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**The Significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse:
Julia Kristeva's Contribution to Moral Theology**

by



Christine Jamieson

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Theology
Saint Paul University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology
Ottawa, Canada
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Dissertation Abstract

The Significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse Julia Kristeva's Contribution to Moral Theology

**Christine Jamieson
Saint Paul University, Faculty of Theology**

This dissertation is concerned with the significance of embodiment for moral theology. It enters into dialogue with Christian ethicists struggling with issues relating to embodiment. A central concern for Christian ethicists is feminist critiques of theology's tendency to focus on an immaterial world of ideas while downplaying the material world. Theology falls short, according to these critiques, of recognizing or probing more deeply the significance of the body in shaping ideas through its influence on knowing. The dissertation considers a variety of responses to embodiment issues and orders these responses in relation to their degree of differentiation in probing the complexity of human embodiment. The limitations in these various responses continually summon more highly nuanced approaches. This need for a deeper probing of the complexity of embodiment and ethical discourse leads to Julia Kristeva's contribution. Thus, the goal of the dissertation is to demonstrate Kristeva's important contribution to the significance of the body for moral theology.

The thesis begins by identifying a polarization between, on the one hand, the temptation to completely transcend the body and, on the other, the temptation to excessively identify the human person with his or her body when addressing imbalances which limit and oppress women and men. Within a survey of literature in Christian ethics, I identify three levels of progressively more nuanced responses. The levels are those who privilege the body excessively bracketing out the transcendent dimension, those who also privilege the body but leave room for transcendence and those who recognize the need to move beyond an either/or corrective.

I then consider the work of feminist theologian and ethicist, Rosemary Ruether. Ruether has published extensively on the issue of embodiment and ethics especially as this affects women. Ruether's analysis reveals the deep and pervasive limits which confront us when we attempt to move beyond the polarity between an essentialism (transcending the body) and a determinism (privileging the body). Ruether points us in the direction of Julia Kristeva's contribution to the issue. She moves beyond the limitations identified in the extant literature and acts as a vector pointing beyond the polarity. Yet, Ruether leaves work undone. Hence, I turn to Kristeva to take the analysis of the body-psyche dynamic to a level that both explains the polarity and probes a creative dynamic in the human person that allows for an undermining of the polarity.

Chapters two, three and four give an account of the work of Julia Kristeva. Chapter two presents an overview of Kristeva's work. Amid Kristeva's *variety* of sources there emerges a central concern underlying all of her work; her concern for "otherness" - her own and the world's. Thus, Kristeva's concern for ethics emerges. She understands ethics in relation to the open structure of the heterogeneous speaking subject. Concern for and respect of that open structure is the inner dynamism from which Kristeva does not stray throughout the variety of topics she broaches. I conclude the second chapter by discussing the major critics of Kristeva's work.

Chapter three presents the theoretical part of Kristeva's foundational book *Revolution in Poetic Language*. It is here that we see the body's significance in language. My focus in presenting this section of Kristeva's book is to demonstrate her intricate connection between the body and language. I focus on her clarification of the body as 'divided' and her theory of

how that dividedness continues to influence the speaking subject as a 'split subject.' Language, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and the speaking subject is *in process/on trial*. Kristeva's reworking of 'negativity,' understood through Hegel and Freud, affords an understanding of negativity which neither diminishes its force (subsuming it under the presence of consciousness) nor augments its power ("biology is destiny") thus ruling out creativity. Rather, negativity, for Kristeva, exposes the precarious foundation upon which the speaking subject is founded. It undermines consciousness' seeming "mastery." Thus, my focus is also on the ethical function which emerges in Kristeva's text. For ethics, here, is precisely that undermining of consciousness' mastery, keeping the subject from, what Kristeva calls, "narcissistic fixations."

In chapter four I clarify Kristeva's contribution to the problem set out in chapter one. Here I highlight the *ramifications* of her theory. I do this by exploring Kristeva's phenomenological study of the condition of *abjection* in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. It is Kristeva's contention that the human experience of abjection connotes, in all cultures, the failure of the speaking subject to repress fully the maternal container - that originary relationship with the mother. The abject confronts us with the primal separation from the maternal body which constitutes the origin of every speaking being. At the preconscious level of the psyche, the maternal body is, according to Kristeva, at once both desirable and repulsive and underlies our condition as divided beings. Following this, I highlight again, Kristeva's distinctive understanding of ethics. Ethics, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and connotes an undoing or an unravelling. The creativity which ethics produces is Kristeva's response to the "horrors" of totalitarianism. Ethics is creativity rooted in negativity. Thus, ethics appears at a point where it is least expected. It appears at the boundaries of civilization

where moral codes break down and give way to what Kristeva calls the free play of negativity. This free play permits the speaking subject a partial escape from the totalitarian (hence unethical) enclosure of the symbolic realm. It is from this perspective that the connection between ethics (as Kristeva understands it) and the body - specifically, although not exclusively, the maternal body - emerges.

In the final chapter, I explore the theological implications of Kristeva's thought through a comparative analysis of her work with the work of Ruether. I elaborate here on Kristeva's contribution to the ongoing discussion which I outline in chapter one. I argue that Kristeva's theory of the split subject pushes the limits of Ruether's contribution. Thus, I argue that Kristeva moves beyond Ruether in her investigation of the determining role of the body in language, and subsequently, in ethical discourse. Yet, I also argue that Ruether remains important from a theological perspective, precisely because she is willing to name the transcendent dimension that Kristeva refuses to acknowledge. There is a transcendent dimension that consistently comes through in everything Kristeva writes. Her refusal to name the transcendent realm impoverishes what, in my view, is the most important aspect of her entire thought. In a rare and astonishing manner, Kristeva brings to our awareness the creative *productivity* that underlies the human psyche. Yet, because of her fear of falling prey to the repressive consequences of totalitarianism, Kristeva avoids naming that dynamism of the human person. I conclude the fifth chapter by exploring this phenomenon in Kristeva's work and demonstrating, what I consider is Ruether's contribution to Kristeva.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Kenneth R. Melchin who, in his capacity as my director, journeyed with me through this dissertation. The underlying question that guided my research and dissertation emerged gradually during our dialogues. I am grateful to Ken for his willingness to provide the space for this important clarification to emerge and for having confidence in the authenticity of my quest.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents

Margaret Patricia
and
James Easton

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Introduction

Since the late 1960's, there has been a strong, systematic critique by feminist theologians¹ against theology's² androcentric and misogynist bias. A significant aspect of this critique is the objection to theology's dualistic framework. Theologies which aspire to escape the finite, corporeal world through positing an infinite, spiritual realm beyond the world of our senses have been vigorously challenged. For many feminist theologians, our inherited understanding of the mind and body as separate results in the worship of a God who is absolute spirit completely removed from the physicality of humanity. Consequently, it causes a striving for an afterlife beyond the finite human condition. Through male transcendent theologies which, directly or indirectly, see the earth as "man's" possession and discount (even despise) the body (especially the female body³) one consequently loses touch with one's connection to the physical environment and one's physical self.⁴ It is within this debate that my study is situated.

¹Some of the earliest feminist theologians in the North American context are Phyllis Bird, Carol P. Christ, Mary Daly, Rosemary Haughton, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell and Phillis Trible. Mary Daly and Rosemary Ruether stand out for the significant influence of their writing and their testimony.

²Most of the feminist theologians mentioned in footnote 1 are from the Roman Catholic tradition. However, the critique against theology is not restricted to the Roman Catholic tradition nor is my use of the term. Rather it refers to the theology of all Christian traditions.

³For most of the early philosophers and theologians, women were associated with the body and the earth. For example, Plato considered the public realm to be an escape from the private, necessary condition of the human body. Only men were allowed in the public realm. Women, along with slaves, were relegated to the private realm; women because of their inescapable link to reproduction and slaves because of their duties to the household. Many theologians and philosophers doubted that women had a soul - so closely did they align women to the body .

⁴This hierarchically ordered, dualistic framework plays a major role, according to many feminist theologies, in the ecological crisis the world now faces. In addition, they contend that the menacing threat of nuclear war, with its potential to destroy all life on earth, is only considered an option because those making the decisions understand themselves as somehow removed or "above" their own connection to the physical environment. Belief in a spiritual, transcendent

There are two concrete concerns which are implicated in the title of the thesis, "The Significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse." The first is the *role* our body plays in ethics. Women's ordination is an example. For some, it is wrong that the Roman Catholic Church continues to exclude women from the priesthood. They contend that exclusion is based *only* on the *physical* difference between men and women. Thus, the impact of sexual difference is central in considering the *role* of the body in ethical discourse. What is the impact of sexual difference? How has it dictated men and women's thinking about themselves and each other? How is that expressed in history? Is there another way of understanding ourselves if not through our bodily engagement in the world? Or, are human beings determined by their bodily existence? Such questions surface when one considers the role of the body in ethical discourse.

The second concern underlying my study are the *ramifications* of sexual differentiation as it pertains to ethical discourse. For example, it is only in this century that women in Western culture have progressed in a systematic and sustained manner toward emancipation from cultural and religious limits placed on them because of their bodily difference. Even so, in many cultures and religions, women are still confined by strict rules concerning costume and conduct. In all areas of the world, women continue to suffer from harassment and abuse simply because they are women. There is also the *global* problem of violence against women. Despite progress in

world beyond the concrete, physical world in which we live fosters a willingness to risk everything. See, for example, Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ, editors, *Weaving the Visions* (Harper: San Francisco, 1989); Naomi Goldenberg's *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); and Rosemary Ruether's *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).

emancipation at many levels, violent behaviour towards women grows rather than declines.⁵ Thus, the significance of the body in ethical discourse underlies diverse debates concerning "women's issues." Examples of these so called "women's issues" are abortion, women and poverty, equal wages for equal work and the "glass ceiling." Even more urgent, the significance of the body in ethical discourse concerns violence and dehumanizing treatment toward women in the family (domestic violence, traditional practices such as genital mutilation, infanticide, incest), in the community (rape, sexual assault and harassment, trafficking in women, prostitution, labour exploitation, pornography, women migrant workers) and by States (violence against women in detention and custodial violence, as well as, violence against women in situations of armed conflict and against refugee women).

My introduction to Julia Kristeva was through her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. At the time of reading the book, I was troubled and perplexed about the problems women face. Like many women studying theology, the issues of androcentricism, misogyny and the status of women within Christianity in particular and religion in general concern me. There is a great deal of feminist theological literature dealing with this, yet nothing I read seemed to me to touch the depth of the problem. Reading *Powers of Horror* pushed my thinking in a direction that

⁵The problem of violence against women was brought to our attention in staggering proportions this century. Statistics are available from the United Nations. The United Nations is a leading organization in addressing some of the most horrendous treatment of women. Even from its beginning, the United Nations concentrated on securing equality for women. In 1946, the General Assembly established concomitantly the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women. The treatment of women and the violation of human rights were integrally linked. The United Nations continues its efforts to promote the dignity and worth of women along with women's essential contribution to development and peace in the world. In September 1995, the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing.

was difficult to accept. Kristeva is convincing in her assessment that the pervasive problems women face are the result of deeply ingrained aspects of the human psyche. Through her psychoanalytic analysis of the common human experience of abjection, Kristeva relentlessly penetrates the chasms of the psyche in order to understand what this experience is and how it emerges. Her analysis is like a blessing and a curse. She follows the trail of abjection. It leads her to an experience that all human beings have in common - the experience of birth, the experience of separating from the mother's body. Kristeva powerfully demonstrates how this preverbal, archaic experience is both a heartbreaking loss *and* a separation upon which our lives utterly depend. Kristeva's theory is that this pivotal experience in the growth of the human psyche continues to live in us. It continues to influence us. Thus, it accounts for the strangely intertwining emotions of hatred and desire that are directed at women's bodies in every culture. The *inescapable* element in this scenario is that all human beings are born through women's bodies.⁶ All men and women are determined by this physical reality. All suffer from its consequences. Yet women particularly bear the brunt of its determining influence.

Despite Kristeva's "horror", my experience when reading her work is one of liberation not oppression. Sensing its importance, this experience of liberation set me on a quest. Much of the dialogue concerning women's issues, particularly the problem of violence against women and the problem of misogyny, is limited because, in my view, it is unable to reach the depth of

⁶There is no doubt that the possibility of birth outside the womb demands consideration here. It needs to be dealt with in a thorough manner considering its effects on women and men and how each understand and live out their role in reproduction. In fact Kristeva does consider this issue briefly in an interview. (Julia Kristeva, interviewed by Elaine Hoffman Baruch, translated by Brom Anderson and published as "Feminism and Psychoanalysis" in *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, edited by Ross Mitchell Guberman [New York: Columbia University Press, 1996] pp. 113-121. p.120.) However, this experience and its ethical implications are beyond the scope of this study.

understanding which Kristeva offers. This is so because the range of questions and insights has not expanded enough to address the deep and troublesome psychic dynamic that exists within all human beings. This psychic dynamic emerges dramatically in Kristeva's work. My experience of liberation when reading Kristeva's book is the result of a shift in my thinking. The shift puts me in touch with a transcendent experience. It is an exhilarating experience of open-endedness. This experience, I believe, is intricately linked to theology and theology's task. Kristeva offers an important tool. The question becomes how to use it. Where, in what capacity, can that tool be of use to theology? That is a key question that will guide me as I explore the significance of the body in ethical discourse.

Thus, it is my hypothesis that Kristeva deepens our thinking about the underlying cause of marginalization and violence against women. I will argue that she contributes significantly to theology in its struggle with ethical issues concerning women and the role of women in the church and in society. Exploring Kristeva's work in relation to the significance of the body in ethical discourse, I believe, will highlight that contribution. Kristeva's linking of the body and the psyche is neither idealistic nor mechanistic. She avoids both biological determinism and the dualistic severing of body and spirit. She demonstrates an interconnectedness between the body and the psyche that is at once determined *and* creative. She links this interconnectedness with both the potentially productive and the potentially destructive forces that hover at a preconscious level in the human psyche. In order to develop Kristeva's contribution, I will engage in conversation with the work of feminist theologian and ethicist, Rosemary Radford Ruether. Ruether's work is important in this context for two reasons. First, Ruether is one of the few feminist theologians working in the area of Christian ethics who avoids the polarity of, on the one hand, privileging the

body and, on the other hand, disregarding the body in her effort to bring to light and overcome the bias within Christianity which marginalizes women. I will argue that this polarity *continues* to be problematic among scholars who are addressing women's concerns in Christian ethics. In her extensive analysis of women and Christianity, Ruether deliberately steers a middle road avoiding both extremes. She consciously tries to maintain a balance between privileging the body and transcending the body. I will argue that Ruether takes her readers to the *limits* of that problem of polarity. She exposes the impossibility of overcoming the polarity without a deeper analysis. Thus Ruether's work acts as a vector pointing to the need for a deeper analysis. It is my hypothesis that Kristeva's work contributes to the deeper analysis needed. It facilitates a shift in the level of our thinking as we address the problem. The second manner in which Ruether's work enhances Kristeva's contribution is through its *challenge* to Kristeva's work. There is a transcendent dynamic operative in Kristeva's work that she refuses to acknowledge. I will draw attention to that dynamic in order to mine its astonishing potential and move beyond the limitation I see in Kristeva's thought. Ironically, it is Ruether's work that best assists us here.

Thus, there are three linking concerns which guide my thesis. First, there is the problem of androcentricism, misogyny and violence against women. Second, there is Kristeva's penetrating analysis of that malaise and the shift in levels of thinking about the problem that her analysis invites. Third, there is the transcendent dimension in Kristeva's work. Through a detailed analysis of Kristeva's work, I will show that the issues of violence against women, hatred of women, indeed, fear of women's power, are traced to the origins of the psychic development of all human beings. This is the utter *horror* of Kristeva's claim *and* the grounds for the shift in thinking that is needed to address the problem.

Overview

In chapter one I will delineate the problem with which the thesis is concerned, that is, the significance of the body in ethical discourse. I will identify a polarization within the field of Christian ethics. In working with the problem of women's marginalization both in society and in the Church and in attempting to address the denigration of women in various spheres of society (public and private), Christian ethicists tend to either privilege the body or discount the body. I will argue that, despite awareness on the part of Christian ethicists concerning this problematic understanding of human nature as dual, they continue to organize their thought around that schema. I will consider three levels of interpretation. I will show that, although there are difficulties in all three, each subsequent level offers a more nuanced approach than the preceding level. First, I will consider those who advocate an extreme physicality or privileging of the body. Next, I will explore the work of those who also privilege the body yet, recognizing the problematic nature of the first approach, consciously move beyond the latter's extremism in offering a more nuanced corrective. Finally, I will consider the work of those who attempt to get beyond an either/or solution. In moving beyond the either/or solution, this group takes us deeper into the complexities of the problem. Still, I will argue that, despite the subtlety of their arguments and their recognition of the need to transcend the either/or polarity, their arguments fall short in providing tools to Christian ethics in its struggle with ethical issues concerning the body. I will then argue that, Rosemary Ruether, through both her extensive research and her willingness to *enter* the dialectical condition of the human person, uncovers the pervasiveness of that dualism and the ubiquitousness of sexism in a manner more extensive and more definitive than the others.

Next, I will show that it is precisely Ruether's relentless efforts which uncover the *limits* of her project and bring us to a limit-situation of human existence. I will argue that, Ruether demonstrates the degree and pervasiveness of barriers for women in the patriarchal order. She points to relations of alienation and domination, but she fails to take us further in understanding *why* this is so. I also will argue that Ruether's corrective is limiting rather than liberating. It is my contention that her corrective of the patriarchal order in "primary intuitions of religious experience" reveals *her* failure to move beyond the schema of dualistic thinking and thus, her failure to grasp the underlying condition upon which all human persons are founded. It is this underlying condition of the human person which brings us to consider Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic and linguistic analysis of the speaking subject as a "split subject." I will conclude chapter one with the hypothesis that Kristeva uncovers a limit-situation more irrevocable than Ruether's. I will consider Kristeva's contention that it is in the "in-between-ness" of that limit-situation that ethics emerges. I will ask whether Kristeva's deeper analysis of the condition upon which human persons are founded reveals the limits of Ruether's work and if Ruether's willingness to "name" the transcendent contributes to the work of Kristeva. I will ask about the implications of Kristeva's work for theology.

I will then move on in chapters two, three, and four to give an account of the work of Julia Kristeva. Chapter two will present an overview of Kristeva's work from the late 1960's to the present. It will highlight the *variety* of sources from which Kristeva draws, yet will reveal a central concern underlying all of her work; her concern for "otherness" - her own and the world's. This central concern will continually emerge throughout chapter two. Throughout the overview, I hope to make three things clear concerning Kristeva's methodology and her overall strategy. First,

there is a fluidity to Kristeva's thought which defies categorization. As will become clear, this fluidity is necessary, given the task Kristeva undertakes; to investigate the genesis of meaning at the origin of the human person. Second, and as a consequence of the first, Kristeva's thought does not follow a strict logic. She is not a systematic thinker. This, in large part, has to do with the subject matter she is dealing with - the preconscious, prelinguistic world of the speaking subject. Subsequently, it also has to do with the strategy she adopts to investigate this world and articulate it in a manner which is illuminating without being reductive. Third, there is an underlying concern for ethics in all of Kristeva's thought. She understands ethics in relation to the open structure of the heterogeneous speaking subject. It is the underlying concern for, and respect of that open structure, that is the inner dynamism from which Kristeva does not stray throughout the variety of topics she broaches. In my presentation of Kristeva's thought, I will focus on and clarify her original contribution to an understanding of how the human subject is constituted in language. This will draw us into a discussion of the child's originary relationship with its mother and its necessary *loss* of that relationship (or that mother) as the child, in its subsequent development, enters the symbolic realm. However, as we shall see, that original relationship does not disappear, but continues to influence the speaking subject.

I conclude the second chapter by discussing the major critics of Kristeva's work. I first consider the bi-polar reactions Kristeva's work elicits. I then look at what are, in my view, the more balanced interpretations of Kristeva's work. This effort assists us, I believe, in exposing some of Kristeva's weaknesses. But more importantly, it elaborates upon the important contribution Kristeva's thought makes in addressing some of the major problems of our century. Central to this, Kristeva's work, I believe, contributes enormously to deepening our understanding

of the significance of the body in ethical discourse. Thus, I argue that, Kristeva advances our understanding of both the systematic marginalization of women and the pervasive degradation of and violence against women that we witness across cultures.

This done, the way will be made clear for presenting, in chapter three, the theoretical part of Kristeva's foundational book *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In my presentation of this most important section of her book, I hope to demonstrate its significance in clarifying and justifying Kristeva's theory concerning what she calls the semiotic and symbolic modalities within the speaking subject. It is here that the body's significance in language will be seen. My focus in presenting this section of Kristeva's book is her demonstration of the intricate connection between the body and language. It is her clarification of the body as 'divided' and her theory of how that dividedness continues to influence the speaking subject as a 'split subject.' Language, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and the speaking subject is *in process/on trial*. Kristeva's reworking of 'negativity,' understood through Hegel and Freud, affords an understanding of negativity which neither diminishes its force (subsuming it under the presence of consciousness) nor augments its power ("biology is destiny") thus ruling out creativity. Rather, negativity, for Kristeva, exposes the precarious foundation upon which the speaking subject is founded. It undermines consciousness' seeming "mastery." Thus, my focus will also be on the ethical function which emerges in Kristeva's text. For ethics, here, is precisely that undermining of consciousness' mastery, keeping the subject from, what Kristeva calls, "narcissistic fixations."

In chapter four I clarify Kristeva's contribution to the problem set out in chapter one. Here I highlight the *ramifications* of her theory which I elaborate in chapter three. I do this by exploring Kristeva's phenomenological study of the condition of *abjection* in her book *Powers of*

Horror: An Essay on Abjection. It is Kristeva's contention that the human experience of abjection connotes, in all cultures, the failure of the speaking subject to repress fully the maternal container - that originary relationship with the mother. The abject confronts us with the primal separation from the maternal body which constitutes the origin of every speaking being. At the preconscious level of the psyche, the maternal body is, according to Kristeva, at once both desirable and repulsive and underlies our condition as divided beings. Following this, I highlight Kristeva's distinctive understanding of ethics. Ethics, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and connotes an undoing or an unravelling. As we will see, ethics for Kristeva, appears at a point where it is least expected. It appears at the boundaries of civilization where moral codes break down and give way to what Kristeva calls the free play of negativity. This free play permits the speaking subject a partial escape from the totalitarian (hence unethical) enclosure of the symbolic realm. It is from this perspective that the connection between ethics (as Kristeva understands it) and the body - specifically, although not exclusively, the maternal body - emerges.

In the final chapter, I explore the theological implications of Kristeva's thought through a comparative analysis of her work with the work of Ruether. I elaborate here on Kristeva's contribution to the ongoing discussion which I outline in chapter one and to which Ruether herself makes an important contribution. However, following the in-depth analysis of Kristeva's thought in the preceding three chapters, I argue that her theory of the split subject pushes the limits of Ruether's contribution. Thus, I argue that Kristeva moves beyond Ruether in her investigation of the determining role of the body in language, and subsequently, in ethical discourse. Yet, I also argue that Ruether remains important from a theological perspective, precisely because she is willing to name the transcendent dimension that Kristeva refuses to

acknowledge. As I show in my analysis of Kristeva's work, there is a transcendent dimension that consistently comes through in everything she writes. Kristeva's refusal to name the transcendent realm, her refusal to accept it as anything more than "the quirks of biology and family life"⁷, impoverishes what, in my view, is the most important aspect of her entire thought. In a rare and astonishing manner, Kristeva brings to our awareness the creative *productivity* that underlies the human psyche. Yet, because of her fear of falling prey to the repressive consequences of totalitarianism, Kristeva avoids naming that dynamism of the human person. I conclude the fifth chapter by exploring this phenomenon in Kristeva's work and demonstrating Ruether's own contribution to Kristeva's work.

⁷Kristeva, *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, p. 41.

Chapter One

Contributions to the Significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse:

Laying Out the Parameters of the Thesis

1. Setting the Stage

1.1 The Problem

Many academics in the field of theology are broaching the topic of the body and its significance for knowing. This, in large part, is due to feminist critiques of theology. These critiques emerge both from within and outside the field of theology. They are aimed at theology's tendency to focus attention primarily on an immaterial world of ideas while largely ignoring the material world. The body, which shapes ideas through its influence on knowing and yet is part of the material world, is ignored. Feminist critiques are especially significant for moral theology as that field struggles to address imbalances which limit and oppress women.¹ Yet, a polarization between the temptation to completely transcend the body, on the one hand, and to excessively identify the human person with his or her body, on the other hand, continues to influence current attempts to address some of the more pressing imbalances. Until moral theology addresses the polarization and moves beyond it, the immense difficulties it seeks to confront and overcome will continue to plague those who take on its tasks. This polarization and the search for a means beyond the impasse are the concern of this study.

¹Lisa Sowle Cahill, in her essay "Current Theology: Notes on Moral Theology: 1989, Feminist Ethics," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) : 50, states that "Virtually by definition, feminist theology is "moral" theology or ethics. It emerges from a practical situation of injustice and aims at social and political change."

2. State of the Question

Theology, like other disciplines (for example, philosophy, psychology and sociology), is tackling ethical issues which involve the human person's embodiment in the world. Central to these issues are concerns which women bring to theology. The issue of women's ordination in the Roman Catholic Church and the highly emotional debate concerning abortion are two examples of ethical issues which involve theology and the body. These concerns tend to take up one (or sometimes both) of two levels of critique. They expose limitations within the traditional theological and moral anthropologies which have relegated women to a subordinated status in relation to men and/or they offer alternatives to these limitations. The overarching purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for Julia Kristeva's contribution to moral theology on this topic. I will argue that Kristeva significantly augments our understanding of the polarity identified above. By expanding our understanding, Kristeva's work shifts our thinking to a higher level. In the subsequent chapters, I will seek to demonstrate how she does this. Thus, the trajectory of this chapter is as follows. First, I will examine various contributions which relate to the problem identified above, that is, the polarization between privileging the body and transcending the body when one addresses ethical concerns. I see these responses at three levels with each level significantly more nuanced than the previous. The levels are: (i) the responses of those who, in an effort to avoid suppression of the body, privilege the body excessively; (ii) the responses of those who also privilege the body but recognize the limitations of the first approach and so consciously move beyond it, offering a more moderate corrective; and (iii) what I consider the more sharply differentiated responses of those who are struggling with ways to address feminist critiques of theology which revolve around the polarity. This last level of responses offers, in my view,

more than an either/or solution. With all of the responses, I will look at both contributions *and* limitations. I will consider each through the lens of the polarity identified above, using it as a litmus test to guide us in considering the value of their work to the topic at hand. Second, I will explore in a more extensive manner the work of feminist theologian and ethicist, Rosemary Radford Ruether, whose thought, in the overall scheme of this thesis, will lead us to the margins of that polarity. I propose that Ruether's work acts as a vector pointing beyond these polarities. Finally, I will give a brief account of the aspect of Julia Kristeva's work which figures into the problem identified above. As I have already indicated, it is my contention that Kristeva takes the body-psyche dynamic to a level that both explains and moves beyond the impasse of the polarity.

3. Current Contributions: Three Levels of Responses

3.1 The Body as Sole Criterion

Naomi Goldenberg and Carol P. Christ address the problematic mind/body split in much of their work. They both link the ecological crisis and the nuclear threat to men's refusal of their own finiteness, to the denigration of women and women's experience and to the worship of an unchanging (male) God who is removed from physical existence. Both have turned to privileging Goddess religions which, in varying ways, identify the Goddess with (mother) earth.² Carol Christ believes that the crisis which threatens the earth has spiritual roots because humanity has lost a sense of the sacredness of the earth. We have forgotten that

²Both Goldenberg and Christ, in their effort to distance themselves from the transcendent God of theology, prefer to call themselves "thealogians" because of their turn away from God (theos) and toward Goddess (theas).

the earth is our home. For Christ, "The preservation of the earth requires a profound shift in consciousness: a recovery of more ancient and traditional views that revere the connection of all beings in the web of life and a rethinking of the relation of humanity and divinity to nature."³ For Christ, human beings *are* nature. There is no separation. There is no essential difference. Humanity is intricately linked to the "web of life" we call nature. Furthermore, according to Christ, there is no hierarchical order in nature. Christ posits that *the* essential religious insight is knowing "that we are but a small part of life and death and transformation."⁴ In light of this knowledge, "The essential religious response is to rejoice and to weep, to sing and to dance, to tell stories and create rituals in praise of an existence far more complicated, more intricate, more enduring than we are."⁵ The value of human beings is neither more nor less than the value of birds in the sky and flowers in the field. The divine, too, is part of this "web of life" even as it sustains it. Spirituality, for Christ, is directly tied to celebration of "our connections to all that is finite."⁶

Naomi Goldenberg's theology parallels Christ's in the former's concern for the denigration of physical life and the physical environment. Like Christ, Goldenberg links this denigration with belief in transcendental entities.⁷ She is highly critical of abstract theological

³"Rethinking Theology and Nature," *Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality*, ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol Christ (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), 314.

⁴*Ibid.*, 321.

⁵*Ibid.*, 321.

⁶Carol P. Christ, "Finitude, Death, and Reverence for Life," *Semeia* 40 (1987) : 102.

⁷Naomi Goldenberg, "Archetypal Theory and the Separation of Mind and Body: Reason Enough to Turn to Freud?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1 (Spring 1985) : 55.

systems. Goldenberg posits that theories which separate mind and body are "antiwoman" and "antilife."⁸ Only "theories and disciplines which see the body as the nexus of all human experience"⁹ can guide humanity through environmental disaster and nuclear threat and facilitate the development of new ways of living. Thus, for Goldenberg, theisms need to be left behind. Only the tools of psychoanalysis and feminism can resurrect the body and "return words to flesh."¹⁰ Psychoanalysis helps to uncover some of the deep, unconscious motives behind the suppression of the body in religious traditions. It also debunks the illusion that we are separate from our bodies by revealing that all thought stems from somatic needs.¹¹ Feminism (particularly feminist writing), because it is more accessible than an esoteric psychoanalysis, is able to undermine the illusions which psychoanalysis, for its part, brings to

⁸Ibid., 55.

⁹Ibid., 64.

¹⁰This is part of the title of one of Goldenberg's book. The full title is *Returning Words to Flesh: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

¹¹This understanding of the link between thought and somatic need is also found in Julia Kristeva's work. However, there is a significant difference between the limitations I see in Goldenberg's thought and the manner in which Kristeva understands this. The main difference is *where* each takes this theory. Goldenberg, for her part, sees it as a means of deconstructing religious notions about God and the transcendent reality, bracketing out that realm completely. Only the earth-worshipping Goddess religions contribute to Goldenberg's vision of a better world. The Goddess movement undermines the patriarchal religions. Goldenberg values it for its subversive capacity. In addition, for Goldenberg, there is no possibility of a "leap" from the somatic to the intellectual world of self-reflection and different levels of consciousness. With a strict adherence to Freud on this topic, Goldenberg asserts that "[a]nalysis can support no "epigenesis" of meaning when that meaning is seen as lying beyond or outside the body and the textured intimacy of its past." (*Returning Words to Flesh*, 180-1.) Kristeva, on the other hand, sees religion's role in a much more positive light. She also allows for a "leap" which enables her to move beyond the biological determinism of Freud. Both these issues will be fully developed in later chapters.

the surface, albeit, in a privileged, individualized context. Feminist writing reaches groups and is taken up in public settings. For Goldenberg, it becomes the medium of the message. As Goldenberg states, "[f]eminist writing at its best, I think, can shatter the illusion of objectivity which turns so much modern scholarship into mechanized jargon. It can return rationality to its roots in emotion and body."¹² Thus, for Goldenberg, feminist writing facilitates the undermining of belief in transcendental entities. It grounds humanity in the physical.

I have briefly presented the perspective of Carol Christ and Naomi Goldenberg concerning the body's significance in ethical discourse. In their attempt to overcome the problematic mind/body dualism, both are examples of what I see as an extreme polarization on the side of privileging the body. Although both make significant efforts at avoiding a reversal of the mind/body dualism they critique, in my view, their ultimate bracketing out of transcendence leads them to this reversal. They are critical of the theologies which are cut off from the physical but, by reducing human experience to a bodily reality, are offering a theology cut off from the transcendent. Their views appear to embrace an undifferentiated state of consciousness which, as both have admitted, has links to archaic, primal expressions of worship. In my view, neither have addressed the complexity of the problem they tackle. Their solution offers only a primal re-connection with nature. Although Goddess rituals may serve the purpose of allowing people to express a deep dimension of themselves - a dimension that is rooted in emotion and the body - I suggest that this by no means exhausts the complexity of the mind/body dualism or how to address its problematic ramifications especially as it pertains to women.

¹²Ibid., 187.

3.2 Privileging the Body in the Mind/Body Relationship

In attempting to *name* women's experience, the "concrete" and "embodied" nature of the person are central for feminist thought, since it is precisely at this level that women were refused entry into the status of the fully human¹³ and into the authoritative role in the Church (the priestly dimension).¹⁴ However, this identification of women's experience with embodiment is problematic. I will now outline the responses of three Christian ethicists who continue to privilege the body but in a manner that does not amount to the extreme reversal

¹³From the perspective of sacramental theology, Susan Ross in "'Then Honor God in your Body' (1 Cor. 6:20): Feminist and Sacramental Theology on the Body," *Horizons* 16 (Spring 1989) : 10-11 explains it this way:

"The importance of the human body and the theological significance of male and female bodies have been central to the theology of the sacraments. In the older, more traditional sacramental theology represented by Aquinas and papal documents such as *Casti Connubii*, the distinction between male and female is an ontological and hierarchical one, rooted in an understanding of human nature as dual. Aquinas, for example, uses the concepts of perfection and imperfection for males and females, as the oft-quoted passage from Q.92 of the *Summa Theologiae* puts it. He bases his definition of women as "misbegotten males" on his (mistaken) analysis of empirical reality, in which the male sex is demonstrably superior, because it is visibly active. Transcendence and immanence are also used to symbolize the male and the female. In this particular schema, the female is tied not to imperfection but to the body itself, and more precisely, to the body without the redeeming qualities of the soul. What is problematic for women is not their sheer bodiliness (which is obviously shared by men) but rather their *unbalanced* bodiliness. Both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas list the ways in which they perceive women to experience the relation of body to soul in a different way than men do. This, for Aquinas and others, indicates women's lesser rationality and lesser spirituality and is again rooted in an "empirical" observation of the body."

¹⁴See John Paul II's Apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem: On the Dignity and Vocation of Women* dated August 15, 1988 and released September 30, 1988 in *Origins* 18 (1988) : 261 and 263-83.

of Goldenberg and Christ. James B. Nelson, Paula M. Cooley, and Susan Ross share a common concern regarding the significance of the body in ethical discourse. They recognize the problematic nature of *distancing* oneself from the body. Thus their corrective focuses on the central role of the body in any reading of reality.

The starting point of James B. Nelson's theology and Christian ethics is human embodiment. Two of his major works, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*¹⁵ and *Body Theology*¹⁶, deal specifically with the topics concerning Christian ethics and the body. In *Embodiment*, the earlier of Nelson's works, he equates the body with sexuality. By sexuality, Nelson does not mean sexual intercourse which he refers to as "sex." Rather sexuality refers to thinking and acting as male and female. Thinking and acting as male and female is, in fact, the focus of the book. For Nelson, privileging the sexual body is an important avenue through which we reach "human wholeness." Nelson hints at the meaning of human wholeness but falls short of a conclusive definition. He does, however, allude to a "natural" ethics when he links human wholeness with the ethical imperative of becoming what we essentially are. For Nelson, sinfulness is denial of the embodied and, therefore, sexual character of experience. Grace overcomes this sinfulness. Grace is God's acceptance of the total human self and *our* subsequent ability to accept our total human self. Nelson insists on the central importance of the body's meaning when one undertakes the task of theology. He correlates bodiliness and sexuality. Consequently, he believes that theology cannot come to terms with the deep and pervasive problems it faces concerning the body and sexuality

¹⁵James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978).

¹⁶James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

without recognizing that "human sexuality provides the possibility for humans to become what God would have them become - fulfilled, integrated, sharing and free recipients of the divine love."¹⁷ Nelson utilizes the human experience of sexuality as a means to understand and live out faith. Thus, the purpose of his book is "to explore some of the ways in which sexuality enters into our experience of Christian faith." It is "to recognize our alienation from our sexuality and to lay bold claim to the gospel's promise of reconciliation to our embodiment."¹⁸ Thus, for Nelson, the sexual body is a key factor in reaching human wholeness. As well, it is an important tool for theology.

Nelson's more recent book, *Body Theology*, although again dealing with the topic of sexual theology, widens his study to include "men's issues" and biomedical ethics in relation to the body. He sees the mind/body relationship as complementary. His approach to body experience is through an understanding that it is revelatory of God. For Nelson, we do not *have* bodies, rather, we *are* bodies. Consequently, he is again concerned with overcoming alienation from the body and sexuality which is fostered by traditional ways of thinking about and living out our human sexuality.

Nelson equates the possibility of human wholeness with a resurrection of or a privileging of the sexual body. However, identifying the person with his or her body and failing to put forward an understanding of human wholeness expose the limitations of this approach. Nelson's methodology in these two works is experientially based. He raises important ethical issues concerning the body and sexuality. However, his studies do not go

¹⁷Nelson, *Embodiment*, 6.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 272.

beyond an experientially based reflection. He fails to offer a systematic critique of the issues he broaches. His lack of differentiation between his use of the terms "body" and "sexuality" is problematic. Norman Pittenger, in the forward to Nelson's book, *Embodiment*, suggests that Nelson has taken the issues of embodiment and human sexuality to their roots.¹⁹ I would argue that the shortcoming of Nelson's work is that he has *not* gone to the roots of bodiliness and human sexuality. Rather, Nelson has presented an understanding of bodiliness and sexuality that has omitted significant preconscious aspects of both. Nelson has not considered the integral interrelationship between the body and the psyche which gives rise to unconscious factors. Thus, his work, in privileging the body as the key to theology and Christian ethics, offers little hope of assisting one to move beyond the polarity.

In much of her writing, Paula Cooley addresses the problem of polarity between an "essentialist" position and a position of "cultural determinacy." She consciously attempts to steer a "third road" beyond these two extremes. She names this third road, in separate articles, "touch"²⁰ and "pain."²¹ Cooley explores how the sensations of touch and pain act as points of reference or authoritative experiences offering balance and corrective to the traditional polarity. In her essay "The Word Become Flesh: Woman's Body, Language, and Value," Cooley addresses how the devaluing of embodiment impoverishes men and women. This is so at many levels, particularly that of ethical interaction with others. She posits that, through

¹⁹Ibid., 5.

²⁰Paula Cooley, "The Word Become Flesh: Woman's Body, Language, and Value," *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, ed. Paula M. Cooley, Sharon A. Farmer and Mary Ellen Ross (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 17-33.

²¹Paula Cooley, "Experience, Body, and Authority," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989) : 325-342.

touch, word and flesh are inseparable. Touch communicates value by signalling danger or pleasure. Yet it exceeds the limits of language in that it communicates in a manner that goes beyond verbalization. For Cooley, this means that touch

potentially facilitates and symbolizes cultural and social change in values whether positive or negative; as such it represents tremendous power to create and to destroy. In the extreme, touch can symbolize either domination and brutality or an abiding intimacy that presupposes equality.²²

In a second essay, "Experience, Body, and Authority," Cooley draws on the experience of pain in a similar manner as her use of touch in the previous article. Pain is both culturally construed and a bodily experience. For Cooley, pain, therefore, "makes the body itself both an authority and a resource for theoretical work."²³ As with the experience of touch, the experience of pain is the "third road" for Cooley in her attempt to redeem the authority of experience in the theological enterprise.

In a third article, "The Redemption of the Body: Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Inherited Christian Doctrine,"²⁴ Cooley presents "materiality" and the body as linchpins for the possibility of a reconstruction of Christian doctrine that redeems the body, embraces creation, and emancipates women. In this article, Cooley asserts that the body has authority because it is the source of feeling. For example, the experience of being tortured has moral authority whether one is the victim or a witness to the act. The moral authority of the witnesses and

²²Cooley, "The Word Become Flesh: Woman's Body, Language, and Value," 20.

²³Cooley, "Experience, Body, and Authority," 338.

²⁴Paula Cooley, "The Redemption of the Body: Post-Patriarchal Reconstruction of Inherited Christian Doctrine," *After Patriarchy: Feminist Transformations of the World Religions*, ed. Paula M. Cooley, William R. Eakin and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 106-130.

victims of the mass extermination of Jews in the Second World War demonstrates this in a poignant manner.

Despite Cooley's recognition of the problematic polarity between essentialism and cultural determinism, in my view she has not overcome that polarity. She privileges the body and through the body, touch and pain, as means of reconstructing Christian Doctrine. Yet, Cooley fails to offer sufficient evidence that this strategy is effective in moving beyond the polarization between materialism and idealism. Like Nelson, she falls short of her goals. One may sense, at an intuitive level, the importance of Cooley's direction, but at the same time question the effectiveness of her approach.

