of the drive in "The Drive and its Source-object", *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher, London: Routledge, 1999; "Pulsion et Instinct", *Adolescence*, vol. 18, 2000, pp. 649-668; "Sexuality and Attachment in Metapsychology" in *Infantile Sexuality and Attachment*, ed. Daniel Widlöcher, New York: Other Press, [*Sexualité Infantile et Attachment*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2001].

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *SE VII*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press, 1956, p. 145.

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Repression" (1915d), *SE XIV*, p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> In Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, ed. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1985, p.213.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984, p. 26, p. 240 n.14.

<sup>13</sup> In Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

<sup>14</sup> *Gerard Manley Hopkins: a Selection of Poems and Prose*, ed. W.H. Gardner, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953, pp. 54-58.

<sup>15</sup> Dominique Scarfone, " 'It was not my mother': from seduction to negation", *New Formations*, no. 48, Winter, 2002-3 (" 'Ma mère, ce n'est pas elle'. De la séduction à la négation", *Colloque internationale de psychanalyse*, Jean Laplanche et collaborateurs: Montréal 3-5 Juillet 1992, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, op. cit., p.27.

<sup>17</sup> Jean Laplanche, "Implantation, Intromission", *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher, London: Routledge, 1999; Piera Aulagnier, *La violence de l'interprétation*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975.

## Liberty, Freedom, the Imaginary

### Atle Kittang, University of Bergen

Since I am the local member of this panel, I would like to start by expressing how glad and grateful we are here at the University of Bergen to have Professor Julia Kristeva as our special guest at this seminar. She has lectured in Norway before. That means in Oslo, of course. I hope this will not be the last time we see her here in beautiful Bergen.

Professor Kristeva has just given a very personal and thought-provoking lecture, demonstrating not only the interdisciplinary originality that we know so well from her books and articles, but also her special way of making theoretical thinking relevant to the "dark times" that we are living through. I ask your permission, Professor Kristeva, to continue a little on a personal level.

In fact, I remember very well the curious feeling of euphoria that I had when I read your introduction to Bakhtin way back in the 1960s, in 1967, to be exact. It was – and still is – a very thorough and technical introduction, written with what I feel to be great seriousness: Bakhtin observed and presented through the lens of a young semiologist (as we called ourselves back in 1967). And yet I had this funny feeling of euphoria. Since I was not the only one to feel like that, I have asked myself why.

A central element in every euphoric state of mind is this sense of inner expansion, of being carried away (the Greek verb *pherein* means "carry", we also find it in the word metaphor; and the prefix *eu* means "well, good"). So the feeling was one of liberation, tout simplement. It was not only related to this specific period of time – the late 1960s – when we were all young and free and believed in the possibility of radical change. It was definitively related to the text we read as well, which started with the idea of "*une logique autre que scientifique*" [a logic other than scientific], which took us through some very Kristevian reformulations of Bakhtin, introducing a concept, intertextuality, which rapidly became a key concept in the contemporary French theory of the text, and which ended by proclaiming "dialogism" and "ambivalence" as the fundamentals of a new way of thinking.

Is it a surprise that so many of the basic ideas of the Bakhtin essay find their echo in the lecture that professor Kristeva just gave? I do not think so. Anyway it comes as no surprise that the central theme of the lecture was freedom and how the condition of real freedom lies in the way we think.

The concept of freedom belongs to the heritage of the Enlightenment philosophers, a fact that Professor Kristeva underlined in her lecture by referring to the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant is the great critical-analytical philosopher who established a radically new way of thinking about knowledge, morals, and aesthetics. But I dare say that he was also, in a way quite peculiar to him, the first existentialist, given the absolutely

crucial role that he gave to the concept of freedom, especially as the condition of possibility of morals and art. Man's basic characteristic is freedom – this is the radical claim made by Jean-Paul Sartre 150 years after Kant. But, in a way, Kant anticipates this claim. Our autonomy as moral beings resides in our freedom, and also our creativity as artistic or aesthetic beings.

Professor Kristeva also emphasized the subtle links between Kantian freedom and the kind of freedom that underlies our contemporary globalized neo-liberal societies. I agree that freedom as the possibility of "self-beginning" is also the possibility of the "enterprising individual", and that a certain instrumentalism and "thinking-as-calculus" may have their roots in Kant's philosophy of freedom – together with the kind of thinking that belongs to the natural and bio-medical sciences, imposed as models upon the rest of us today. But I also think that the other kind of freedom that Professor Kristeva talked about – the Heideggerian or more generally existential freedom – has its seeds in the philosophy of Kant.