Susan Ross also recognizes the importance of not falling prey to this polarization. Still, she advocates a bodily basis for an understanding of human selfhood. Although working in an area more directly associated with sacramental theology, Ross deals with the topic of the body in a manner that necessarily involves ethics. In her essay "'Then Honor God in Your Body' (1 Cor.6:20): Feminist and Sacramental Theology on the Body,"²⁵ Ross asserts that neither feminist theology nor sacramental theology addresses embodiment adequately, despite the fact that both affirm the goodness and intrinsic sacrality of the body. For Ross, sacramental theology emphasizes the importance of the body in a manner that leads to dualism and hierarchy. Feminist theology, in an attempt to overcome this dualism and hierarchy, treats the body with ambivalence. Yet Ross sees each offering a corrective to the other. If sacramental theology uses the body as a symbol in a manner that tends to equate women's bodies with nature and men's bodies with the divine, then feminist theology, in its mistrust of

²⁵Ross, "'Then Honor God in Your Body' (1 Cor.6:20): Feminist and Sacramental Theology on the Body," 7-27.

this equation, must distance itself from the body to such an extent that the body loses its power as a symbol. Yet, for Ross, it is feminist theology with its emphasis on women's control of their own bodies, whether sexually or reproductively, that brings ethical discourse on the body into prominence. Feminist theology will not accept a sacramental theology that settles for dualistic and hierarchical interpretations of the body. Thus, feminist theology forces the discussion to open up to a more grounded and less alienating understanding of the body as self. Ross advocates a bodily basis for an understanding of human selfhood as a corrective to the alienating dualism of the "body" and the "soul." For Ross, this is a key to living "with the variety and ambiguity of human physical existence."²⁶

In a later article entitled "The Bride of Christ and the Body Politic: Body and Gender in Pre-Vatican II Marriage Theology,"²⁷ Ross examines "the body's function in determining biological, social, and theological roles in Roman Catholic marriage theology."²⁸ She exposes deep-seated motivations behind the intermixing of the metaphors of, on the one hand, body, Church, and bride and, on the other hand, spirit, Christ, and bridegroom. She points to the power and authority of the clergy and their desire to maintain the hierarchical structure of the Church as one example of such deep-seated motivations. Ross draws on French historian and philosopher, Michel Foucault's work, *The History of Sexuality*.²⁹ In that text, Foucault

²⁶Ibid., 27.

²⁷Susan Ross, "The Bride of Christ and the Body Politic: Body and Gender in Pre-Vatican II Marriage Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 71 (1991) : 345-361.

²⁸Ibid., 360.

²⁹Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 3 vols., trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage books, 1980, 1985, 1986).

examines the connection between sex and power. Foucault's theory assists Ross in broaching the subject of the political agenda of the Church and its use of the body as an instrument in fulfilling that agenda. As well, she demonstrates how contemporary feminist theology, in reinterpreting, through the perspective of women's experience, the Church's traditional meaning of body, has uncovered aspects of these underlying motivations. This, in turn, has caused dissention in the Church at all levels. Ross posits the centrality of the body in the current upheaval within *every* aspect of theology (for example, systematic, moral and sacramental) and within the very foundations of the Church. She aligns her thinking with that of Johannes Metz when she states, "Roman Catholicism's continual emphasis on sexual morality as the litmus test of orthodoxy can be interpreted as indicating the privatization of religion into the categories of the bourgeois."³⁰ Ross links the Church's utilization of the symbol of the body with Marx's critique of religion as the opiate of the masses. However, as Ross maintains, the use of the body as justification for power and authority, as well as justifying the subordination of women, does not seem to be calming the masses as we approach the third millennium of Church history.

Ross attempts to uncover deeply entrenched patterns which underlie and influence not only sacramental theology but all fields of theology. However, Ross fails to uncover an understanding for the cause of these patterns. Nor does she offer assurance that these same patterns are not taking place in a different form in her own critique. In other words, Ross has exposed deeply entrenched patterns, political agendas, and ulterior motives, but has not indicated a deep understanding of the underlying causes of these difficulties. Thus, although

³⁰Ross, "The Bride of Christ and the Body Politic," 361.

Ross explicitly aims to correct the polarity between relying on the body as a basis for understanding reality or completely ignoring the body, in my view her corrective remains unconvincing as a route which will take us beyond the pole of privileging the body.

Nelson, Cooley and Ross privilege the body in attempting to overcome the problematic mind/body dualism that underlies theology. Yet, in privileging of the body they do not take the extreme route of Goldenberg and Christ. Their approach is more nuanced and, thus, more moderate, as each struggles to highlight the imperativeness of an experientially-based theology. However, despite each one's attempt to offer a corrective that will assist theology in moving beyond the mind/body polarity, their proposed solutions remain part of the problem. That is, the solutions continue to operate within the mind/body dualism, and, thus, do not help us to move beyond the polarization that results.

3.3 Both/And: Mind *and* Body

I will now briefly outline the theories of three Christian ethicists who are concerned with the problems that arise when one too excessively aligns women (and men) with embodiment. Thus, each, with his or her specific focus, advocate a need to go beyond bodily differences in addressing women's struggles within the Church.

Lisa Sowle Cahill, Margaret R. Miles, and Paul E. Dinter are concerned with theology's traditional understanding of the role of men and women in the church. That is, they share a common concern regarding a too literal identification of men and women with their bodies. This identification aligns women's intellectual, emotional and moral capacity with their role in reproduction. Implicated here are traditional perceptions of differences between "feminine" and "masculine" and the subsequent subordination of "feminine" traits. The

traditional position within theology advocates equality between women and men, while promoting a hierarchical relationship based on gender roles. Cahill, Miles and Dinter seek to demonstrate the underlying bias of these questionable interpretations of the bodily realm. They seek to expose their historical roots and undermine their "natural law" status. In order to understand the implications of the problem they identify, let us consider the critiques of Cahill, Miles and Dinter separately.

Cahill is critical of both feminist theology and the theology of the Roman Catholic Church as each address problems concerning embodiment and the status of men and women in the Church. In terms of feminism, Cahill identifies several difficulties with feminist perspectives on embodiment and Christian ethics. Her critique is based on limitations she perceives at four levels. First of all, the authority of experience, key for feminist thought, raises significant problems regarding cognitive and moral knowledge. This is especially so in feminist concerns about embodiment. If women object to the limiting and oppressive heritage of men's ideas of who they are, the authority of their own experience, for Cahill, offers little more credibility. The *Western* feminist's notion of women's embodiment is also limited. Second, feminists turn to embodiment as a source of emancipation from the constraints of rational Western heritage. Some see it as an escape from the smothering excess of rational and linear thought cut off from the sheer bodiliness of the human person. However, this "solution," according to Cahill, can feed into the very stereotypes that oppress and degrade women. Third, how can one differentiate between the biological body and our cultural constructs of the body? Also, Cahill asks, *who* will define this? How do we *use* the category of embodiment? What is our criteria? Fourth, should feminists emphasize bodily difference between men and women or "emphasize the essential similarity of human capacities across

genders?"³¹ Which is more beneficial for women in addressing the issues of "justice" and "equality?" Certainly, *nothing* can be accepted uncritically - but what are the parameters which will guide the critique?

Cahill brings to our attention criticisms against the papal letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*. These criticisms see the papal letter as employing a "confused anthropology" which adds up to an "unconvincing attempt to re-centre a teaching which does not respond to the demands of thought and ethical values today."³² In attempting to respond to feminist concerns, the pope affirms women's essential equality with men yet continues to employ an anthropology based on a complementarity model. Problematically for feminists, this model places the male in a role of authority and leadership. The female is aligned with the role that constitutes, for the pope, her "essential nature" - motherhood. Cahill joins others in her critique of the papal letter's unquestioned acceptance of a paradigm shaped through a Western, patriarchal culture. The acceptance of this paradigm reveals a bias that is not acknowledged by the Church. As well, Cahill insists that the pope cannot remain isolated from a more contemporary perspective regarding the role of men and women. Following the feminist critique, Cahill agrees that the "demands of thought and ethical values today" *are* important criteria by which one must judge any anthropology put forward. Yet, Cahill is critical of a feminist ethics that relies solely on experience without reference to a transformative and hence more adequate

³¹Lisa Sowle Cahill, "Current Theology: Notes on Moral Theology: 1989 Feminist Ethics," *Theological Studies* 51 (1990) : 54.

³²Ibid., 59. Cahill is quoting Marie-Thérèse van Lunen Chenu's criticism from "Between Sexes and Generations: Maternity Empowered," in *Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology*, ed. Anne Carr and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Concilium* 206 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989) : 31-41.

criteria of truth. Cahill's review of "the feminist eschewal of ahistorical paradigms of gender identity, social organization, and even of moral order itself"³³ is sympathetic to the turn to experience and specifically the bodily experience of women, but she refuses to give that pole precedence. Cahill acknowledges the contribution that both poles contribute to the ongoing feminist debate concerning the roles of women in church and in society. She struggles to achieve a balance between the two poles. The feminist appeal to experience is plagued by a "nagging relativism" yet the essentialism of metaphysical categories as criteria for truth, after the feminist critique, is no longer plausible. Cahill refers to David Tracy's statement here: "contemporary Western feminist theory . . . at its best is the most ethically challenging and intellectually sophisticated exposure of the full dilemmas of our pluralistic and ambiguous postmodern moment."³⁴ In the end, Cahill privileges "not absolute but 'relatively adequate' criteria"³⁵ for truth. Despite her attempts at a balanced approach distancing herself from adherence strictly to experience on the one hand or essential categories on the other, Cahill fails to go beyond a simple or straightforward "both-and" approach. Thus, in my view, she fails to help us better understand the complex relationship of mind-body. She does not adequately take into consideration the influence of the body on *all* notions of truth and, thus, fails to achieve the more differentiated understanding to which she aspires.

The importance of the 'body' in the *history* of Christianity has been given some

³³Ibid., 63.

³⁴Ibid., 63.

³⁵Ibid., 64.

attention in the past few decades.³⁶ As a theologian in the field of history, Margaret R. Miles has done extensive research on the history of Christianity's perception of the body's value and its significance vis-à-vis moral issues. However, the intention which underlies her work moves beyond history. Miles wants to demonstrate the connection between current attitudes toward the body (including how these attitudes affect women) and particular interpretations of the body throughout Christian history. Miles has contributed three major works to the field. The first, *Augustine on the Body*,³⁷ charts the development of Augustine's thought which evolved from despising the body as the source of alienation to affirming the body as part of the whole person. Miles demonstrates how, despite this positive overtone, Augustine's thought concerning the body remains ambivalent. In principle, Augustine affirms the body and

³⁶Recent examples are Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, Mass.: Pope Center, 1985); Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus Books, 1979); and Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Caroline Bynum's work, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991) follows her earlier work *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) in engaging texts from the past to uncover the roots of our thinking about flesh and body and where we have deviated from those roots. Bynum believes that in doing this she, as an historian, offers insights which can contribute significantly to current dialogue on the notion of woman as flesh or body, the notion of woman as body rather than spirit, the understanding of Christ in his humanity or body and the understanding of the eucharist as flesh and as food. Similarly, Lawrence E. Sullivan in his article "Body Works: Knowledge of the Body in the Study of Religion," *History of Religions* 30, no. 1 (August 1990) : 86-99, emphasizes the central importance of chronicling the 'history' of the body in that it serves as a key locus for culture, especially in a culture's religious experience and practice. For Sullivan, a key question in studying religion must be "What kind of challenge is our own bodily existence to this study?" (99) Martha J. Reineke, in her article "'This is My Body:' Reflections on Abjection, Anorexia, and Medieval Women Mystics," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58 (1990) : 245, reverses this by positing "the centrality of religion to the social construction of the human body."

³⁷Margaret R. Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1979).

sexuality as good. Yet there remains a counter-motion in his work that discloses an incomplete conversion to that intellectual principle. Miles' second work, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism*,³⁸ examines Christian attitudes toward the body from the early and medieval eastern and western traditions through selected writings of early Church Fathers. As with her book on Augustine, Miles reveals that Christian tradition has consistently understood the body as good and valuable for human existence. Through a careful examination of the writings of prominent Church Fathers throughout the history of the Church, Miles counters the tendency to see Christianity as positing a negative attitude toward the body. A third book dealing with the issue of the body, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West*,³⁹ takes her project one step further. She attempts to unearth *what* is signified by the human body through examining "the meanings of bodies in their particular religious and social contexts."⁴⁰ Miles' thesis, in *Carnal Knowing*, stems from the underlying supposition that the human body carries significance and meaning. Implicated here is Miles' theory that female bodies especially were a vehicle, in Christian writing and religious ritual, as well as in art, for conveying "male frustration and limitation in societies of Christian West."⁴¹ Miles' hope is that both the attraction and repulsion demonstrated in the use of the female body in history (both sacred and secular) can now be

³⁸Margaret R. Miles, *Fullness of Life: Historical Foundations for a New Asceticism* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1981).

³⁹Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Vintage Books: New York, 1991).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, xi.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 12.

balanced by *female* subjectivity expressed through art and literature. This is Miles' central concern in *Carnal Knowing*; that women, through art and literature, take up the necessary task of *self*-representation. For Miles, there are several conditions necessary for women's self-representation. First, female self-representation cannot be a reversal. As Miles understands it, in Christian writing, men have inadvertently represented *themselves*, not women, in their imaging of the female body. Women must not follow this pattern by projecting their own meaning onto male bodies. Rather, women must discern what has been authentic about the meanings encoded in male representations of the female body. At the same time, women need to move beyond male representation to one that is more in line with the truth about themselves. In other words, women must appropriate a representation that is more honest and direct. Using male bodies for this purpose merely becomes a reversal of the false representation suffered by women. The second condition necessary for female self-representation has two levels: (1) women must take up positions of leadership in order to be represented in public and (2) in order to avoid the mistake of fostering a hierarchy, women must empower others. The third condition responds to Miles' suggestion that "representations of women may be the cultural artifact on which men find most unanimity" and because of this "'woman,' the object of male fear and longing . . . in revealing her body, is said to have revealed 'herself.'"⁴² For Miles, women must challenge this aspect of a collective male voice with their own collective female voice. Yet Miles insists that a female collective voice must allow room for diversity and particularity regardless of potential problems this may pose. Women must not take collectivity to a totalitarian extreme. The tension between the

⁴²Ibid., 172.

validation of the body within Church doctrine and the pejorative view that was expressed in Christian writing, literature and art has existed throughout the history of Christianity. It is Miles' theory that only by representing the female body as "revelation and subjectivity" will women effectively counter the cultural construction of the female body as "erotic" and an "object of fascination and scorn." It is this that will "correct and complete the Christian affirmation of body."⁴³

Miles' presentation on the body and the body's relation to moral issues in a theological context is extensive and thorough. Through her research in these three books, she contributes significantly to exposing the tension between two diametrically opposed views of the body in the history of Christian thought. Yet Miles' limitation surfaces in accepting too quickly what she considers an effective counter to the cultural construction of the female body as "erotic" and an "object of fascination and scorn."⁴⁴ Correcting and completing the Christian affirmation of the body, although a long and arduous task for Miles, appears somewhat naive when one considers her very straightforward approach. Her corrective presupposes that women's *self*-representation will avoid the pitfalls which men fell into. Miles believes that women's self-representation will be direct in a manner that men's, throughout history, was not. In my view, Miles has not paid enough attention to the manner in which the body influences *all* representation. Thus, although Miles demonstrates links between Christian history and current attitudes toward the body, her approach does not probe further into the complexity of the relationship between body-mind in her appeal to the notion of women's bodies as

⁴³Ibid., 185.

⁴⁴Ibid., 185.

"revelation and subjectivity."

Paul E. Dinter, a third author concerned with the excessive use of the body as a point of reference for ethical issues, criticizes the Roman Catholic Magisterium for its literal interpretation of the "body of Christ." Approaching the problem from a linguistic perspective, Dinter, in his article "Christ's Body as Male and Female,"⁴⁵ is critical of the Roman Catholic Church for employing the metaphorical image of the "body of Christ" in a too narrow or literal sense when dealing with the issue of women's ordination. He suggests a corrective within a broader understanding of the use of metaphor and symbolism. Dinter highlights the specific function of metaphor and symbol (to convey a surplus of meaning) in order to expose the flawed theology of the Roman Catholic Church in its use of the body, specifically Christ's body, in excluding women from the ordained ministry. For Dinter, the Church's tendency to use the particular symbol of the body of Christ and the choice of twelve male apostles contravenes the purpose of metaphor and symbol. The fact that the Church does not fail to use metaphor and symbol in its proper sense in other contexts (for example, the Church as the body of Christ) reveals that there is something deeper involved here. Dinter examines the complex meaning of the Pauline metaphor of the body of Christ in order to demonstrate the manner in which symbols and metaphors indicate more than one meaning. In this, he contends that the Church's narrow and literal use of the 'body of Christ' and the choice of the twelve demonstrates that "only a magisterium become an authority to itself would set up as divinely determined something as metaphorically indeterminate as how and where the body of Christ

⁴⁵Paul E. Dinter, "Christ's Body as Male and Female," *Cross Currents* 44 (1994) : 390-399.

can be manifested in its baptized members."⁴⁶

Dinter's linguistic approach offers a rational solution to a pre-rational or pre-logical problem. Dinter outlines clearly the inconsistencies in the Roman Catholic Church's use of metaphorical language. However, as Dinter himself demonstrates, symbols reveal multiple layers of meaning which reach one at the affective level of the psyche. Consequently, explanations that remain at the level of logic fall somewhat short in helping to gain insight and move beyond deeply ingrained motivations in interpreting symbols and metaphors in one manner and not another. In my view, this is Dinter's limitation, he offers a corrective at the level of logic but does not take us beyond that level.

It is my contention that Dinter, Cahill and Miles stop short of probing the complexity of the impact of the body in ethical discourse. Each one has approached theological and ethical problems facing women in a manner that has not taken the complexity of human embodiment sufficiently into consideration. They have dealt with the problems via the tools of "criteria for truth" (Cahill), "self-representation" (Miles), and "symbol" or "metaphor" (Dinter). Yet, in my view, their contributions are limited. Specifically each has failed to adequately account for the preconscious manner in which the body influences thought. Thus, the logical, straightforward corrective that each offers, given their critiques, suffers from a certain naivete in not taking into consideration the murkier dimensions of bodily influence. Their common concern to demonstrate the historical and cultural roots of interpretations of the body and the body's significance in ethical discourse is flawed only in that they fail to follow through to the depth required in their exploration of the body-mind relationship .

⁴⁶Ibid., 399.

3.4 Conclusion

These eight authors contribute important insights into the concerns feminism brings to theology. However, the limitations in each one's work, which I identify above, remains problematic. These limitations revolve around the central issue of the dualism between the body and the spirit. It is the seemingly inescapable polarity that one is confronted with in attempting to address the inherent problems of this dualism. Although each ethicist attempts to work his or her way through the polarity, in the end, each argument falls short. I have illustrated an element of that failure in my brief consideration of each one's work. I presented these in a manner that demonstrates a progression of more differentiated approaches to the polarity. Goldenberg and Christ represent the least differentiated approach because the body is the sole criterion for a consideration of ethics. Nelson, Cooley and Ross also privilege the body, but in a more nuanced manner. That is, they do not completely erase the transcendent dimension. Cahill, Miles and Dinter offer a solution to the mind-body polarity that attempts to achieve a balance by allowing both dimensions to play a significant role. However, they do not delve into the complexity of the mind-body relationship and, consequently, fail to probe its depth. It is my contention that the work of Julia Kristeva offers an insight into the roots of the polarity. In the following chapters, I demonstrate how Kristeva's insight, on one level, may *appear* fixed yet, at another level, provides a route beyond the polarity.⁴⁷ To point to

⁴⁷The problems these eight ethicists tackle but are unable to move beyond - problems which run the gamut from essentialism using ahistorical categories to historical determinism - are problems which, according to many feminist critics, plague Kristeva's work. However, as the thesis progresses, I hope to show that Kristeva takes her readers to a level that manages to transcend these problems. These critiques against Kristeva are surveyed in chapter two under the heading "Critiques of Kristeva's Work."

the direction of Kristeva's work, I will consider the work of feminist theologian and ethicist, Rosemary Ruether. Ruether's work serves as a link between the eight authors outlined above and the work of Julia Kristeva because she tackles the problems identified by feminist theology in a manner more extensive than most others in the field. She reveals the deep and pervasive limits with which one is confronted when one attempts to move beyond the polarity between an essentialism (transcending the body) and a determinism (privileging the body). The importance of Ruether's work in the overall scheme of the thesis warrants an extensive consideration of her writings.

4. Ruether's Feminist Theology

The polarity between either transcending the body or identifying exclusively with the body continues to direct the thinking of Christian ethicists on the subject of the body's significance in ethical discourse. This was demonstrated above by a brief analysis of the work of eight authors who identify and endeavour to move beyond the traditional dualistic perspective. However, rather than offering a route beyond the inherited imbalances within the Christian tradition, these efforts, in my view, lack the differentiation to solve the problems. Rosemary Ruether recognizes this dilemma and, in much of her work, wrestles with the tension that exists between the either/or impasse. Ruether's reluctance to abandon the Christian tradition (or her Roman Catholic heritage) while she uncompromisingly applies well-aimed critiques toward unjust structures of the Church serves as a source of frustration to liberal, conservative and radical thinkers on all sides of the impasse.⁴⁸ Yet, it is precisely

⁴⁸For example see critiques by Susan Power Bratton, "Ecofeminism and the Problem of Divine Immanence/Transcendence in Christian Environmental Ethics," *Science and Christian*

because Ruether *enters* the tension and deals with the ambiguity that she takes us towards the work of Julia Kristeva. This is why Ruether is an important interlocutor with Kristeva. Ruether consistently and courageously enters the paradoxes that she has confronted in more than thirty years of academic life. Throughout the span of her struggle, Ruether has written and spoken extensively on issues concerning feminism, racism, anti-Semitism, ecology and many other related topics. Chief among these issues is the inferior status of women in theological, christological and soteriological teachings of the Christian tradition and the subsequent exclusion of women from authoritative and preaching roles in the Church. The underlying dualistic view of the body/spirit split and the subsequent hierarchy of lower/higher in relation to this split is, for Ruether, the main reason for the injustices against women both in the Church and in society generally. Sexism is not the only injustice brought about by the body/spirit dualism. The roots of racism, anti-Semitism, militarism and the ecological crisis can be traced back to the same dualism and for strikingly similar reasons.

In this section, I will describe Ruether's methodology and elaborate on three specific themes in her work. These themes are the image of woman in the Church, the nature and condition of evil and the possibility of a feminist theological reconstruction. Focusing on both Ruether's methodology and the three themes provide key links to Kristeva's work. As well, they advance our comprehension of both the pervasiveness of the problem of sexism and the

Belief 6 (1994) : 21-40; Carol Christ, "Feminist Theology?" *Christianity and Crisis* (April 29, 1985) : 161-162 and *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 57-71; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 17-18; Frederick Sontag, "Crucifixion and Realized Eschatology: A Critique of Some Proposals Concerning Feminist Theology," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 4 (1990) : 66-73; and Delores S. Williams, "The Color of Feminism," *Christianity and Crisis* (April 29, 1985) : 164-165.

determining influence of the idealist-materialist polarity. Thus, they will, I believe, facilitate my argument that Ruether brings us up against the *limit-situation*⁴⁹ of the polarity. In what follows, I will present specific aspects of Ruether's methodology which pertain to the linkages with Kristeva's work. I will then give an elaboration of the three themes, again, with the view of making linkages to Kristeva.

4.1 Ruether's Dialectical Methodology

Rosemary Ruether, from the earliest stages of her studies, has been suspicious of dualisms which privilege one pole to the exclusion of the other. She identifies her theological method as intrinsically dialectical. Her dialectical method stems from a desire "to resurrect the repressed" side of a dualism in order to "put the dominant position in a larger context and make sense out of both [poles] in a new way."⁵⁰ As a result, Ruether critiques the Roman Catholic magisterium's teachings on morality, especially sexual morality, for bracketing out women's experience. Ruether sees women's experience offering a unique and important

⁴⁹When I speak of "limit-situation" I am using an existential term taken from the work of Karl Jaspers. It refers to a moment or situation in the existence of a human being where he or she comes to the boundaries of his or her existence. For example, death or suffering will bring a person to this moment. One experiences a shattering of one's existence, where one's ordinary way of understanding and existing in the world is no longer sufficient. At the same time, for Jaspers, the limit-situation introduces the human being to an awareness of transcendence which can become a liberating experience. When I say that Ruether's work reveals a limit-situation, I mean that her relentless critique of patriarchy brings us to a boundary of our existence, where our usual way of understanding the world and existing in the world is shattered. There is also a movement toward transcendence at exactly this moment. I will argue in this thesis that Kristeva facilitates that movement toward transcendence even though Kristeva herself does not go in that direction.

⁵⁰Rosemary Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," *Journeys: The Impact of Personal Experience on Religious Thought*, ed. Gregory Baum (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 44.

contribution to the issues of the body and sexual ethics within the context of the all-male perspective of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching office. Feminist ethics does not posit another definition or explanation of "full humanity" for either sex. Rather, Ruether asserts that feminist theology's groundedness in personal and social experience offers a more inductive, practical and critical approach to embodiment and sexual ethics.

In *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, Ruether asks fundamental questions concerning the devaluation of nature and the body (specifically woman's body). She mines anthropological insights in seeking to uncover the roots of the devaluation of nature which she sees as directly linked to the devaluation of women. Ruether's "ecological-feminist theology of nature" critiques the "presuppositions of the superiority of the 'higher' over the 'lower' forms and hence the domination of the 'highest' form - namely, the human - over the rest solely for human self-interest."⁵¹ For Ruether, humanity needs "to learn how to use intelligence to mend the distortion we have created" in order to "cultivate the harmonies and balances of the ecological community."⁵² Ruether posits that if there is hope of survival for our world at both a relational and environmental level, human beings must strip off the false consciousness that alienates us from our bodies and from our roots in the earth, sky, and water. Ruether praises psychoanalysis as a key tool for women in attempting to unmask the "irrational dimension of sexism."⁵³ Yet, she qualifies this in critiquing psychoanalysis for

⁵¹Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 86-87.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 89.

⁵³Rosemary Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 137.

"replacing patriarchal religion, for rationalizing and sanctifying the inferiority of women."⁵⁴ Ruether criticises both Freud and Jung and their subsequent disciples for their analysis of "psychic development within patriarchy" and for creating "therapies that reinforce male domination."⁵⁵ She advocates the need for women to struggle against male subjugation of their experience.

In *Sexism and God-Talk* Ruether clearly states the guiding principle of her work as a feminist theologian.

The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine, or to reflect the authentic nature of things, or to be the message or work of an authentic redeemer or a community of redemption.⁵⁶

The critical principle creates a tension between the here and now (women's experience as denigrated and marginalized) and the not yet (the promotion of women's full humanity). The principle is unique only in that it is *women's* humanity that is promoted. Within the overarching framework of the promotion of the full humanity of women, the tension acts as Ruether's starting point in her feminist theology.⁵⁷ Her starting point is always a concrete,

⁵⁴Ibid., 137.

⁵⁵Ibid., 158.

⁵⁶Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 18-19.

⁵⁷This is so in every social issue Ruether tackles, including racism, antisemitism and militarism. For example in her essay "Western Christianity and Zionism," *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices*, ed. Naim S. Ateek, Marc H. Ellis and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 147-157, Ruether examines and deconstructs "patterns of Christian Zionism which have been used to ignore and disregard Palestinian human and political rights and to justify occupation." (147) That is, Ruether

current situation where the full humanity of women is not promoted. From this very concrete situation, Ruether utilizes strategies such as historical analysis and deconstruction to uncover the root of the injustice. These strategies create a larger backdrop from which to view the concrete event. Understanding patriarchy (or any system of thought) from a broader perspective, taking in its historical conditions, enables one to begin to glimpse the underlying presuppositions upon which it rests. It is the first and necessary condition for the possibility of moving beyond an ideology. As Ruether states,

We have to look back over the broad sweep of the history of culture in which a male ruling class conquered nature and the female. Only by understanding what this conquest does to women can we begin to create a new cultural psychology that will enable women to come into their own as fully human persons.⁵⁸

Ruether's dialectical method emerges naturally from her manner of being in the world.⁵⁹ The hermeneutical skills she acquired in her studies of classical and ancient history

identifies the tension between the present treatment of the Palestinians and the future promotion of the full humanity of the Palestinians.

Examples of this phenomenon in Ruether's work can also be seen in the following quotations from *Sexism and God-Talk*: "By entering into the dialectic between the Canaanite and Biblical religions from both sides, allowing Canaanite religion to speak positively to Biblical religion, as well as vice versa, we might discover new insights into the foundation of Western religions and cultural consciousness." (41) Also, ". . . Lucan Mariology suggests a real co-creatorship between God and humanity, or, in this case, woman," (154) suggesting a dialectical relationship between God and humanity.

⁵⁸Rosemary Ruether, *Mary - The Feminine Face of the Church* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), 76.

⁵⁹Ruether grew up in a context that allowed her to experience her identity (as female) from a perspective that contradicted the social and cultural norms of her time. By the time she was old enough to realize the incongruity of her experience in relation to the expectations of the world she lived in she was well grounded in her own identity. Ruether experienced a contradiction within her very person. Her powerful capacity to stand exactly in the middle of that contradiction in order to understand it enabled her to experience all subsequent social injustices and incongruities in a similar manner. See Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual

enhance her ability to distance herself from one perspective in order to allow for the emergence of what lies hidden or repressed. This has both positive and negative results. Positively, the elements of history which were repressed come to the surface. Thus, women's stories are given a voice. Negatively, the dark or corrupt side of history is revealed. A false consciousness is exposed revealing a darker, sinister aspect of human consciousness; one we prefer to forget.⁶⁰ Ruether understands that ideology links what it represses with evil. She is aware of ideology's perpetual circle of repression and the "gap" between what is presented and what is missing. Her insight gives her the courage and foresight to enter into dialogue with ideology exactly where these gaps begin to occur. So, Ruether is not only a champion of the voiceless, of those who have been oppressed by dominant systems or ideologies. She relentlessly seeks to bring to light all forms of false consciousness. She seeks to demystify all claims to absolute truth by disclosing the historical condition of all systems of thought. Ruether's goal of recovering the repressed, whether positive or negative, is not reversal. Rather it is to put the repressive ideology into a larger and, for Ruether, more balanced context.⁶¹

As indicated above, Ruether practices her dialectical methodology on many levels. Her critique of ideology surfaces from the dialectic between theory and practice, that is, between

Autobiography," 34-56.

⁶⁰Rosemary Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon Press, 1982), 138-141.

⁶¹As Mary Hembrow Snyder asserts, Ruether's strategy is self-corrective in that her "dialectical stance seeks to uncover the truer self in persons and communities." It, thereby, moves "beyond the alienation created by oppositional thinking and head[s] toward a new vision of wholeness, mutuality, and justice." *The Christology of Rosemary Radford Ruether: A Critical Introduction* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988), 15.

tradition as written or articulated and as it is lived out in concrete situations. Thus, Ruether, following liberation theology, tests theory against practice. In feminist theology, the concrete experience where tradition is tested is women's experience. Ruether recognizes the importance of tradition's role in the dialectic. In addition to tradition's dialectical role in relation to concrete situations, there are aspects within the tradition itself which act as a dialectic. For Ruether, the best example of this and one that she relies on regularly in her work, is the prophetic literature from the Old Testament.⁶² Ruether calls this literature the critical prophetic principle.⁶³ It acts as a catalyst within the tradition of the Old Testament undercutting any tendency to exploit and dominate others. However, women did not count among those who were exploited and dominated. Consequently, Ruether appropriates the critical prophetic principle on behalf of women who are oppressed. In the same manner that the critical prophetic principle is a self-corrective built into the tradition of the Old Testament, Ruether's appropriation of the principle acts as a self-corrective to a tradition or ideology which oppresses or seeks to bracket out a part of humanity. It is in this context that Ruether utilizes negation.

I see negation, not as an attack on someone else's person or community, but as a self-criticism of the distortions of one's own being and community. Criticism of these distortions opens up the way for a positive reconstruction of the healing and liberating word of the tradition and capacities of human life.⁶⁴

For Ruether, it is only through negation that healing (synthesis or reconstruction) are possible.

⁶²For Ruether's elaboration of the importance of the Old Testament prophetic literature and her appropriation of it, see *Sexism and God-Talk*, 22-33.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁴Ruether, *Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian*, 141.

Thus, the dialectical method of Ruether's feminist theology seeks a synthesis. Yet, it is not a static synthesis. It is a synthesis that is fluid and changing because it emerges from the concrete, practical experience of women of different cultures and religions.⁶⁵ Negation is the means for both a theoretical struggle and a practical struggle. It is a negation which shatters any hope of a unitary vision because it exposes the false ideologies and social consequences of oppression. It gives voice to the repressed side of all cultures and all religions. For Ruether, negation and affirmation are linked in a dialectical relationship.⁶⁶ Consequently, negation involves the resurrection of plurality from its repressed position in Western thought. Plurality is part of the negativity of negation because it reveals a conflict of interpretations upsetting or breaking down the unitary vision of any one tradition. Healing and liberation are possible only if one is willing to enter directly into this negation and come out the other side. Yet the other side remains open to critique and change. For Ruether, there is continual movement and only partial resolutions and syntheses. These, in turn, are superseded in the continual struggle

⁶⁵Ruether's has edited a book, *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), which is a compilation of essays by fourteen Latin American, Asian, and African women. The aim of the book is multifaceted - building linkages between "third world" women and "first world" women, linking "third world" women with other "third world" women, and "look[ing] for an important corrective to the myopias of the white affluent context from dialogue with women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America . . ." (Ruether, "Introduction," 6.)

⁶⁶Bernard Lonergan's definition of a dialectic is helpful in understanding what Ruether is proposing. "[L]et us say that a dialectic is a concrete unfolding of linked but opposed principles of change. Thus, there will be a dialectic, if

- (1) there is an aggregate of events of a determinate character,
- (2) the events may be traced to either or both of two principles,
- (3) the principles are opposed yet bound together, and
- (4) they are modified by the changes that successively result from them."

Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 217.

of practice testing theory. Therein lies the forward movement of Ruether's dialectical method. For Ruether, the movement is forward because it moves toward a more just society which necessarily involves healing and liberation.

If Ruether's foundations appear precarious, she grounds her thought in a deep belief in the goodness of creation and in the justice and compassion of God/ess⁶⁷ who is the source and ground of our being. The very possibility of justice, goodness, repentance and forgiveness stem from the realization of their absence. Again, Ruether confronts us with a dialectic or two opposed principles. This time it is between, on the one hand, the aspiration toward new possibilities and toward the evolution of humanity and, on the other, a grounding in a primordial matrix, an original harmony.⁶⁸ God/ess is present in the struggles for justice that women concretely experience. In fact, for Ruether, God/ess *is* the struggle for justice. It is only in the struggle for justice that human beings hear God/ess' call and begin to envision new possibilities. So Ruether's inductive method has a foundation. It is the experience of the oppressed struggling for justice and equality amid the contradictions and complexities of the human condition. Ruether justifies the correctness of her method through an appeal to

⁶⁷Ruether uses the unpronounceable symbol "God/ess" when referring to the divine matrix of all being. It is a conscious attempt to use a symbol devoid of patriarchal bias.

"When discussing fuller divinity to which this theology points, I use the term God/ess, a written symbol intended to combine both the masculine and feminine forms of the word for the divine while preserving the Judeo-Christian affirmation that divinity is one. This term is unpronounceable and inadequate. It is not intended as language for worship, where one might prefer a more evocative term, such as Holy One or Holy Wisdom. Rather it serves here as an analytic sign to point toward that yet unnameable understanding of the divine that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men." (*Sexism and God-Talk*, 46.)

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 71.

humanity's essential goodness which, due to her dialectical method, is continually critiqued and modified. She believes that truth will be discovered in the freedom experienced in concrete situations. For Ruether, there is a correlation between our vision of ethics and the ground of being from which we emerge. Kathleen Sands puts it this way.

[Ruether's] theological method is founded on [the] faith that there is "an original base of meaning and truth before corruption," that "truth is more basic than falsehood and hence able, ultimately, to root out falsehood," that even our most radical criticisms of the world are grounded upon "a deeper bedrock of authentic Being."⁶⁹

4.2 Three Themes in Ruether's Work

Three specific themes that occur in the work of Rosemary Ruether will now be examined. Ruether's proposals concerning a feminist theological reconstruction stem from her extensive analyses of the sexism and domination of women both within culture generally but more specifically within the history of the Church.⁷⁰ Implicated in this are the image of woman in the Church and the Church's concept of evil. The correlation of woman and evil in the development and history of the Church's theology give Ruether the major insights she needs to begin to build an alternative theology based on a feminist reconstruction.

⁶⁹Kathleen M. Sands, *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 88.

⁷⁰See, for example, Rosemary Ruether, "Is Christianity Misogynist? The Failure of Women's Liberation in the Church," *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972) which is a study of sexism in the writings of the Church Fathers and Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*.

4.2.1 The Image of Woman in the Church

Ruether asserts that both the Jewish and Christian religion are patriarchal.⁷¹ Both proceed from an androcentric bias which underlies their self-understanding and their teachings. Patriarchy draws from a dualistic framework which separates "transcendent" spirit (mind, ego) from "inferior," "dependent" physical nature. This, in turn, leads to a hierarchical interpretation of other seeming dualisms. Ruether's critique of patriarchy extends beyond its implications concerning the subordination of women to men. She sees patriarchy as encompassing "the whole structure of Father-ruled society: aristocracy over serfs, masters over slaves, king over subjects, racial overlords over colonized people."⁷² However, the female-male dualism represents, for Ruether, patriarchy's deepest, most pervasive form of dualism. It underlies all other forms of dualism. Women are the oppressed of the oppressed.⁷³ For Ruether, dualistic consciousness results in alienation at three levels: alienation from self, from the other and from the earth. Relationships are based on a hierarchical subject-object scheme. Through relationships of domination and exploitation human beings, who are essentially social beings, are dehumanized.⁷⁴ Both women and men are embroiled in the

⁷¹Although the term patriarch was originally applied to the fathers of the tribes of Israel, the concept of patriarchy did not originate with the Jewish religion. Patriarchy, a system of government for a family, church, or society in which fathers (or male heirs of their choice) rule, can be seen in early forms of government in Egypt, Rome and Greece prior to the emergence of Judaism.

⁷²Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 61.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁴See Judith Vaughan's interpretation of Ruether in *Sociality, Ethics, and Social Change: A Critical Appraisal of Reinhold Niebuhr's Ethics in the Light of Rosemary Radford Ruether's Works* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 103-145.

hierarchical scheme, yet women have suffered inexplicably as the dominated "lower" or "inferior" half of the duality. According to Ruether's analysis, the Church, as an institution made up of males who hold the positions of authority, does not escape the temptation to "project" onto others (females) intolerable aspects of its own identity. Hence, women have come to represent the sinful, base "side" of human beings. Males have come to represent the virtuous, upright facet of being human. In fact, throughout the history of Jewish and Christian theology, the male is the norm of authentic humanity.

Study of ancient Goddess religions reveals a female divinity almost always more powerful than the male divinity. In fact, archaeological evidence seems to indicate "that the most ancient human image of the divine was female."⁷⁵ Worship of the female divinity appears to be the result of the "mysterious" powers of fecundity.⁷⁶ The Goddess was seen as the source of new life and the source of life's continuance. This, in turn, resulted in an appeal to the Goddess when life and sustenance seemed threatened. Worship of the Goddess did not entail a personal, individual relationship. Rather, it involved a relationship with the ground and source of all life.

Here the divine is not abstracted into some other world beyond this earth but is the encompassing source of new life that surrounds the present world and assures its continuance. . . . That which is most basic, matter (mother, matrix), is also most powerfully imbued with the powers of life and spirit.⁷⁷

The emergence of patriarchy and Jewish monotheism signals a suppression of the

⁷⁵Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 47.

⁷⁶Archaeological studies confirm this through their discovery of images of Goddess figures with protruding abdomens and breasts. *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 48 and 49.

Goddess religions with their worship of both nature as "Mother Earth" and the female power of fecundity. The presupposition of a higher or superior status of culture over against nature led to the gradual suppression, defeat and ultimate repression of the Goddess religions. Certainly, throughout the Old Testament references to the conquering of nature religions and the wickedness of worshipping other gods refers, in large part, to the Goddess religions and their worship of nature. Still, the Goddess as symbol of nature does not entirely disappear. Rather, she is relegated to an inferior role in relation to Yahweh, the God of Israel. Ruether, attempting to gain a larger perspective from her studies of pre-patriarchal societies, draws our attention to the peculiarity of imaging God solely through one gender. We are so accustomed to this that we have long ceased questioning its oddity. In Ruether's study of ancient societies, a one gender image of God is "a sharp departure from all previous human consciousness."⁷⁸ Because male monotheism advocates a social hierarchy and male rule, God is imaged only as male. In male monotheism,

God is modeled after the patriarchal ruling class and is seen as addressing this class of males directly, adopting them as his "sons." They are his representatives, the responsible partners of the covenant with him. Women as wives now become symbolically repressed as the dependent servant class. Wives, along with children and servants, represent those ruled over and owned by the patriarchal class. They relate to man as he relates to God. A symbolic hierarchy is set up: God-male-female. Women no longer stand in direct relation to God; they are connected to God secondarily, through the male. This hierarchical order is evident in the structure of patriarchal law in the Old Testament, in which only the male heads of families are addressed directly. Women, children, and servants are referred to indirectly through their duties and property relations to the patriarch.⁷⁹

Male monotheism, in contradistinction to the earlier nature religions which permitted both

⁷⁸Ibid., 53.

⁷⁹Ibid., 53.

God and Goddess, begins to split reality into a physical-spiritual dualism. The spiritual realm comes to be seen as superior to matter. Nature (and the Goddess) is gradually seen as needing to be controlled. There is a chaotic and uncontrollable element in nature that needs to be ordered as far as possible. Ruether is reluctant to attempt to discover the deep, underlying reasons for the "defeat" of Goddess religions by patriarchal religions⁸⁰ and the development of a dualistic framework within monotheism especially as it pertains to the relation between men and women and the juxtaposing of women and nature. She does, however, endeavour "to lay out several key elements in male-female relations that contribute to the devaluation of women in the analogy of devalued nature."⁸¹ The, at times, violent breaking away of the male child from the maternal sphere during puberty rites plays a major role in denigrating women since one of the conditions for breaking away is the repudiation and devaluing of the woman's realm.⁸² The domination of women's labour and the silencing of women in the public realm also contributed to women's status as inferior. In addition, the hierarchy of male over female draws its rational from the earlier hierarchy of humans over nature.

Men occupy the sphere of freedom and confine women to the realm of

⁸⁰Ruether states in *Sexism and God-Talk*, "This is a book of theological reflection on such symbolic structures, not a book on anthropological history. So there will be no attempt to ask how this structure 'happened,' even if it were possible to answer that question with any completeness." (72)

⁸¹Ibid., 72.

⁸²Although Ruether is examining primitive tribal relations from ancient times, it is interesting to note that there continue to be traces of this behavior today. "[B]oys are much more likely than girls to emphasize the importance of not acting like the opposite sex. Behavior labeled "feminine" is a threat to masculinity for boys, whereas "masculine" behavior among girls is of less concern." Roberta G. Simmons and Dale A. Blyth, *Moving into Adolescence: The impact of Pubertal Change and School Context* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1987), 179-180.

necessity. The female then comes to be seen from the male point of view as a threatening lower "power" who seeks to deprive him of his freedom and drag him down into the realm of necessity. Male transcendence is defined as flight from and warfare against the realm of the mother, the realm of body and nature, all that limits and confines rather than being controlled by the human (male).⁸³

The Genesis story of God creating the world out of a watery chaos speaks to us of the division and the tension between chaotic nature or matter and orderly spirit. Nature, beyond providing sustenance and life, becomes something to be protected against and controlled. Women's proximity with nature stems from their role in reproduction. If one accepts the culture-nature hierarchy, the justification of women's "lower" status stems from their proximity with nature in their "physiological investment in the biological processes that reproduce the species."⁸⁴ Reproduction, according to this scheme, limits women's ability to develop individuality and autonomy. Women, in their reproductive role, are linked with necessity in the same manner that all human beings are linked with necessity in the need to eat and sleep. These are factors of our existence that we have no control over. They ground us in a natural reality that reduces us to necessity rather than the freedom found in the spiritual realm. For Ruether, the male fear or dread of nature and, by association, of women, stems from a fear of death. Nature and women remind men that they too are of the earth, and must return to the earth in death. The desire for immortality and patriarchal religions' focus on life after death allow men to distance themselves from a natural existence. It allows them to move toward a supernatural existence. The control of women, both in their reproductive role and in their social role, stems from the same imperative to control nature. Men gain a sense of

⁸³Ibid., 75.

⁸⁴Ibid., 72.

power over their destiny in being able to control the forces that drag them "down" into the "natural" realm where physicality and death lurk. For Ruether, continuance of existence is less of a concern for women. Women, precisely because they are involved in the birthing and rearing of children, focus more on immediate realities and necessities and less on the continuance of their own existence. They are focused on the continuance of their children's existence and on the immediate tasks that these children face them with. For Ruether, fear of death contributes greatly to the manner in which women have been imaged in the Church throughout history. Another contributing factor linked with this is sexual phobia. Sexuality, like death, connotes a "natural" bodily process that is despised by the spiritual man. Desire for transcendence and dominance over nature implicates sexuality. Women, from the male perspective, are associated with debased sexuality because, as Ruether paraphrases Augustine, they draw "the male mind down from its heavenly heights to 'wallow in the flesh.'"⁸⁵

Christianity's roots in Judaism and Platonism result in two key legacies. From the Hebrew religion it inherits "the myth of world cataclysm" and from Platonism, "the myth of the flight of the soul to heaven."⁸⁶ Ruether sees these alienated world views as originating in "the breakup of the communal life of earlier tribal society."⁸⁷ Judaism and Platonism coincide in Christianity. Despite the egalitarian attempts of early Christianity, its eventual acceptance of a world-hating and body-hating heritage continued to marginalize and scapegoat women. In the history of Christianity, women are reduced to three images as a result of this

⁸⁵Rosemary Ruether, *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 101.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, 122.

inheritance. The images are woman as whore, as wife and as virgin. All three images, which are found in the writings of the early Church Fathers, exhibit the dualistic perspective that aligns woman with body. As whore, woman symbolizes sinful carnality which tempts man and drags him down from his virtuous, transcendent position. As wife, woman is defined as submissive body with her husband as her head. Her body belongs to her husband. As virgin, woman is given the opportunity to escape her bodily nature. Virginity is the highest ideal for woman. Only in virginity "does woman rise to spirituality, personhood and equality with the male."⁸⁸ Yet, this elevated state costs a woman her body and her female identity for she must cast these down and, as far as possible, leave them behind.

The writings of the early Church Fathers witness to Christianity's fidelity to the heritage of a phobic and denigrated image of woman. The misogynist attitudes of Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Thomas Aquinas are well documented.⁸⁹ Reformist attitudes, although seemingly less phobic concerning sexuality, continued to view women as subordinate and inferior. For Luther, woman's inferiority in mind and body is due to punishment for her role in the Fall. Through the Fall, woman lost her original equality with man. Calvin and, following him, Karl Barth see the subordination of women not so much as lack of equivalence with men but as part of the divinely ordained plan.⁹⁰ In Ruether's analysis, the pattern of woman's "inferior nature and the punishment for her responsibility for sin . .

⁸⁸Ibid., 109.

⁸⁹See Ruether, "Is Christianity Misogynist? The Failure of Women's Liberation in the Church," *Liberation Theology*; Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing*; and Mary T. Malone, "The Church Teaches," *Women Christian: New Vision* (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1985), 105-123.

⁹⁰Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 97-99.

. can be illustrated in the entire line of classical Christian theology from ancient to modern times."⁹¹ Thus in Christian theology throughout history including the present, the feminine can not image God. The feminine images only the creature.

The feminine represents either the original creation, the good material shaped by the hand of God, or the new creature, the eschatological community reborn from the Passion of Christ. As such, the good feminine is a spiritual principle of passive receptivity to the regenerating powers of God.⁹²

This deeply entrenched misogyny has ramifications on the Church's understanding of sin and evil.

4.2.2 The Nature and Condition of Evil: Implications for Women

Throughout the history of Christian theology, evil and sin have been projected onto women. However, in Ruether's view, this projection certainly did not originate with Christianity. The tendency to project evil onto the "other" who is outside or apart from the individual or group identity has roots in the very origins of the human species. Ancient tribal groups, according to anthropological evidence, saw themselves as the centre of the collective self. Specifically, the males of these groups saw themselves as the norm in contradistinction to females, other tribes and nature. Thus, they felt antagonistic toward the "other" while passively adopting their own group identity. Ruether draws from H. A. Hays' book, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Feminine Evil*, in order to understand with more clarity the roots of oppression against women and the juxtaposing of women and evil. To rephrase the above, in early tribal societies, normative sexuality was male. Women were seen as deviants

⁹¹Ibid., 95.

⁹²Ibid., 139.

and aberrations. Ignorance and superstition created fear of women's sexuality. These tribes believed that the vagina was a wound and the blood that came from the vagina was an indication of castration. This led to the isolation of women. Elaborate taboos against women developed for fear that too much contact would lead to castration for men. Women were regarded as an evil which men had to protect themselves against.

Menstruation, childbirth, everything connected with the sexuality of women, and finally, even the very presence of women, came to be seen as "unclean"; a debilitating influence that might threaten the virility of the male.⁹³

The tribe of Israel inherited these practices and perceptions as witnessed in the Torah and the Talmud. Indeed, Ruether contents that their affects continue to be felt in the banning of women from the priesthood in the Roman Catholic tradition. Indications of the ancient concept of women's uncleanness can be discovered in the underlying perception of women in current canon law.⁹⁴

At another level, *myths* of female evil have passed down to us from early in the history of humanity. Ruether asserts that two myths which continue to have an affect on the collective unconscious⁹⁵ of humanity are the Greek story of Pandora and the Hebrew story of Eve. Both myths have had enormous sway in scapegoating "women as the primordial cause

⁹³Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 96.

⁹⁴See Clara Maria Henning's article "Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes," in *Images of Women in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. Rosemary Ruether (Simon and Schuster, 1973).

⁹⁵This term is drawn from the psychology of Carl Jung and refers to "the inherited deposit of the past experience of the human species, preserved in the unconscious of each of us in the form of archetypes or symbolic figures and myths. These determine the shape of our imaginings and dreams, and in periods of crisis may recur with great emotional intensity to point out our destinies." Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 68.

of evil."⁹⁶ The myth of Pandora, written by Hesiod, the eighth century B.C. Greek poet, purports that the god, Zeus, fashioned Pandora and sent her to punish men because they had offended him. She carried with her a vase containing all the calamities that men experience - pain, sickness, death and strife. Pandora, because she was fashioned to be curious, opened the vase and released the evils among men. The Hebrew myth of Eve carries some similarities. Yahweh's punishment of exile from Eden is unleashed because of Eve's disobedience to Yahweh and her tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. The biblical myth reversed the original Assyrian and Indian versions where the Goddess, Eve, created Adam as her mate.⁹⁷ In the Hebrew adaptation, God creates Eve from the rib of Adam. Symbolism related to birthing is avoided in the Genesis story most likely in order to create as much distance as possible from the mother and the Goddess myths. The Genesis creation story incriminates Eve as the first to break God's law and subsequently to convince Adam to follow. Yet, it was not until Pauline theology appropriated the myth that implications concerning women and sin start to become entrenched in Christianity. In fact, it is Pauline theology, with its "Old" and "New Adam" paradigm, that is at the root of this parochial folktale becoming theologically prominent and being considered divine revelation. Consequently, as the early church grew, it more overtly blamed women, as daughters of Eve, for evil and sin in the world. For example, in the post-Pauline epistle, 1 Timothy 2:14, it states, "and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."⁹⁸ As Ruether comments:

⁹⁶Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 165.

⁹⁷See Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1983), 288-291.

⁹⁸RSV.

These myths reveal a tremendous male fear of women's suppressed power, which, having been once unleashed, overthrew original paradisaical conditions and introduced disease, mortality, hard work, and frustrating struggle for survival in place of what was ease and happiness in the midst of spontaneous plenty.⁹⁹

Woman, as the cause of sin and death, is ultimately responsible for the death of Christ, God's own son. This belief is clearly evidenced in the Latin Church Father Tertullian:

*You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die. [de Cult Fem 1.1]*¹⁰⁰

Ruether finds it significant that both Pandora and Eve, along with other mythic female figures, are, in alternative mythologies, seen as Mother-Goddesses. She correlates blaming women for the loss of original paradise with the loss of the human being's original union with the mother in infancy when the infant literally lived off the mother's body. Ruether asks if this is the reason males, through their mythology, scapegoat women for the loss of paradise. Be that as it may, Ruether views male mythology as the underlying cause of the deeply ingrained belief concerning women's responsibility for the advent of evil in the world. In addition, from female *actions* which purportedly lead to evil there emerges an ontological principle concerning women. "The female comes to represent the qualities of materiality, irrationality, carnality, and finitude which debase the "manly" spirit and drag it down into sin and death."¹⁰¹ The linking of women with evil and the subsequent suppression of women into dependence

⁹⁹Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 168.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 167.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 168-169.

on males is witnessed throughout history. For Ruether, the fact that women need to be *continually* suppressed indicates, in fact, that women are not inferior. It indicates that women have strong intellectual capacity and physical strength. The need for *continual* suppression of women is evidence that women continue to emerge beyond how they have been defined. The slaughter of over a million people, mostly women, during the witchcraft persecution that began in fourteenth century Europe and lasting until the seventeenth century spreading to America with the Puritans is an example of this. A more current example is patriarchal psychotherapy which Ruether argues plays a major role in continuing to keep women subordinated. Freud, in particular,

codified all the traditional negative views of the female psychology, giving them scientific respectability for the new psychological and social sciences. These negative stereotypes have been a key element in the repression of the women's movement through the popular mass media.¹⁰²

For Ruether, the juxtaposition of women and evil continues to lurk beneath the consciousness of many present day realities; the emaciated bodies of fashion models as role models for girls; the neoconservative movements with their mandate to return to "family values"; and heightened pornography and violence against women (for example, pornography on the Internet). For Ruether, the liberation of women is impossible within the structure of a culture that conditions both men and women to live out their lives adhering more or less consciously to an alienation between men and women which results from the belief that men possess "[t]he psychic traits of intellectuality, transcendent spirit and autonomous will," and that women possess "the contrary traits of bodiliness, sensuality and subjugation."¹⁰³

¹⁰²Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 117.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 116.

For Ruether, sexism itself is evil. Since sexism is the oldest and most pervasive form of human oppression she interprets it as "a primal expression of human fallenness."¹⁰⁴ It is entwined into the very fabric of our existence. Language and symbols incorporate sexism into every means of communication. All human beings, male and female, are conditioned by sexism even from before birth. All choices are biased by this cultural conditioning. Sexism is both individual and systemic. As historian and theologian, Ruether has traced this sexism throughout the history of Christianity demonstrating the intertwining of sexism into the very inner logic of Christianity. Fundamentally, for Ruether, sexism produces a hierarchical relationship between men and women that is based on inauthenticity. It is inauthenticity that Ruether aligns with evil: "[e]vil comes about precisely by the distortion of the self-other relationship into the good-evil, superior-inferior dualism."¹⁰⁵ Distorted relationships, manifested in projection of evil onto women and the exploitation of women, are so entrenched in our education, our socialization and our socioeconomic and political structures, that the feminist task of addressing this problem is wrought with problems.

Yet, characteristically, it is in the almost hopeless situation of the evil of sexism that Ruether discovers a means of possible conversion. The myths we use to understand how evil "began" or "came into the world" demonstrate the human capacity to imagine something other than the reality at hand. The drive within the human person toward the transcendent dimension of existence - the potential good that is imagined but not experienced - results in a polarity between what is and what could be. On the one hand, there is the underlying cause

¹⁰⁴As quoted in Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 76.

¹⁰⁵*Sexism and God-Talk*, 163.

of the subject-object duality that the human person experiences in relation to what is other than herself or himself. How this has been lived out in the history of humanity has more often than not been one of domination and exploitation. The victims of this domination and exploitation, more than any other group, have been women (even though Ruether understands well the interconnectedness between every kind of domination and exploitation - racism, antisemitism, exploitation of the earth's resources, etc.) In addition to this, the capacity to project onto the other the evil or dark side of oneself has resulted in horrendous cruelty of human beings to other human beings. There is a point where the exploitation no longer serves *only* the *self interest* of the dominant group. It becomes an irrational, hysterical and violent fight against what is perceived as evil. On the other hand, in terms of the polarity, the capacity of the human person to imagine alternatives is the very condition for the possibility of escaping a deterministic reading of reality. This capacity facilitates the possibility of moving beyond the condition of "what is." As Ruether states,

In spite of the reality of systemic evil which we inherit, which has already biased us before we can choose, we have not lost our ability to choose good rather than evil, and hence our capacity for responsibility.¹⁰⁶

The dialectic between these two poles is the precise point where Ruether sees hope for overcoming sexism. Rather than continuing to name evil as "other," for example "males are evil," Ruether insists that the very false naming of evil, the projection of evil and the exploitation of those considered evil, is the true naming of evil.¹⁰⁷ So, as indicated above, it

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 182.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 163.

is the "distortion of the self-other relationship into the good-evil, superior-inferior dualism"¹⁰⁸ that defines evil.

Consequently, for Ruether, the only means to begin to overcome the original evil of sexism is through a conversion to relationality. Conversion, for Ruether, means "a *metanoia*, or 'change of mind,'" but in a specific context. It refers to "the dialectics of human existence" converting "from opposites into mutual interdependence."¹⁰⁹ For Ruether, the recognition of sexism as sinful and evil is the first step in recognizing women as equivalent and not as "other." The myth of female evil crumbles in face of this realization. Women are full human beings just as men are full human beings. Concurrently, reducing women to an evil and inferior status reduces men as well from their potential as relational human beings.

Ruether does not see the "complementarity" theory of John Paul II, evidenced in his August 1988 statement on the "Dignity and Vocation of Women", as a solution to misogyny and marginalization of women. Rather, it actually enhances the problem. It continues to divide "males and females into two opposite psycho-symbolic ontologies."¹¹⁰ Thus, it destroys authentic "I-Thou" relationships between two people who are both equal and fully human, not one half of some undefinable aberration of the human person. Genuine communication calls for fully autonomous, individuated selves. Sexism, whether under the

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 163.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 163.

¹¹⁰Rosemary Ruether, "Women's Difference and Equal Rights in the Church," *Concilium* 6 (1991) : 13.

guise of an anthropology of complementarity or "God's divinely ordained plan"¹¹¹ manifests itself in a denial of women's rights to control their own bodies and in the limiting of women to a preordained identity and subsequent role in society.

The sins of sexism, (violence, hierarchical and anticomunitarian bias to name the most obvious) as mentioned above are both systemic and individual. Consequently, for Ruether, there are two aspects of evil. On the one hand, there is indeed an aspect of evil that is so pervasive that we are *predisposed* to choose evil rather than good. Yet, on the other hand, choice is never obliterated. Ruether walks a fine line between wanting to exonerate women from being blamed for the "Fall" without dismissing the theology of the "Fall" entirely. Ruether wants to avoid the trap of reversal in positing that males, by nature, are evil or are to blame for all evil in the world. Nor does she wish to adopt the romantic view that we can return to a paradisiacal time when there was no evil.¹¹² Ruether's endeavour is to expose the human person's culpability for evil and his or her responsibility in face of that culpability. Although sexism is the oldest and most pervasive form of evil, she does not see it as the *only* form, nor does she see males as the only culprits. Women are culpable also. It is only when human beings, men and women, accept responsibility for the evil that exists in the world that steps can begin to be taken to address it.

¹¹¹This can be witnessed in the backlash that feminists, especially within Christianity, are experiencing from right-wing, neoconservative groups.

¹¹²Ruether's position is in contradistinction to tendencies in the thought of some feminists, for example, Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess," *Woman-Spirit Rising: A Feminist Reader on Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 273-287; Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminist* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); and Naomi R. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

Thus, in spite of the reality of systemic evil which we inherit, which has already biased us before we can choose, we have not lost our ability to choose good rather than evil, and hence our capacity for responsibility. We can unmask sexism as sin. We can disaffiliate with it. We can begin to shape at least our personal identity and then our more immediate relationships with others in a new way.¹¹³

4.2.3 Feminist Theological Reconstruction

Both the starting point and the end point of Ruether's attempts at a feminist theological reconstruction is her understanding of the divine. God/ess, Ruether's unpronounceable word for "that yet unnameable understanding of the divine",¹¹⁴ signals the possibility of a transformation. Human beings have the potential for authenticity and creativity. Authenticity refers to a willingness and capacity to be grounded in our existence. God/ess is the ground of all being, the matrix of existence. God/ess can be compared to a womb from which all life was shaped and came into existence. In being authentic, the human person aligns himself or herself to that ground and matrix of all being. This amounts to being true to who we are. In their creative potential, human beings are able to transcend the givenness of life and strive toward new possibilities. Yet this striving is not an alienation from our groundedness in matter. It is a striving for *redeemed* possibilities, that is, possibilities that are interconnected with our condition as material beings in a material world. Hence, metaphorically, God/ess calls us both back to ourselves and forward to ourselves. The call is never one of alienation from ourselves or from any other being. Being authentic and creative depends on relationality. We are only able to be authentic and creative if we are in

¹¹³Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 182.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 46.

relationship with others - other human beings or other beings of creation. Rather than the alienation from self, others and the world that is brought about through domination and exploitation, we are called to a harmonization with our bodies, with others, and with the world. We are called to this harmony by an experience of the divine. To draw from another spacial metaphor, the God/ess is the centre point of spirit and matter, holding in dialectical tension these two aspects of the human person without denying or repressing either. The God of Exodus continues to liberate. It is a liberation that enables us to live the dialectical condition of our existence in harmony with all of creation. As Ruether states,

The God/ess who is the foundation (at one and the same time) of our being and our new being embraces both the roots of the material substratum of our existence (matter) and also the endlessly new creative potential (spirit).¹¹⁵

For Ruether, spirit and matter are "the inside and the outside of the same thing," they "are not dichotomized."¹¹⁶ Given that all existence is made up of energy, that what is visible is in fact particles of energy interrelating with other particles of energy, the distinction between matter and spirit quickly fades. This energy, which makes up all living beings, surpasses individual egos. Rather, it makes us relational beings. We do not enter *into* relations, we *are* relational. For Ruether, being relational is the core of our identity as living beings. The patterns and interrelationship which make up all energy is the undercurrent of the patterns and interrelationship of all life - it *is* life, there is no distinction.

For Ruether, we are called, as relational beings, to recognize our relationship not only with our fellow human beings, but with all of creation and with all matter including, and

¹¹⁵Ibid., 70-71.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 85.

perhaps especially, the earth. The interconnectedness of all living beings means that alienation at any level has ramifications on all life. This becomes abundantly clear not only at the level of relations between human beings but, perhaps even more so, when we consider the growing ecological crisis. Domination and exploitation of the earth continues to have irreversible effects. For Ruether, only a conversion to mutuality and relationality will address the crisis and, hopefully, save humanity and all of creation from ultimate destruction.

The interconnectedness of all living creatures and relationality as the authenticizing human capacity create, for Ruether, a ripple effect at every level of human existence. The Church, ministry, liturgy, as well as socioeconomic society, are transformed through the authentic, creative potential of human persons. Ruether's vision of an inclusive humanity, encompassing not only women but all social groups and all races, demands an ongoing, ever expanding process. The creation of a new society liberated from sexism, as well as from all other forms of domination and exploitation, can not be imagined as a static reality. It must be imagined as a continuous process with no fixed ending. It is not a "once and for all" occurrence. Rather, liberation and creativity are ongoing and will be experienced and expressed differently as each new generation emerges. However, again, it is not an infinite open-endedness unconnected with our materiality and our finiteness. As Ruether states, "Nature itself is historical. The universe is a great being that is born, grows, and presumably will die."¹¹⁷ Ruether does not want to risk the temptation of positing an infinity cut off from the finite condition of our materiality. For Ruether, this split is the root cause of domination and alienation.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 86.

Conversion to relationality is the true meaning of redemption. Conversion takes place both at an individual and a societal level. There is an "unbreakable dialectic" between the self and society.¹¹⁸ Socioeconomic humanization results only from the dialectical relationship between a redeemed self and a redeemed society. One does not create the other, both must exist concurrently. Similarly, a redeemed ministry becomes one of mutual empowerment not hierarchical clericalism. Yet without an initial conversion of both individuals and the community, a conversion that primarily encompasses a liberation from sexism, any attempt to reform ministry is fruitless. The Church, as the community of the people of God/ess, may initially take the form of autonomous feminist base communities. These base communities could act as the necessary "other side" in a creative dialectic with the historical Church. Rather than creating a schism or permanent divide, there remains a space between the two where dialogue can take place. At the same time, the feminist base communities act as the needed support for both women and men who seek liberation from sexism but who do not want to sever all ties with their historical Church. The base communities support and renew those who take seriously their responsibility in light of sin and suffering in the institutional Church.

Only by this creative dialectic between renewal community and historical institution is the Church regenerated by the Spirit within history. This is the inescapable paradox of living in the liberating community within the framework of historical existence.¹¹⁹

The feminist base communities help women as they become aware of the pervasiveness of sexism. These communities affirm women in their pursuit of liberation from sexism. They

¹¹⁸Ibid., 216.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 206.

ground women in their relational selves and hence, give them the courage and strength to explore creative alternatives to sexism. They also help women face their own limitations. Conversion for women is manifested in a basic self-esteem. Women need to experience their own self-worth in order to have a solid base as they challenge the "status quo" of the institutional Church and society at large. It is also needed in order that they may face their own complicity in sexism, whatever form that may take. Women need to avoid the dual temptation of either buying into male individualism with its egoistic self or completely cutting themselves off from the "male" world. Women must "affirm instead the 'grounded self' which is related to others and to mutual service."¹²⁰ Men also must be converted. Women's conversion alone is not enough to overcome sexism. Ruether acknowledges that, as female, she cannot contribute to an understanding of "interior" male conversion. Rather, she points to exterior signs of conversion that are needed. Men also need to be grounded in their authentic selves in order to throw off sexist attitudes such as "'pride' in masculinity that oppresses women."¹²¹ They must also have the courage to face the terror of ridicule from other men. It is men's "fear of loss of male status" that oppresses them and causes them to oppress each other.¹²²

Thus, Rosemary Ruether envisions a new society embracing gender justice. Gender justice in turn leads to liberation from all forms of domination and exploitation. Yet ironically, it emerges from the very domination and exploitation that brought it about. The passion for

¹²⁰Ibid., 188.

¹²¹Ibid., 191.

¹²²Ibid., 191.

justice which emerges from a depth of consciousness within the converted person is itself the beginning of a new creation.¹²³ For Ruether, the question is always, what can be salvaged to act as "fertilizer for new life?"¹²⁴ Reaching for an inclusive humanity, with all the revolutionary meaning that involves, corresponds to prophetic faithfulness to the word and justice of God/ess. The fuller divinity to which Ruether's feminist theology points also envisions a fuller humanity. This is a humanity made up of converted individuals encompassing "full and equivalent human nature[s]"¹²⁵ calling for nothing less than a social revolution. For Ruether, a nonsexist world, devoid of exploitation and domination has not been realized because there is still not sufficient numbers of converted individuals to create an effective collective power. Yet, Ruether believes that this nonsexist, liberated society is possible because she believes in an essential goodness in humanity. Deep in the psyche of all human beings there exists an image of a just and redeemed world that we are striving to accomplish. She justifies her belief in this original goodness through humanity's link with nature. Living in relationality and mutuality is our true existence. Living as isolated egos in a flight to an unrealizable future is an aberration of our true existence. It is alienation from our bodies, from other human beings and from the world. To create and live in a just society requires, for Ruether, some basic ingredients;

acceptance of finitude, human scale, and balanced relationships between persons and between human and non-human beings. These ingredients can be expressed in many variants and cultures, adapted to different environments. They include a human scale of habitats and communities, an ability of people

¹²³Sands, *Escape from Paradise*, 71.

¹²⁴Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, xix.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 111.

to participate in the decisions that govern their lives, work in which everyone can integrate intelligence and creativity with physical participation, a just sharing of profits and benefits of production, an interpenetration of work and celebration, a balance of rural and urban environments.¹²⁶

4.3 Conclusion

Rosemary Ruether's feminist theology attempts to overcome the deep divisions endemic to patriarchy. The divisions between a human person and his or her body, between men and women, and between humanity and the earth are, Ruether admits, pervasive and deeply carved into our psyches. Ruether's underlying faith in the goodness of humanity allows her to remain hopeful in face of a somewhat dismal reality. Frederick Sontag's article, "Crucifixion & Realized Eschatology: A Critique of Some Proposals Concerning Feminist Theology,"¹²⁷ levels six, interrelated critiques at Ruether's feminist theology. These critiques serve as a point of departure in identifying an underlying limitation in Ruether's effort. First of all, Sontag is critical of Ruether's choice to remain linked to institutional structures. History demonstrates that institutions corrupt and any attempt at social reformation sooner or later fails. Second, Sontag is sceptical about Ruether's optimism concerning the "coming of the kingdom" here and now. Again, history reveals other courageous attempts that failed. (For Sontag, the Gospel message of Jesus [and his mission] is perhaps the best example.) Third, Ruether's vision of an egalitarian world free of hierarchies "runs up against the contradiction of a God who created all the divisions we now face, including male and female."¹²⁸ Is

¹²⁶Ibid., 254.

¹²⁷Frederick Sontag, "Crucifixion & Realized Eschatology: A Critique of Some Proposals Concerning Feminist Theology," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 4 (April 1990) : 66-73.

¹²⁸Ibid., 69.

Ruether's attempt at sketching an ideal world contrary to the human condition? Is Ruether's vision based on the false premise that division is not our original condition? Fourth, what will prevent Ruether's new communities from eventually adopting the "will to power" tendency that seems to rise up when any group begins to affect influence? Fifth, what "power" can Ruether appeal to which will enable her communities to bring about a new humanity based on mutuality? Will this be sufficient to dissolve deeply entrenched divisions? Finally, has Ruether sufficiently grappled with the pervasive nature of evil? As Sontag puts it, "[s]omehow evil and sin and destruction have all magically been banished by her decree."¹²⁹ Sontag's critiques are pessimistic in face of Ruether's continued optimism yet they assist us in identifying the limit-situation¹³⁰ of Ruether's feminist theology. There is a common thread which links each critique and ties in directly to the key limitation of Ruether's entire corpus.¹³¹ Sontag is focusing on the deep underlying patterns of existence which continue to alienate human beings - as Ruether knows - from themselves, from each other and from the world. Sontag is correct in that Ruether has not identified that pattern and hence, as appealing as her arguments may be, falls short of offering a corrective to these deep patterns in the relations

¹²⁹Ibid., 72.

¹³⁰The limit-situation refers to a moment or situation in the existence of a human person where he or she comes to the boundaries of his or her existence. (See footnote 49 above.) Ruether's persistent and extensive critique of patriarchy takes us to this limit-situation. She exposes a pervasive bias which underlies our way of understanding the world. Ruether consciously seeks transcendence in this situation. However, as Sontag has suggested somewhat indirectly, and as I will argue, Ruether has not gone far enough. I suggest that the work of Julia Kristeva will push this limit-situation irrevocably and, in so doing, will clearly reveal why Ruether's analysis falls short.

¹³¹In the next section (5), "Summary and Critique of Current Contributions," the limits of Ruether's work are discussed further.

of alienation and domination. Ruether has attempted to walk the fine line between the bipolar arguments identified at the beginning of this chapter. That is, the polarization between the temptation to completely transcend the body, on the one hand, and to excessively identify the human person with his or her body, on the other hand. In fact, Ruether, in her expansive analysis, has accomplished a great deal more than most. Yet there remains the limit-situation (hinted at but not identified by Sontag either). It is precisely this limit-situation that will guide our journey through the psychoanalytic and linguistic work of Julia Kristeva. In the final chapter, the limit-situation will come into focus as the point of meeting between Ruether and Kristeva and will figure into what each has to contribute to the other.

5. Summary and Critique of Current Contributions

The purpose of the preceding analysis is to elaborate briefly a progression of responses to the polarization between privileging the body and transcending the body when one addresses ethical issues concerning embodiment. I initially explored three, what I consider, progressively differentiated levels of the discussion. The first level, that of Naomi Goldenberg and Carol Christ, offers theories that overtly privilege that physicalist pole bracketing out the transcendent dimension. The second level continues to privilege the body but in a less extreme manner. That is, Nelson, Cooley and Ross posit that the body determines experience yet each acknowledge the role of the other pole. Cahill, Miles and Dinter, representing the third level, offer a much more differentiated approach than the prior levels. They recognize the problematic tension between the two poles and consciously seek to move beyond the either/or scenario. However, they approach the problem in a straightforward

manner that fails to probe its complexity. This led to a second stage, a concentration on Ruether's work. Ruether probes the complexity. It is for this reason that her work is considered more extensively. Ruether, as witnessed in her intrinsically "dialectical" method, understands the importance of the dialectical relationship between the dominant and the repressed within any theory. She consciously seeks to "resurrect" the repressed. Further, Ruether sees the immense importance of psychoanalysis in unmasking *unconscious* factors in sexism. She speaks of the "irrationality" of sexism. Ruether understands deeply the need for uncovering the bias that operates within patriarchal societies. She advocates the need of a conversion both at an individual level and at an institutional level. Thus, Ruether's deeper probing of the complexity of the mind-body relationship and some of its more irrational aspects, in my view, points the way to Kristeva's contribution. It is, in fact, the *limits* within Ruether's work that act as a vector to Kristeva's work. This is so at two levels. i) Ruether's extensive critique of the patriarchal order offers a penetrating view of the pervasiveness of sexism and sexism's culpability in current attitudes toward the body.

The reason why sexism is the "last cause" is doubtless because its stereotypes are older and deeper in our culture than any other. . . . The psychic organization of consciousness, the dualistic view of the self and the world, the hierarchical concept of society, the relation of humanity and nature, and of God and creation - all these relationships have been modeled on sexual dualism.¹³²

ii) Ruether's analysis, due to its far-reaching and extensive inquiry, affords a discovery of the limits of the current approaches to the significance of the body in ethical discourse. Ruether is motivated in all her works by a desire to understand the ubiquitousness of sexism. Her

¹³²Rosemary Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 3.

analyses penetrate a wide variety of diverse fields in order to untangle the web of bias and allow space for the alternative of an egalitarian and communitarian vision encompassing an ecologically balanced world. Ruether's limits appear in her failure to understand "the relations of alienation and domination - between self and body, between leaders and community, between person and person, between social groups, between Church and world, between humanity and nature."¹³³ Ruether describes these relations keenly and attempts to lay out alternatives that are not fashioned on a hierarchal model but on systems which are mutually cooperative and mutually supportive - systems which bring together in harmony and wholeness, rather than accentuate divisions between higher and lower. However, Ruether's demonstration of the pervasive nature of sexism fails on two counts. First, she fails to uncover the roots of a problem which leaves her in the vulnerable position of falling prey to the problem (in a different disguise) herself. Ruether's analysis of patriarchal systems and her critique of dualistic thinking leading to alienation and domination have not gone far enough in explaining the pervasiveness of the devaluation of women and the devaluation of the body. In other words, Ruether grasps well the closed off options for women within the existing order. What she does not develop further is *why* this is so. Second, what tools can women rely on if "nothing can be said that is authentic to woman herself in patriarchal culture," and when "women in patriarchal societies do not exist as themselves, but as cultural and ideological creations of male domination"?¹³⁴ Ruether, in her relentless effort to identify the evils of patriarchy, significantly restricts women's options. Ruether's attempts to move beyond

¹³³Ibid., 83.

¹³⁴Ibid., 148.

the existing order through the "primary intuitions of religious experience itself"¹³⁵ present a precarious foundation and expose significant limits to her analysis. I suggest that these examples of the limits within the work of Ruether point us to the importance of Kristeva's contribution. The levels of progressively differentiated responses with the eventual (and needed) probing of the complexity of the mind-body relationship found in Ruether's work, in my view, call for the deeper analysis of Kristeva's psychoanalytic and linguistic theory.

6. Kristeva's Thesis

Julia Kristeva understands the body psychoanalytically as instincts, drives and needs. In the beginning, the human person is *only* instincts, drives and needs but he or she gradually develops in conjunction with the psyche and the intellect. Yet, that completely bodily realm is not left behind as a person develops. Rather, it continues to circulate beneath the psyche and the intellect and continues to produce an effect on them. Kristeva speaks both of the language of the body or the body's imprint in language and also of the "place" of the body - that is, outside language. For Kristeva, the body is the *place* where we "are" as speaking beings; it is the place of the material support of the language of communication yet it remains forever outside language. The body can never be represented. This phenomenology of the body stems from Kristeva's analysis of the completely bodily relationship between the mother and the child at the very origins of the child's existence. It is that original and completely bodily relationship that is the nucleus, for Kristeva, in understanding our attitude toward the body at an individual level and a cultural level.

¹³⁵Rosemary Ruether, "The Future of Feminist Theology in the Academy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (Fall 1983) : 710.

Kristeva describes the human person or the experience of the human person in such a way as to unearth a deep, pervasive dialectic that constitutes the very foundation of what it means to be a "speaking subject." Kristeva, drawing on Freud and Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud, sees the dialectic within the human person as between what she terms the "semiotic" process and the "symbolic" process. The mature human person embodies these two processes. The dialectic between them occasions the speaking subject. Kristeva equates the semiotic process with the infantile experience that is pre-subject/object; before the child differentiates between itself and its mother. But, as has already been mentioned, unlike most theories in child development, this "infantile" stage is not left behind as the child becomes a speaking subject. Rather, the semiotic process engages in a dialectical relationship with the symbolic process. In terms of child development, the symbolic process emerges with the entrance of a "third" to disrupt the undifferentiated experience (from the child's perspective) of the mother-child relationship. The "third," although not necessarily restricted to the father, signifies the paternal function. The beginning of differentiation is the beginning of language. It is a time in the child's development that signifies a repression of the undifferentiated maternal relationship where all drives and needs are given full reign. It is a time that signifies the emergence of the initial stages of the formation of the child's identity. That is, it signifies the possibility and capacity of the child, in being a speaking subject, to become an "I" - one who distinguishes between "I" and "other" through language. Thus, the symbolic refers to the restraints put on the child through "the establishment of sign and syntax" of "grammatical and social constraints."¹³⁶ For Kristeva, this deep underlying structure is what constitutes the

¹³⁶Leon S. Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 7.

speaking subject. Consequently, Kristeva would define the speaking subject as a "split subject." For Kristeva, even though the repression of the semiotic or maternal relationship is absolutely necessary for the human person to have an identity, we *must* be aware of the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and symbolic. If we, as individuals and societies, repress one or the other of these two processes which constitute who we are, it can lead to psychotic or totalitarian states.¹³⁷

The repression of the maternal entity is the necessary split that Kristeva writes of when she refers to the human person as a "split subject." It is not something particular to women or to men. Rather, it is the necessary condition of becoming an autonomous speaking subject, whether male or female. It is the necessary condition of "having" an identity. Kristeva's goal in her exploration of the "split subject" is to bring to the surface that which has been lost; that which will and *must*, according to her theory, always be lost, always be a *loss*: the missing mother. Kristeva, like Ruether, maps out an "impossible" situation. Yet Kristeva sketches a situation infinitely more irrevocable than Ruether. Kristeva is clearer on the fact that it *is* irrevocable. She is clearer that it is *necessarily* so and *why* it is so. Still, it is precisely within Kristeva's sketch of the deep roots of the repression of the maternal body at the very foundation of the formation of identity that her contribution to understanding the significance of the body in ethical discourse lies. Ruether does not push her analysis as deeply as Kristeva. Ruether demonstrates her understanding of the pervasiveness of the patriarchal order when she admits that "nothing can be said that is authentic to woman herself in patriarchal

¹³⁷ Why this is so will be clarified in the subsequent chapters (two, three, and four) dealing with Kristeva's work. For now, the purpose of this section is to indicate the importance of Kristeva's work vis-a-vis the discussion at hand.

culture."¹³⁸ Yet Kristeva demonstrates *why* this is so in a manner more extensive and more definitive than Ruether. It is my contention that, for precisely this reason, Ruether will never be able to deliver what she hopes for, "a nonsexist society . . . created where women are recognized as full human persons."¹³⁹ Kristeva's ethical project lies in allowing for an "inbetween" space that reveals "meaning's doubleness, its unnamable, its unspeakable - its grounding in the unsignifiable."¹⁴⁰ For Kristeva, it is only in this inbetween space that ethics and, hence transformation, can truly take place. For, it is here that the subject is able to take distance from inherited systems of thought and ways of understanding that "have been and continue to be complicitous with our ways of oppressing."¹⁴¹

7. Conclusion to Chapter One

In this chapter I outline a series of progressively deeper interpretations revolving around a topic I identify as the significance of the body in ethical discourse. The central difficulty in addressing ethical issues which concern the body (ordination of women, abortion, violence against women, etc.) is an inability to get beyond the polarity between an excessive

¹³⁸Ruether, *New Woman, New Earth*. I am referring here to Ruether's belief, as I quoted earlier, that "women in patriarchal societies do not exist as themselves, but as cultural and ideological creations of male domination." (148) Therefore, for Ruether, it is only women, in this particular sense, who are limited by patriarchal culture. Men, in this sense, would not be "cultural and ideological creations of male domination." (148)

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁴⁰Alice Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 111.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 99.

privileging of the body (physicalism) and an excessive transcending of the body (idealism). The polarity results from the pervasive mind-body dualism that continues to influence how human beings think about themselves and the world. It emerges in those reacting to Christianity's androcentric bias. It emerges also in those responding to critiques raised by feminist theology against the androcentric bias brought about by the inherent dualism in Christian theology.

Initially I consider the work of Naomi Goldenberg and Carol Christ. They are representative of a group of feminist theologians who, in order to combat misogyny and androcentricism, have turned to Goddess religions and earth-centered theologies. Their effort does not work through the problem as much as counter the problem with a response that ends up being, in my view, a reversal. They attempt to do away with the dualism and the subsequent hierarchy by returning to a primal existence prior to the inauguration of dualism. Nature and the body are the litmus test by which all else is measured. They are the nexus of all reality. I identify these feminist theologians as part of the physicalist pole. I next consider the work of three Christian ethicists who struggle with the problems Goldenberg and Christ identify yet, in privileging the body, do not bracket out the transcendent dimension. Thus, while still privileging the body, they offer a more moderate approach which avoids the problem of reversal. I next examine the work of three Christian ethicists who make a conscious attempt to move beyond the polarity. They shift to a deeper level in their response. They address the polarity in a more nuanced manner. Yet, in my view, they are unable to move beyond the polarity in any significant manner. They advance our understanding of the various aspects of the problems. However, they do not succeed in offering a viable corrective because they fail to probe its complexity.