Regarding the relationship between freedom and human authenticity, I would like to add a small etymological footnote to what Professor Kristeva said. The origin of the French word *liberté* is the medieval *livreteit*, dating from the late 12th century, meaning *libre arbitre*, or "free will". In this sense, freedom is not "absence of constraint" or "the individual's possibility to follow her or his desires". Freedom in this sense reminds us that we have to build our lives on deliberate choices if we are to live authentically. We have a moral obligation to choose freely and deliberately between good and bad, right and wrong, between authentic and inauthentic ways of living. This is emphasized not only in medieval theology but even more so in the philosophical tradition which culminates, I would say, with Sartre. In Sartre's philosophy man is "condemned" to freedom; freedom is the very mode of existence of human consciousness. But as such it is fundamentally dependent upon the principle of negativity. This is the Sartrean version of Heidegger's "*Sein-zum-Tode*", the basic existential structure of *Dasein*, of the mode of existence of human beings.

Following Sartre in his first important work, *L'imaginaire*, from 1940, this purely negative principle of human consciousness is nowhere as evident as in the kind of intentional act called imagination, whose intentional object is devoid of reality and therefore in a certain sense is "nothingness". In fact, for Sartre imagination is "the essential and transcendental condition of consciousness" (*la condition essentielle et transcendante de la conscience*). We should note the Kantian character of this statement.

Sartre's book on the imaginary has been rather severely criticized, even by people who are initially sympathetic to phenomenological theories of imagination. Their main point is that Sartre adopts a far too negative attitude towards man's power of imagination. I think the criticism misses Sartre's main point. Of course a philosophical analysis which is based upon negativity as the "essential and transcendental condition" not only of the imagination, but also of consciousness as such, will necessarily use a vocabulary that sounds "negative" and also present "negative" examples in clarification.

Why do I spend so much time on Sartre? For two reasons. Firstly, it gives me occasion to remind you of the brilliant chapters that Julia Kristeva herself has written about *L'imaginaire* in her book *La révolte intime* (Intimate Revolt), from 1997. And secondly, Sartre leads me to the last theme I shall comment upon in this brief talk, namely the tension which for every thinking individual will always persist within the very concept of liberty, the tension between the necessity of independence and the necessity of engagement, between exile and community. If freedom implies the obligation to choose between right and wrong, good and bad, then it also implies an engagement which, somewhere along the road, means adopting a cause. But no cause would ever exist if human beings did not have this negative capacity to imagine things that do not exist.

Few people that I know of have written more poignantly about the cruelty and necessity of exile than the late Edward Said, who was Julia Kristeva's colleague at Columbia University in New York. His last little book, *Freud and the Non-European* (*Freud et le monde extra-européen*), from 2004, deals with Freud's speculations concerning Moses as a non-Jewish founder of Judaism and with the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians – the Palestinian "cause" that was Said's life-long engagement. And it ends with this melancholic question which also contains a hope: "Could the diasporic condition and its values one day become the political model governing life among men?" (*La condition diasporique et ses valeurs pourront-elles un jour aspirer à devenir le modèle politique régissant la vie entre les hommes?*). The diasporic condition means not only exile in the geo-political sense of the word, but above all this identity of non-identity, this "troublesome, invalidating, destabilizing identity" (*identité troublante, invalidante, déstabilisante*), which Said sees as "the very essence of cosmopolitanism" (*l'essence même du cosmopolitisme*).

Edward Said has brought us back to where Professor Kristeva's lecture started. And we have also in a certain way returned to the early Kristeva that I wanted to remind you of on this occasion: the other logic, the ambivalence, the dialogical structure of the novel, the unsettling work of intertextuality and of the semiotic. I thank you all for listening with patience to my brief comments and footnotes to an admirable lecture.

## The concept of working through

### Irène Matthis, International Psychoanalytic Association

It is a great honour for me to have been invited to this event and a special pleasure because it is Julia Kristeva who is the worthy recipient of the Holberg Prize. Kristeva in all her contradictory gestalts: as a foreigner in France, as a spokeswoman for “French Theory”, as a psychoanalyst from a non-medical background and a theoretician with an emotional base underlying her line of thought. I have long admired her work and find her thinking stimulating.

I first encountered the name Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s, in the pages of the *Tel Quel* journal. At that time I was only an ordinary medical doctor, just starting my psychoanalytical training. I did not understand much of what I read in *Tel Quel* and when, a year or two later, I started reading Lacan, to whom my attention had been drawn, I understood even less. But you don’t have to grasp everything cognitively for it to have an impact on you. My reading affected me like all great thinking and good writing. Over the years, these first seeds have been fertilised and nourished by more reading, of “French Theory” in particular, and, to be more specific, during the 1980s through my own work on translating and introducing the works of French analysts in Sweden.