There are several reasons for my extensive exploration of Ruether's work. First of all, Ruether is the only feminist theologian and ethicist who has worked out a systematic critique and reconstruction of Christian theology. This is particularly evident in her book *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*. Drawing from that book and from other works (produced over the span of Ruether's thirty-year academic career), I outline Ruether's comprehensive and thought-provoking theory. This facilitates my aim to demonstrate how, with Ruether, we again shift levels. Ruether's work goes well beyond that of the eight authors whose work is summarized earlier. She is thorough in her analysis of the problem of sexism in the Church. She works through both sides of the issue in her effort to find a balance beyond extreme representations of the mind-body dualism. Yet, despite Ruether's thoroughness, there are nagging questions she leaves unanswered. Stephen Sontag addresses some of these questions in his critique of Ruether's work. His questions can be summarized as follows. What guarantee can Ruether give that her theology will not fall prey to the same problems that she critiques in patriarchy? Sontag's critique is justified, I think, because Ruether does not sufficiently demonstrate an understanding of the roots of the "evil" (sexism, in particular, and domination and alienation in general) she attempts to overcome. It is my hypothesis that Kristeva's work gives us the needed insight into the deep, primal roots of the "evil." Thus, we shift levels again with Kristeva's work. I hope to show that Kristeva's work responds to the questions left unanswered in Ruether. These unanswered questions concern Ruether's dialectical methodology, her presentation of the "image of woman" in the church, her presentation of links between women and evil in Christian theology and her own understanding of evil, and finally, her feminist theological reconstruction. Each of these aspects of Ruether's thought links us to Kristeva. In my view, Kristeva's work takes up where

Ruether leaves off. Kristeva does not address these issues in an overt manner. Yet I believe they appear in Kristeva's work. They emerge because there is a common thread that links Ruether and Kristeva. Kristeva, in her penetrating psychoanalytic analysis, extends that thread well beyond Ruether. The "thread" that Kristeva takes further revolves around questions of *why* a dialectical method is utterly essential in unravelling the complexity of the evil Ruether addresses. It involves an understanding of the underlying, preconscious motivation behind the way women have been imaged in the Church, of the juxtaposition of women and evil, and of the preconscious realm that will inevitably sabotage Ruether's attempts of reconstruction as long as they remain unexplored. These are the questions that Ruether's work leaves undone. It is my hypothesis that as we examine specific elements of Kristeva's work these questions will be addressed in a manner that advances our understanding significantly. Along with this, in the following chapters I will explore Kristeva's work with the goal of addressing two additional and related questions. The first concerns ethics. Does Kristeva's work provide a way of working out a relationship between bodily experience and psychic activity that does not fall prey to either of the two poles I have identified above? The goal of chapter four will be to answer this question. The second question relates to theological ethics. Can Kristeva's work contribute to theology in spite of her explicit critique of theology? I believe it can. I have indicated this in my introduction. Significantly, it is in dialogue with Ruether that I believe Kristeva's contribution to theology emerges. Demonstrating this is the goal of chapter five. First the background to Kristeva's thinking and her methodology need to be explicated. This is the goal of chapters two and three.

Chapter Two

The Trajectory of Kristeva's Thought: 1966-1996

1. Introduction

When Julia Kristeva arrived in Paris in late 1965 her background and sensibility allowed her to mix easily with the contemporary French intellectual scene. As a native of the Eastern European country of Bulgaria, where religious interests were restricted and politics dogmatic, Kristeva, along with many children, grew up with an active interest in art and literature. She was brought up in a middle-class family. Her father was an intellectual, a distinguished scholar, according to Leon S. Roudiez.¹ Although her early education (prior to the eviction of foreign religious from Bulgaria) was from French nuns, she eventually would belong to the Communist Party children's groups and, later, party youth organizations. During her university years in Bulgaria she worked on a communist youth newspaper. Kristeva's literary studies exposed her to the traditional styles of French literature acceptable to Marxist-Leninism (Victor Hugo, Voltaire, Anatole France) but her own private interest also encompassed such authors as Céline and Maurice Blanchot (considered corrupt in the eyes of Communist censors.) Hence, with a background in literary criticism and Marxist-Leninism, Kristeva fit well into the Parisian intellectual world of the latter half of the 1960's, where Russian formalism via Claude Levi-Strauss, a revival of Marxism, and a renewal of psychoanalysis, via Jacques Lacan, dominated and coexisted. Still, it was Kristeva's "difference", her inability to "fit in" which influenced dramatically the path she would take in the years to follow - over three decades of an impressive number of important and

¹Leon S. Roudiez, "Introduction" in Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), x.

influential works.

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate both these similarities and differences. This will be done by considering three areas simultaneously: the context or milieu of Kristeva's writings; those who influenced Kristeva most directly; and the trajectory Kristeva's thought takes in the more than thirty years since her arrival in Paris. It seems that in tackling these three areas simultaneously, a truer reading of Kristeva's intellectual (and personal, to some extent as that plays an important role in each major shift in Kristeva's thinking) journey will appear, one that does not lose the important sense of fluidity in Kristeva's thought and which may not be conveyed if each of these areas is considered independently. It will also, I believe, allow a central concern to emerge amid the broad and eclectic routes Kristeva's thought takes.

Various interpreters of Kristeva's work have identified distinctive periods where specific interests and concerns have influenced Kristeva more than others. For example, Alice Jardine presents "three Kristeva's:" Kristeva of the 60's, Kristeva of the 70's and Kristeva of the 80's.² Briefly, the Kristeva of the 60's develops her important methodology which she terms "semanalysis." This methodology springs from the more traditional science of semiotics, but purposely goes beyond semiotic's idealistic foundation which presupposes the existence of a rational system prior to the subject. It focuses on the materiality of language, the sounds and rhythms of words, the form of texts, their articulation and style. Kristeva of the 70's is searching for a discourse. She is searching for a way to describe that which has been repressed throughout Western history and marginalized to the extremes of totalitarianism and

²Alice Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 96-116.

psychosis. Finally, Kristeva of the 80's delves more deeply into psychoanalytic interpretation - of abjection, of the (impossible, allusive) language of love and of melancholy - attempting to say what is not being said. John Lechte³ basically concurs with Jardine although with slight variations. He also sees three periods of Kristeva's intellectual trajectory: the writings of the 1960's and early 1970's where Kristeva outlines her theory of semiotics; the writings of the later 1970's with their focus on the "speaking subject"; and the more psychoanalytic writings of the 1980's. Others attempt to interpret Kristeva via the *themes* of her texts, for example, Kelly Oliver⁴ and Leon S. Roudiez.⁵ This is also true of Toril Moi,⁶ although she follows a more chronological approach in attempting to explicate Kristeva's thought. These mainline interpreters of Kristeva's work offer important insights. Thus, they are important sources for presenting, in this second chapter, a broad survey of Kristeva's work. The goal of this survey is to highlight the historical roots and foundations of Kristeva's thought. It is to follow the trajectory of her thought over the past thirty years.

In order to accomplish this task and following others (mentioned above), four identifiable periods in Kristeva's work will be presented. The first to be considered will be the years that led to the completion of Kristeva's doctoral studies and the publication of her

³John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁵See Leon S. Roudiez, "Introduction" in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 1-20 and Roudiez, "Introduction," *Nations Without Nationalism*, ix-xii.

⁶See Toril Moi, "Introduction" in Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 1-22.

monumental work dealing with linguistics and semiology, *La révolution du langage poétique*⁷. This will include a consideration of the most significant influences impacting Kristeva's thought: the Russian discourse-theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, semiologist Roland Barthes (Kristeva's most important teacher), French linguist Emile Benveniste, the avant-garde writer Georges Bataille, and French psychoanalyst and intellectual Jacques Lacan. The completion of *La révolution* saw a shift in Kristeva's writing away from her rigid and severely academic style to a more personal style marked by significant events in her life. Kristeva's focus during this second period (from approximately 1974 to 1980) accented her awareness of the limitations of political involvement, her interest in the phenomenon of motherhood (with the birth of her child), and her use of psychoanalysis with the completion of her training and the opening of her psychoanalytic practice. Major texts during this time include *Des chinoises*⁸ (1974) and *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*⁹ (1980). Two important essays during this period are "Stabat Mater"¹⁰ (1977) and "Le Temps des femmes"¹¹ (1979). A third period highlighted

⁷Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974). Translated as *Revolution in Poetic Language* by Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

⁸Julia Kristeva, *Des chinoises* (Paris: Editions des Femmes, 1974). Translated as *About Chinese Women* by Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, 1977).

⁹Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980). Translated as *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹⁰First published as "Hérétique de l'amour," *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977) : 30-49. Reprinted as "Stabat Mater," *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983). Translated as "Stabat Mater," *Tales of Love* by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

¹¹"Le Temps des femmes," originally published in 34/44: *Cahiers de recherche de sciences des textes et documents* 5 (Winter 1979) : 5-19. Translated as "Women's Time" by A. Jardine and H. Blake in *Signs* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1981) : 13-35.

Kristeva's specific focus on understanding the human psyche. *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* marked this shift followed by *Histoires d'amour* (1983), *Au commencement était l'amour*¹² (1987), and *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie*¹³ (1987). A fourth period, reveals Kristeva's turn back to political analysis with the tools of psychoanalysis and fiction. Her works, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*¹⁴ (1989), *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir*¹⁵ (1990), *Les Nouvelles maladies de l'ame*¹⁶ (1993), *Le Temps sensible. Proust et l'expérience littéraire*¹⁷ (1994) and her first novels *Les samourais*¹⁸ (1990) and *Le vieil homme et les loups*¹⁹ (1991) reflect this further

¹²Julia Kristeva, *Au commencement était l'amour: psychanalyse et foi* (Paris: Hachette, 1985). Translated as *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* by Author Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

¹³Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987). Translated as *Black Sun* by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

¹⁴Julia Kristeva, *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1989). Translated as *Strangers to Ourselves* by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

¹⁵Julia Kristeva, *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (Paris: Rivages, 1990). Translated as "Open Letter to Harlem Désir," *Nations Without Nationalism* by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

¹⁶Julia Kristeva, *Les nouvelles maladies de l'ame* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1993). Translated as *New Maladies of the Soul* by Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

¹⁷Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps sensible. Proust et l'expérience littéraire*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). Translated as *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* by Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

¹⁸Julia Kristeva, *Les samourais* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1990). Translated as *The Samurai: a Novel* by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

¹⁹Julia Kristeva, *Le vieil homme et les loups* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1991). Translated as *The Old Man and the Wolves* by Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

evolution.²⁰ I will end the chapter by considering various responses to Kristeva's work. I will look at what I consider to be the more extreme responses and the more balanced responses.

2. Four Stages

2.1 First Stage: The Bulgaria-Paris Transition: 1966 to 1974

Julia Kristeva spent the first twenty-five years of her life in the midst of Bulgarian culture and politics. Bulgaria is one of the Balkan states (that is, the countries of the Balkan Peninsula: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Rumania, the former Yugoslavia and the European part of Turkey). It is a country little known to the Western world and one which suffered a considerable amount of political violence in the aftermath of the first and second World Wars. Although only three years old, Kristeva was part of the politically adrift and disillusioned Bulgaria which emerged from the Second World War. She witnessed the subsequent seizure of political power by the Communist party under the surveillance and intervention of the Soviet Union. She grew up during a time when religion was systematically repressed and so to some extent was becoming subversive. It was a time when the terror of personal vendettas and political vengeance infiltrated the then dogmatic political realm. The outlets (often subversive) of art and literature at many levels absorbed the interests of the Bulgarian people. Kristeva lived also in the midst of a certain courageous resistance (both by the peasants and the intelligentsia) to the severe repression and isolation of the Chervenkov years when

²⁰Kristeva's most recent books include *Possessions* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1996). Translated as *Possessions* by Barbara Bray, forthcoming, 1998; *Sens et non-sens de la révolte* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1996); *Pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997) and *La Révolte intime: discours direct* (Paris: Librarie Arthème Fayard, 1997). These latest works may, in time, come to represent a shift to another stage.

Marxist-Leninism began to dominate all spheres of science and culture. It was a time when dissent and individuality were rapidly disappearing. After 1949, Kristeva would be one of the children educated in the newly remodelled education system (remodelled "in the spirit of socialism, proletarian internationalism, and indissoluble fraternal friendship with the Soviet Union."²¹) However, despite the severe repression, there remained a sense of creativity in Bulgaria and something of a transcultural spirit. Without a strong sense of national identity (due to the political upheaval of the twentieth century which has only recently [since the late 70's] shifted) there has been an openness to outside influence. There has been a spirit of receptiveness in the Bulgarian people that is severely lacking in Bulgaria's more insular neighbours such as Rumania. It is perhaps this window of openness that allowed Kristeva the space inside herself to be open to an infinite strangeness which beckoned her initially toward the infinite without (Kristeva originally had hoped for a career in astronomy or physics) and later (in her linguistic and psychoanalytic preoccupations) toward the infinite within. Her allusion to the finite between two infinities in her first novel *The Samurai* alludes to this realm of Kristeva's journey. "'Two infinities, one middle.' 'Nothing can define the finite between two infinities.' Is that a call for moderation? No - for the heartbreak of paradox!"²² Perhaps this is why Kristeva, at the age of twenty-five and as a result of her first encounter with the French journal *Tel Quel*, was "seduced" by a spirit that spoke to her deeper sensibility - that which

²¹R. J. Crampton, *A Short History of Modern Bulgaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 175.

²²Kristeva, *The Samurai*, 12. (In most cases I use the official English translations when quoting Kristeva's work. When the quote warrants it (mostly in chapter three with quotes from *Revolution in Poetic Language* and chapter four with quotes from *Powers of Horror*), I give the French citation in the footnote.

understood something of the importance of revolution (an infinite revolution) in the face of totalitarian limits.²³

Be that as it may, Kristeva's initial research as the recipient of a scholarship (under the auspices of a Franco-Bulgarian cultural agreement) in French literature *appeared* to be far from revolutionary as she investigated "the emergence of a different genre (or text) out of the interweaving of other preexisting genres (or strands of texts)."²⁴ France at the time of Kristeva's arrival was perhaps one of the few places on the globe that could contain the intensity of a Marxist revival, structuralism with the discovery of Russian Formalism via Claude Levi-Strauss, and a revival of psychoanalysis through Jacques Lacan's rereading of Freud. Kristeva describes this time as "a kind of intellectual turmoil, a sort of real theoretical fever. . . . It was a very, very rare conjunction."²⁵ Yet the rarity seemed to fit well with Kristeva. Perhaps her background enabled Kristeva to take in each of these theoretical fevers without needing to embrace one in particular. Nor did she find the intensity of all three intolerable. Ironically, shortly after her arrival in Paris, Kristeva would be pulled into each one. This was so, first of all, through her involvement with Philippe Sollers and the *Tel Quel* group with their sympathies to the socialist agenda. Second, she was pulled in through her position as a research assistant for Claude Levi-Strauss and by two of her most influential teachers, Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes. Kristeva was influenced by Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism (Kristeva attended Goldmann's seminar on the "sociology

²³Julia Kristeva, "Mémoire," *L'Infini* 1 (Winter 1983) : 48.

²⁴Leon Roudiez, "Translator's Introduction" in Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, x.

²⁵Julia Kristeva, "Two Interviews with Julia Kristeva," interview by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Perry Meisel, *Partisan Review* 51, no. 1 (1984) : 128.

of the novel" and Goldmann directed her thesis on the origins of novelistic discourse which she defended in 1968) and especially by literary theorist and philosopher, Roland Barthes' work in semiology. Finally, she became involved through her own sense of living in exile. This attracted her to Lacan's *Ecrits*. It pushed her to reflect on this painful condition which she came to see as more a part of her psychic structure than a sociological factor.²⁶ Kristeva's doctoral thesis, *La révolution du langage poétique*, emerged, ironically, as a different genre (semanalysis) out of the interweaving of these three factors and launched Kristeva's revolution after all.

2.1.1 *La révolution du langage poétique*: An Introduction

Although some of the themes of *La révolution* will be dealt with in much more detail in chapter three, it is necessary here to outline the main thesis of that impressive work which earned Kristeva a position in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Paris VII. *La révolution* made a major contribution to the analysis of the postmodern reality in which she found herself immersed in the Paris of the late 60's and early 70's. The strength of her work and the importance of her contribution stem directly from her rigorous and successful effort at developing a theory of the unspeakable, hence unrepresentable, dimension of language. Through her detailed analysis of a particular type of modern literature (Mallarmé, Lautrémont, Joyce and Artaud, for example) Kristeva perceives a signifying practice which, although produced *in* language, is only intelligible *through* language. This, for Kristeva, is the "poetic" dimension of language. It is the "materiality" of language, that is, the actual *physical* aspect of language (sounds, rhythms, combinations of letters) which underlies language's

²⁶Julia Kristeva, "An Interview with Julia Kristeva," interview by Edith Kurzwell, *Partisan Review* 53, no. 2 (1986) : 216.

capacity to convey a message. Conveying a message is the language of "transparency," that is, "when the work is forgotten for the sake of the object or concept designated."²⁷ In order to approach this unrepresentable dimension of language, Kristeva presents a dialectical relationship between what she terms the "symbolic" and the "semiotic." The semiotic, a reworking of Lacan's concept of the Imaginary, draws on an insight seen in Plato's *Timaeus* where Plato refers to the *chora* as "nourishing and maternal, not yet unified in an ordered whole . . ."²⁸ Drawing on Plato's insight, Kristeva describes the semiotic as pre-language. It is pre-linguistic, not in a chronological sense, but in the sense that it *underlies* language. The symbolic refers to signification, to identity, to the acquisition of language as meaning, as communication. Kristeva's "semanalysis" (the combination, in her work, of semiology and psychoanalysis) uncovers the speaking subject as a split subject - the semiotic and the symbolic constituting the split. The semiotic, or pre-verbal/pre-linguistic reality of the infant prior to its differentiation between itself and its mother, between "I" and "other", continues to irrupt into the symbolic creating a condition of continual movement, continual disruption. The speaking subject is always in process. He or she is always on trial. The speaking subject is never fixed, never far from the "loss" of "self" brought about by the semiotic. Referring to this process, Kristeva states,

This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society. Then - and only then - can it be jouissance and revolution.²⁹

²⁷Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language*, 5.

²⁸Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 17.

In chapter three of this thesis, further and more detailed elaboration will be given to *La révolution*, considered by many to be the hallmark of Kristeva's work. However, it is important to consider briefly the significant influences or contexts from which this monumental work emerged.

2.1.2 Mikhail Bakhtin

Julia Kristeva's study of the Russian thinker Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin is innovative and penetrating. Due to her rigorous training in Marxist theory and her fluency in Russian, Kristeva, along with her fellow Bulgarian Tzvetan Todorov, contributed significantly in bringing Bakhtin's original and seminal thought to the West.³⁰ In his work on language and literature, Bakhtin turns away from "theoretism" which attempts to explain human behaviour in abstract systems of thought. Rather, his writings embrace the acts of everyday life; the richness, particularity and complexity of everyday social life. Kristeva realized the originality in Bakhtin's synthesis of formalism and history and its much needed contribution to Russian Formalism. Bakhtin's writings express a suspicion of explanatory systems which attempt to finalize events and people's lives. He posits each person's "unfinalizability," "something is always left over - a 'surplus of humanness.'" ³¹ Kristeva is attracted to Bakhtin's focus on the subversive quality of the novel (subversive because of its ambivalence and dialogical character.) Her attraction is due to the potential of Bakhtin's writings to aid what she considered one of the fundamental problems facing contemporary semiotics - describing that

³⁰Kristeva's work from this initial period in Paris was eventually published in *Semeiotiké: Recherches pour une sémalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969) where she elaborates on Bakhtin's work, especially his dialogic theory of the novel.

³¹*The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 65.

"other logic" (other than the Aristotelian logic of science and philosophy) "without denaturing it."³² Bakhtin's dialogical approach to language (dialogism) insists that "dialogue is the only sphere possible for the life of language;" in fact, dialogism is inherent in language itself.³³ So, for Bakhtin, "truth" is not a series of propositions. Rather, "truth" is a conversation. Concomitantly, language is not a system to be studied. Language is a practice of discourse, a dialogue. This is especially demonstrated in the novel, and Kristeva emulates Bakhtin in directing much of her attention to a study of literature, particularly the novel.

Another important contribution which Kristeva drew from Bakhtin was the latter's examination of the notion of *carnival* or carnivalesque discourse.

The poetic word, poly-valent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture. Bakhtin was the first to study this logic, and he looked for its roots in *carnival*. Carnavalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law.³⁴

This analysis of carnival played an extremely important role in Kristeva's theory of the semiotic and the symbolic. For carnival connotes structural dyads; a dyad without resolution, but a "'potential infinity' . . . where prohibitions (representation, 'monologism') and their transgression (dream, body, 'dialogism') coexist."³⁵

2.1.3 Roland Barthes

³²Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," *The Kristeva Reader*, 59.

³³Ibid., 38-39. (Kristeva is quoting Bakhtin but she does not give the reference.)

³⁴Ibid., 36.

³⁵Ibid., 49.

When Kristeva first began studies in Paris, she participated in Roland Barthes' seminar. (Kristeva's first paper in France was for Barthes' 1966 seminar on Bakhtin.) It was Barthes' work which led Kristeva toward studies in semiotics. Kristeva's project, as mentioned above, of describing that "other logic" outside of language as a system is facilitated through Barthes distinction between *plaisir* (pleasure or a calm enjoyment) and *jouissance* (a kind of bliss or rapture which explodes the "self" and amounts to a loss of self, death, fragmentation, disruption.) The experience of total joy or ecstasy, "sexual, spiritual, physical, conceptual at one and the same time,"³⁶ is the experience one reaches at the edge of language. One reaches it through the materiality of language. Barthes's book *Le Plaisir du texte*³⁷ elaborates on a distinction already introduced in his *S/Z*³⁸

between texts that merely obey a logic of passive consumption [creating pleasure] and texts that stimulate the reader's active participation . . . creating a critical vocabulary capable of concretely describing the effect of words on bodies and, conversely, of bodies on words.³⁹

Barthes' understanding of the pleasure of the text opens the way to Kristeva's analysis "of the often disruptive *jouissance* of language's barely coded, and barely theorizable side."⁴⁰ Barthes' use of the term "amateur" evokes awareness that nothing is insignificant in writing. Writing is *everything*. There is nothing outside of writing, including both subjectivity and (or

³⁶Leon Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language*, 16.

³⁷Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1973). Translated as *The Pleasure of the Text* by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

³⁸Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970). Translated as *S/Z* by Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

³⁹*Johns Hopkins Guide*, 72-73.

⁴⁰Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 68.

especially) the physical body of the author. Kristeva draws significantly on Barthes' notion of the amateur in her theory of both the materiality of language and the body in language as they relate to her understanding of the semiotic.

2.1.4 Emile Benveniste

If Barthes, Kristeva's most important teacher, opened up for her the whole field of semiotics, it was Emile Benveniste who saw "the necessity of introducing the notion of subject into linguistics."⁴¹ Kristeva's focus on analyzing what constitutes the speaking subject is due, in large part, to the important influence of Benveniste. For it is Benveniste's distinction between *énonciation* (the actual stating or utterance) and *énoncé* (an already completed statement or utterance) and, following Bakhtin, his understanding of *discourse* as "language appropriated by the individual as a practice"⁴² which offer Kristeva the link between psychoanalysis and linguistics. Benveniste's method of studying the subject from the perspective of discourse or practice or the actual act of utterance reveal that pronouns ("I", "you") in fact constitute the subject and only have meaning in the context of actual utterance. Outside of utterance they have no meaning. From this, emerges "the realization that the true subject does not precede language, thus reducing the latter to an apparatus of representation: rather, it is constituted by language."⁴³ It is this insight that paves the way for Kristeva's "semanalysis" in that it provides a key step in allowing her to demonstrate the poetic effect in language. Analyzing the plurality of the subject (hence Kristeva's eventual positing of the

⁴¹Kristeva, "Two Interviews with Julia Kristeva," 130.

⁴²Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," 39.

⁴³Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 71.

"subject in process") in literature is a key step in understanding the dynamics of poetic effect. Benveniste's work also plays (indirectly) an important influence in Kristeva's theory that the subject is founded on a loss. For, the subject of *énonciation* precedes the subject of the *énoncé*. By focusing many of his essays on the status of pronouns, and including in the subject of *énonciation* both its operating consciousness and its interlocutory relationships,⁴⁴ Benveniste demonstrates that *both* affirmation and negation exist in language. It is this affirmation-negation opposition in language that first inspired Kristeva to seek a process of negativity *outside* of language and led, subsequently, to her theory that language is founded on a loss.

2.1.5 Georges Bataille

Part of the impact and popularity of structuralism for the Parisian intellect of the late 1960s and early 1970s was its undermining of the supremacy and privileged place of consciousness. Georges Bataille, in interpreting Nietzsche, dares to confront the "horror" and "death" that Christianity masks and the "death of God" inaugurated. Bataille draws attention to the excessive character of the disruptive negative power which inhabits all "restricted economies." He exposes the instability of all "systems" and their products including "consciousness," "identity," the "subject," a "concept," etc. This is Kristeva's attraction to Bataille's work. Kristeva is well aware of the need to address the regressive character of what she terms "the religion of reason in Sartrean thought"⁴⁵ in his belief in the transparency of language, that is, in his belief that the human person's capacity for choice (conscious choice)

⁴⁴Julia Kristeva, "From One Identity to Another," *Desire in Language*, 131.

⁴⁵Kristeva, "Two Interviews with Julia Kristeva," 131.

is the essential nature of human existence. Sartre ignores the development of linguistics in his attempt to eradicate the difference between subject and object and this, in large part, accounts for his naiveté about the transparency of language. It is Georges Bataille who

would counter Sartre's humanist naiveté and point toward an understanding of the knife edge upon which the existence of society is posed in the battle between the sacred transgression (cf. sacrifice) and the Law as the basis of the social pact.⁴⁶

In Bataille's view, excessive instinctual drives (the negativity) make sublimation possible and yet, at the same time, threaten its stability. The dialectic between sublimation and the excessive instinctual drives plays a significant role in Kristeva's theory.

2.1.6 Ferdinand de Saussure

As mentioned, the undermining of consciousness, Bataille's project indirectly, is also one of the important consequences of structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure, generally considered to be the father of structuralism, draws a distinction between *langue* (language as a system) and *parole* (language as used). With this distinction, language is no longer thought to convey the meaning of things in themselves. Rather, language is built on systems of signs. Meaning emerges out of the relation between these signs. In fact, according to Saussure, language is a product not only of the relation between signs, but the relation between *differing* signs. It is this difference which produces meaning. Objects (which is a positive term) can not be represented in themselves. Objects can only be represented via negativity. "There are only differences" insists Saussure. The distinction between *langue* and *parole*, as well as, the primacy of the negative and differential relation between signs (rather than the sign itself) constitute another important dialectic to profoundly influence Kristeva's thought.

⁴⁶Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 17.

2.1.7 Jacques Lacan

For Jacques Lacan, the acquisition of language plays a key role in the dynamics of personal development. In fact, it is the *determining* factor in the infant obtaining a sense of self. In juxtaposing the unconscious and language, Lacan insists that the unconscious is structured like a language. The symbolic order, what Lacan calls the "Law of the Father" or the "Name of the Father," is brought about by the father's "interference" or breaking in on the undifferentiated (from the infant's perspective) relationship between the infant and the mother. The child's desire must be diverted. It must find substitutions for the mother. It is this development that paves the way for the child's acquisition of language. In addition, Lacan's "mirror stage" enables the child to see itself as somehow separate and as a unity. Up to the point of seeing itself in a mirror (or a mirror equivalent), the child experiences only a plurality of sensation. Although experiencing itself as fragmented, the child builds on the imaginary image it sees in the mirror. It is here that the founding of the ego begins. However, the "Real" - the somatic, the fragmented, the plural - is kept repressed by the interplay between these two "unrealities" - one imaginary and the other substitutionary. Although glimpsed in the work of Barthes, Bataille and Saussure, Kristeva's notion of the semiotic and the symbolic are clearly indebted to Lacan's distinction between the Real on the one hand and the imaginary and the symbolic on the other.

2.1.8 Summary

The dialectical interplay among the various perceptions that each of these six important thinkers glimpse in attempting to uncover the mystery of language is the common denominator and key factor for Kristeva. In pulling together each of these various perspectives, Kristeva is able to unearth a completely new perception and a new possibility

in understanding how the human subject is constituted in language. Bakhtin's insight of the "surplus of humanness" and his analysis of the "carnavalesque" character of the novel gave Kristeva both a key insight and the tools to study the insight. Barthes understanding and demonstration of the *jouissance* reached through the pleasure of the text and his positing that *everything* is significant in writing also assisted Kristeva in her analysis of the affect of the "materiality" of language. Emile Benveniste's study of the status of pronouns and his realization that the subject of *énonciation* includes *both* operating consciousness and interlocutionary relations indirectly led Kristeva to search for a process of negativity *outside* of language. Georges Bataille opened up, for Kristeva, the "knife edge" of existence upon which the speaking subject is built and explicated something of the horror and disruptiveness of the negative power that constitutes the excess in all "restricted economies." Also assisting Kristeva in her in-depth study of this negative power outside of language is Ferdinand de Saussure's positing of the primacy of the negative in the constitution of language. Jacques Lacan's return to Freud in his emphasis on the ego's relation to the unconscious and his fertile hypothesis that the unconscious is structured like a language furnished Kristeva with the psychoanalytic foundation upon which she would build and subsequently move beyond.

2.2 Second Stage: The China Experience and Kristeva's Shift: 1974 To 1980

In the spring of 1974 a group of intellectuals from Paris embarked on a three week visit to China. This group, in part, consisted of Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Marcelin Playnet, François Wahl and Julia Kristeva. The group was invited because of its socialist leanings but they went more in search of the China of the Cultural Revolution than the tenets of Communist China. The effect of that experience, for Kristeva, was intense and definitive. It marked a major shift in her thinking. As a person who had grown accustomed to the Soviet presence and influence in Bulgaria, Kristeva, more than the others, was both aware of and "alarmed by the profound, unflagging, sly presence of the Soviet model" in China.⁴⁷ Kristeva believed herself to be emancipated from hope in political "solutions." She felt more attuned to the importance of the Taoist culture and Chinese writing and poetry than to the politics of China. Yet, despite this, that arduous journey represented a loss of hope in the possibility that the political realm might serve as a vehicle for left-wing ideals embracing the creativity of culture, indeed embracing revolution. Revolution, at the level of collective political action, was no longer something Kristeva could believe. Her book *Des chinoises* recounted the impact China had on Kristeva, especially focusing on her impressions about Chinese women. Kristeva explains that in the book she tries

to convey the strangeness of China and to explain the fascination we Occidentals feel for it, a fascination unquestionably involved with our own strange, foreign, feminine, psychotic aspects.⁴⁸

The impact of this experience played a decisive role in Kristeva's subsequent shift away from

⁴⁷Julia Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," *The Female Autograph*, ed. Domna Stanton, trans. Athena Viscusi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 233.

⁴⁸Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," 233.

the more rigorous and purely linguistic or semiotic work of *La révolution du langage poétique* toward a more personal and internalized style (although still intellectually rigorous) in works such as *Des chinoises* (1974), "Héretique de l'amour" (1977), "Le Temps des Femmes" (1979) and "Le Vréel" (1979).⁴⁹ This shift was away from political involvement and political pressure. It was a shift toward the psychoanalytic experience which Kristeva now felt was "the only one in which the wildness of the speaking being, and of language, [could] be heard."⁵⁰

Kristeva's interest and involvement with feminism ended with her disinvolvement with politics. She saw the feminist movement, in its various forms, like all political movements, caught up in the same "logic of power" it was seeking to undermine. Yet the next few years witnessed Kristeva focusing much of her writing on women's experiences: Chinese women, motherhood, femininity. However, these writings emerged from a psychoanalytic perspective not a political standpoint. This important shift in Kristeva's thinking and subsequent writing is crucial. Yet it should not disguise the fact that the goal of Kristeva's search had not changed. Only the tools had changed. Certainly, between 1965 and 1974, Kristeva's experience of living and studying in Paris was both liberating and exhilarating. She had arrived with her rigorous training in Marxist-Leninist theory which filtered through to all other academic subjects in Bulgaria. She was familiar with at times severe food shortages. She knew of the purges which racked Bulgaria after the takeover of Communist rule. She had first

⁴⁹Julia Kristeva, "Le Vréel," *Folle vérité: vérité et vraisemblance du texte psychotique*, ed. Julia Kristeva and Jean-Michel Ribette (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 11-35. Translated as "The True-Real," by Seán Hand in *The Kristeva Reader*, 214-237.

⁵⁰Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," 234.

hand experience of the systematic repression of religion, literature and art. The emancipation she experienced in Paris certainly could account for Kristeva's initial rigorous and abstract style becoming more personal and less cautious. The influence of growing up in a country where there was so much political unrest and corruption, so many intrigues and betrayals, where dissent and individuality were systematically disappearing would certainly give Kristeva a deep understanding of the horrors of totalitarianism. Kristeva's experience of and exploration into the "dangerous" topic of alienation (a topic which many young writers in Bulgaria were experiencing and writing about) appears completely consistent with her background. Perhaps, the experience in China precipitated an inevitable insight which Kristeva describes in her novel *The Samurai*: "if human rights didn't include the right to be an exception, a unique individual, they'd be in danger of collapsing into Terror or Empire."⁵¹ Perhaps, Kristeva's shift could parallel a shift in the thinking and action of a character, Olga, also in her novel, who, perhaps not surprisingly, also had an alarming and significant experience during a trip to China.

That was the end of her activism in favor of feminism, the Chinese or any other variety. No more politics. Instead, solitude and the little happinesses and unhappinesses of life. The body could meditate on the spirit; the spirit would have no more to do with groups; out of disappointment might come lucidity.⁵²

Judging from the penetrating work Kristeva undertook in the next few years of her life, Olga's decision for the banality of "the little happinesses and unhappinesses of life" (whether or not it reflects some parallel in Kristeva's life) did not halt (or even delay) Kristeva's relentless search for insight into and articulation of the experience of otherness in the speaking subject.

⁵¹Kristeva, *The Samurai: a Novel*, 141.

⁵²Ibid., 183.

2.3 Third Stage: The Speaking Subject and the Human Psyche: Horror, Love, Melancholy

Kristeva's focus on the polyphony of novelistic discourse, her interest in the ambivalence of the novelistic genre becomes more personal, more stylish, more avant-garde as she attempts in the 1980's to bring various themes under her "x-ray vision." Her focus is initiated with her work prior to and including *La Révolution*. It is intent on expressing the inexpressible and developing a heuristic which leads one to the other side of language. The transition period that marked the late 1970's became a point of departure for Kristeva allowing her to enter more deeply into what she calls the "productive openness" of "adolescence" - a term which Kristeva understands as "less an age category than an open psychic structure."⁵³ This open system that Kristeva equates with the term "adolescence" offers the possibility of continued renewal for the true "subject-in-process."

Like the 'open systems' of which biology speaks concerning living organisms that live only by maintaining a renewable identity through interaction with another, the adolescent structure opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganization of the individual - thanks to a tremendous loosening of the superego.⁵⁴

Perhaps the 1980's could justifiably be understood as Kristeva's time of adolescence as she opened herself to the repressed in such sublime topics as "horror," "love" and "melancholy."

Kristeva's shift in the latter half of the 1970's from the more political enterprise of the

⁵³Julia Kristeva, "The Adolescent Novel," *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990), 8. First published as "Le Roman adolescent," *Adolescence* 4, no. 1 (1986) : 13-28. (No translator is given for "The Adolescent Novel.")

⁵⁴Ibid., 8.

late 1960's and early 1970's to an interest in the personal and the individual finds full expression in the intensely psychoanalytic works that emerge in the 1980's.⁵⁵ Kristeva's search for the unnameable infinite⁵⁶ in the postmodern crisis⁵⁷ that afflicts our Western society takes her through the "hell of naming" horror, love and melancholy. Although Kristeva understands well the effects of these conditions at the political level, her concern lies elsewhere. As Kristeva writes, "let others continue their long march toward idols and truths of all kinds."⁵⁸ The "quiet shore of contemplation"⁵⁹ that Kristeva sets aside for herself stems from her desire "to be receptive to . . . suffering . . . to open [her] ears to meaning of another kind."⁶⁰ This receptiveness and openness takes the form of a psychoanalytic listening. Kristeva's intense focus on *this* listening stems from the profound and personal insight that the "subject-in-

⁵⁵See *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection* (Paris, Seuil, 1980); "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," first given as a paper at "The Politics of Interpretation" symposium sponsored by *Critical Inquiry* and held at the University of Chicago's Center for Continuing Education in the autumn of 1981, this essay was published in *The Politics of Interpretation*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 83-98 and has been reprinted in subsequent publications as "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," trans. Margaret Waller in *The Kristeva Reader*, 301-320 and *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 89-105; *Histoires d'amour, Au commencement était l'amour. Psychanalyse et foi; Soleil noir, dépression et mélancolie*.

⁵⁶In "Mémoire" published in the first edition of the journal *Infini* Kristeva refers to her "never abandoned effort to take transcendence seriously and to track down its premises into the most hidden recesses of language." "Mémoire," *L'Infini* 1 (Winter 1983) : 44.

⁵⁷Kristeva writes about this crisis in "Psychanalystes en temps de detresse" in *Lettre Internationale*, 21 (Summer 1989). Translated as "Psychoanalysts in times of distress," by Michael Münchow in *Speculations after Freud: Psychoanalysis, philosophy and culture*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow (London: Routledge, 1994), 13-26.

⁵⁸Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 210.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁰Kristeva, "Preface," *In the Beginning was Love*, xiii.

process" and nothing else constitutes society. It also stems from her subsequent realization that transformation takes place only at that level. This shift in Kristeva's focus should not be seen as a retreat into solipsism or individualism. Rather, it stems from the awareness that without the knowledge of the dialectical interplay between the symbolic and the semiotic that constitutes the subject-in-process, politics becomes ideology. Kristeva recognizes the danger of politics (after the "death of God") "becoming a substitute for dogmatic religious practices."⁶¹ From this "listening," the plurality of meaning which surfaces from the open system of the subject-in-process allows Kristeva, the psychoanalyst, the necessary conditions to accomplish her task. Kristeva understands her task, at the beginning of the 1980's, in this light.

The task is not to make an interpretive summa in the name of a system of truths - for that attitude has always made interpretation a rather poor cousin of theology. The task is, instead, to record the *crisis* of modern interpretive systems without smoothing it over, to affirm that this crisis is inherent in the symbolic function itself, and to perceive as symptoms all constructions, including totalizing interpretation, which try to deny this crisis: to dissolve, to displace indefinitely, in Kafka's words, "temporarily and for a lifetime."⁶²

Kristeva's penetrating analysis, in the 1980's, of the three conditions of postmodern society that need to be recorded - horror, love and melancholy - accomplishes her task.

2.3.1 *Powers of Horror*

Kristeva's three books, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, *Tales of Love*, and *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, can be viewed as a trilogy indicative of Kristeva's odyssey through the psyche of the speaking subject. Each of these conditions, horror, love

⁶¹Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 211.

⁶²Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 103.

and melancholia, displays the fragility of the speaking subject. Each conveys the tenuous and shifting ground upon which the speaking subject is built. As an "analyst-semiologist"⁶³ Kristeva's relentless questioning does not stem from the desire to constantly subvert meaning and leave the subject in a state of continual upheaval. Rather, Kristeva's questions stem from the realization that any fixed point achieved by the speaking subject and represented in all codes or systems - whether religious, moral or philosophical - is illusory. It is this illusion that Kristeva wishes to subvert even though it means descending into the horror that underlies and upholds any symbolic organization.

Initially, *Powers of Horror* was meant to be a text on the work of the French novelist, Louis Ferdinand Céline (1894-1961). In her work with Céline's texts, Kristeva became aware of how he constantly dealt with abjection.⁶⁴

With Céline we are elsewhere. As in apocalyptic or even prophetic utterances, he speaks out on horror. But while the former can be withstood because of a distance that allows for judging, lamenting, condemning, Céline - who speaks from within - has no threats to utter, no morality to defend. In the name of what would he do it? So his laughter bursts out, facing abjection, and always originating at the same source, of which Freud had caught a glimpse: the gushing forth of the unconscious, the repressed, suppressed pleasure, be it sex or death. And yet, if there is a gushing forth, it is neither jovial, nor trustful, nor sublime, nor enraptured by preexisting harmony. It is bare, anguished, and as fascinated as it is frightened.⁶⁵

⁶³This is Kristeva's self-definition. See *Powers of Horror*, 92.

⁶⁴The discovery of abjection that Céline's writings immerse us in is not something unique to Céline. Abjection can be found in other authors of modern literature such as Artaud, Borges, Dostoyevsky, Joyce and Proust. However, Céline's writings are particularly horrifying. According to Kristeva, they "converge on a scene of massacres or death." Ibid., 149.

⁶⁵Ibid., 206.

"Avec Céline, nous sommes ailleurs. De l'énonciation apocalyptique, prophétique même, il a le dire de l'horreur. Mais tandis que cette énonciation

The object is that which somehow breaks through in Céline's narratives yet remains unnameable because of its position prior to the distinction between subject and object in language. The object is associated with the archaic mother, with whom needs and desires are given full, uncensored, uninhibited, undifferentiated reign. The object is that which horrifies and fascinates because of its state of abomination. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva demonstrates how this horror and fascination is connoted in all cultures by the feminine and by anything that is only partial object. That is, it is anything that has not separated fully in its autonomous stance as a subject or an object. Rather, it retains a certain eerie quality in its nonidentity with any particular socio-symbolic system. Hence, because of its archaic, prelinguistic, abominable character which horrifies and fascinates, the object is "what culture, the *sacred*, must purge, separate, and banish."⁶⁶

The experience of abjection that Céline's narratives evoke within the reader creates a state of fragility. This state has, according to Kristeva's analysis, in the long history of humanity, been dealt with and to some degree "purified" in us through religion. At the edge of what Kristeva considers as the collapse of Judeo-Christian monotheism, she sees two substitutes for religion. One is, at a more private level, psychoanalysis, where these limiting states are allowed to live. The other, which is a more public elaboration of this state of

se soutient d'une distance qui permet le jugement, la lamentation, la condamnation, Céline - lui qui est dedans - n'a ni menace à proférer ni morale à défendre. Au nom de quoi le ferait-il? Son rire jaillit alors, face à l'abjection et toujours de la même source, entrevue par Freud : l'irruption de l'inconscient, du refoulé du plaisir réprimé, qu'il soit sexe ou mort. Pourtant si irruption il y a, elle n'est ni joviale, ni confiante, ni sublime, ni enchantée par une harmonie présumée. Elle est nue, angoissée, aussi fascinée qu'effrayée." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 241.)

⁶⁶Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 103.

fragility and which Kristeva sees as extremely important, is art.

The various means of purifying the abject - the various catharses - make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religion.⁶⁷

For Kristeva, the artistic experience does not repress the abject in the severe and total manner of religions. Rather, it allows for a lifting of the repression. It is a lifting that Kristeva sees as crucial if we are to demystify power and not fall prey to ideologies.

When Kristeva speaks of the importance of aesthetic practice as "the modern reply to the eternal question of morality"⁶⁸ she continues to put forward an ethics which seeks to shatter codes rather than produce them. Complicitous with this, aesthetic practices allow what has been repressed to emerge. They stand on the border between "Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality,"⁶⁹ so that the distinctions begin to dissolve. Aesthetic practices descend to an 'elsewhere' that *sustains* meaning and interpretation and yet *collapses* meaning and interpretation. In other words, the artistic endeavour, as exemplified in the writing of Céline and elaborated in *Powers of Horror*, is to bring about at times the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic. In this, identity itself is threatened by the writer's meshing with and blending into the abject. Confronting the abject through aesthetic practices allows that which has been lost and which is unnameable to come to the surface without it

⁶⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 17.

⁶⁸Kristeva, "Women's Time," 35.

⁶⁹Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 16.

leading to the two extremes of "psychic explosion" or "psychic censorship."⁷⁰

2.3.2 *Tales of Love*

Tales of Love, like *Powers of Horror*, seeks to open the speaking subject to an experience that cannot be communicated, at least not in the straightforward manner that philosophers "from Plato, down to Descartes, Kant, and Hegel"⁷¹ had hoped. The experience of love, bereft, in our postmodern age, of guideposts we can believe in or trust, has become the *crisis* of love in the speaking subject as the end of the twentieth century draws near. The psychoanalytic listening to the human psyche's terror and fascination in face of horror and abjection is now, with *Tales of Love*, transmuted into the psychoanalytic listening to the human psyche's search for love. Yet love too (like horror) erupts in the psyche as a "nontime . . . both instant and eternity, past and future, abreacted present, [which] fulfils me, abolishes me, and yet leaves me unsated . . ."⁷² It is a freedom that delights as it anguishes. Yet, it is a freedom that is uncontained because, for Kristeva, we lack a code of love, we lack a stable mirror which will reflect our love back to us. Kristeva maintains it is only in the psychoanalytical relationship that one can search for love. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva allows horror and abjection to emerge in order that ideology be checked in its triumphant march to violent victory. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva is now seeking to uncover a psychic space which welcomes idealization and counters the reign of abjection.⁷³ Kristeva is not advocating

⁷⁰Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts," 109.

⁷¹Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 8.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 6.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 354.

a new amatory code to replace what the emergence of abjection in the psyche has shattered. Rather, Kristeva names the Imaginary⁷⁴ as antidote to the crisis, turning the crisis into a *work in progress*. In the section entitled, "Freud and Love: Treatment and its Discontents,"⁷⁵ Kristeva speaks of the ternary structure of narcissism and refers to Freud's "Third Party" as a condition of psychic life.⁷⁶ This Third Party is outside the mother-child dyad and precipitates the mother's desire being turned away from the child toward an other. It is this break in the dyad that allows individuation and development within the child to take place. It is a process that allows for a psychic space to be opened up within the child as he or she, via Lacan's mirror stage, begins to glimpse him/herself as separate from the mass of fragility which has constituted its experience heretofore. The child falls in love with that object, its own image brought to existence because the bodily exchange of maternal fondness (which is abjection or devouring) has been diverted. Narcissism, for Kristeva, is the possibility for love. The possibility of love depends on the movement away from the abject mother toward that Third Party (the other) who is the ideal father. It depends on a movement toward identification with an ego ideal. But it is more than being separated from the sublime union with the mother that the Third Party fulfils. The Third Party also is able to reflect the child back to itself through interaction with the mother. In this sense, love has to come partly from the "father." So, in this manner the Third Party brings about the detachment and separation necessary for love. However (and this is especially so today according to Kristeva) the eruption of the abject and

⁷⁴In Jacques Lacan's sense of the word.

⁷⁵Ibid., 21-56.

⁷⁶Ibid., 34-35.

the fragility of psychic space constitutes a danger for our culture.

Today Narcissus is an exile, deprived of his psychic space, an extraterrestrial with a prehistory bearing, wanting for love. An uneasy child, all scratched up, somewhat disgusting, without a precise body or image, having lost his specificity, an alien in a world of desire and power, he longs only to reinvent love. The ET's are more and more numerous. We are all ET's.⁷⁷

If separation between mother and child is not established, the psychic space necessary for the child to love, already precarious, becomes impossible. Kristeva's claim is that the dissolution today of a language of love is creating a perilous situation in our postmodern world. Deconstruction's exposure of what underlies the dogma of religions and the ideology of politics rather than leading to emancipation is steering us toward the dissolution of both relationships and the ability to accept the other. According to Kristeva, it is the "open system" (referred to at the beginning of this section) which creates the possibility of a life connected to others and therefore renewable. To be open to others allows not only interaction but also the emergence of heterogeneity. In fact, it is only as heterogeneous subjects that we are able to relate to others. Heterogeneity enables the psyche the fluidity necessary to look at and take in what is other than itself since that very capacity for otherness is, in fact, what constitutes the speaking subject. Yet, separation between mother and child causes its own malady, what Freud termed melancholia and Kristeva interprets as the failure of an object taking the place of the loss of the mother.

2.3.3 *Black Sun*

There is no object for the melancholic, only a sadness as an ersatz object; or, as Kristeva goes on to say, there is only a 'Thing (*chose*), a vague, indeterminate 'something', a 'light without representation', or, as in Nerval's

⁷⁷Ibid., 383.

metaphor, a 'black sun' (*soleil noir*).⁷⁸

So Kristeva tackles the subject of melancholia in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, again utilizing art, literature, philosophy and the history of religion and culture to understand the subject from a psychoanalytic perspective. *Black Sun* continues Kristeva's penetrating analysis of love. If love becomes possible, via primary narcissism, it is the failure of this primary narcissism that causes the melancholic's impossible yearning for the loss of the mother. According to Kristeva, melancholy is an "unsymbolized" sadness on the border of semiotic and symbolic, an inadequate or imperfect separation from the mother. Paradoxically, the inadequate or imperfect separation from the mother causes the melancholic to subsist in an unnamable sadness cut off from otherness both within and without.

⁷⁸Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 185.

2.3.4 Summary

Horror, love and melancholy are states, the roots of which hark back to a primal, archaic experience prior to the emergence of the speaking subject. These states connote the terrifying yet fascinating semiotic realm associated with the relationship of jouissance between the mother and child. They provoke a dread at the remnant of abjection necessary for the child to separate from the all-encompassing, devouring relationship with the mother. They remind us of the fragile condition of our psyches. They are conditions which frighten us, arouse us, sadden us because they take us to a place of "nontime," a place before time. They remind us of the loss, at once devastating and necessary, on which our identity is built. Religious discourse, says Kristeva, no longer speaks to these conditions. It has lost its significance in a postmodern, technocratic world grown disillusioned and meaningless. Only psychoanalysis and art can address the precarious condition of this world, precarious because it stands on the edge of an abyss that defies containment. Such is the "mission" Julia Kristeva has taken on in the 1980's. The mission to ameliorate, ever so slightly, this condition she sees both within and beyond.

2.4 Fourth Stage: "Psychoanalysts in Times of Distress" Dissident and Stranger; Exile and Healer

What good are psychoanalysts at a time of distress oblivious to itself? I imagine a huge city with houses of glass and steel, reaching the sky, reflecting both the sky, itself and you. People cultivate their image, hurried and made up in the extreme, covered in gold, pearls, pure leather. In the streets, on every corner, the filth piles up and drugs accompany the slumber or rage of the outcasts . . .⁷⁹

⁷⁹Kristeva, "Psychoanalysts in times of distress," 14.

Paradoxically, an editorial in *Tel Quel* in 1977⁸⁰ and a paper given at "The Politics of Interpretation" symposium in 1981⁸¹ serve to introduce and explain the direction of Kristeva's work in the late 1980's and the 1990's. The link between psychoanalysis and politics remained significant for Kristeva despite disenchantment with politics following her China experience. She highlights the importance of understanding the political value of what she terms "the specific histories of speech, dreams and *jouissance*."⁸² Thus, Kristeva's insistence on the secondary status of politics and the inevitable impotence of collective political action. Kristeva speaks of the "*dissident function* of the intellectual"⁸³ in face of what she sees as the religion of rationalism. Reason, subversive originally, is now, according to Kristeva, accorded an exalted place (an alternative form of worship replacing religion in this supposedly atheistic period) under the aegis of a technocratic age. *Thought* must now replace reason. This is the task of the true dissident (a new type of intellectual). For Kristeva, "thought is tenable only as an 'analytic position' that affirms dissolution and works through differences."⁸⁴ The position of exile is concomitant with dissidence and must always remain so. This is the position that Kristeva finds herself in as an exile from socialism and the Marxist rationality. Kristeva's effort to continually subvert *this* rationalism, which she sees rearing its head in the West despite denial at many levels, is her task as an exile. The position of exile - ultimately a non-position,

⁸⁰See Kristeva, "Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident," *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977) : 3-8.

⁸¹Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis."

⁸²Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual," *The Kristeva Reader*, 294.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 294.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 299.

always and forever outside - is the only position from which one can participate in what Kristeva sees as a new interpretation. The *new* "interpreter" "renounces the game of *indebtedness*, *proximity*, and *presence* hidden within the connotations of the concept of interpretation."⁸⁵ For Kristeva, there is no longer an object to interpret, there is only a void. All attempts to give meaning spring from what Kristeva calls "the phallic *jouissance* obtained by usurping that unnameable object, that *Sachverhalt*, which is the archaic mother."⁸⁶ It is exactly at this point that one can link psychoanalysis and politics in the work of Julia Kristeva. Psychoanalysis, focusing on *particular* discourses, (that is, the discourse of the individual) discloses the desire and the loss on which all discourse and, hence, all interpretation is founded. It is only as a dissident interpreter in the position of exile that one can dare enter the precarious and dangerous political arena without falling prey to ideological and totalitarian temptations.

2.4.1 *Strangers to Ourselves and Nations Without Nationalism*

After almost twenty years as a practising psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva has ventured again, with the publication of *Etrangers à nous-mêmes (Strangers to Ourselves)* into that precarious and dangerous realm of political discourse. *Strangers to Ourselves*, as well as the subsequent *Nations Without Nationalism*, testify to a renewed interest in things political. In *Strangers to Ourselves* Kristeva sets up an analogy between the human psyche and the logic of the social. The psyche, constituted as it is by a series of separations, resembles the make-up of all things social because, like the psyche, the social emerges only in face of what is not

⁸⁵Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 92.

⁸⁶Ibid., 98.

included. We are reminded again of Kristeva's dialectic between the symbolic and the semiotic. As the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic constitutes the psyche, a similar dialectic constitutes the social (that is, any society or nation which defines itself as such.) Kristeva's willingness to enter into the topical debate in France concerning the status of foreign workers stems not so much from her desire to re-enter the political realm, but more to show the intricate link between the individual and the social. Although Kristeva does not elaborate on the psychic scheme which she laboriously details in other works, especially *La révolution du langage poétique*, she draws on this scheme as a point of reference for her analysis of the phenomenon of the "stranger." Kristeva tries to demonstrate that it is only from the position of exile, a position which all human beings have in common at a deep psychic level, that one can truly begin to address foreignness and otherness. Kristeva calls for a cosmopolitanism resembling somewhat the Enlightenment understanding of that term. By drawing on Montesquieu's privileging of the "rights of man" over the "rights of the citizen," his "heterogeneous, dynamic" notion of the nation as *esprit général*, and Diderot's insertion of strangeness into the self, Kristeva comes up with an understanding of cosmopolitanism to which she can ascribe. Kristeva's cosmopolitanism springs from a psychoanalytic adherence "toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable."⁸⁷ It is in this light that Kristeva has entered the political arena in an effort to contribute to the present-day debates on immigration which are gripping not only France but the entire Western world.

The ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious - desiring, destructive, fearful, empty,

⁸⁷Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

impossible . . . the ultimate condition of our being *with* others.⁸⁸

Nations Without Nationalism, in part, takes up the issues outlined in *Strangers to Ourselves*. Consisting of a series of essays dealing with the notion of "strangeness," three specifically address the world-wide crisis of racism and xenophobia. (Ethnic cleansing, the definitive outcome of this intolerance, continues to rage even after the horrors of the Nazi extermination camps have gained full knowledge.) Kristeva presents the strange but compelling view that it is only as an exile that one can begin to alleviate the sufferings that fundamentalism, religious illusions and ethnic wars cause. The exile who is also, for Kristeva, a new type of intellectual is in the position, at once unsettling and unsettled, for real thought to emerge.

2.4.2 Novelistic Discourse

Kristeva's insistence in this has also taken the form of two novels, *Les samouraïs* and *Le vieil homme et les loups*. Her shift from theory to utilizing the novelistic mode continues her concerns, but at a level that may be cathartic. When interviewed about her novel *Les samouraïs*, Kristeva comments:

I do not believe it is possible for a rational system, based on the data of consciousness, to respond to the evil and horror that exist in the world. If hell is within us, the issue is not "to avoid driving auto workers to despair" but to cross the abyss of depression with those who are still able to ask for help, while giving consideration to broad solutions in the social realm, but in more modest fashion since too many hopes can easily lead to delusions.⁸⁹

In attempting novelistic discourse, Kristeva wants not merely to convey a message as a rational system might do (the transparency of language). Rather, more than this, the novel will

⁸⁸Ibid., 192.

⁸⁹Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, 102.

be the message in the unsettling, disruptive, joyful, pleasurable experience it gives the reader (the materiality of language). Through her novels, Kristeva is actuating (like performative utterances) what she has been writing about for the last thirty years - transformation through and in the semiotic rupture of the symbolic.

Perhaps we can return now to the opening question, "What good are psychoanalysts at a time of distress oblivious to itself?"⁹⁰ Kristeva, the psychoanalyst, following upon her earlier endeavour to "name" the unnameable, still seeks the possibility of astonishment for those with the *desire to know*. The heterogeneous dynamic that psychoanalysis reveals allows a metamorphosis despite the resistance of the speaking subject. *New Maladies of the Soul*, Kristeva's latest psychoanalytic work, delves into the creative potential of maladies unique to each individual. The "healing" at an individual and subsequently at a collective level stems directly from psychoanalysis' willingness to recognize these new maladies and allow them to be heard.

2.5 Conclusion

In response to a request from the *New York Literary Forum* for an autobiographical text, Kristeva states initially that her own history, "and perhaps most of all, the disturbing abyss that the psychoanalytic experience shapes between 'what is said' and undecidable 'truth' prevent me from being a good witness."⁹¹ As well, Kristeva utilizes the term "hyperbole" to refer to the plural, the "we", position from which she will speak. Indeed, the telling of a

⁹⁰Kristeva, "Psychoanalysts in times of distress," 14.

⁹¹Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," 219.

"story" is essential for psychoanalytic listening. Striving to unearth a deep psycho-symbolic economy, "does not unfold without a share of *fiction*."⁹² Yet, this is completely in keeping with the entire force of Kristeva's work as it has been traced throughout these four stages and as it applies to *both* Kristeva's interpretation of her own life, as well as, *this* interpretation of her life. Yet telling our story, as Kristeva so profoundly understands, makes "all sorrows bearable."⁹³ The telling produces a cathartic effect which serves to move one from the fixed position of suffering to a creative potential. The creative potential comes from the heterogeneity that constitutes us as speaking subjects and offers us the possibility of renewal. The complexity and expansiveness of Kristeva's work, since her arrival in Paris late in 1965, reveal a relentless searching that refuses to compromise. As Roland Barthes wrote, there is a *force* to Kristeva's work.

Force here means *displacement*. Julia Kristeva changes the order of things: she always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud: what she displaces is the *already-said*, that is to say, the insistence of the signified; what she subverts is the authority of monologic science and of filiation.⁹⁴

Yet, strangely, Kristeva's concern is quite simple. Her concern is for otherness; within ourselves and in the stranger - that it needs to be understood and accepted. She is concerned with such banal topics as love and ethics as these are integrally linked to our position as heterogeneous subjects. Only from this position is it possible to create an open system - open

⁹²Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 68.

⁹³This is from Isak Dineson as quoted in Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 19.

⁹⁴Roland Barthes is quoted in Toril Moi, "Introduction," *The Kristeva Reader*, 1. The quote is from Barthes book review of Kristeva's first book *Séméiotiké*. The book review is "L'étrangère" in *La Quinzaine Littéraire* 94 (1-15 May 1970) : 19-20.

to the other.

When Julia Kristeva admits that she feels intimately closer to "the mystical Simone Weil, with her populism, her religious wanderings and errors, rather than to a rationalist such as Beauvoir,"⁹⁵ she reveals in the same moment her weakness and her greatness. Like Simone Weil, Kristeva operates from a logic other than a rationalism. Not irrationalism, rather, beyond that distinction, following an inner dynamism that perhaps must be understood as *desire*, originary and narcissistic, forming the impetus behind all ethical and loving endeavours. Yet, Kristeva is not without critics. In fact, because Kristeva's thought stems from a logic other than a rationalism, she elicits a wide variety of responses. It is important to elaborate some of the most extreme responses and some of the more balanced responses. This is now the task at hand.

3.0 Critiques of Kristeva's Work

3.1 Introduction

Kristeva's thought is peculiar: it is transparent enough that it tends to be reduced very quickly to a set of bipolar opposites by her critics (and thereby criticized as being everything from ultraanarchistic to ultraconservative); but at the same time, it is opaque enough to be uncritically idealized by her most fervent admirers.⁹⁶

Alice Jardine's insightful comment concerning the bi-polar reactions that Kristeva's work elicits offers a good entry point for considering some of the major critiques of Kristeva's

⁹⁵Julia Kristeva, "On *The Samurai*," interviewed by E. Bélorgey, trans. Ross Mitchell Guberman, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, ed. Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 252.

⁹⁶Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts," 106.

work. One might venture to "label" the bi-polar reactions, "over-reactions," since Kristeva's writing (not unlike the writing of the *avant-garde* authors of the nineteenth century who have been subjected to Kristeva's penetrating analysis) can elicit an array of emotions - anger, sorrow, joy, hope, despair, melancholy, sadness. One can detect these emotions in various manners and to various degrees in some of Kristeva's most ardent and virulent critics. Indeed, similar to the forceful effect of *avant-garde* writing, Kristeva's work can crack the symbolic shell that holds our narcissistic image intact. Such is the hazard of the task Kristeva has given herself - the task of describing the divided condition of speaking subjects. It is a task which evokes the semiotic modality in order to reveal its hidden import. It is a task which circumscribes the symbolic modality in order to expose its totalizing tendency. It is a task which attempts to facilitate, through writing - through language itself, a less rigid separation of the two modalities and, thus, allows for an intermingling that produces a more relaxed functioning, a more balanced perspective, a clearer picture of the operations of the symbolic and semiotic and of the *desire* upon which all thought is founded.

Bi-polar reactions to Kristeva's work are the *logical* outcome of Kristeva's "style" of writing. Her strategy of writing at a double level⁹⁷ evokes our divided condition as speaking subjects. However, there are also readings of Kristeva which have managed to move beyond the bi-polar reactions. Therefore, they offer what I consider a more accurate reading in their understanding of the complex task Kristeva has set herself. In what follows, both will be considered. First, I will indicate some of the bi-polar reactions that Jardine, among others,

⁹⁷Kelly Oliver speaks of this double level as a "double-bind." In her book, *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind*, Oliver sees her task as attempting to give "an account of the oscillation between the semiotic and symbolic forces in Kristeva's writing itself." (11)

have observed. This will highlight the evocative quality of Kristeva's writing which I have eluded to above. Yet, it will also indicate the genuine concerns - even fears - that Kristeva's writings elicit - fears and concerns which, I believe, can never be entirely absent when one reads Kristeva. Second, I will consider four interpretations which have moved beyond the bi-polar reactions realizing the importance of Kristeva's work without bracketing out its limitations. These critics are able, in my view, to assess Kristeva's contribution without falling prey to an uncritical idealization or rejection.

3.2 Bi-polar Reactions

In terms of bi-polar reactions, Kelly Oliver has delineated most, if not all of these categories of reactions.⁹⁸ On the one hand, many critics accuse Kristeva of being an essentialist. For example, Teresa de Lauretis states that despite the *appearance* of Kristeva producing a "different text," (for example, in "Stabat Mater") she "does not succeed in either masking or supporting the essentialism of her stated position."⁹⁹ The essentialism of Kristeva's stated position is, in de Lauretis's view, Kristeva's "traditional (modern) view of femininity as motherhood" and her "strenuous defense of heterosexuality and of the phallus as ramparts to be industriously re-erected against death."¹⁰⁰ Also, Elizabeth Grosz asserts that for Kristeva,

⁹⁸See Kelly Oliver's outline of these categories as well as her identification of critics who fall into each category in *Reading Kristeva*, 1-2. The categories I use here draw from Oliver's delineation but I choose not to exhaust her examples. My point in presenting this section is only to demonstrate the variety of reactions, at times extreme reactions, which Kristeva's work elicits from its readers. I will not argue each point. This is not my purpose and is unnecessary within the parameters of this thesis.

⁹⁹Teresa de Lauretis, "The female body and heterosexual presumption," *Semiotica* 67, no. 3/4 (1987) : 270.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 270.

Maternity is . . . not the function of a *woman* (this is also Kristeva's position regarding femininity): it is an organic, a social, pre-signifying space-time: it is disembodied, a function and not a mode of the corporeal specific to women. It cannot be attributed to woman, for 'woman' is precisely that which does not exist. For Kristeva, 'woman' is an essentialist category.

And further, Grosz writes, "Kristeva seems to accept an essentialist notion of maternity as a process without a subject."¹⁰¹ On the other hand, there are those who insist that Kristeva dismantles essentialism. Ironically, drawing on the same aspects of Kristeva's theory as Grosz, Alison Ainley *welcomes* Kristeva's focus on the *site* of motherhood and sees it as countering essentialism. Ainley states that this "notion of positionality is counter to a metaphysical hypostatization of Woman."¹⁰² Marilyn Edelstein believes too that Kristeva avoids the danger of essentialism, although barely. "Feminist critics debate whether Kristeva essentializes women by a glorification of the maternal - reinstating old stereotypes and social obligations - or effaces real women, their bodies, their differences. I think Kristeva (barely) skirts both dangers."¹⁰³

Some critics feel Kristeva's writings actually promote anarchy. For example, Cynthia Chase's criticism that Kristeva's theory is so ultra radical that it has lost complete touch with women subjects and the individual plight of women.¹⁰⁴ In an indirect manner, Kaja Silverman

¹⁰¹Elizabeth Grosz, "The Body of Signification," *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 97.

¹⁰²Alison Ainley, "The Ethics of Sexual Difference," in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 59.

¹⁰³Marilyn Edelstein, "Metaphor, Meta-Narrative, & Mater-Narrative in 'Stabat Mater'," *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: Religion, Women, and Psychoanalysis*, ed. David Crownfield (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 43.

¹⁰⁴See Cynthia Chase's criticism in her "Book Review" of *Powers of Horror in Criticism* 26, no. 2 (1984) : 195.

takes this view also. Silverman speaks of Kristeva's "*choric* fantasy" which "is motivated by the desire to retreat from the superego and the symbolic rather than by the desire to approximate the position of discursive mastery which they represent." Yet, despite her criticism of what she calls Kristeva's "regressive fantasy," Silverman feels Kristeva has committed a "treacherous . . . betrayal of feminism" by installing "the father within the domain of primary narcissism."¹⁰⁵ Alternately, there are many critics who insist Kristeva is ultraconservative or right wing (even fascist, according to Oliver). Ann Rosalind Jones aligns Kristeva's views with the "New Right in the US and the UK, clamouring for a return to a traditional family and a politics of self-help." She believes Kristeva is searching for "new authorities to replace lost traditions."¹⁰⁶ And again, Juliet Flower MacCannell considers Kristeva's thinking ultra conservative, complicitous with the patriarchy in suppressing any possibility of the empowerment of women.¹⁰⁷ While more sympathetic to the contribution Kristeva makes to American feminists, Domna Stanton also insists that, despite the seeming subversiveness of the semiotic, Kristeva "relies on a series of traditional images." Stanton asserts that, "[b]y emphasizing the subject's desire to destroy the father and to (re) possess the mother, Kristeva's model for engendering the poetic does not then deviate fundamentally from the patriarchal oedipal script."¹⁰⁸ Janice Doane and Devon Hodges go so far as to imply

¹⁰⁵Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 99, 123-124.

¹⁰⁶Ann Rosalind Jones, "Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics," *Feminist Review* 18 (Winter 1984) : 70.

¹⁰⁷Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Kristeva's horror," *Semiotica* 62, no. 3/4 (1986) : 345-351.

¹⁰⁸Domna Stanton, "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva," *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia

that Kristeva is a proponent of a natural order. For Doane and Hodges, Kristeva normalizes motherhood for women. They maintain that for Kristeva, "[t]he mother's role is naturalized when she becomes the origin of sexual difference rather than a casualty of existing structures of sexual difference."¹⁰⁹ They are critical of what they see as Kristeva's refusal to consider cultural determinants vis-a-vis the "social, political, and economic situation of women." They insist that "a psychoanalysis that normalizes the notion of the mother as origin does not engage in the feminist task of destabilizing the familiar categories in which women have been confined."¹¹⁰ Thus, for Doane and Hodges, Kristeva's discourse is blatantly anti-feminist, "blaming women for every oppressive position they find themselves in: as inhabitants of the harem, as wives of Don Juans, as depressives, and, finally, as single parents."¹¹¹ Along these lines, many interpreters of Kristeva are critical of her seeming "homophobia" and her *carte blanche* acceptance of the psychoanalytic perspective that heterosexuality is normative. For example, Noreen O'Connor, Diane T. Meyers, Judith Butler, and Ann Rosalind Jones offer this critique.¹¹²

University Press, 1986), 166. See also, "Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection," *The Future of Difference*, ed. Eisenstein and Jardine (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), 73-87.

¹⁰⁹Janice Doane and Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 61.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 77-78.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹²Noreen O'Connor, "The An-Arche of Psychotherapy," *Abjection, Melancholia and Love*, 42-52; Diana T. Meyers "The Subversion of Women's Agency in Psychoanalytic Feminism: Chodorow, Flax, Kristeva," *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference, Agency, and Culture*, ed. Nancy Fraser and Sandra Lee Bartky (Bloomington:

Some critics assert that there is an ahistorical component to Kristeva's work. Nancy Fraser believes Kristeva attempts to avoid both extremes of essentialism/anti-essentialism and ahistorical/historical but contends that Kristeva,

in her thinking about identity, difference, and femininity . . . alternates essentialist gynocentric moments with anti-essentialist nominalist moments - moments that consolidate an ahistorical, undifferentiated, maternal feminine gender identity with moments that repudiate women's social identities altogether.¹¹³

Others maintain that Kristeva is, in fact, unable to transcend history in her presentation of subjects with fixed social identities. Doane and Hodges believe that what others have interpreted as "Kristeva's progressive opening up of maternal desire as fruitfully unsignifiable is bleakly fixed for Kristeva in *Black Sun*: if the mother's desire does not signify to the infant a desire for the phallus, the infant is doomed to suffer."¹¹⁴ In terms of a possible "escape" for women from their historical condition as marginalized and denigrated, Andrea Nye believes that Kristeva has closed off all options. For Nye, Kristeva has "mapped an impossible situation."¹¹⁵

Many of Kristeva's critics see her work as closing off any possibility of change. Like Kristeva's portrayal in "Holbein's Dead Christ", "there is not the slightest suggestion of

Indiana University Press, 1992), 136-161; Judith Butler, "The Body Politics of Julia Kristeva," *Revaluing French Feminist*, 162-176; Ann Rosalind Jones, "Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics," *Feminist Review* 18 (Winter 1984) : 56-73.

¹¹³Nancy Fraser, "The Uses and Abuses of French Discourse Theories for Feminist Politics," *Revaluing French Feminism*, 177-194.

¹¹⁴ Doane and Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, 60.

¹¹⁵Andrea Nye, "Woman Clothed with the Sun: Julia Kristeva and the Escape from/to Language," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987) : 681.

transcendancy."¹¹⁶ For example, Ann Rosalind Jones insists that Kristeva's symbolic is a rigid, monolithic structure incapable of movement.¹¹⁷ Diane Jonte-Pace is critical of Kristeva for not attempting to find a solution to the misogyny she uncovers in all culture. While praising Kristeva for revealing "the power and ubiquity of the image of death as female," Jonte-Pace is less happy with Kristeva's refusal to uncover the sociological conditions which produce this metonymy and hence to move beyond it.¹¹⁸ Dorothy Leland accuses Kristeva of "determinism" and "political pessimism."¹¹⁹ Finally, there are others who contend that Kristeva opens up possibilities, especially in terms of "breaking out" of the "prison-house"¹²⁰ of language. For example, Thomas Foster states,

¹¹⁶Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 110.

¹¹⁷Jones, "Julia Kristeva on Femininity," 68.

¹¹⁸Diane Jonte-Pace, "Situating Kristeva Differently: Psychoanalytic Reading of Woman and Religion," *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva*, 20-22. It seems to me that Jonte-Pace is criticizing and praising Kristeva for the same thing. On the one hand, Jonte-Pace states that "Kristeva accurately reveals the power and ubiquity of the image of death as female." Thus, through her relentless and penetrating analysis, Kristeva has made explicit what other psychoanalysts, namely Freud, Winnicott, and Klein, merely left implicit. (20) And Kristeva has shown why this is so. Yet, despite agreeing with Kristeva's analysis of how this develops in the psyche of the speaking subject, Jonte-Pace seems to indicate that she does not understand the "power and ubiquity of the image of death as female" after all when she states: "Let us then, inquire into the question of the relation of this metonymy to misogyny and to absence, considering how absence in death might be symbolized without recourse to the differences of gender and how the differences of gender might be dissociated from absence in death." (22) It appears that Jonte-Pace, while grasping the depth of Kristeva's analysis, has missed Kristeva's basic point that the mother as loss, negativity, indeed death, is the *necessary condition* upon which the speaking subject is established.

¹¹⁹Dorothy Leland, "Lacanian Psychoanalysis and French Feminist: Toward an Adequate Political Psychology," *Revaluing French Feminism*, 113-135.

¹²⁰This term is drawn from Frederik Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).

the preverbal negativity of the semiotic . . . always appears as a disruption within the symbolic order. Such disruptions call attention both to the contradictions on which that order is founded and to the subjects capacity to exceed and to transgress the preexisting social and linguistic structure in which we are inscribed.¹²¹

Various bi-polar reactions to Kristeva's work are delineated above. I chose to focus on specific aspects of the above critics' responses to Kristeva. I purposely omit engaging in the nuances of each argument, as well as, responding to any of the critiques. Rather, my goal is to indicate the *multiplicity* of the reactions to Kristeva. It is to demonstrate the range of (even contradictory) interpretations that Kristeva's work evokes. We have seen those who are adamant that Kristeva is anti-feminist (some feel misogynist) and that her work is complicitous with the patriarchal order. Others see her as pro-feminist, but in a subversive manner not easily accepted (or understood), especially by American feminists. Kelly Oliver has noted what I consider an important observation of her experience of reading Kristeva.

As soon as I came to some conclusion about one of her theories, I would read a passage that would convince me of something else. In terms of traditional philosophical discourse I might say that Kristeva's writing is full of contradictions. But hers is not a discourse that strictly adheres to the logic of noncontradiction. Rather, hers is a discourse that breaks the law of noncontradiction upon which traditional notions of identity are built. Kristeva's writing challenges traditional notions of identity. This is what opens up the possibility of interpretation.¹²²

I suggest that this experience is common for anyone who attempts more than a cursory reading of Kristeva's texts. Virtually all of the bi-polar reactions are possible at one point or another when reading Kristeva.

¹²¹Thomas Foster, "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: 'Women's Time' and Housekeeping," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (1988) : 79.

¹²²Lechte, *Reading Kristeva*, 1.

3.3 Moving Beyond the Bi-polarity

In an extremely insightful article on the difficulty (both psychically and politically) of Kristeva's task, Jacqueline Rose suggests that Kristeva's "work gives us the measure of the difficulties when politics tries to open itself up to the ravages of the unconscious mind."¹²³ Rose pinpoints the exigency of the borderline position Kristeva finds herself in when she pushes language to its limits. She makes two important points concerning this crisis position. First, because Kristeva "confront[s] language at the point where it undoes itself, pushing against that illusion of safety through which alone it can function, uncovering the psychic forces which sustain that illusion but which equally put it at risk,"¹²⁴ she *must* counter that with a *desire* for the Law. Hence Kristeva's oscillations and her "contradictions." Kristeva's decision "to drive that engagement with language and the sign into the most violent depths of their own process" elicits danger both psychically and socially.¹²⁵ Something of that *danger* is apparent when one struggles, both intellectually and psychically, with her texts. Rose is correct to bring to our attention the importance of this strategic (and courageous) move on Kristeva's part. The second important point Rose draws to our attention deals with political ramifications of Kristeva's project. Kristeva, as we have seen, has been criticized particularly by American feminists for her rejection of politics and, specifically, for her seeming "hostile" attitude to feminism as a movement. Yet, Rose astutely points out that Kristeva, again, walks the razor's edge between reform and revolution. The political limitations of the semiotic has

¹²³Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (Thetford, Norfolk: The Thetford Press, 1986), 164.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 143.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, 143.

to do with that modality's reliance on the symbolic. As we will see explicitly in chapter three, "the semiotic has to work through the very order of language it defies."¹²⁶ In response to Kristeva's more virulent critics of her "shift to the right," Rose states:

Paradoxically, the very aspect of the theory which stopped Kristeva's writing from spinning off into the gratuitous celebration of noise is the aspect now criticised for its psychically normative implications; as if 'being an analyst' . . . and working towards an at least partial symbolisation of the repressed meant, by definition, abdicating any commitment to social change.¹²⁷

One can understand why, more than most, Rose is *both* appreciative of Kristeva's contribution to the issues of politics, psychoanalysis and feminism *and* critically tolerant of Kristeva's tendency to delve, occasionally, into an abject condition of the speaking subject which brings to the surface some of the more oppressive and "horrifying" aspects of cultures' marginalization of women. As Rose indicates, Kristeva recognizes that any transformation requires a letting go of the very thing that allows us, in the first place, to recognize the need for transformation.¹²⁸ This is not an easy pill to swallow for any political activist, feminist or

¹²⁶Ibid., 147.

¹²⁷Ibid., 147.

¹²⁸Rose elaborates,

"The problems raised by Kristeva's challenge to language and identity can perhaps be recognised as another version of a more familiar political question: how to effect a political transformation when the terms of that transformation are given by the very order which a revolutionary practice seeks to change. The presence of 'revolution' in the title of that early book was never, it should be stressed, part of a suggestion that psychic or aesthetic disruption could substitute for other forms of politics. . . In 1974, Kristeva located this logical 'impasse', or bind, in the Marxist theory of a class whose abolition, along with that of class itself, will emerge out of the same historical conditions which produced it. The proletariat has a privileged consciousness of a social totality tending towards its own elimination, which also means eliminating the very class and consciousness which had grasped its totality as such." (Ibid., 148.)

otherwise.

While critical of and disappointed in Kristeva's "lack of attention to women subjects and their texts" Alice Jardine states that "there can be no doubt that this was a calculated political decision on her part."¹²⁹ Jardine recognizes a critically important aspect of Kristeva's understanding of ethics that, at a level significantly different than the one Rose chooses to explore, explains Kristeva's strategy and the subsequent reactions to her strategy. Kristeva's strategy evolves from the realization that "'there are political implications inherent in the act of interpretation itself,' whatever meaning that interpretation ultimately bestows."¹³⁰ This awareness and the depth with which Kristeva pushes it, accounts for the seriousness of Kristeva's engagement with ethics. Unlike Lacan who scorns and rejects ethics and Derrida who leaves ethics in perpetual suspension, Kristeva *engages* ethics but only as *practice*. As Jardine suggests, for Kristeva, "what is ethical is a practice which dissolves narcissistic fixations - dissolving them before they become rigidified as sociosymbolic structures." Grasping this engagement of ethics as practice is of the utmost importance if one wishes to (seriously) engage in Kristeva's work.

In his book entitled *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68*, Peter Starr determines that Kristeva's ethical contribution is intricately interwoven with her contribution to politics. Kristeva's decision, following her 1974 trip to China¹³¹, to say "good-

¹²⁹Jardine, "Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts," 110.

¹³⁰Ibid., 114.

¹³¹See the section entitled "Second Stage: The China Experience and Kristeva's Shift: 1974 to 1980" earlier in this chapter (page 91) for references to this journey.

bye to politics, feminism included,"¹³² notwithstanding, Starr maintains that there "are profound continuities - both theoretical and political - beneath Kristeva's apparent shifts in the prevailing winds of political fashion."¹³³ These continuities, for Starr, in part relate to Kristeva's "ethical function of transgressive practice"¹³⁴ and can be linked with Kristeva's relentless drive to push beyond what Starr calls the "logic of specular doubling." Based on a psychoanalytic (Lacan) reading, this logic asserts that "revolutionary action is doomed to repetition because revolutionaries invariably construct themselves as mirror images of their rivals."¹³⁵ Starr notes the significant substitution of "dissidence" and "ethics" in Kristeva's late 1970 works for the "revolution" and "politics" of her earlier works. However, the "enigma" which Kristeva detected and made manifest in *La révolution du langage poétique* exposing a disturbing *and* exhilarating uncanniness about our existence as speaking subjects has never strayed from being the "subject" and "object" of Kristeva's inquiry. And this is exactly the *place* where ethics and politics come together for Kristeva. It is the reason why, at the limit, there is no differentiation for Kristeva. It is the reason why Kristeva will never adopt *a* politics, but will always disrupt that which politics (including Marxism and feminism) places. There is no utopia for Kristeva, either presymbolic or symbolic. Kristeva adheres neither to unity nor nihilism, neither to a narcissistic drive for One Meaning "paranoid in its demand for

¹³²Kristeva, "*Mémoire*," 52.

¹³³Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 129.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 129.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

coherence"¹³⁶ nor complete loss of meaning. Rather, as Starr understands, "her theoretical project is marked by a radical open-endedness."¹³⁷ Thus, Kristeva's politics is ethical and her ethics is political. As Starr indicates, it is a "political ethics" built "on a rigorously nonnarcissistic basis."¹³⁸ We hear Kristeva's concern, and this would speak directly to many of the bi-polar reactions elaborated above, in her statement,

Every time the revolutionary process settles in, realizes itself, and so takes form as a state structure or an ideology, this process is betrayed, reduced to local interests . . . , to preexisting ideological systems, to subjective identifications representing private property.¹³⁹

Finally, in *Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical*, Dawne McCance situates Kristeva among those "French" writers who are attentive to "excluded differences." Such attentiveness is ethical and makes change possible. McCance points out that Kristeva, for her part, "seeks modes of *signifiance* that respect the heterogeneity of the addressee."¹⁴⁰ It is respect for a subject who is always in the making, who "is alive only if it is never the same."¹⁴¹ For Kristeva, ethics respects the *dynamics* of every text and every writing subject, indeed, of every speaking *subject-in-process*. In this sense, "Western culture's representation of woman", indeed, *any* representation, in Kristeva's ethics, must be continually dissolved and

¹³⁶Ibid., 11.

¹³⁷Ibid., 236-237, footnote 14.

¹³⁸Ibid., 157.

¹³⁹Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, 377, translated and quoted in Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt*, 159.

¹⁴⁰Dawne McCance, *Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 18. The "French" writers referred to besides Julia Kristeva are Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault.

¹⁴¹Kristeva, "My Memory's Hyperbole," 220 and quoted in McCance, *Posts*, 91.

posited in an open-ended infinity. McCance reminds us that Kristeva brings to the surface, continually, the "heterogeneity that representation 'forgets'."¹⁴²

3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, if Kristeva advocates anything for feminists, it is to remain perpetually open, perpetually exploring, always receptive to that which representation represses. It is to move beyond any particular "reaction" to explore that which causes reactions and disrupts our narcissistic image. Each of these four interpreters, Rose, Jardine, Starr and McCance, offers an insight into the enigma that Kristeva's writing presents. They assist us in understanding why Kristeva's writing evokes such diverse, even extreme, reactions at both ends of the spectrum. They aid us in our appreciation of the difficult, even arduous task Kristeva has both taken on and offers others. The ethical task which Kristeva proffers is both exhilarating and arduous. It opens the speaking subject to the infinity of his or her existence. Yet, it reminds the speaking subject that he or she "is an exile, a wanderer (*égaré*), a subject whose only place, locus, is language and thus whose position (identity, meaning) can never be fixed."¹⁴³

4. Conclusion to Chapter Two

The purpose of this chapter has been to offer a *cursory* reading of the work of Julia Kristeva in order to suggest some basis upon which a deeper analysis of specific themes can proceed. That this reading has been cursory can not be overstated. It becomes understandable now as the chapter draws to a close and the intellectual and personal focal points of Kristeva's

¹⁴²McCance, *Posts*, 98.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 95.

life have emerged. Kristeva's work is at once extremely complex and varied, yet remarkably simple. It demands intellectual rigour but even more so, it demands a willingness to approach her texts from the open structure of the heterogeneous speaking subject. Only from that position, can one begin to *experience* the importance of what she says.