Today, in the few minutes allotted for a first comment on Julia Kristeva’s rich lecture, “Thinking about liberty in dark times”, I want to single out the concept of Thinking Through, relating it to the conflictual theme also outlined by Kristeva, of the two visions of freedom: one nowadays often associated with economic neo-liberalism and globalisation, the other with a conceptualisation of Being beyond or before the calculating logic of cause and effect.

As Kristeva points, out the concept of “thinking through” is borrowed from Freud’s concept of “working through”. This is a concept of fundamental importance in all psychoanalytic work, and Freud first introduced it in his 1914 paper on psychoanalytic technique: “Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten (Remembering, Repeating and Working Through). In her paper, Kristeva presents this “working through” as an antidote to national depression in these dark times. Thus, we must regard it as a concept of no little importance. So what could it actually imply?

She relates it to the very special role of the intellectual as the one who continues the “tradition of critical questioning, ... of political debate, ... and also ... [and this I think is important] involving self-criticism” – especially characteristic of the French tradition. In this panel I represent, in addition to Kristeva herself, the psychoanalytic experience. So let me relate this concept of thinking through or working through to this experience and its theoretical implications.

In the very early days of Freud’s work with patients, in the 1880s and 1890s, the method he applied was that of Joseph Breuer: Remember the moment at which the

symptom was formed, and then abreact it in a cathartic process, often achieved through the use of hypnosis. Freud realised fairly soon that this was not enough. It could perhaps help there and then, but as things developed, the symptom – or another similar symptom – would return, or foolish or destructive behaviour would be repeated. Because this is what happens, as most of us have probably experienced personally. We tend to repeat the same inadequate behaviour over and over again, and we seem to have difficulty learning from our experience, and our history. Instead we repeat it.

This is the case not only for individuals, where repetition compulsion – as it has been named by psychoanalysis – and its underlying psychological mechanisms have been analysed and described. The same mechanism also seems to be active in groups and in the behaviour of whole nations. The importance of working through comes to the fore in relation to this tendency to repeat symptomatic behaviour instead of changing it.

It states that it is not enough to be cognitively aware of, for example, an impulse, an emotion or an idea; it has to be experienced in a way that connects idea to feeling in a personalised emotional experience, where you come to recognise your own responsibility in relation to your own “lived” experience, i.e. critical self-reflection is necessary. This is what happens in the transference/ counter-transference relationship between analyst and patient, mentioned by Julia Kristeva. This is an experience that might move a person, make him change position, or perspective if you like. It can throw new light on your life, bringing out from the darkness a radical sense, in the double signification the word has in French: the direction in which I actualise my life and the meaning it takes on, for me and for those with whom I am involved. It is an embodied process, not only a cognitive one, which we as analysts are privileged to witness in our work with our patients. Today, new developments in brain research and neuroscience, also mentioned by Kristeva, come to our assistance, showing by way of traditional objective methods that there was reason in Freud and his followers’ psychological speculations relating to the functioning of the human mind.

In our human minds’ workings, there is a tendency to dichotomise [that is????] due to the way our consciousness functions. And our consciousness is the only instrument through which we can gain knowledge of the world. For example, we normally think of body and mind as separate entities, as we usually separate the mental from the physical world. This proclivity to dichotomise underlies all our dealings with reality, and it is well described in Kristeva’s positioning of the two types of civilisation, exemplified nowadays by the North American and the European ways of life respectively, and expressed in the two different visions of freedom: the freedom to calculate and become an entrepreneur on the one hand and the freedom of “Being-in-the-World prior to any Cause”, on the other.

The two visions of freedom are today cast in a more fixated and potentially fatal opposition than ever before. However, and this is the point, they are always present in each one of us – as a conflictual theme which, when not taken into account as our joint herit-

age, we too often split into non-communicating systems, projecting the one or the other part onto someone or something else, which we can then blame, denigrate and attack. As psychoanalysts, we recognise this tendency to split and project from pathological cases of depression and manic defence, or narcissistic disturbances. This may also be the case when whole nations are involved or, for that matter, in the case of religious, ethnic or sexual conflict.

These phenomena are enacted expressions of understandable but unacceptable defence systems and resistances. To deal with these acting outs of national states, we have to fight the dichotomisation in the best way we can: in a process of thinking through, of working through. This is the task of intellectuals of all nations, and I think Julia Kristeva is a brilliant example in our time, one who puts her energy and capacity into stimulating thinking about liberty in dark times.



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