The stage is set now for a deeper look, in chapter three, at Kristeva's understanding of that open structure of the heterogeneous speaking subject or the subject-in-process. This is done through a presentation of Kristeva's most important work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

Chapter Three

Revolution in Poetic Language

1. Introduction

The importance of Kristeva's far-reaching theoretical work, *La révolution du langage poétique. L'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle. Lautrémont et Mallarmé*, cannot be overstated. Written in 1972-73 to be submitted in 1973 as her thesis for the *doctorat d'état* in Paris, Kristeva defended the thesis in the summer of 1973. Its success won her a chair in linguistics at the University of Paris VII. The text was subsequently published in 1974. From the beginning of her arrival in Paris in late 1965, Kristeva began laying the groundwork for this monumental work and the importance of this new and innovative thinker did not go unnoticed. Many distinguished journals such as *Critique*, *Langages*, and *Tel Quel* began immediately to publish Kristeva's preliminary studies. In addition, Kristeva published two books prior to the publication of *La révolution du langage poétique: Séméiotiké. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* and *Le Texte du roman*.¹ The importance of *La révolution du langage poétique* for the purpose of this thesis is also significant. Just as *La révolution du langage poétique* became the culmination of Kristeva's previous efforts, so Kristeva's subsequent work, without exception, grows out of and rests on the foundation laid out in *La révolution du langage poétique*. It is imperative for our purposes, therefore, to pay close attention to the

¹Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotiké. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969). This book is a collection of theoretical essays from Kristeva's early period. It has not been translated into English with the exception of two of its essays, "The Bounded Text" and "Word, Dialogue, and Novel," which have been included in Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, pp. 36-63 and pp. 64-91 respectively. Julia Kristeva, *Le Texte du roman. Approche sémiologique d'une structure discursive transformationnelle* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970). This was actually the first theoretical work Kristeva wrote although it was not the first to be published. It is basically an analysis of the birth of the novel in late medieval times and has roots in Kristeva's interests and studies prior to leaving Bulgaria.

overarching themes and concerns within the text since they set the trajectory for Kristeva's thought through the past thirty years. Any shifting in Kristeva's thinking has been at a methodological level. The expansion of her thought remains faithful to the originating focus which was well established in *La révolution du langage poétique*.

Consequently, *La révolution du langage poétique* will be discussed in a fairly extensive manner. Before proceeding to this, it is important to comment on the structure and content of the mammoth (646 pages) text. *La révolution du langage poétique* consists of three parts: A) *Préliminaires théoriques*, B) *Le dispositif sémiotique du texte* and C) *L'état et le mystère*. Only the first part, *Préliminaires théoriques*, has been translated into English.² Indeed, it has been suggested that parts B and C are untranslatable due to their extremely detailed analysis of the poetic works of Comte de Lautréamont and Stéphane Mallarmé.³ Kristeva's intricate analysis of French passages from Lautréamont and Mallarmé is intended for specialists in French literature or, more specifically, for those interested in the "materiality" of the specifically *French* language. Consequently, translation would be extremely difficult if not impossible.⁴ The theoretical section of the book, Part A, basically sets the groundwork

²Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller, with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

³Michael Payne, *Reading Theory: An introduction to Lacan, Derrida, and Kristeva* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 193. Specifically, Kristeva analyzes Mallarmé's poem "Prose" and Lautréamont's prose poems *Les Chants de Maldoror* and *Poésies* in Part B. In Part C Kristeva demonstrates how these poetic texts confront nineteenth-century France's state and society disrupting the static symbolic order of the bourgeoisie.

⁴Leon S. Roudiez, in his introduction to Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 5, states that: "While [Kristeva's] specific aim is to analyze the alteration . . . that marked several writers' relation to language during the late nineteenth century (and she does examine, in detail, works by Lautréamont and Mallarmé), the most valuable portion of this book, in my opinion, lies in its first two hundred pages

which is subsequently demonstrated in Parts B and C. Consequently, our interest will be focused primarily (although not exclusively) on the first part of Kristeva's text entitled "*Préliminaires théoriques*."

Drawing on Marx's insight that capitalism contains within its system forces which will ultimately destroy it, Julia Kristeva, in writing *Revolution in Poetic Language*, takes as a starting point the insight that within language are mechanisms that have the power to destroy it. The implications of this insight account for and justify Kristeva's juxtaposing of poetic language with the potentially transformative and unsettling activity of revolution. There are two important factors constituting Kristeva's thinking that need to be noted in order to grasp the force and direction of *Revolution in Poetic Language*. When it was written, Kristeva was deeply immersed in the left-wing activity of the avant-garde literary journal *Tel Quel*. Indeed, she was one of that journal's distinguished editors. In a review of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Phillip E. Lewis refers to Kristeva's "revisionary materialist semiotics."⁵ In fact, "revisionary" is an appropriate description of how Kristeva approaches all of the wide array of interdisciplinary studies included in her text. Just as Lewis describes Kristeva's method as "revisionary" vis-à-vis semiotics, so her methodology is revisionary in every field she broaches. Kristeva has been described as embracing dialectical materialism⁶ yet her use of

entitled '*Préliminaires théoriques*.'"

In addition, John Lechte, in attempting to give a literal translation of a poem by Mallarmé states that it is "almost impossible because the syntax is entirely fluid." *Reading Kristeva*, 112.

⁵Philip E. Lewis, "Revolutionary Semiotics," trans. Caren Greenberg *Diacritics* (Fall 1974) : 37.

⁶For example, see Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1977), 9.

Marxist theory is far from conventional. As Kristeva states as early as December 1973, "I never intended to follow a correct Marxist line, and I hope I am not *correctly* following any other line whatsoever."⁷ This comment is revealing (and has proven extremely accurate) in its indication of Kristeva's aim. Yet, it is not a defiant stance toward modes of authority. Rather, it has been Kristeva's *strategy* from the beginning. Leon Roudiez draws attention to this in his "Introduction" to *Desire in Language*:

Indeed, when dealing with concepts borrowed from various disciplines, be they called Marxism, linguistics, philosophy, psychoanalysis, or semiology . . . [Kristeva] has fitted them to the object of her investigations. Not "applying" a theory, but allowing practice to test theory, letting the two enter into a dialectical relationship.⁸

This leads to the second important point needing elaboration in order to comprehend the full import of Kristeva's contribution in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In following her own investigations with these "concepts borrowed from various disciplines," Kristeva draws upon heretofore untapped resources. In her careful reading of various thinkers (for example, Hegel, Husserl, Marx and Freud) Kristeva presents detailed and precise analyses, yet her analyses are more than clarification, they are "productive." More than discovering a weak point in each of these thinkers, Kristeva mines an aspect of a theory in order to unearth a depth and magnitude which has not been understood (even at times by the authors themselves) or has been misunderstood. Kristeva's interpretation of Hegel is, perhaps, the clearest example of this in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In the second section entitled "Negativity: Rejection" Kristeva takes her concept of "negativity" directly from Hegel.

⁷See Julia Kristeva, *Psychanalyse et politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), 73.

⁸Leon S. Roudiez, "Introduction" in *Desire in Language*, 1.

Hegel's "negativity" can be seen as that which brings about the dissolution of the theses while being at the same time part of the movement that produces the theses.

Negativity constitutes the logical impetus beneath the thesis of negation and that of the negation of negation, but is identical to neither since it is, instead, the logical functioning of the movement that produces the theses. . . . [N]egativity is the liquefying and dissolving agent that does not destroy but rather reactivates new organizations and, in that sense, affirms.⁹

Hegel recognized this important "self-destructive" movement underlying consciousness, yet "subsumes it under the *presence of consciousness*."¹⁰ "If [consciousness] wishes to remain in a state of unthinking inertia, then thought troubles its thoughtlessness, and its own unrest disturbs its inertia."¹¹ For Hegel, this movement is under the control of a transparent consciousness, it is "under the rule of the One and the Understanding."¹² Kristeva's appropriation and clarification of this Hegelian term, through utilization of the thought of Freud and Lenin, allows her to arrive at a heterogeneous notion of negativity that does not find the resolution that Hegel propounds. Such is Kristeva's methodology:

⁹Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 109.

"Elle est l'impulsion logique qui peut se présenter sous les thèses de la négation et de la négation de la négation, mais qui ne s'identifie pas avec elles, puis-qu' elle est autre chose que ces thèses : le fonctionnement logique du mouvement les produisant. . . la négativité est le liquéfiant, le dissolvant, qui ne détruit pas, mais relance de nouvelles organisations, et en ce sens affirme . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 101 & 102.)

¹⁰Ibid., 184.

¹¹Ibid., 184-85. "En vain elle veut se fixer dans une inertie sans pensée; la pensée trouble alors l'absence de pensée et son inquiétude dérange cette inertie." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 165.) Kristeva is quoting Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 52.

¹²Ibid., 114. ". . . sous l'emprise de l'Un et de l'entendement . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 105.)

appropriation and clarification. Yet, in addition, it is a creative reading that moves us into a realm not anticipated, or at least not accepted, by the original source. This particular example will reappear later in this chapter in the elaboration of *Revolution in Poetic Language*. For now, it is sufficient to demonstrate something of the method Kristeva follows in her struggle to discern the deep underlying dynamics that constitute the subject in language and make up signifying practice in general.

The four sections which constitute the theoretical part of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "The Semiotic and the Symbolic," "Negativity: Rejection," "Heterogeneity" and "Practice," correspond to four themes which, once understood, provide the necessary backdrop to Kristeva's entire corpus. Although Kristeva's style and focus of writing changed significantly after her psychoanalytic training in the late seventies, the theoretical framework established in *Revolution in Poetic Language* remains key in unearthing the import of her contribution.

2. *Revolution in Poetic Language*

2.1 Preliminary Investigations

Kristeva's ambition in writing *Revolution in Poetic Language* is multi-faceted and complex. She is in dialogue with such diverse fields as Marxist theory, philosophy, linguistics, structuralism, semiotics, psychoanalysis and scientific theory, naming only the most obvious. Kristeva's desire to demonstrate the intricate link between poetic language and revolution - specifically in nineteenth-century avant garde poetry's effects within a particular "historical

and economic formation, namely, the France of the Third Republic"¹³ - ultimately has implications in every area of discourse and in every dimension of language. For this reason, Kristeva's aim reaches far beyond this more obvious goal of the book. For Kristeva, the social mechanism of language represses something both logically and chronologically anterior to it, what Kristeva terms *signifiance*, an

unlimited and unbounded generating process, [an] unceasing operation of the drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through the exchange system and its protagonists - the subject and his institutions.¹⁴

Hence, Kristeva needs to combine psychoanalysis and linguistics in order to study this "generating process." Poetic language taps into this process through its "material" expending of language. But this "generating process" is not exclusive to poetic language. It is found at *every* level of human existence. It underlies human existence. It is a force so strong and potentially dangerous that our ignorance of it can lead, according to Kristeva, to, at one extreme, rigid totalitarian regimes and, at the other, a complete psychotic break.¹⁵ This ultimately is Kristeva's concern; the stagnation which results from the totalization and control propounded by a science and theory removed from history. It is a stagnation which philosophies of language, in particular structuralism and semiotics, have absorbed. As well,

¹³Lechte, *Reading Kristeva*, 142.

¹⁴Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17.

"Ce que nous désignons par *signifiance* est précisément cet engendrement illimité et jamais clos, ce fonctionnement sans arrêt des pulsions vers, dans et à travers le langage, vers, dans et à travers l'échange et ses protagonistes : le sujet et ses institutions." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 15.)

¹⁵Kristeva's claim here may appear extreme. Her justification, however, for the potential strength and violence of *signifiance* pushing societies and individuals to the borders of existence in totalitarianism and psychosis will become clear in the development of Kristeva's thought in this chapter and the next.

Kristeva is concerned about a static subject removed from direct experience, contained within a fixed shell which "represses the *process* pervading the body and the subject."¹⁶ Kristeva wants to examine in-depth the interdependence between two modalities within language (the symbolic and the semiotic). As well, she wants to examine the inception of the "revolution" which poetic language generates despite (capitalist) society's repression.

The notion of "dialectic" is essential to Kristeva and it is important to elaborate on her use of dialectical materialism. Kristeva's dialectical materialism is distinct from Marxist theory. Just as Marx "overturned" Hegel's dialectics with his focus on materialism, so Kristeva overturns Marx's dialectic with her focus on the *subject in process/on trial*. The weakness of historical materialism surfaces in its inability to take into account the speaking subject. The options of either (1) a mechanistic focus solely on modes of production omitting the subject altogether or (2) ascribing an 'identity' to the subject which bears too much resemblance to the 'essential human nature' and the division of subject and object posited by idealism led to the psychoanalytic critique of most forms of Marxism. It was Jacques Lacan who addressed this critique in "positing that the theory of signification is the theory of the subject," and in doing so, proposing "an understanding of the subject as the materialist process itself."¹⁷ Modes of production are determined, according to Marxism, by three 'practices,' that is, by three "particular form[s] of productive activity by which the social formation is produced and

¹⁶Ibid., 13. ". . . réprime le *procès* traversant le corps et le sujet . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 11.)

¹⁷Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 92.

transformed."¹⁸ These three practices are "economic practice" which is "constituted by the form of the productive forces, and the form of the relations of production," "political practice" which is "constituted by the contradiction between classes, in capitalism that between the bourgeoisie and the working class," and "ideological practice" which "produces positions which enable subjects to act within the social totality."¹⁹ The omission of the speaking subject from these three practices is, according to the psychoanalytic and literary critique of Marxism, at the basis of Marxism's inability to account for a phenomenon such as fascism which can motivate a class of people to act against its own material interests. It also accounts for the continual dominance of bourgeois ideology bereft of a 'revolutionary subject.' Lacan's re-reading of Freud in light of the importance of language structure at a conscious and unconscious level revealed a level of materialism as yet unexplored. Yet, it was Kristeva who elaborated the implications of this by rethinking the foundations of a structuralism enmeshed in a mechanistic reduction of the subject and a semiology resting on an idealist premise of the subject. Insistence on the relevance for materialism of a fourth practice, 'signifying practice,' stems from recognizing the need for an understanding of how the human subject is constructed. For Lacan and Kristeva, the human subject is constructed in language. Consequently, the process of signification is the process of the subject him or herself. Therein lies the importance of adding language as a fourth practice to the traditional three embraced in Marxist thought. "Signifying practice," which constitutes, for Kristeva, a positing and an erupting, is dialectical at the very basis of its movement.

¹⁸Ibid., 63.

¹⁹Ibid., 64.

I shall call signifying practice the establishment and the countervailing of a sign system. Establishing a sign system calls for the identity of a speaking subject within a social framework, which he recognizes as a basis for that identity. Countervailing the sign system is done by having the subject undergo an unsettling, questionable process; this indirectly challenges the social framework with which he had previously identified, and it thus coincides with times of abrupt changes, renewal, or revolution in society.²⁰

The continuing effects of negativity and rejection²¹ sabotage any possibility of the subject becoming unary (*unaire*).²² The speaking subject is constituted through the dialectic between the establishment and the countervailing of a sign system, that is, through the dialectical relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic realm.

In focusing on a process, or a materiality, anterior to the signifier, Kristeva juxtaposes language and the body in a manner that reveals the intricate connection between the two. The body, for Kristeva, is, again, not a unified body. It is not the image that the infant glimpses in its reflection of itself during the "mirror stage," rather, it is a "divided" body; a body made up of drives and pulsions, instincts and energies. Understanding this is key in discerning Kristeva's whole project, as well as, her important contribution. Kristeva brings the body into prominence when she focuses on difference within the body underlying difference within

²⁰Kristeva, *La Traversée des signes*. Quoted in Leon Roudiez's "Introduction" in Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 18.

²¹As these terms are understood in the section entitled "Negativity: Rejection" in Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 107-164. I elaborate on them further in this chapter in the section entitled "Negativity." (See page 155.)

²²Drawing on Alice Jardine and Thomas Gora's translation of "*sujet unaire*" as "unary subject" in *Desire in Language* and also Margaret Waller's translation in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, I choose to retain this rather than adopt the more common translation of "unitary subject." As Richard Starr points out in *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 235, endnote 3, "unitary subject" is "apt to elide the always split nature of the *sujet unaire*."

language. In fact, Kristeva's work can be seen as materialist in the extreme. She is grounded in a materialism that both overturns the Cartesian subject - the thinking subject "who defines his being through thought and language"²³ - and sabotages any attempt to get rid of the subject.

Kristeva begins *Revolution in Poetic Language* by stating that we must break out of static philosophies of language, "encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society" which "[repress] the *process* pervading the body and the subject."²⁴ It is in breaking out of this repression that we can gain access to "the generating of signifiante."²⁵ Yet, Kristeva is very aware of the impossibility of this task. She is aware of the seemingly inherent contradiction in using abstract thought (the posited 'outside') to break out of and reveal what abstract thought represses. So, she admits at the start that our *only* strategy is to "decenter the closed set and elaborate the dialectics of a process within plural and heterogeneous universes."²⁶ Yet, one may ask how Kristeva avoids the very problems she is trying to overcome? She avoids them by unearthing a signifying practice which escapes reduction through "shattering" discourse and through "exploding the subject and his ideological limits."²⁷ This shattering of discourse and exploding of the subject

²³Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 14. ". . . le sujet cartésien reconnaissant son être dans la pensée ou dans le langage . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 12.)

²⁴Ibid., 13.

²⁵Ibid., 13.

²⁶Ibid., 14. ". . . de l'ex-centrer et d'élaborer la dialectique d'un procès parmi des univers pluriels et hétérogènes." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 12.)

²⁷Ibid, 15. ". . . étant un éclatement du sujet et de ses limites idéologiques . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 13.)

reveals that linguistic changes constitute changes in the *status of the subject* - his relation to the body, to others, and to objects; it also reveals that normalized language is just one of the ways of articulating the signifying process that encompasses the body, the material referent, and language itself.²⁸

It reveals that there are processes, especially seen in art and religion, that exceed normalized discourse, that spill over the "self-contained" subject. Kristeva calls this exceeding or "spilling over" a heterogeneous practice (which she names *signifiance*²⁹) in order to indicate

on the one hand, that biological urges are socially controlled, directed, and organized, producing an excess with regard to social apparatuses; and, on the other, that this instinctual operation becomes a *practice* - a transformation of natural and social resistances, limitations, and stagnations - if and only if it enters into the code of linguistic and social communication.³⁰

So this "meaning as production," which Kristeva calls *signifiance*, is analyzed through her renowned method of "semanalysis" which attempts (as the name expresses³¹) to go beyond

²⁸Ibid., 15-16.

"D'abord, cet éclatement . . . révèle que les modifications langagières sont des modifications du *statut du sujet* - de son rapport au corps, aux autres, aux objets; et que le langage normalisé est une façon parmi d'autres d'articuler le procès de la signifiance qui embrasse le corps, le dehors matériel et le langage proprement dit." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 13.)

²⁹This term will not be translated into English as "significance" due to the incompatibility of the two terms. Whereas "significance" connotes intention in communication and representation, Kristeva links *signifiance* to the materiality of language.

³⁰Ibid., 17.

". . . d'une part, que les poussées biologiques sont socialement captées, dirigées et agencées de manière à produire un excès par rapport aux appareils sociaux, et, d'autre part, que ce fonctionnement pulsionnel est devenu une *pratique* : c'est-à-dire une transformation des résistances, des finitudes et des stagnations, naturelles et sociales, si et seulement si il a pu rencontrer le code de la communication linguistique et sociale. (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 14-15.)

³¹Kristeva prefers the term "semanalysis" to "semiotics" "owing to the etymology of 'analysis': *analysein*, to dissolve; dissolving the sign, taking it apart, opens up new areas of signification." See Leon Roudiez's definition in his "Introduction" in Kristeva, *Desire in*

the more traditional semiotics' study of signification to "study . . . the processes which break down or subvert the production of meaning."³² This analysis will bring to the surface the heterogeneity of language and will illuminate the subject in process/on trial. Of this heterogeneous process, Kristeva says it is

neither anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, [it] is a structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer *boundaries* of the subject and society. Then - and only then - can it be jouissance and revolution.³³

2.2 The Semiotic and the Symbolic

In taking to task the formalism of both structuralism and semiotics, Kristeva draws on two trends in current linguistic research which attend to the "externality" that lies beyond or outside the self-imposed limits of these formal theories of language.³⁴ The first reaches this externality through the psychosomatic realm, that is, through "the dimensions (instinctual drives) and operations (displacement, condensation, vocalic and intonational differentiation)"³⁵ that psychoanalysis, in particular the work of Melanie Klein, addresses. The second trend,

Language, 18.

³²Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1989), 154.

³³Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 17.

". . . ni fond morcelé anarchique, ni blocage schizophrène, est une *pratique* de structuration et de déstructuration, passage à la *limite* subjective et sociale, et - à cette condition seulement - il est jouissance et révolution." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 15.)

³⁴*Ibid.*, 21.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 22.

expressed particularly in the work of Emil Benveniste, rehabilitates a "subject" of enunciation, the phenomenological subject who intends or "means." Kristeva links these two trends or modalities in a dialectical relationship referring to the first as "the semiotic" and the second as "the symbolic." Kristeva insists the semiotic and the symbolic are "inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language."³⁶ As well, the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic is constitutive of the subject.

Freud realized that in analyzing dreams, slips of the tongue, etc., science had access to the unconscious or to that realm which is foreign or remote to consciousness. His theory of the unconscious (that there *is* a part of the mind in which dynamic mental processes occur, but are not immediately available to the subject's awareness) permits an understanding of the semiotic. Freud's discovery came about through his investigation into the "generally agreed" upon realization that there are breaks in conscious processes. They are not complete in themselves. These gaps within conscious processes gave Freud a glimpse into the otherwise unreachable unconscious. While the semiotic realm is not identical to the unconscious, there are clear analogies in that both operate outside the conscious awareness of the subject. As well, both the semiotic realm and the unconscious contain drives and impulses which disturb the subject's unitary identity and so create "gaps." Subsequently, Jacques Lacan would emphasize and elaborate upon Freud's recognition of the importance of the role of language. Language is both the key link between the semiotic and the symbolic realms and the medium through which each operates.

³⁶Ibid., 24.

The semiotic, as we have already briefly seen,³⁷ refers to a pre-linguistic stage in the development of the infant. Kristeva appropriates the traditional sense of the word "semiotics" understood as the general study of symbolic systems. Traditionally, semiotics is "the study of patterned human communication behaviour, including auditory/vocal and facial expression, body talk (kinestics), touch (proxemics), signs, symbols (semiology)."³⁸ She entwines this meaning with the Platonic term, *chora*³⁹, which gives her the insight and the tool necessary to speak about a mode of production and a space (both motile and static) within the human person that is anterior to language. This seemingly paradoxical strategy, whether perceived as "confusing"⁴⁰ or "perverse"⁴¹, allows Kristeva the needed scope to "descend" into a realm that is inexpressible, bordering on the irrational, psychotic, impulsive, destructive dimensions of the human psyche while still retaining a hold on the ordering, regulating functions that the term "semiotic" also connotes. Kristeva uses the Platonic term *chora* to assist in articulating her use of semiotic. The *chora* is a *space*; a container which holds *signifiante*. Yet, the *chora*

³⁷See the section of chapter two entitled "First Stage: The Bulgaria-Paris Transition: 1966 to 1974." (page 78)

³⁸The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary (1987), s.v. "semiotics."

³⁹Kristeva is criticized for employing Plato's term. For example, as Margaret Waller notes in her translation of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, note 11, 239, "The term "*chora*" has recently been criticized for its ontological essence by Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, annotator and tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 75 and 106, n. 39."

⁴⁰See Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994), 346-347, where he comments that Kristeva appropriates the word "semiotic" in a confusing manner.

⁴¹See Allon White, *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 70. White does not use this term in a pejorative sense. Rather, he is commenting on Kristeva's use of a term ("semiotic") which is central to the classical approach to structuralism and semiology in a manner that undermines the traditional understanding of both these disciplines.

is a *rhythmic* space; it is not fixed or situated. "Neither model nor copy, the *chora* precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm."⁴²

Kristeva speaks of the "semiotic" *chora* as the "rhythmic space" out of which the process of *signifiance* is constituted.⁴³ Thus, it is both the condition upon which discourse or language is founded, as well as, that which continually disrupts discourse or language (as witnessed in the "gaps" that exist within speech.) The semiotic *chora* is linked with "woman" and with "feminine."⁴⁴ How is this so? The semiotic *chora*, seen in full display in a newborn infant, displays itself in the intimate connection between the infant's body and the body of the mother. If for Plato, the *chora* signified the mysterious and primary space out of which all things originate, Kristeva sees it less as answering a theoretical question concerning the origins of things and more as "a specifically bodily and distinctively female space within which language and subject come to be."⁴⁵ It is the mother's body which orders the *chora* through the drives of the infant, specifically through "the oral and anal drives both of which are oriented and structured around the mother's body."⁴⁶ These drives are ambiguous. They are

⁴²Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 26. "Ni modèle, ni copie, elle est antérieure et sous-jacente à la figuration donc à la spécularisation, et ne tolère d'analogies qu'avec le rythme vocal ou kinésique." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 24.)

⁴³Ibid., 26.

⁴⁴Ibid., 29.

⁴⁵Payne, *Reading Theory*, 177.

⁴⁶Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 27. "Les pulsions orales et anales, dirigées et structurées toutes deux par rapport au corps de la mère . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 26.)

both productive and destructive. They bind and orient the infant to the mother's body. They are constant movement "both positive and negative in the degree to which they settle into a pattern but also destroy the stability of that pattern's new movements."⁴⁷ It is this dualism within the body itself that "makes the semiotized body a place of permanent scission."⁴⁸ The oral and anal drives, those sensory-motor impulses, create a constant movement within the infant. These bodily drives create a force that Kristeva, following Freud, insists is predominately destructive. It is at this point that Kristeva draws on Hegel's extremely important (for Kristeva) term "negativity." Distinct from "negation, which is the act of a judging subject,"⁴⁹ "[n]egativity . . . is the fourth term in the Hegelian ternary dialectic . . . It is, in effect, the very movement or 'ground' of the dialectic."⁵⁰ Prior to thought or knowledge, it is the primary instinctual trait upon which all drives and impulses operate. The oral and anal drives, constituting the primary material introjection and rejection in the infant's body and associated exclusively with its relationship to the mother's body, are both the condition for and potential dissolution of the symbolic realm.

The "split" nature of the speaking subject is constituted through a dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic. For Kristeva, the symbolic, like the semiotic, is also a signifying process. However, whereas the semiotic is generated through the

⁴⁷White, *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing*, 70.

⁴⁸Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 27. ". . . fait du corps sémiotisé un lieu de scission permanente." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 26.)

⁴⁹Ibid., 28. "Nous appellerons ce processus d'engendrement sémiotique une *négativité* en la distinguant de la négation comme acte du sujet jugeant." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 28.)

⁵⁰Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 133.

bodily relationship between the infant and its mother, the symbolic, that is,

syntax and all linguistic categories - is a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures.⁵¹

The remainder of the section entitled "The Semiotic and the Symbolic," which I will briefly outline, elaborates the signifying process within the speaking subject. Kristeva wants to lift from repression this dialectical process that not only brings the speaking subject to "syntactic and categorical understanding"⁵² but also continues to disrupt and ceaselessly recreate that understanding. Kristeva draws not only on psychoanalysis to articulate this process, but also on a certain style of literary practice, specifically the work of Mallarmé and Lautréamont.

Although drawing on phenomenology's demonstration of "the insurmountable necessity of *positing* an ego as the single, unique constraint which is constitutive of all linguistic acts as well as all trans-linguistic practice,"⁵³ in contradistinction to Husserl, Kristeva reverses phenomenology's question. Instead of asking "What are the operations of the I?" she asks, "How is the thetic, which is a *positing* of the subject, produced?"⁵⁴ Kristeva

⁵¹Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 29.

"Comme il apparaîtra dans ce qui suit, le *symbolique* et par conséquent la syntaxe et toute la catégorialité linguistique, est un produit social du rapport à l'autre, à travers les contraintes objectives constituées par les différences biologiques, entre autres sexuelles, et par les structures familiales concrètement et historiquement données." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 29.)

⁵²Ibid., 30.

⁵³Ibid., 32. ". . . la contrainte infranchissable de la *position* d'un ego, comme seule et unique contrainte constitutive de tout acte linguistique, aussi bien que de toute pratique trans-linguistique." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 31.)

⁵⁴Ibid., 36. "Et alors, la question ne doit-elle pas porter sur ce qui produit le 'je' plutôt que sur les opérations de ce 'je'-là? . . . comment le thétique qui est une *position* de sujet, a-t-il pu

wants to extend the research beyond phenomenology's theory of the subject to the semiotic condition that *produces* Signification, the Thetic, and the Subject.⁵⁵ She wants to demonstrate that the speaking subject is not the unified subject of phenomenology but, rather, is a subject *in process/on trial*. How? Recently, two new planets were discovered.⁵⁶ Although extremely large, their presence was not detected due to their proximity to the stars around which they rotate. The brilliance of the stars has kept any knowledge of the existence of the planets hidden from scientists.⁵⁷ What *could* be observed, however, was a phenomenon that occurred approximately every four days. It consisted of a fluctuation in the movement of the stars (the planets' sun) and was observed by scientists on earth. It was through extremely precise and intricate investigation into this fluctuating that scientists were able to piece together rather detailed information about these planets hidden by their sun.⁵⁸ The investigation of these scientists has interesting parallels to Kristeva's work in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Just as the planets' existence was hidden by the star, the semiotic is hidden by the arrival of

être produit?" (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 35.)

⁵⁵Ibid., 36.

⁵⁶Michael D. Lemonick, "Searching for Other Worlds," *Time Magazine*, 5 February 1996, 46-51.

⁵⁷"But picking out a planet against the glare of a star is like trying to spot a 100-watt light bulb next to a 100-billion-watt searchlight. Astronomers find it much easier to look for the subtle influence a planet might have on its parent star." Ibid., 49.

⁵⁸"An orbiting world's gravity should, for example, tug faintly on the star that is its sun, pulling it first this way, then that. If the plane of the planet's orbit is such that a star is being pulled first toward and then away from the Earth, the motion will cause light waves coming from the star to be squeezed together, then stretched apart--making the light look first a little bit bluer than it really is, then a little bit redder, then bluer again, and so on. These subtle color changes--examples of the so-called Doppler shift--can be precisely measured, and the magnitude of the wobble pinned down, with a device called a spectrometer." Ibid., 48.

signification, in other words, by the symbolic. Just as scientists posited the existence of a planet named X in order to begin to investigate it, Kristeva posited the existence of a realm she designated "semiotic" in order to distinguish between the qualitatively distinct stages in the unfolding of the signifying process. One key strategic move in this process for Kristeva, is a revamping of the Husserlian term *thesis* using the term *thetic*.⁵⁹ The thetic is

the condition of all enunciation, which requires separation (of the subject from his image and from objects) so that they may be identified, redistributed, and combined; the thetic phase is the "deepest structure" of signification in that it contains the object, the proposition, and the complicity between them; all signs are thetic.⁶⁰

Freud's theory of the unconscious allowed us to see that the thetic phase is not an origin or foundation, but a *moment* in signification. The separation of subject and object, "the condition of all enunciation," is necessary in order that a "position" or a positing within the symbolic order may be established. As Kristeva states, "the thetic phase . . . establishes signification."⁶¹

Two crucial stages within the development of the subject where the thetic stage is established are the mirror stage and the castration stage. Kristeva draws on Lacan's rereading of Freud to outline the importance of these stages. The mirror stage constitutes the "spatial intuition" within the infant (usually between the ages of six to eighteen months) which enables the infant to begin to experience a separation from the semiotic realm. In this original experience of separation, the infant sees its image in a mirror. There are three phases involved

⁵⁹(Gk *thetikos* such as [fit to be] placed, positive, affirmative. [*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, fourth edition, s.v. thetic.]) Kristeva uses this term because it indicates that which has been laid down or stated, such as positive statements or propositions.

⁶⁰Payne, *Reading Theory*, 241.

⁶¹Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 45.

in the mirror stage. First, the image the infant sees in the mirror is perceived as a real person (probably associated with the adult holding the infant if such is the case) whom the infant tries to grasp. Second, the infant becomes aware that what it sees in the mirror is an image and not a real person. Third, the infant perceives the image as its own self. The infant, prior to control over motor skills, is able to recognize the image as itself yet different from the body it experiences. The destructive and disturbing drives and instincts is the body that the infant *experiences*. Yet, the infant grasps an image of itself which is unified and whole. In this manner, the infant achieves its first conquest over its body. However, this original experience of separateness⁶² also constitutes the infant's first experience of alienation from itself. The experience paves the way for the more heightened experience of alienation that the infant later undergoes in its acquisition of language. This alienation refers again to the separation of the semiotic and the symbolic, the division upon which the speaking subject is constituted.

⁶²It is the infants' first *experience* of separation. However, for both Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva, the infant *is* divided. Division constitutes the infant even from before it is born. As Dawne McCance puts it:

"And yet, the subject, 'born' divided as a result of this narcissistic illusion, should not be conceived of as a unity prior to the mirror stage. For Lacan, the human creature, being a creature of biological drives, is originally submitted to the divisions of matter. Even before birth, there is already 'a certain dehiscence at the heart of the organism, a primordial Discord.' The mirror stage is not a 'fall' from wholeness into language and (as) difference."

And,

"Like Lacan, Kristeva suggests that fragmentation or division belongs to the child's 'prehistory,' and therefore that the *chora* (a term she uses to suggest a space or place 'anterior' to language) does not imply an original unity, an idyllic and harmonious beginning outside of the Father's binary law. For this reason, the 'before' of the *chora*, like that of Lacan's mirror stage, cannot simply be read into the before/after logic of a periodization, a developmental history, or a diachronic theory of language."

Posts: Re Addressing the Ethical (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 142, endnote 7 and 145, endnote 10.

Kristeva calls this stage primary narcissism. She describes it as entailing two separations: 1) the infant's separation from its own image seen in a mirror; and 2) the subsequent "positing of the object . . . likewise, separate and signifiable."⁶³ At this stage in the child's development, the posited "image" and "object" are fragile. They remain susceptible to the negativity of the oral and anal drives which constitute a separation from the mother's body. Yet, they also, as already stated, facilitate the infant's entry into language. "It is this identification and unification of a self as a self's image which is important for the generation of a unified consciousness capable of producing speech."⁶⁴

The castration stage "puts the finishing touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say, separate."⁶⁵ It signifies the detachment of the child from the mother. The child's exclusive desire for the mother is broken by the entry of a third term, the father, or anything that draws the mother's desire away from the child to something outside that exclusive relationship. This is the "imaginary castration" that keeps the infant from dissolving into the body of the mother. It produces in the infant its first experience of lack or absence. Hence, the mother becomes the infant's first object of desire. Following Lacan, Kristeva identifies the mother with the phallus, Lacan's symbol *par excellence*. It is during this period that the child's sexual experience ceases being polymorphic. Kristeva states that this

⁶³Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 45.

⁶⁴White, *Carnival, Hysteria, and Writing*, 76.

⁶⁵Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 47. "La castration parachève ce processus de séparation qui pose le sujet comme signifiable, c'est-à-dire séparé . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 44.)

decisive moment [is] fraught with consequences: the subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, *separates* from his fusion with the mother, *confines* his jouissance to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility onto the symbolic order.⁶⁶

This second phase of separation is more fixed and permanent. It is the castration stage which firmly posits the subject and enables the subject to defend itself against the fragmenting attacks of the drives. It enables the subject to enter the symbolic world of language. It establishes the position of the *thetic* as the entry point into language. Yet, the *thetic*, for Kristeva, is

a traversable boundary. [It] is completely different from an imaginary castration that must be evaded in order to return to the maternal *chora*. It is clearly distinct as well from a castration imposed once and for all, perpetuating the well-ordered signifier and positing it as sacred and unalterable within the enclosure of the Other.⁶⁷

This dual role of the *thetic*, on the border between the semiotic and the symbolic, is an integral point in Kristeva's understanding of the process of the speaking subject.

2.2.1 Kristeva's Expanded Sense of "Text"

For Julia Kristeva, the speaking subject is a split subject. This cannot be

⁶⁶Ibid., 47.

"Moment décisif et lourd de conséquence : le sujet trouvant son identité dans le symbolique, se *sépare* de son implication dans la mère, *localise* sa jouissance comme génitale, et transfère la motilité sémiotique dans l'ordre symbolique." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 45.)

⁶⁷Ibid., 51.

"Le *thétique* en tant que limite franchissable est donc tout autre chose qu'une castration imaginaire à esquiver pour rentrer dans la *chora* maternelle, ou une castration imposée à tout jamais, perpétuant le signifiant ordonné, le posant sacré et inaltérable dans l'enceinte de l'Autre." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 49.)

overemphasized. In order to account for such splitting, Kristeva posits two modalities within the signifying process; the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva relates the split in the human person with the split in language (the signifier and signified constituting the split in language). For Kristeva, the link between the two is displayed, as well as, effected through her expanded, social sense of the "text." In fact, Kristeva's understanding of the text is so integral to her theory that it is the link between the individual and the social as well. Although inclusive of the literary text, Kristeva's broader use of the term connotes *any* signifying form. The text, as signifying form, is also comprised of two modalities related to the semiotic-symbolic distinction. Kristeva names these the genotext and the phenotext. The genotext, foreshadowed by and aligned with the semiotic, is the non-phenomenal aspect of language and textuality. That is, it is outside of or exterior to the subject of enunciation. The genotext is the engendering of meaning without positing a meaning itself.

In other words, even though it can be seen in language, the genotext is not linguistic (in the sense understood by structural or generative linguistics). It is, rather, a *process*, which tends to articulate structures that are ephemeral (unstable, threatened by drive charges, "quanta" rather than "marks") and nonsignifying (devices that do not have a double articulation). . . . The genotext can thus be seen as language's underlying foundation.⁶⁸

The phenotext, similarly foreshadowed by and aligned with the symbolic, is the language of communication. It is not a process, but a "structure; it obeys rules of

⁶⁸Ibid., 86-87.

"C'est dire que le géno-texte, s'il est repérable à travers le langage, n'est pas linguistique (au sens de la linguistique structurale ou générative). On dira qu'il est un *procès* qui tend à articuler dans des structures éphémères (labiles, menacées par les charges pulsionnelles, "quanta" plutôt que "marques") et non-signifiantes (dispositifs sans double articulation) . . .

Le géno-texte se présente ainsi comme la base sous-jacente au langage . . ."
(*La révolution du langage poétique*, 83-84.)

communication and presupposes a subject of enunciation and an addressee."⁶⁹ So the text, akin to the speaking subject, is a heterogeneous process constituted by a dialectic of the genotext and the phenotext - at once, opposed to and enabling each other. Again, like the speaking subject, the dialectic of the genotext and the phenotext never finds resolution in the text. In other words, the text is:

the process or place in which opposing terms alternate in endless rhythm, supported by the chora; as instinctual rhythms pass through specific theses, meaning is constituted and is exceeded by what is outside meaning (materiality, for example); the text is produced by these psycho-social-biological processes.⁷⁰

In this manner, Kristeva irrevocably links the speaking subject with the text and the text becomes the meeting point between the individual and the social.

Kristeva considers poetic language the best illustration of the tearing open of the thetic by the semiotic while still retaining the thetic. In other words, poetic language, more than any other signifying practice, permits the thetic to retain its precarious position as the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic without becoming either metaphysical (where everything signifies) or materialist (where everything is mechanistic). Poetic language, according to Kristeva, is currently the only vehicle with which to challenge the technocratic ideologies of capitalism - "those positions of mastery that conceal their violence and pretend to be mere neutral legality."⁷¹ This is because, in the wake of Freud's discovery which

⁶⁹Ibid., 87. "Le phéno-texte est une structure . . . obéit à des règles de la communication, suppose un sujet de l'énonciation et un destinataire." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 84.)

⁷⁰Michael Payne, *Reading Theory*, 241.

⁷¹Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 83. ". . . autant de positions maîtresses qui cachent leur violence et ne se donnent que comme légalité neutre?" (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 81.)

"designated sexuality as the nexus between language and society, drives and the socio-symbolic order,"⁷² poetic language, so capable in the works of men like Mallarmé and Lautréamont of exposing the dialectical condition of the subject, has regained its violent and dangerous potential of disturbing the logic that dominates the social order. The subversiveness of poetic language is that it disturbs this logic not by going against it, but "by assuming and unravelling its position, its syntheses, and hence the ideologies it controls."⁷³ So the text (poetic language) transgresses the symbolic order by preventing the thetic from repressing the semiotic genotext. The text is the vehicle which allows the semiotic to break into the thetic and keeps the thetic from positing itself as a permanent authority beyond question. This transgression is also productive in that it "brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice that are called 'creations.'"⁷⁴

So, we have come back to Kristeva's initial insight concerning the connection with Marx's belief "that capitalism had produced its own gravedigger: the proletariat."⁷⁵ Just so, language produces its own gravedigger: poetic language or the text. Poetic language displays the violent and destructive force which resides within language itself. This force is capable of

⁷²Ibid., 84.

"C'est seulement grâce à la découverte de Freud qui, en levant le voile mystérieux que xix^e siècle maintenait sur la sexualité, l'a désignée comme nœud entre le langage et la société, la pulsion et l'ordre socio-symbolique . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 82.)

⁷³Ibid., 83. ". . . en assumant et en dépliant sa position, ses synthèses et jusqu' aux idéologies qu'elle manipule." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 81.)

⁷⁴Ibid., 62. ". . . et cette transgression occasionne toutes les transformations de la pratique signifiante : c'est ce qu' on appelle la 'création'". (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 62.)

⁷⁵Ibid., 105.

destroying any ideology as soon as it is positioned as such. As well, it has its own self-correcting mechanism, for as soon as it posits itself as corrective to the current social order, the same force begins to unravel *that* position. Yet while destroying, poetic language is producing. As Kristeva, citing Marx, states:

Within this apparent asociality, however, lies the social function of texts: the production of a different kind of subject, one capable of bringing about new social relations, and thus joining in the process of capitalism's subversion: "The realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production." "Truly free works, musical composition for example . . ." "Free time - which is both leisure and higher activity - will have naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and it is as a new subject that he will enter into the process of immediate production."⁷⁶

⁷⁶Ibid., 105-106.

"Dans cette apparente asocialité réside pourtant la fonction sociale des textes : produire un sujet différent, susceptible d'induire de nouveaux rapports sociaux, et s'inscrivant ainsi dans le processus de subversion du capitalisme : ' . . . le règne de la liberté commence seulement à partir du moment où cesse le travail dicté par la nécessité et les fins extérieures; il se situe donc, par sa nature, au-delà de la sphère de la production matérielle proprement dite.' 'Le temps libre - qui est à la fois loisir et activité supérieure - aura transformé son possesseur en un sujet différent, et c'est en tant que sujet nouveau qu' il entrera dans le processus de la production immédiate.'" (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 100.)

Marx's two works which Kristeva cites are: *Capital*, 3 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1974), 3:820 and *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 2:289 and 311.

2.3 Negativity

Caught up within this dynamic [practice], the human body is also a process. It is not a unity but a plural totality with separate members that have no identity but constitute the place where drives are applied. This dismembered body cannot fit together again, set itself in motion, or function biologically and physiologically, unless it is included within a practice that encompasses the signifying process.

Without such a practice, the body in process/on trial is disarticulated; its drives tear it up into stymied, motionless sectors and it constitutes a weighty mass. Outside the process, its only identity is inorganic, paralyzed, dead. Within the process, on the other hand, by confronting it, displacing its boundaries and laws, the subject in process/on trial discovers those boundaries and laws and makes them manifest in his practice of them.⁷⁷

The term negativity, as Julia Kristeva uses it, is drawn from Hegel, but seen through the lens of Freud. Kristeva determines that the key difference between Hegel and Freud in their understanding of the term is that Hegel subordinates the underlying thrust of negativity to consciousness. Freud, on the other hand, recognizes the crucial and, at times, overpowering role negativity plays in the unconscious, beyond the control of consciousness, and so does not subordinate one to the other. In Kristeva's elaboration of the signifying process, negativity is the link between the psychical and the somatic. It straddles both realms

⁷⁷Ibid., 101.

"Pris dans cette dynamique, le corps humain est lui aussi un procès. Il n'est pas une unité, mais une totalité plurielle, à membres distincts qui n'ont pas d'identité mais qui sont le lieu d'application des pulsions. Ce corps démembré ne se ré-ajuste, ne se met en branle, ne fonctionne biologiquement et physiologiquement, qu'à condition d'être inclus dans une pratique qui embrasse le procès de la signifiante.

"Sans une telle pratique, le corps en procès se disloque, les pulsions le déchiquètent en territoires bloqués et immobiles, il est un volume pesant : hors du procès, il ne retrouve d'identité qu'inorganique, paralysée, morte. Dans le procès, en l'affrontant, en déplaçant ses limites, ses lois, le sujet en procès les découvre et les énonce en les pratiquant." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 96.)

and ties one to the other. This link between the body and the psyche is crucial. It is the most important and most original insight Kristeva contributes to an understanding of the relation between corporeality/biology and sociality/psychology. In this second part of her theoretical study, Kristeva systematically elaborates this insight through a series of steps leading from Hegel to Frege to Freud and, in the final chapter, returning, but with a revisionist comprehension, to Hegel.⁷⁸

Kristeva draws our attention to negativity as Hegel's "fourth 'term' of the dialectic." It lies beyond or underneath the "triplicity" which only appears "in the realm of the Understanding."⁷⁹ Negativity is not a position. Rather, it dissolves or liquifies positions. However, positions are not possible without the impetus of negativity operating as the "logical functioning of the movement that produces the theses."⁸⁰ Negativity is fundamental to Hegel's theory of consciousness. For Hegel, consciousness is continually advancing, continually going beyond itself. This "continually going beyond itself" stems from Hegel's observation into the untruth of phenomenal knowledge. All knowledge continually moves toward the ideal of a correspondence between Notion and object, "the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds

⁷⁸In addition, Kristeva spends time in this section analyzing various (mostly unacknowledged) implementations of Hegel's concept, for example by Heidegger and Kierkegaard but also, in a more positive vein, Lacan and Derrida. Of Derrida's *Grammatology* Kristeva states that, "It is, in our view, the most radical of all the various procedures that have tried, after Hegel, to push dialectical negativity further and elsewhere." Ibid, 140. These analyses in *Revolution in Poetic Language* have been highly praised but are not dealt with here due to their digressive nature vis-a-vis our specific focus on the body.

⁷⁹Ibid., 113.

⁸⁰Ibid., 109.

to object and object to Notion."⁸¹ Negativity, for Hegel, is fundamental in consciousness' journey toward unity. It goes beyond the Kantian notion of *negation* where the negation of a term is its contradiction, that is, *X* is merely *not Y*.⁸² Hegel encompasses a conception of negativity where *X* is also *different than Y*. For Hegel, negativity is "the necessary liaison and immanent genesis of differences."⁸³ It is this (and only this) reading of negativity that dialectical materialism appropriates from Hegel. It is Hegel's conception of negativity that "prepared the way for the very possibility of thinking a materialist *process*."⁸⁴ This is because for Hegel, all activity, all thought, all truth springs from negativity. Negativity is the internal source; it is the internal impulsion of all spontaneous life movement. As already indicated, Hegel's negativity is not the Kantian negation of the knowing, understanding subject. That negation is situated and remains at the level of the symbolic. It begins and ends in the symbolic realm. Hegel's negativity exceeds a means-end rationality. It cannot be understood from the perspective of binary oppositions. Rather, Hegel's negativity explodes binary oppositions into a heterogeneity where links cannot be found at a rational level. Negativity as the link between the bodily and psychical realms must not be seen as a logical operation. Rather, it is a link in the sense that it both constitutes the symbolic and dissolves the symbolic. The symbolic realm is not possible without the semiotic realm. Likewise, although the semiotic realm "antedates" the symbolic, the semiotic is not possible without the symbolic.

⁸¹ Payne, *Reading Theory*, 184. As quoted from Hegel, see note 44.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 184.

⁸³ Coward and Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, 89. As quoted from Lenin, "Philosophical Notebooks," *Collected Works*, 38 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1972), 97.

⁸⁴ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 110.

It is negativity which is both the point of meeting between the two and the point of separation or splitting apart. It is what enables a subject in process/on trial to both become an "I" in face of an "other," and yet what disrupts and dissolves that "I." Transcendent unity, according to Kristeva's reading of Hegel, represses the "force" which Hegel attributes to negativity. For Kristeva, this force of negativity constitutes a revolutionary force. It has the potential to disrupt identity at all levels; at the level of the institution and the state, as well as, the individual.

Despite the dynamic and disrupting potential of Hegel's negativity, it was Freud's notion of drives which released the full impact of its force. Kristeva refers to Hegel's use of negativity's "Force" (*Kraft*) as both an "independent" and "subjugated" force.⁸⁵ Hegel realized the potential of that force, but undermines it by bringing negativity within the realm of understanding and reason.

Although posited, the "material" expression of Force, when thought of within the framework of conceptual unity, remains an *opaque* expression and, in ideal totality, this cannot be otherwise. In conceiving radical negativity as an *expression*, the idealist dialectic deprives itself of negativity's powerful moment: the scission that exceeds and precedes the advent of thetic understanding.⁸⁶

Although negativity appears as Force for idealism, it is situated in the realm of thought and,

⁸⁵"Independent and Subjugated 'Force' in Hegel" is, in fact, the title of chapter two of the section entitled "Negativity: Rejection." See *Ibid.*, 114.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 115.

"Tout en étant posée, l'extériorité 'matérielle' de la force, pensée par rapport à l'unité conceptuelle, reste une extériorité *opaque*, et il ne peut en être autrement dans la totalité idéale : la dialectique idéaliste, en pensant la négativité radicale comme une *extériorité*, se prive du moment fort de la négativité, de la scission qui excède et précède l'avènement de l'entendement thétiq." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 107.)

consequently, loses its impact as heterogeneous. Force, in the realm of thought, is no longer a material negativity, a free energy, it has lost its "reality" in becoming a thought. So, Kristeva's reading of Hegelian negativity (a materialist reading to which Hegel left himself open and, in fact, had already anticipated) breaks through idealism's repression in order,

to think this negativity as the trans-subjective, trans-ideal, and trans-symbolic movement found in the *separation of matter*, one of the preconditions of symbolicity, which generates the symbol as if through a leap - but never merges with it or with its opposite logical homologue.⁸⁷

Kristeva is elaborating upon the semiotic modality within the human person with regard to the former's initial and ongoing impact on the symbolic modality. She asserts this is necessary since theories of language, drawing from our Western philosophical tradition, have repressed this dynamic to such an extent that language is dead in their hands. In addition, because the semiotic realm functions at the level of the body - in the drives and instincts that underlie language and bring into existence the speaking subject - the Cartesian subject, already an "I", positions itself *precariously* on the foundation of a unified and disembodied subject without a history. Despite Hegel's idealism, Kristeva draws on his conception of negativity because he recognized an "outside" beyond "presence" and "identity." Yet, it was Freud's theory of drives that enabled Kristeva to push Hegel's negativity toward an instability far more permanent than the temporary instability Hegel envisioned in negativity. In fact, in contradistinction to Hegel's conception of negativity which "by a masterly stroke, he

⁸⁷Ibid., 117.

"... permet de penser cette négativité comme le mouvement trans-sujetif, trans-idéal, trans-symbolique de *séparation de la matière*, constitutif des conditions de la symbolicité et engendrant par un saut le symbole même, sans se confondre jamais avec lui ni avec son homologue logique opposé." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 108.)

subordinated to absolute knowledge,"⁸⁸ the "Freudian revolution"⁸⁹ enabled Kristeva to postulate a dialectical logic of *contradiction* based on "the *materiality - the heterogeneity* - of that negativity whose concrete base Hegel was unable to see . . ."⁹⁰ Hence, negativity is not the reversal of thetic judgement, it is transversal to thetic judgement. That is, it cuts across thetic judgment, moving through it, disrupting it, as well as, constituting it. It was Frege who posited the logical inconsistency in the conception of negative *thought*. Negation occurs only within syntax, that is, "negativity in judgment is a negation of the predicate . . ."⁹¹ If p is true, then not-p is false. True and false, positive and negative are contained within the realm of consciousness and thought which, for Frege, are indestructible. Negative *thought* does not exist because it lies outside consciousness. Although analytic philosophy and modern logic fall outside the scope of this dissertation, it is important here because it reveals the *logical necessity* of positing the "elsewhere" of negativity, that is, "outside the confines of language."⁹² Kristeva consequently draws on Freud's notion of *expenditure* or *rejection*.

It was the concrete operations of the pre-verbal gestures in infants, specifically what Freud refers to as the infant's "*fort-da*,"⁹³ that gave Freud the insight he needed to understand rejection and the drive charges linked to rejection. Through Freud's insight Kristeva is able

⁸⁸ Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject" in *The Kristeva Reader*, 31.

⁸⁹ Kristeva refers to this in *ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹¹ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 122.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 122.

⁹³ See Freud's discussion of the *fort-da* game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, revised edition, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 7-66 .

to show the material base of language. Prior to the infant's ability, via symbolic fantasy, to summon and reject the "mother" at will, the drives in the body - introjecting and rejecting, creative and destructive, positive and negative - form the materiality underlying language and the symbolic realm. These drives, therefore, constitute a part of not language per se, but the signifying process. Yet, it is specifically *rejection* that constitutes the initial separation of an object from the body and it is this moment of separation that "fixes [an object] in place as *absent*, and as a *sign*."⁹⁴ For Kristeva, rejection is fundamental. It is located both in drives and in consciousness, because it both precedes *thetic* unity and presupposes *thetic* unity. It is "the key moment shattering unity, yet it is unthinkable outside unity."⁹⁵ Again, the term *rejection* is used by Kristeva because it signifies both heterogeneity *and* unity. Kristeva recasts Hegel's conception of negativity through Freud's notion of expulsion and uses the term rejection to achieve this. This important strategy allows her to illustrate the signifying process as both divided *and* unitary. It facilitates Kristeva's effort to demonstrate and to stress that the symbolic function is born through bodily drives, and most specifically *anal rejection* - the symbol's "precondition and its repressed element."⁹⁶ Kristeva defines rejection as the semiotic mode of the anal-aggressive drive. *Drives* can be understood as stemming from Freud's account of the infant's psycho-sexual stages. Although not mutually exclusive in the child's development, the stages refer to the infant's focus on a specific erotogenic zone (or bodily

⁹⁴Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 123. "Cette négativité - cette dépense - pose un objet comme séparé du corps propre et, au moment même de la séparation, le fixe comme *absent* : comme *signe*." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 114.)

⁹⁵Ibid., 147. "Ce *rejet*, cette dépense, est le moment fort de l'éclatement de l'unité, mais il est en même temps impensable en dehors d'elle." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 134.)

⁹⁶Ibid., 149.

centre of arousal) and chronologically, they are the oral stage (where the primary focus is the mouth), the anal stage (focusing on the sphincter muscle), and the genital phase (with the focus on the genitals). The anal-aggressive drive, emerging prior to the mirror phase, is particularly significant due to its linkage with the infant's capacity to separate from the mother. Although sadistic tendencies have already appeared in the oral biting stage, sadistic and aggressive tendencies are particularly powerful at this anal stage. It is typical in this stage that the child manifests aggression, destructiveness, negativism, and externally directed rage. The anal-aggressive drive signifies the return of rejection giving vent to destructiveness and the death drive. Anality is important because it indicates the body's need to rid itself of excess. Yet, this separation and rejection is pleasurable. In the anal-aggressive drive, separation is pleasure not lack. Kristeva makes an important link between this pleasurable expulsion and the expulsion of sounds from the vocal apparatus. (She also speaks of the *discharging* of energy in the muscular apparatus of which dancing is an example.) Discharges manifested in increased frequency of phonemes, repetition, condensing and/or displacing morphemes, etc., all elicit the pleasurable sensations experienced in the earliest stages of infancy. "Thus, without leaving the line of meaning, [rejection] cuts up and reorganizes that line by imprinting on it the path of drives through the body: from the anus to the mouth."⁹⁷

Although Hegel opened the way for the notion of negativity, two aspects of negativity escape his pre-Freudian awareness. The first is the continual return of repulsion or rejection upon itself. The parallel between Hegel's conception of negativity and the Freudian drives

⁹⁷Ibid., 155. "Ainsi, sans quitter la ligne du sens, il la découpe et la réorganise en lui imprimant le parcours de la pulsion à travers le corps : de l'anús à la bouche." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 141.)

allows one to realize the flaw in supposing the subordination of negativity to consciousness on consciousness' way to absolute unity. Drives are the repeated scission of matter; they generate repeated rejection. The contradictory forces of drives (life drives/death drives, ego drives/sexual drives) produce within the subject continual struggle and conflict. The symbolic's dialectical relationship with the semiotic, the place of drive activity, undermines consciousness' subordination of negativity. Along with its foundational role in the emergence of the signifying process, the *continual irruption* of drive activity on the symbolic function subverts or prevents "the stasis of One meaning, One myth, One logic."⁹⁸ Second, and for similar reasons, Hegelian logic does not take account of the underlying heterogeneity that both undermines and maintains the symbolic realm. Rejection, tied so definitively to matter and the scission and expulsion of matter, yet also buttressing social apparatuses, produces an excess which again brings us back to the importance, for Freud and Kristeva following him, of drives.

In all these forms, [of sadism - oral, muscular, urethral, and anal] of which the anal is the last to be repressed and hence the most important, energy surges and discharges erotize the glottic, urethral, and anal sphincters as well as the kinetic system. These drives move through the sphincters and arouse pleasure at the very moment substances belonging to the body are separated and rejected from the body. This acute pleasure therefore coincides with a loss, a separation from the body, and the isolating of objects outside it.⁹⁹

⁹⁸Ibid., 148.

⁹⁹Ibid., 150-151.

"Sous toutes ces formes [un sadisme oral, musculaire, urétral et anal] dont l'anale est la dernière à être refoulée et en ce sens la plus importante, se manifeste une érotisation des sphincters glottique, urétral et anal aussi bien que du système kinésique, produite par des poussées, des charges énergétiques. Ces pulsions traversent les sphincters, et suscitent le plaisir au moment même où se détachent du corps des substances lui ayant appartenu et désormais rejetées en dehors. Plaisir aigu coïncidant avec une perte, avec

These drives do not merely *produce a* speaking subject. They break through the repression of language producing a *heterogeneous* subject, beyond grasp, beyond containment, beyond synthesis.

Hegel's conception of negativity, as Kristeva has reworked it through Freud's theory of drives and expulsion, becomes, for Kristeva, *rejection*. In Kristeva's hands, rejection is "the semiotic mode of...permanent aggressivity." But that is not all. It is also "the possibility of [permanent aggressivity] being *posited*, and thus *renewed*."¹⁰⁰ Hegel subordinates "negativity" to consciousness and in so doing tames and subdues its potential. Freud, realizing that complete repression cancels the symbolic function, conquers "negation"¹⁰¹ through an intellectual acceptance of the repressed. Kristeva, by reworking Hegel's negativity through Freud's theory of drives and expulsion, posits rejection operating in poetic language as a "third-degree negativity."¹⁰² It is this third-degree negativity which manages to lift repression without subduing "[t]he repeated death drive (negativity, destruction)."¹⁰³

Kristeva's rejection is neither a subordination of negativity nor a conquering of

la séparation du corps et l'isolation d'objets hors de lui." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 137.)

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 150. "Ce que nous désignons par *rejet* n'est rien d'autre que le mode sémiotique de cette agressivité permanente, et la possibilité de sa *position*, donc de son *renouvellement*." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 137.)

¹⁰¹See Freud's text on *Negation*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, revised edition, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 19 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 235-239 which Kristeva refers to in the last chapter of "Negativity: Rejection," 162-164.

¹⁰²Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 164.

¹⁰³Ibid., 163.

negation. Rather, by aligning rejection with poetic language (specifically as seen in the work of Mallarmé and Lautrémont which Kristeva will demonstrate in meticulous detail in Part II of *La Révolution du langage poétique*) Kristeva is able to demonstrate rejections' appearance in the symbolic realm, that is, within language, without losing its force or its economy.

Poetic negativity is third-degree rejection. As the rejection of symbolic and neurotic negation, it recalls, spatially and musically, the dialectical moment of the generating of signifiante....In so doing, the text *momentarily* sets right the conflict between signifier and signified established by the symbol of negation and which determines all censorship originating in society - re-positing it, of course, but redistributing it as well. The text makes rejection work on and in the very place of symbolic and social censorship, which establishes language as a symbolic system with a double articulation: signifier and signified.¹⁰⁴

2.4 Heterogeneity

Julia Kristeva's methodology and style of writing tends to circle around the concept or idea she is trying to express. This strategy permits a deepening and intensification of what was said earlier. She pulls the reader further and deeper into the text and into the phenomenon she wants to describe, but which defies conventional means of description. In one sense, Kristeva's text becomes the very process she is attempting to describe or reveal. That is, the

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 164.

"La négativité poétique est un rejet au troisième degré : rejet de la négation symbolique et névrotique, il remémore spatialement, musicalement, le moment dialectique de l'engendrement de la signifiante.

"Par là même, le texte ressoude *momentanément* la discordance entre signifiant et signifié établie par le symbole de la négation et déterminant toute censure d'origine sociale, pour la re-poser, bien sûr, mais en la redistribuant autrement. Il fait agir le rejet sur le lieu même de la censure symbolique et sociale qui instaure le système du langage comme un système symbolique (doublement articulé : signifiant/signifié)." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 150.)

semiotic realm and its dialectical relationship with the symbolic realm, as well as, the disrupting effect of rejection upon the speaking subject are difficult, as Kristeva is well aware, to keep "in mind." What Kristeva is attempting to reveal is elusive to consciousness. It evades thought, metaphorically "turn[ing] the corner always a pace or two ahead of us."¹⁰⁵ Such is the difficulty of Kristeva's task and the necessity of her methodology. Her third section entitled "Heterogeneity" is no exception. The emphasis here is again on "drives," "rejection" and "negativity" within the thought of Freud and Hegel. However, Kristeva takes us deeper. The notion of a heterogeneous subject becomes even more prevalent as does its linkage with both the biological sphere and the social sphere.

Although post-Freudian theories tend to focus more on the neurobiological aspect of drives (a mechanistic reading), Kristeva is critical of their tendency to bracket out what she considers Freud's most significant insight. Freud maintains both the dichotomy of drives (life drives/death drives, ego drives/sexual drives) *and* the heteronomy of drives (their determination within the social realm.) Yet, even more than this, Freud maintains that drives are heterogeneous. They not only divide matter, they "multiply" it; they pluralize it. This pluralization of matter underlies and constitutes, for Kristeva, the signifying process.

Freud's fundamental insight into the heterogeneity of drives reveals drive activity's signifying and signifiable conflictual materiality. In a moment that constitutes a *leap* and a *rupture* - *separation* and *absence* - the successive shocks of drive activity produce the signifying function.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵From Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945), 288.

¹⁰⁶Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 167.

"... le geste fondamental de Freud qui y voit une hétérogénéité - matérialité signifiante et signifiable, conflictuelle, et dont les heurts successifs produisent la fonction signifiante par un moment de *saut* et de *rupture*, de *séparation* et d'*absence*." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 152.)

This heterogeneity of drives is most obvious when observing the kinetic energy of infants prior to the channelling of this motility and gesturality through social constraints. However, the heterogeneity can also be observed in the "already constituted subject" by means of poetic language. It appears in the paragrammatic quality of that text's linguistic texture when infinite possibilities open up through the combination of letters or phonemes producing an unconventional reading. This infinite network of possibilities within the speaking subject rarely finds release due to the extreme precariousness of that position. Kristeva calls the symbolization of this plurality of drives "the place of an untenable contradiction" and, therefore, it is a place that "only a limited number of subjects can reach."¹⁰⁷

What makes Kristeva's theory move beyond a strictly biological reading (and, therefore, move beyond a mechanistic reading) is her use of social constraint. Because she proposes a dialectical reading of the speaking subject, between the semiotic and the symbolic realms, both presuppose the other and neither can exist without the other. Therefore, Kristeva's theory is neither biologist nor idealist. She advocates neither sheer repetitive determinism, nor the illusion of One meaning (the fiction of unity and identity - what Kristeva at times calls the "homosexual relation") devoid of the contradiction and plurality within matter which underlies that meaning and produces it. The importance of this dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic and, consequently, the importance of the heterogeneous drives that produce the signifying subject stems from the resultant realization

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 155. "La symbolisation du rejet est le lieu d'une contradiction intenable et qu' un nombre restreint de sujets atteint." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 142.)

that the symbolic is founded not merely on a lack, but also on an excess.¹⁰⁸ For Kristeva, the symbolic is more than a "sign" in the absence of the "real." If repression is not too severe, the symbolic is (or can be) ruptured by the "real." This is what constitutes continual production; the re-jection¹⁰⁹ hence renewal of the symbolic. This renewal or "affirmative moment of rejection" is the process of production itself. It is not the "object" aimed at or desired because it is lacking. Rather, it is the very process itself stemming from excess. The object (of desire) is no longer the goal. The object (of desire) becomes what Kristeva calls the "lower threshold" which allows "rejection to be articulated as social practice."¹¹⁰ The production, or process, which Kristeva calls the heterogeneity of drives experienced in rejection ends up, in Kristeva's theory, as the only possibility for renewal and creativity. Reversing Hegel's account of negativity as that which consciousness must subsume and go beyond in order to reach absolute unity, Kristeva's re-jection disrupts (not subsumes) the object, stases, or the thetic moment generating a multiplicity of meaning.

From this logic, Kristeva posits the importance of the practice of the text. In this

¹⁰⁸Kristeva is specifically in dialogue with Jacques Lacan here. Kristeva agrees with Lacan that the speaking subject is founded on a lack but critiques Lacan through her attempts to bring the body back into the speaking subject by revealing the materiality which produced it. Hence, the speaking subject is founded not only on lack, but also on excess. Desire is not merely desire for the lacking object which can never be reached, it is also a continually renewed desire that is produced through the heterogeneous drives.

¹⁰⁹The hyphenation (for example, see Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 171, *le re-jet* see 155 of the original text, *La révolution du langage poétique*) emphasizes the underlying sense of the word rejection - a "throwing back" (from the Latin *jacere*) "again" (*re-*).

¹¹⁰Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 177.

instance, the text, for Kristeva, is not merely any text.¹¹¹ Rather it is very specific. Kristeva draws on Roland Barthes' understanding of the term, as described in his essay "From Work to Text." Barthes

argues that a text is a structure of language for which usual notions of closure, meaning, and authorial intention do not apply. For Barthes a text continually produces meaning independent of its association with an author. It interacts with a reader, is produced by the reader, and is a source of joy or *jouissance*.¹¹²

Similarly, in Kristeva's use of the term, the focus is on production and not on the actual product. It is the place where opposing terms alternate in endless rhythm. As with the speaking subject, the text is produced through the instinctual drives which are triggered in the *chora* underlying the text.¹¹³ Hence, the text is both materiality and sociality. We are reminded of Kristeva's term "semanalysis" where meaning is conceived "not as a sign-system but as a *signifying process*."¹¹⁴ Kristeva's text bears no resemblance to a text used in social exchange for the purpose of conveying meaning. Rather, the text is perceived as poetic language which carries revolution within its very materiality of language. Specifically, Kristeva ties the revolutionary text to the avant-garde experience (especially that of Lautrémont and Mallarmé) of the late nineteenth century. In its revolutionary capacity, the text has a transformative

¹¹¹In contradistinction to her earlier use of the term "text" where its reference is broader encompassing any signifying practice.

¹¹²*The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Joseph Childers and Gary Hentzi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 303.

¹¹³Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 99.

¹¹⁴Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject" in *The Kristeva Reader*, 28.

power, it transforms reality exactly at the point or moment of non-closure.¹¹⁵ Consequently, for Kristeva, "the text is a *practice* of rejection, since practice's key moment is *heterogeneous contradiction* and *signifying thesis* is its necessary precondition."¹¹⁶

Kristeva is interested in more than the personal experience or individual, subjective representation that constitutes or is elicited by texts. For Kristeva, "maintaining heterogeneous contradiction is essential"¹¹⁷ at the level of social order. Therefore, in contrasting the Hegelian position with the text as practice, Kristeva will both link *and* move beyond Hegel's conception of negativity by highlighting the rejection found in the nineteenth century avant-garde experience. The revolution in poetic language, which Kristeva ultimately wants to bring to our awareness, can be detected in the texts of Lautrémont and Mallarmé. In the texts of these avant-garde writers one experiences more than "art" as a social function or a cultural preoccupation. At a deeper level, there is a rupture in the very unity and a shaking of the foundation upon which culture and society is built. It is this deeper level that reveals poetic language's continuance of

positive rejection, both within the subject and within the social order(s) of which the subject is a part. In this sense, art's perverse and perennial rejection of aesthetic or formal unity is an eloquent testament to its irrepressible assertion of "human" heterogeneity.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Winfried Nöth, *Handbook of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 322.

¹¹⁶Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 187. "Disons, pour y revenir, que le texte est une *pratique* du rejet, la pratique ayant la *contradiction hétérogène* pour moment fort et la *thèse signifiante* pour condition nécessaire." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 167.)

¹¹⁷Ibid., 189. ". . . l'essentiel serait de maintenir la contradiction hétérogène . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 169.)

¹¹⁸Payne, *Reading Theory*, 196.

Capitalist and technocratic defenses against this rupturing and "perverse" force are powerfully manifested in the form of class struggle, liberal accommodation and marginalization of avant-garde discourse¹¹⁹ which keep "heterogeneous contradiction within a simply subjective representation" and consequently render "it inaudible or complicitous with dominant bourgeois ideology."¹²⁰ However, as Kristeva has maintained from the beginning, language has within it the revolutionary power to continually undo its own structures. It is the revolutionary power which is manifested in the always renewed return of "materiality" in "logic."¹²¹

2.5 Practice

In the final section of the theoretical part of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, entitled "Practice," Kristeva draws attention to dialectical materialism's overturning of the Hegelian dialectic through positing the primacy of practice in knowledge.¹²² In highlighting this overturning she is able to allude to what she calls a "second overturning of the dialectic"¹²³ which was inaugurated by nineteenth century avant-garde poetry, seen especially in the work of Lautrémont and Mallarmé. This second overturning, according to Kristeva's reading,

¹¹⁹Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 190-191.

¹²⁰Ibid., 190. ". . . tenir la contradiction hétérogène dans une représentation simplement subjective, c'est la rendre inaudible ou complice de l'idéologie bourgeoise dominante . . ." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 170.)

¹²¹Ibid., 191.

¹²²Ibid., 198-199.

¹²³Ibid., 214.

moves beyond the primacy of practice over theory posited by Marx, Lenin and Mao Tsetung. It moves beyond these thinkers as a result of their resistance to challenging consciousness' presence to itself. If Marx, and those following, overturned the Hegelian dialectic by demonstrating that history moves forward through "a succession of struggles and ruptures within relations of production,"¹²⁴ the poetry of Lautrémont and Mallarmé demonstrate that dialectical materialism's ignored and atomistic subject is, in fact, a heterogeneous subject. Prefiguring Freud's revolutionary undermining of "consciousness-present-to-itself", avant-garde poetry of the late nineteenth century exploded the subject into infinite pieces. If Marxism mandated political economy the task of exposing the class struggle of history, "art's" task, especially according the Lautrémont and Mallarmé, was to demonstrate the absence of the subject in his or her practice.

The subject never *is*. The *subject* is only the *signifying process* and he appears only as a *signifying practice*, that is, only when he is absent *within the position* out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds.¹²⁵

The poetic works of Mallarmé and Lautrémont demonstrate more than a realization that there is no single, unified meaning underlying the letters on the page. They also demonstrate that the subject of writing is not reducible to a single, unified "I" - hence, the subject never *is*. This, in turn, takes us back to "the semiotic chora which underlies the language system."¹²⁶

¹²⁴Ibid., 215. ". . . une succession de luttes et de ruptures dans les rapports de production." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 188.)

¹²⁵Ibid., 215.

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

¹²⁶Kristeva, (*La Révolution du langage poétique*, 225.)

The important implication of the "subject who never *is*" becomes clear in the "revolutionary" capacity of these poetic works. For, this demonstration of the absence of the subject in textual practice is not restricted to esoteric poetry. In fact, it includes all social practice including "everyday, scientific, and technical practice."¹²⁷ In elaborating on the social implications of the scission in the process of the signifying subject, Kristeva insists that all textual practices are implicated in this dissolving process. Yet the text as practice, as demonstrated in the poetry of Mallarmé and Lautrémont, specifically calls "into question (symbolic and social) *finitudes* by proposing *new signifying devices*."¹²⁸ This, for Kristeva, is the text's ethical function. The subject in process/on trial in language as revealed in the text necessitates a new and different understanding of ethics.

"Ethics" should be understood here to mean the negativizing of narcissism within a *practice*; in other words, a practice is ethical when it dissolves those narcissistic fixations (ones that are narrowly confined to the subject) to which the signifying process succumbs in its socio-symbolic realization. Practice, such as we have defined it, positing and dissolving meaning and the unity of the subject, therefore encompasses the ethical.¹²⁹

When Mallarmé says that "Every Thought Gives Forth a Throw of the Dice"¹³⁰ he is alluding

¹²⁷Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, 216.

¹²⁸Ibid., 210. ". . . celle d'être une *pratique* mettant en cause des *finitudes* (symboliques et sociales) par la proposition de *nouveaux dispositifs signifiants*." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 185.)

¹²⁹Ibid., 233.

"Nous entendrons par *éthique* la négativation du narcissisme dans une *pratique*; autrement dit, est éthique une pratique qui dissout les fixations narcissiques (étroitement subjectales) auxquelles succombe le procès signifiant dans son effectuation socio-symbolique. La pratique, telle que nous l'avons définie posant-dissolvant le sens et l'unité du sujet, recouvre ce que nous venons de dire de l'éthique." (*La révolution du langage poétique*, 203.)

¹³⁰Ibid., 228.

to the precariousness of the position of the subject in process/on trial who is not the master of thought as consciousness presumes. The ethical function of the text is detected in the text's capacity to expose this precariousness, to position itself as a fine balance between, on the one hand, madness and, on the other, social and symbolic relations.

2.6 Conclusion

In Part B of *La révolution du langage poétique: l'avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle: Lautrémont et Mallarmé*, entitled "Le dispositif sémiotique du texte," Kristeva proceeds to demonstrate in an intricately detailed analysis of specific works by Mallarmé and Lautrémont the plurality of meaning and the heterogeneity of the subject. In other words, Kristeva explains, via an analysis of these works, her concept of signifying practice. Through the timbre in Mallarmé poetry, Kristeva is able to point to "semiotic devices", such as rhythm, repetition, condensation, and metonymy, etc., which reveal the drive basis of the symbolic order."¹³¹ From this, Kristeva demonstrates that these texts elucidate a "truth" which is "plural" and "uncertain."¹³² With Lautrémont's work, Kristeva shows how the unified, inscribing "I" writing from a single position also becomes pluralized and uncertain, disappearing on the one hand, multiplying infinitely on the other. Part C, the last section of *La révolution du langage poétique*, entitled "L'Etat et le mystère," again takes the works of Lautrémont and Mallarmé in order to show how these "revolutionary" poetic works confronted the "particularly static version of the symbolic embodied in the bourgeois

¹³¹Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 142.

¹³²Kristeva, *La Révolution du langage poétique*, 289.

representative state and society in late-nineteenth-century France."¹³³ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation (as well as superfluous) to delve into these last two sections.

3. Conclusion to Chapter Three

The fairly extensive focus on the first theoretical part of *La révolution du poétique langage* was necessary due to its important contribution vis-à-vis the polarity identified in chapter one. Kristeva's penetrating analysis of the underlying corporeal and instinctual dimension of language and the speaking subject transforms the discussion of the body/psyche polarity. Through her analysis, we see the inescapable determinism of the body's effect on the psyche, yet, at the very same moment and drawing from the same bodily effects on the psyche, we also see a creative power which transcends the body's determining influence. This is Kristeva's radical insight. It shifts the mind-body relationship to a level where we are able to understand the polarity between the two, why it is so, why it must be so, and, yet, why it is *not* determinant. We now move to chapter four where we consider the ramifications of body-psyche relationship which is, paradoxically, both determining and *not* determinant. Thus, Kristeva's analysis of the limit-situation is significantly more determinate yet, paradoxically, profoundly more creative than either Ruether's expansive offering or the contribution of the eight, progressively differentiated, responses to the problems of the mind-body relationship outlined in chapter one. This explication of *Revolution in Poetic Language* allows us now to investigate, with some clarity, Kristeva's subsequent works as they relate to the importance, indeed the determining impact, of the body in Kristeva's thought. Although all of the relevant

¹³³Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 150.

works by Kristeva will be taken into consideration, *Powers of Horror*¹³⁴ will be specifically highlighted. *Powers of Horror* is the text that most elucidates the ramifications of what Kristeva has put forward in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. As well, it serves our purposes by being a vehicle through which we can see the significance that Kristeva's theory has in understanding the deep psycho-somatic causes of the body's repression and degradation. At the same time, we can, I believe, begin to glimpse the power and magnitude of the body as a determining factor in ethical discourse.

¹³⁴*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*. (Paris: Seuil, 1980). Translated as *Powers of Horror*, by Leon Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Chapter Four

The Ramifications of Kristeva's Theory: Abjection and Ethics

1. Introduction

The link between the body and the psyche in the human person is imperative and irrevocable. It constitutes the precarious boundary condition of each person. Just as the energy of the drives brought about by scission within the body bursts upon the psychic realm, so meaning and signification infiltrate the body even from the original separation at birth. Kristeva's detailed elaboration of the role of negativity in the constitution of the speaking subject has led us to a deep understanding of this link. It has profoundly clarified the originary role of the body-psyche link in the dialectical, divided condition within the human person. The intricate connection between language (the psyche) and the body originates in a *divided* body made up of drives and pulsions, instincts and energies. This dividedness, which comprises the human body, underlies a dividedness within the speaking subject. Kristeva calls the two modalities which constitute the dividedness within the speaking subject the semiotic and the symbolic. Ultimately language is the key link between the semiotic and the symbolic. In addition, language is the medium through which each operates.

The import of Kristeva's theory, as elaborated above, vis-à-vis the impact of the body in ethical discourse needs to be highlighted. This is now the task at hand. I will address this task in two stages. Initially, I will demonstrate how Kristeva applies her theory using the notion of *abjection*. Unearthing the important implications behind the term abjection enables Kristeva, in her work entitled *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, to draw attention

to the *limits* of primal repression. Primal repression¹ implicates the conscious experience of repulsion with the first formations of the unconscious. Kristeva wants to investigate what she terms both the "near and far side" of primal repression. In fact, the experience of repugnance, disgust and abjection emphasize that limit and denote separation. For Kristeva, primal repression is "the ability of the speaking being, always already haunted by the Other², to divide, reject, repeat."³ The abject confronts each of us with this primal separation which constitutes the origin of every speaking being. It is the *maternal body* from which we all must separate. The maternal body is both desirable and repulsive at the stage of primal repression. Primal repression connotes the ambiguity of our state as *divided*. We "do not cease looking . . . for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body."⁴ Our divided state, which constitutes both desire and repulsion as primers of our existence as speaking beings, is of paramount importance to our consideration of the ethical significance of the body.

¹Kristeva speaks of *primary* repression within the context of her understanding of abjection. "The abject is that pseudo-object that is made up *before* but appears only *within* the gaps of secondary repression. *The abject would thus be the "object" of primal repression.*" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.) L'abject est ce pseudo-objet qui se constitue *avant*, mais qui n'apparaît que *dans* les brèches du refoulement secondaire. *L'abject serait donc l'"objet" du refoulement originare.*" (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 20) All quotes from *Powers of Horror* will be drawn from the English translation. However, the original French of key quotes will be included in the footnotes.

²For Kristeva, like Lacan, "Other" is capitalized to show that it is not simply the other person but rather signifies "a hypothetical place or space, that of the pure signifier, rather than to a physical entity or moral category." (Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language*, 17.)

³Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12. ". . . la capacité de l'être parlant, toujours déjà habité par l'Autre, de diviser, rejeter, répéter." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 20.)

⁴*Ibid.*, 54. ". . . n'arrêtent pas de chercher . . . le dedans désirable et terrifiant, nourricier et meurtrier, fascinant et abject, du corps maternel." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 66.)

The second stage of the task of elaborating the importance of Kristeva's theory vis-à-vis the impact of the body in ethical discourse will be to highlight Kristeva's distinctive understanding of ethics as it is found in various sources of her work. As with all Kristeva's theories, ethics connotes an undoing or unravelling rather than a building up or putting together. In addition, as we shall see, there is an intricate connection between ethics and women in Kristeva's thought. Kristeva's suppositions concerning ethics stem directly from the underlying premises put forward in *Revolution in Poetic Language* which have been outlined in some detail in chapter three. It is my contention that Kristeva's foundational theory in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, as well as, her application of that theory in subsequent works give us the tools necessary to address and begin to move beyond the impasse outlined in chapter one.

In chapter two, I attempt to outline the basic trajectory of Kristeva's thought over the past thirty years. In so doing, I demonstrate how her analysis of the speaking subject continually deepens. I try to show that the issue of ethics is never far from Kristeva in these analyses. In fact, it is central to her entire *oeuvre*. In chapter three, I proceed to demonstrate the depth of Kristeva's pursuit vis-à-vis unearthing the dialectic upon which the speaking subject is founded. Again, ethics surfaces as key in this study due to its proximity to the underlying condition of the speaking subject as divided.

Thus, we come to chapter four. Here we will glimpse something of the sheer starkness and baseness (Kristeva's "horror") which form one part of the implications of what was put forward in chapters two and three. Yet, exactly at the point where Kristeva's "horror" seems inescapable, ethics crops up. This is both Kristeva's strategy and her insight. It is the heuristic which leads her to the discovery that ethics is implicated (as we shall see) with the body, and

even more specifically, with the maternal body. Thus, to reiterate, in what follows the specific contribution of Julia Kristeva vis-à-vis the significance of the body in ethical discourse will be highlighted by first considering her key insights in *Powers of Horror* and second, through an elaboration of Kristeva's "dissident" reading of ethics.

2. *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*

Powers of Horror is a deep and penetrating analysis of abjection. During her study of the work of Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Kristeva became aware of Céline's obsessive fascination with abjection. Whereas the works of Mallarmé and Lautrémont expose the fragility of the unified "I" and shatter the subject infinitely, Céline's work exposes the individual and society to the "horror" and abomination that underlie order and identity. Céline's themes of "evil, idiocy, infamy, the feminine . . . and their styles . . . immerse us in the abject . . ."⁵ In Céline's writings, the abject breaks through yet remains unnameable. One experiences it even if one cannot name it. Our primary interest in abjection is its association with the feminine or the maternal.⁶ Four questions or considerations which direct Kristeva's "Essay on Abjection" aid us in understanding why she places abjection and the feminine/maternal in juxtaposition.

As already indicated, the initial impetus behind Kristeva's study was her experience of abjection in the work of Céline. She wanted to understand as deeply as possible, first, this aspect of Céline's work and, second, his fascination with the abject even though it seemed to

⁵Julia Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context: From Nietzsche to Nancy*, ed. Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, trans. Margaret Waller (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 102.

⁶Kristeva does not elaborate on the connection between the feminine or the maternal and women. As well, Kristeva uses the terms "maternal" and "feminine" interchangeably.

defy all grasp. Following this, Kristeva goes on to connect abjection with the purifying element which all religions have in common. Kristeva's third question, linked to the first and second, therefore, is 'from what or of what must we be purified?' The role of art in symbolizing these limit states of the human psyche or the collective psyche is particularly revealing in Kristeva's study of the work of Céline. Yet, underlying these three motivations (abjection in Céline's work, his fascination with abjection and abjection as that from which we must purify ourselves) is Kristeva's question concerning the very *roots* of identity. This in turn links us back to negativity and rejection as elaborated in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. For, as we have seen, identity is founded on negativity and rejection - identity emerges from a loss, it emerges from repression and, at the limit, from abjection. Consequently, negativity, rejection and now abjection are all implicated with the semiotic and subsequently, as Kristeva has convincingly demonstrated, with the feminine.

In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva takes us deeper into this labyrinth through a somewhat unsettling study of the various ways culture deals with the abject and by association the feminine. As in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the implication of the body is paramount. By observing how the abject is articulated in various cultural modes, Kristeva will illustrate the ramifications of the central insight in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, that is, *the inescapable and determining link between the body and the psyche*. In the process, the impact that these ramifications have on women becomes poignantly clear.

The initial chapter, "Approaching Abjection," is Kristeva's attempt to describe or unearth the abhorrent, intolerable excludedness of abjection. The abject is "the unnameable."

It "disturbs identity, system, order." It "does not respect borders, positions, rules."⁷ Kristeva's task is difficult. How to signify "something" that can never be "named." She approaches the task from an exterior and an interior perspective. Exteriorly, abjection is manifested in what is seen as improper and unclean.

Loathing an item of food, a piece of filth, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrust me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck. The shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery. The fascinated start that leads me towards and separates me from them.⁸

The experience of being thrust aside signifies abjection. What is abject is thrust aside. It thrusts me aside. Significantly, this act of thrusting aside and being thrust aside is the condition of living. It is the condition of identity. This is of prime importance regarding Kristeva's investigations. It is not to study abjection or what is abject for itself that Kristeva is broaching the topic. Rather, Kristeva is attempting to understand what it is that underlies our 'clean and proper' identities. She wants to grasp why that "it" threatens *and* attracts us. She wants to understand why we repress it so severely yet secretly (hidden even from ourselves) desire it.

Interiorly, abjection emerges as the struggle to separate from the maternal body. Abjection *displays*, for Kristeva, the "loss" that my identity is founded on. The foundation of

⁷Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4. "Ce n'est donc pas l'absence de propreté ou de santé qui rend abject, mais ce qui perturbe une identité, un système, un ordre. Ce qui ne respecte pas les limites, les places, les règles." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 12.)

⁸Ibid., 2.

"Dégoût d'une nourriture, d'une saleté, d'un déchet, d'une ordure. Spasmes et vomissements qui me protègent. Répulsion, haut-le-cœur qui m'écarte et me détourne de la souillure, du cloaque, de l'immonde. Ignominie de la compromission, de l'entre-deux, de la trahison. Sursaut fasciné qui m'y conduit et m'en sépare." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 10.)

my being is not an identity, a system or an order. Rather, "I" am founded on that which is pushed away, repressed, abjected in order that "I" may live. Kristeva observes two levels at which this is so. First, societally or culturally, in separating what is human from what is animal. Thus, separating marks out "a precise area of our culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals and animalism."⁹ Second, at an individual level in needing to break away from the archaic relationship with the maternal entity. (This breaking away is begun even before one exists outside the mother. Indeed, birth is perhaps the most definitive breaking away which we undergo.)

If being is founded on "loss" (and Kristeva has made a convincing case for this as outlined in the preceding chapter) than *want* or desire is "logically preliminary to being and object."¹⁰ It is only through language that the subject-object distinction emerges. Yet, it is not the subject-object distinction, or our identities as "split-subjects," that concerns Kristeva here. Rather, she is focusing on *that* from which we are split. She is zeroing in on how the very action of splitting is both chronologically and synchronically nearer to us than our seeming unified selves (Lacan's mirror stage). There is a price for "achieving" an identity within the symbolic realm. We "leave behind" an originary primordial *jouissance*, where all drives and instincts were allowed complete and uninhibited reign. It is loss that inaugurates our being a subject - loss of the terrifying and desirous primordial mother. The uncanny, eerie quality of abjection is what brings this loss to consciousness. Hence the danger of abjection, my very

⁹Ibid., 12-13.

¹⁰Ibid., 5.

life is at stake. "[W]hat is *abject* . . . draws me toward the place where meaning collapses."¹¹

Kristeva elaborates a psychopathological condition which lies on the border between neurosis and psychosis. This condition is known as the "borderline case." Kristeva's interest in this condition is due to its propensity to display not merely abjection, but *abjection of self*. Clinically, the borderline personality:

includes a tendency to chronic, agitated depression, a proclivity for addictions and eating disorders, an inability to maintain stable, intimate relationships, and periodic eruptions of rage and/or self-destructive impulses. Subjectively, "borderlines" experience polarized feeling clusters of self-doubt and self-loathing, coupled with feelings of loneliness, emptiness, and abandonment at one time and intense, diffuse anxiety and even panic to the point of disorganization at other times. They frequently resort to hostility and contempt in an effort to protect themselves from these feelings.¹²

For Kristeva, the borderline patient displays in a dramatic and pronounced manner a condition *that lives within each of us*. In Kristeva's reading, borderline refers to a cultural borderline. On one side of the frontier the subject fits into the existing culture, on the other side he or she falls outside of it by descending into hysteria; a condition where meaning collapses. The borderline patient displays an opposition more fundamental than the conscious/unconscious opposition. Consciousness requires a more primordial repression. The more fundamental opposition is between "I" and "Other" or between "Inside" and "Outside." This fundamental opposition rises out of the primary separating process which we have already spoken of - that "mapping or zoning of the infant's body by the mother, into a territory having surfaces,

¹¹Ibid., 2. ". . . au contraire, l'*abject* . . . est radicalement un exclu et me tire vers là où le sens s'effondre." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 9.)

¹²Charles D. Hackett, "Psychoanalysis and Theology: Two Dialectics," *Journal of Religion and Health* 25, no. 1 (1986) : 35-36.

orifices, and insides."¹³ Abjection of self, which is displayed in the language and acts of borderline patients, can be understood as *the failure of complete separation*. This failure lurks within each of us; it is the horror that repulses us, yet at the same time, fascinates us for its possibility of *jouissance* in the primal, in some sense, sexual relationship with the mother. It is the horror of incest and also the horror of murder. The borderline patient loses his or her "subject." The subject (the identity of the person, the "I") is swallowed up by abjection because of the person's inability to keep that primal relationship repressed. To a certain extent the borderline patient refuses to throw away that which *must* be let go of in order to achieve or retain an ego identification. That is, it refuses to let go of the archaic mother. So, the borderline case is "the one by whom the abject exists, (he) is thus a deject who places (himself), *separates* (himself), and therefore strays instead of getting his bearings."¹⁴

Kristeva speaks of a "narcissistic crisis" that manifests itself clearly in borderline cases. Abjection breaks down or breaks through the walls of repression that keep our "beautiful image" intact. It breaks down our identity. It reveals to us the flux that was and is before the differentiation that came about through language, before borders or boundaries were established. Abjection of self is manifested in the borderline patient's display of the unapproachable yet intimate memory that "all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundation of its own being."¹⁵

¹³Cynthia Chase, "Book Review," *Criticism* 26, no. 2 (1984) : 194.

¹⁴Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 8. "Celui par lequel l'abject existe est donc un *jeté* qui (se) place, (se) *sépare*, (se) situe et donc *erre*, au lieu de se reconnaître, de désirer, d'appartenir ou de refuser." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 15.)

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 5. "Rien de tel que l'abjection de soi pour démontrer que toute abjection est en fait reconnaissance du *manque* fondateur de tout être, sens, langage, désir." (*Pouvoirs de*

Abjection, this elusive, unnamable "something" that is not recognized as a thing, cannot be assimilated. It remains always outside, excluded, intimate yet unapproachable, luring yet repulsive. It is the final remainder, the one which cannot be broken down. It is the waste product which cannot be disposed. Abjection does not *exclusively* refer to the more primitive drive vis-à-vis the relationship to the mother. Yet, the repudiation of the feminine in all cultures is a powerful and in some sense horrifying signification of abjection. Powerful and horrifying because, along with murder, violence and aggression, the mother "retains powers of horror for us, powers that have been literally the negative source of all civilization."¹⁶ How is such a view justified? Kristeva states:

The abject, not yet object, is anterior to the distinction between subject and object in normative language. But the abject is also the nonobjectality of the archaic mother, the locus of needs, of attraction and repulsion, from which an object of forbidden desire arises. And finally, abject can be understood in the sense of the horrible and fascinating abomination which is connoted in all cultures by the feminine or, more indirectly, by every partial object which is related to the state of abjection (in the sense of the nonseparation subject/object). It becomes what culture, the *sacred*, must purge, separate, and banish so that it may establish itself as such in the universal logic of catharsis.¹⁷

Fundamentally, what Kristeva is speaking about in terms of the feminine is something very concrete. That is, she is speaking about the feminine body or the maternal body.¹⁸ The loss the individual recognizes within him or herself is the loss of and desire for the maternal

l'horreur, 12-13.)

¹⁶Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Kristeva's Horror," *Semiotica* 62, no. 3/4 (1986) : 336.

¹⁷Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 102.

¹⁸For Kristeva, the feminine body and the maternal body are indistinguishable. This is because at a primordial level of the psyche, both culturally and individually, the feminine body and the maternal body both connote abjection.

body *before* language (the father or the "third") has made an appearance. That is, it is desire for the maternal body before signification, before symbolization. Hence the *unnameable* trait of this "object" of desire. It is before naming. It is outside language. As Mark Taylor understands this, "Mother is the 'name' of the unnameable. Every totalizing system encodes the insignificant maternal remainder as 'the object.'"¹⁹

Kristeva's phenomenological survey of abjection surfaces the "missing mother" with all the power and horror she holds for the speaking subject. This in turn leads Kristeva into three areas of study. Each area, in its own manner, *displays* the repudiation of the feminine. These three fields are analytic theory, the history of religions, and contemporary literary experience.²⁰

2.1 Analytic Theory

In her analysis of the psychopathological condition of *phobia*, Kristeva links that condition definitively with the subject/object relation. In fact, phobia or fear plays a formative role in the constitution of the subject. For Kristeva, it is phobia that permits us to encounter the object. Phobia is the irrevocable link between undifferentiated and differentiated consciousness in the human subject. Yet why is this necessarily so? Kristeva states that: "Fear and object proceed together until the one represses the other." She goes on to ask, "But in which one of us is that fully successful?"²¹

¹⁹Mark C. Taylor, *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 163.

²⁰Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 31.

²¹Ibid., 34. "Ils cheminent ensemble, peur et objet, jusqu' à ce que l'un refoule l'autre. Mais qui d'entre nous y réussit pleinement?" (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 45.)

There are two stages that stand out in Kristeva's consideration of analytic theory which assist us in understanding this scenario. They refer to phases in the psychic development of the human person and Kristeva, following Freud, names them the "pre-oedipal phase" and the "oedipus structure or phase." (In certain respects, these two phases correspond respectively to phobia and object.) The oedipal phase is identified with the subject's relation to the father and it tends to bracket out the more primordial pre-oedipal phase which indicates the relation with the mother. Freud's theory of the "Oedipus complex" entails much more than the common understanding of it as:

a strong, typically unconscious attachment of a child to the parent of the opposite sex, especially of a son to his mother, with antagonism toward the other parent.²²

The deeper significance for Freud is his realization of the child's *identification* with the father. It is the Oedipal drama which necessitates and ensures the child leaving "its Mother in order to be accepted, recognized, and enabled to speak in the realm of Father-language."²³

According to this Oedipal triangle,

the father is the mainstay of the law and the mother the prototype of the object. Toward the mother there is convergence not only of survival needs but of the first mimetic yearnings. She is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as subject. The mother is my first object - both desiring and signifiable.²⁴

²²*Funk & Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary*, 9th ed., s.v. "Oedipus complex."

²³Martha J. Reineke, "Life-Sentences: Kristeva and the Limits of Modernity," *Soundings* 71, no. 4 (1988) : 457.

²⁴Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 32.

"... le père est le support de la loi et la mère le prototype de l'objet. C'est vers la mère que convergent non seulement les besoins pour la survie mais surtout les premières aspirations mimétiques. Elle est l'autre sujet, un objet qui garantit mon être de sujet. La mère est mon premier objet désirant et

Yet for Kristeva, this identification with the father through desire for the first object - the mother - is secondary to identification with the mother in the pre-oedipal phase. It is this originary connection with the mother which causes the necessary link between phobia and object. For it is *this* relationship, or the manner of the relationship that is implicated with the phobia. Within the Oedipal triangle which constitutes the subject something remains blurred.²⁵ It is this "something" that remains blurred which both terrifies and fascinates the subject. The terror that this "something" elicits in the subject becomes displaced onto the phobic object. It becomes a fear that one speaks. One can name this fear. Thus, the phobic object, the fear that one can name, takes on

all earlier alarms of archaic, non-representable fear. . . By means of the signifier of the phobic object . . . it calls attention to a *drive economy in want of an object* - that conglomerate of fear, deprivation, and nameless frustration, which, properly speaking, belongs to the unnamable.²⁶

The pre-oedipal phase indicates the relationship between the mother and child being such that the child is bound to the mother's body without that body being as yet "another." The child's very becoming an "I" necessitates a breaking away. The child cannot return to that pre-oedipal relationship without risking the loss of its identity. Yet concomitantly, what is lost in the act of breaking away never leaves. It appears as both desire and terror, as both the object of want and the object of abjection. In fact, for Kristeva, the pre-oedipal stage

signifiable." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 43.)

²⁵Ibid., 35.

²⁶Ibid., 34-35.

". . . tous les émois antérieurs de la peur primitive irreprésentable. . . Il désigne par le signifiant de l'objet phobique . . . une *économie pulsionnelle en manque d'objet* : ce conglomerat de peur, de privation et de frustration sans nom qui sont à proprement parler de l'innommable." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 45 & 46.)

connotes *both* the psychic pain *and* the violence which characterizes the early interaction between the mother and child. Through her reading of phobia, Kristeva seeks to demonstrate the necessary connection between *want* and *aggressivity*. For Kristeva, they are

chronologically separable but logically coextensive. Aggressivity *appears* to us as a rejoinder to the original deprivation felt from the time of the mirage known as "primary narcissism" . . . Fear and the aggressivity intended to protect me from some not yet localizable cause are projected and come back to me from the outside: "I am threatened."²⁷

The symbolic, paternal realm which occasions the child's entry into language also prohibits the child's pre-oedipal relation with the mother. It prohibits that relation with the threat that the child will lose not only a part of itself, but its whole self. So, it is anguish that causes the child to speak. The anguish brought about by separation, by a breaking away. Identification with the father obliterates the pre-oedipal phase. But the, literally, *insignificant* maternal remainder, the object which the phobic object signifies, remains - albeit, undercover or underneath. The semiotic, which signifies the pre-oedipal relation, although obliterated "continues to circulate beneath language, disrupting from time to time the symbolic identity of language."²⁸ To a certain extent it is abjection and the phobic object that preserves this pre-oedipal relation. Hence, we see again the close link between abjection and the mother - this time by implication in the condition of phobia.

²⁷Ibid., 39.

". . . chronologiquement séparables mais logiquement coextensifs. L'agressivité nous *apparaît* comme une réplique à la privation originaire éprouvée depuis le mirage dit 'narcissisme primaire' . . . La peur et l'agressivité qui doit me protéger d'une cause ou d'un autre, encore non localisable, sont protégées d'une cause ou d'un autre, encore non localisable, sont projetées et me reviennent du dehors : 'je suis menacé'." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 50.)

²⁸Jean Wyatt, "Avoiding self-definition: In defense of women's right to merge (Julia Kristeva and Mrs. Dalloway)," *Women's Studies* 13 (1986) : 120.

Kristeva moves from describing abjection (and in that we see the identification of what is abject with the feminine/maternal entity) to a consideration of analytic theory. She does this to reveal, among other things, "the horror within" that ends up being the horror and the *jouissance* that the maternal body confronts one with in the recesses of the formation of one's identity. Kristeva accomplishes, in this section on analytic theory, "a psychoanalytic phenomenology of the subject that remains in the grasp of the mother."²⁹ She does this through a consideration of the fate of the subject who fails the normalization process brought about by the Oedipal triangle. That is, the Oedipal triangle, which condemns the subject to becoming that divided self known as the speaking being, fails in directing the subject (the child) toward an object (the mother). The subject fails to separate and divide and, hence, fails to reach the fixed position of a speaking subject.

Kristeva's identification of phobia, as the other side of the unnameable that terrifies and threatens our very self, reveals a lack or absence at the origin of language. "Language learning takes place as an attempt to appropriate an oral 'object' that slips away and whose hallucination, necessarily deformed, threatens us from the outside."³⁰ We are all phobic, then, and at the origin of our speaking is anguish over the pain and violence of the separation of our body from our mother's body. Phobia reminds us of that eerie space (the *chora*) that we need to repress in order to remain *who* we are. Phobia is at the crossroad between the pre-oedipal and the oedipal phase. It speaks to us of what is unnameable and what can potentially

²⁹ MacCannell, "Kristeva's horror," 328.

³⁰Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 41. "L'apprentissage du langage se fait comme une tentative de faire sien un 'objet' oral qui se dérobe, et dont l'hallucination forcément déformée nous menace du dehors." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 52.)

suffocate us. It enables us in establishing our positioning as subjects confronted with objects.

2.2 The History of Religions

The central section of Kristeva's book *Powers of Horror* analyzes religions which have shaped and accompanied the history of humanity vis-à-vis abjection. Drawing on Polytheism, Judaism, and Christianity, Kristeva demonstrates how each of these various types of religions codes the abject through, respectively, defilement, taboo and sin. How do these religions deal with the conditions of psychosis and phobia? That is, how do they deal with the identity's fragility and the constant threat of abjection breaking through? How do they articulate this abjection without succumbing to it? Such are the motivations that guide Kristeva through her study of the history of religions. Our interest centres around the proximity of the separation from the mother with the various ways religions code the abject.

The sacred in religious discourse signifies that which is set apart. It is opposed to or in dialectic with what is profane.³¹ This dialectic between the sacred and the profane is illustrative of the deep division which Kristeva is seeking to elucidate. It is indicative of the dividedness of our existence as speaking beings. It points to the symbolic/semiotic dialectic within each human person. Kristeva endeavours to disclose how religious discourse aligns the abject (or the profane) with the archaic, prelinguistic relationship with the mother. As a consequence, Kristeva contends, religious discourse represses the feminine/maternal in a variety of patterns. The link between the three religious discourses which Kristeva analyzes using the tools of psychoanalysis is the need for separation. Whether that separation is from

³¹See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959).

filth or defilement, from exterior objects which threaten cleanliness and purity, or from the "sin" which exists within one's own self, the logic of exclusion comes into play in order to enhance differentiation. Abjection is the nexus here that both threatens identity and enables identity. Abjection is dealt with differently in these three religious systems.

Drawing on the religious rites of Indian society with its polytheistic form of religious discourse, Kristeva illustrates how the *act* of ritual wards off that which threatens the subject's clean and proper self.³² Rituals relating to defilement denote boundaries - keeping what is clean and proper from what is dirty and abject. These rituals or rites surrounding defilement,

particularly those involving excremental and menstrual variants, shift the *border* (in the psychoanalytic meaning relating to borderline patients) that separates the body's territory from the signifying chain; they illustrate the boundary between semiotic authority and symbolic law.³³

The rituals themselves connote a prelinguistic or presymbolic level where identity and symbolic order disappear. Yet, that is precisely why these rituals have the impact they do. For they purge abjection via the very mode where abjection is given full reign. They meet

³²Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 163.

³³Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 73.

". . . en particulier autour des variantes excrémentielle et menstruelle, transposent la *bordure* (au sens psychanalytique de *borderline*) qui sépare le territoire du corps de la chaîne signifiante : ils illustrent la frontière entre l'autorité sémiotique et la loi symbolique." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 88.)

The emphasis on excrement and menstrual blood as defilement and hence polluting (tears and sperm are not considered polluting although they also belong to and are excreted from borders of the body) is significant. Kristeva clarifies the focus on these two *particular* polluting elements when she states that "those *two* defilements stem from the *maternal* and/or the feminine, of which the maternal is the real support." (71) ". . . ces *deux* souillures relèvent du *maternel* et/ou du *féminin* dont le maternel est le support réel." (87) The relation of menstrual blood to the feminine/maternal is obvious. Concerning excrement, the elaboration in chapter three above pertaining to the violence of the anal drive vis-à-vis the relation of the infant to its mother helps us to understand something of the significance of excrement in relation to the feminine/maternal.

abjection on its own terms, so to speak, utilizing the prelinguistic, semiotic realm. In fact, it is the ritual's proximity to the semiotic realm which gives it power over that which threatens the identity of the subject. Societies, particularly through religious codes, assist the subject in its journey toward becoming that divided being which Kristeva terms the split subject. What threatens the identity of the subject threatens the identity of any cultural code. Society has a vested interest in the subject's full entrance into the symbolic realm just as the speaking subject needs the communal expression through ritual and codes to ward off that which threatens it from within. Again, this time through a consideration of Polytheistic religions, we come back to that feminine/maternal which, rather than being understood as primal essence, is an unnameable otherness which threatens the speaking subject with self-abnegation or, at the limit, self-loss. Significantly, this archaic relation to the mother, which threatens the ego and creates uncertainty of borders in the subject, is "all the more determining as the paternal function was weak or even nonexistent." Hence, the threat of matriarchal and polytheistic pagan religions to the Jewish faith. In addition, it is significant that in these rituals and rites, *remainders* are also considered polluting. Remainders pollute because of their incompleteness. Their polluting status denotes the abhorrent state of non-totalizing thought.

As intimated above, separation from that which is unclean and threatening to identity is also seen, in a clearer manner, in the Old Testament. There is a shift in levels, however, for abjection is dealt with more through a series of rules and regulations than through rituals. Yet, it is the same strategy of exclusion and separation which is at play. However, the rational (and the Law) from which the strategy of identity within the Jewish world emerges, departing from the polytheistic religions of the pagan world, is that of monotheism. Monotheism is threatened by an "autonomous force." The roots of this autonomous force are, according to Kristeva,

in "the cathexis of maternal function - mother, women, reproduction."³⁴ The logic of distribution, which founds the symbolic community of the Old Testament (Monotheism), is based on "a *series of separations* that are oral, corporeal, or even more generally material, and in the last analysis relating to fusion with the mother."³⁵ Again, this is so at a social level (the Judaic religion in face of paganism and its maternal cults) *and* an individual level (in the life of each speaking subject).

Kristeva draws on and extends the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas. Douglas' insight into the pattern found in the Levitical abominations, (Leviticus 11-16 and 19-26) illuminates the logic of "separation" and "individual integrity."³⁶ This logic is the connection that runs through these Levitical chapters. Kristeva groups the Levitical abominations under three major categories: "1) food taboos; 2) corporeal alteration and its climax, death; and 3) the feminine body and incest."³⁷ Kristeva argues for the relation between all three categories and the needed separation from the maternal body in order to enter into and remain in the symbolic realm of the father. Her point is that although biblical abomination takes in purification and defilement rites, it operates in a wholly different realm from sacrificial religions. That is, it has established a *logic* which sets up and maintains the symbolic order, the divine order of the One, True God. Kristeva presents a strong case that the relation

³⁴Ibid., 91.

³⁵Ibid., 94. ". . . une *série de séparations* orales, corporelles ou encore plus généralement matérielles, et en dernière instance relatives à la fusion avec la mère." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 113.)

³⁶Ibid., 99.

³⁷Ibid., 93.

between the setting up of this order and the prohibition against incest (the abjection of the mother) is the *mytheme* underlying the entire progression of prohibitions in these chapters of Leviticus. "From food to blood, the loop of prohibitions has no need of being looped, for we are still and from the beginning within the same logic of separation."³⁸ Important for our purposes is the tracing of this logic of separation "back" to the archaic separation from the maternal body.

The advent of Christianity shifts abjection to yet a *different* level. Christianity signifies an inversion of Judaism. Abjection is no longer exterior, but rather, is a condition that is permanent and comes from within. Although a new arrangement of differences, the processes of division, separation and differentiation remain. "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man." (Mark 7:15, also Matthew 15:11³⁹) Christianity brings about the inception of a new system of meaning inaugurating a *different* speaking subject. It invites a removal of guilt from the archaic relation to the first pre-object (ab-ject) of need; the mother. Sin is now the means of coding the abject. Sin is that place within the speaking subject that accounts for his or her condition as separate and divided - "body and spirit, body jettisoned from the spirit."⁴⁰ Still sin is that part of us, the body, the flesh, that causes the division to widen interminably, irretrievably.

³⁸Ibid., 103. "De la nourriture au sang, la boucle des interdictions n'a pas à être bouclée, car nous sommes toujours depuis le début dans le même logique de la séparation." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 121-122.)

³⁹Cited in Ibid., 114. (The Bible version is not given.)

⁴⁰Ibid., 120.

For evil, thus displaced *into* the subject, will not cease tormenting him from within, no longer as a polluting or defiling substance, but as the ineradicable repulsion of his henceforth divided and contradictory being.⁴¹

This separation manifests itself in sin which signifies the dividedness of the human condition; the division and battle between the body and the spirit. Sin becomes associated with the flesh and although this sin of the flesh belongs to both sexes, "its root and basic representation is nothing other than feminine temptation."⁴² Perhaps the greatest contribution of Christianity to the human condition, according to Kristeva, is its facilitation of what is abject. By incorporating abjection within the speaking subject Christianity allowed, to a certain degree, the return of the repressed. At the same time, sin becomes implicated, in Christianity, with the beautiful. Sin is the condition of *both* abjection and beauty. The ambivalent quality of sin arises from sin's capacity to facilitate communication - it is where we can meet the sacred.

With Christianity, abjection becomes absorbed into speech. It becomes integrated into the symbolic realm through acknowledgment (confession) and absolution. Sin becomes related to will and judgment. Abjection is no longer what is outside our control and so in need of magical powers to ward off its evil effects. Abjection has now become integrated "into logic and language."⁴³

On this peak of discourse, power no longer belongs to the judge-God who

⁴¹Ibid., 116.

"Car le mauvais, ainsi déplacé *dans* le sujet, n'arrêtera pas de le travailler de l'intérieur, non plus comme substance polluante ou souillante, mais comme répulsion indéracinable de son être désormais divisé, contradictoire." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 137.)

⁴²Ibid., 126. ". . . sa racine et sa représentation fondamentale n'est autre que la tentation féminine." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 148.)

⁴³Ibid., 129.

preserves humanity from abjection while setting aside for himself alone the prerogative of violence - the violence of separation as well as of punishment. Power henceforth belongs to discourse itself, or rather to the act of judgment expressed in speech and, in less orthodox and much more implicit fashion, in all the signs (poetry, painting, music, sculpture) that are contingent upon it.⁴⁴

The split or the division is dealt with differently in Christianity for the height of sin is overturned by the height of beauty. One has only to remember the self-abasement of the early church saints and martyrs and their actual entry into what was unclean and abject (Saint Francis kissing the leper) in order to be reconciled and saved. Of this, Kristeva states: "Mystics have placed themselves precisely in that place of reversal of abjection of sacred or social laws: in this sense, they reveal the motive of religions, they discover the repressed."⁴⁵

One of Kristeva's overall concerns in *Powers of Horror* is the need to find a means to articulate abjection. Religious codes enabled humanity to deal with the horrors without and within throughout the ages of civilization. Yet, amid the decline and ultimate collapse (according to Kristeva) of Judeo-Christian monotheism, it is art, and specifically literature, which is emerging to take religion's place.

The various means of purifying the abject - the various catharses - make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called

⁴⁴Ibid., 132.

"A cette pointe du discours, le pouvoir n'est plus au Dieu-juge qui préserve l'humanité de l'abjection en se réservant le droit à la violence pour lui seul - violence de la division comme du châtement. Le pouvoir désormais est au discours lui-même, ou plutôt à l'acte de jugement exprimé par la parole et, de manière moins orthodoxe et beaucoup plus implicite, par tous les signes (poésie, peinture, musique, sculpture) qui en dépendent." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 154.)

⁴⁵Julia Kristeva, "Critiques: Julia Kristeva: Pouvoirs de l'horreur," *Tel Quel* (Hiver 1980) : 52. "Les mystiques se sont placés précisément en ce lieu de renversement de l'abjection en code sacré ou social: en ce sens, ils révèlent le ressort des religions, ils en découvrent le refoulé." (My translation.)

art, both on the far and near side of religion. Seen from that standpoint, the artistic experience, which is rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies, appears as the essential component of religiosity. That is perhaps why it is destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religion.⁴⁶

Thus, in the final chapters of *Powers of Horror*, the literary work of Céline is elaborated.

2.3 Céline's Horror

Céline's work demonstrates the sublimation of abjection. Hence, for Kristeva, it is a substitute for the sacred. Yet, artistic experience does not repress the abject in the severe and total manner of religions. Rather, it allows for a lifting of the repression, a lifting that Kristeva sees as crucial if we are to demystify power and not fall prey to ideologies. As mentioned earlier, Céline's writings represent and elaborate a tension between attraction and repulsion, between fascination and disgust of what has been repressed. That is, of what Kristeva has written about throughout *Powers of Horror* - abjection. Abjection emerges within the themes (evil, idiocy, infamy, the feminine, etc) and the style (rhythmical, musical, tampering with vocabulary and syntax so that narrative drowns in style)⁴⁷ of Céline's writings. It gives vent to what society, law, and religion repress. His writings stand on the border between

⁴⁶Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 17.

"Les diverses modalités de *purification* de l'abject - les diverses catharsis - constituent l'histoire des religions, et s'achèvent dans cette catharsis par excellence qu' est l'art, en deçà et au-delà de la religion. Vue sous cet angle, l'expérience artistique, enracinée dans l'abject qu' elle dit et par là même purifie, apparaît comme la composante essentielle de la religiosité. C'est peut-être pour-quoi elle est destinée à survivre à l'effondrement des formes historique des religions." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 24-25.)

⁴⁷Ibid., 137.

identity and nonidentity; subverting and affecting "mankind's ultimate guarantee"⁴⁸ - language. He does this *with* language. This is what Kristeva sees as the aesthetic task - to retrace "the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression."⁴⁹ The aesthetic task is to allow what has been repressed to emerge. It is to stand on the border between "Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality,"⁵⁰ so that the distinctions begin to dissolve. It is to descend to an 'elsewhere' that *sustains* meaning and interpretation and yet *collapses* meaning and interpretation. In other words, the artistic endeavour, as exemplified in the writing of Céline, is to bring about, at times, the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic. In this, identity itself is threatened by the writer's meshing with and blending into the abject and its "feminine-maternal resonance."⁵¹ In this, not only does the artistic task release the repressed feminine, it is itself, because of its propensity toward disturbing identity, the "feminine operation."⁵²

3. Kristeva's Ethics: Ambiguous and Irreconcilable

There is an important link between the trajectory of Kristeva's thought in *Powers of*

⁴⁸Ibid., 137.

⁴⁹Ibid., 18. ". . . les frontières fragiles de l'être parlant, au plus près de son aube, de cette 'origine' sans fond qu' est le refoulement dit originaire." (*Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, 25.)

⁵⁰Ibid., 16.

⁵¹Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 103.

⁵²Reading literature through Kristeva's interpretation helps one to understand the pervasiveness of this tendency in literature. See for example, Kate Millett's 1970 analysis of misogyny in the works of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer. *Sexual Politics* (New York: Avon, 1970).

Horror and the *ethical* implications of Kristeva's entire *oeuvre*. Something of the ethical impact and strategy of Kristeva's work has been described in chapter two.⁵³ As well, an ethical imperative that underlies all of Kristeva's work (and has become more pronounced in two recent publications concerning xenophobia, immigration, and foreignness⁵⁴) comes clearly to the fore in the two works we have paid particular attention to here, *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Powers of Horror*. Yet, how Kristeva understands ethics is expressed in an earlier essay.

Ethics used to be a coercive, customary manner of ensuring the cohesiveness of a particular group through the repetition of a code - a more or less accepted apologue. Now, however, the issue of ethics crops up wherever a code (mores, social contract) must be shattered in order to give way to the free play of negativity, need, desire, pleasure, and *jouissance*, before being put together again, although temporarily and with full knowledge of what is involved.⁵⁵

Again, although Kristeva's approach to the issue of ethics was dealt with in chapter two, the import of her description here, following our excursus through *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Powers of Horror*, significantly deepens our understanding of what she is

⁵³See the sections in Chapter 2 entitled "Third Stage: The Speaking Subject and the Human Psyche: Horror, Love, Melancholy", "Fourth Stage: 'Psychoanalysts in Times of Distress:' Dissident and Stranger; Exile and Healer", and the "Conclusion."

⁵⁴See Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* and *Nations Without Nationalism*.

⁵⁵"The Ethics of Linguistics," *Desire in Language*, 23.

"N'étant plus une habitude coercitive assurant la cohérence d'un groupe à travers la répétition d'un code, d'un discours plus ou moins accepté, la question de l'éthique surgit désormais au lieu où le code (les moeurs, le contrat social) doit se briser pour laisser place au jeu de la négativité, du besoin, du désir, du plaisir, de la jouissance, avant de se refaire, mais provisoirement et en connaissance de cause."

"L'Éthique de la linguistique," *Critique* 30 (mars 1974) : 206; reprinted in *Polylogue* (Seuil: Paris, 1977), 357.

putting forward concerning ethics. Kristeva aligns ethics with what breaks down identity. So, ethics is allied with what is marginal, with what is excluded and, at the limit, with what is psychotic. In addition, it is associated with a subject who is *in process/on trial* and, subsequently, dissociated with a fixed or unitary subject. Kelly Oliver identifies three models of ethics within Kristeva's work.⁵⁶ These models are poetry, maternity, and psychoanalysis.⁵⁷ What links each of these models is heterogeneity. For Kristeva, ethics is intrinsically linked with the plural and borderline condition of poetry, maternity, and psychoanalysis. Let me elaborate.

3.1 Poetry as a Model for Ethics

Poetry, as we have seen,⁵⁸ has a revolutionary force. This revolutionary force stems

⁵⁶See Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unravelling the Double-bind* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 8 and Kelly Oliver, "Introduction: Julia Kristeva's Outlaw Ethics," *Ethics, Politics, and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Routledge, 1993) 1-22.

⁵⁷John Lechte identifies the condition of being in exile as another model for ethics. (*Julia Kristeva*, 70-80.) Another model, following Kristeva's use of the term ethics, could be the condition known as "dicephalus," conjoined twins who share an undivided torso and two legs. It is a rare condition, only four sets of twins, in recorded history, have survived. There is a fascinating and deeply moving story from *Life* magazine (April 1996) about Abigail and Brittany Hensel who each has her own heart and stomach, but together rely on three lungs. "Their spines are joined at the pelvis, and below the waist they have the organs of a single person. Each controls the limbs and trunk, and feels sensations, on her own side exclusively: If you tickle the ribs on the right, only Abby giggles. Yet the girls manage - no one knows exactly how - to move as one being." (51) As the reporters of the story (Jen M.R. Doman and Kenneth Miller) note: "The paradoxes of the twins' lives are metaphysical as well as medical. They raise far-reaching questions about human nature: What is individuality? How sharp are the boundaries of the self?" (51)

⁵⁸See specifically the section in Chapter Three entitled "Practice." (page 171)

from poetry's potential to reactivate drives.⁵⁹ Poetry, through materiality of language, reaches us at a level "on the far and near side" of signification. It has a capacity to reach the reader or the listener at a level which breaks through an ordinary, familiar interpretation causing both disruption and transformation. It is poetry's revolutionary capacity which makes it dangerous for the "orderly" state of repressive regimes. The suppression of poets is witnessed in every era of history. We continue to see it today.⁶⁰ Poetry reminds us of the "overdetermination of the signifier."⁶¹ This takes us back to Kristeva's term *signifiance*. *Signifiance*, as we have seen,⁶² refers to this quality of "overdetermination" in the signifier. "It refers, to the work performed in language that enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say."⁶³ So, poetry is linked to the semiotic dimension of language. It is linked to that fluid and archaic realm within the human person which underlies speech and upon which speech is founded. Poetic language's proximity to the text as practice⁶⁴ accounts for its force in society. Yet, it is also poetic language's proximity to the subject that accounts for its revolutionary quality. Poetic language reaches the subject at the deepest level prior to or

⁵⁹Oliver, "Introduction: Julia Kristeva's Outlaw Ethics," 2.

⁶⁰"From Plato's imaginary Republic to Stalin's brutal dictatorship, censorship has been the sign of repression, tyranny, and death." (Ibid., 2.) As well the execution, November 10, 1995, of writer and poet, Ken Saro-Wiwa, in Nigeria and the arrest of Taslima Nasrin, poet and novelist in Bangladesh bear witness to both the power of poetic language and the fear of its potential. The censorship and house arrest of Burmese Nobel Peace Prize winner, Aung San Suu Kyi, could also be seen as another example.

⁶¹Ibid., 3.

⁶²See chapter three's section entitled "Preliminary Investigations." (page 133)

⁶³ Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language*, 18.

⁶⁴See chapter three's section "Heterogeneity" (page 165) for a definition of text as practice.

underlying symbolic constraint. In fact, poetic language *utilizes symbolic constraint* to reach this level in the speaking subject. This constitutes the truly *subversive* quality of poetry. In a sense, the revolutionary force of poetic language *becomes* the revolutionary force of the subject for it unleashes this force within subjects. Again, this revolutionary force is connected to the heterogeneity or plurality of both poetry and the speaking subject. It pushes the subject beyond unified identity. It forces the subject to live more intensely its condition of being in-process/on-trial. This is the truly ethical for Kristeva - this open condition of language and, by affiliation, of the subject. We recall that Kristeva's utilization of the term negativity plays an important role here. For it is the negativity which underlies language and the speaking subject that surfaces again here. This negative force disrupts and shatters our "clean and proper" self, our complacent identity and fixed codes. It forces us to continually remake them. Ethics emerges here not as the continual disrupter of human identity but as the necessary catalyst for undoing rigidity and totalitarianism both at an individual level and at a societal level.

3.2 Maternity as a Model for Ethics

If ethics emerges as openness to otherness, the quintessential example of this is maternity. Maternity is a theme that cuts across most of Kristeva's work. Yet, it is in the analytically rigorous yet deeply personal essay, "*Stabat Mater*" that Kristeva analyzes maternity from a cultural *and* an individual level. The actual *appearance* of "*Stabat Mater*" is disturbing. Although beginning in a standard one column mode, the essay suddenly (in a *FLASH*) splits into two columns. The interspersing of double and single columns continues throughout the essay ending with double columns. This format is disturbing because it is hard

for the reader to get any bearings. "Which column do I read first?" "Where do I go next?" The splitting on the actual written page parallels a splitting within the "meaning" of the text. The essay is simultaneously an historical study of the cult of the Virgin Mary *and* an in-depth personal analysis of Kristeva's actual *experience* of pregnancy and motherhood. Beneath the multi-layered text, Kristeva elaborates on the implicit ethics of maternity.

We live on that border, crossroads beings, crucified beings. A woman is neither nomadic nor a male body that considers itself earthly only in erotic passion. A mother is a continuous separation, a division of the very flesh. And consequently a division of language - and it has always been so.⁶⁵

What Kristeva seeks to display both materially in the text and symbolically in the "meaning" of the text is the splitting of the subject that maternity models in a most concrete manner. Otherness is within. Subject and object are undifferentiated. Within the pregnant body of a woman, identity and difference mingle. Pregnancy is the only borderline condition that culture does not condemn. Culture merely attempts to regulate it, to order it, and to tame it. Yet, pregnancy remains beyond the control of any system of thought. It remains beyond the comprehension and reduction of any philosophy of the subject. It remains beyond, it seems, the confinement of any moral coding. Hence, Kristeva names an ethics separated from codes and the Law a *herethics*. It is an ethics separated from morality.⁶⁶ *Herethics* models the

⁶⁵Kristeva, "*Stabat Mater*," *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 254.

"Nous vivons sur cette frontière, êtres de carrefour, être de croix. Une femme n'est ni nomade, ni corps mâle qui ne se trouve charnel que dans la passion érotique. Une mère est un partage permanent, une division de la chair même. Et par conséquent, une division du langage - depuis toujours."

"*Stabat Mater*," *Histoires d'amour* (Paris: Denoël, 1983), 240-241.

⁶⁶Ibid., 263. Morality here is understood as *rational systems of thought* (for example Kant's moral law) based on principles such as duty, obligation, and principles of conduct or, for Kant, a *single* supreme principle of morality.

interactiveness within the open system that human life is. In fact, ethics is that open system. Ethics is *an* open system. Ethics is relational. It reminds us that otherness is within and therefore it impels us, once we realize this, to treat the other with respect, with love. We have a stake in this. Otherness is not something we must contend with. It is not something that impinges upon us from outside. It is within us.

Now, if a contemporary ethics is no longer seen as being the same as morality; if ethics amounts to not avoiding the embarrassing and inevitable problematics of the law but giving it flesh, language, and jouissance - in that case its reformulation demands the contribution of women. Of women who harbor the desire to reproduce (to have stability). Of women who are available so that our speaking species, which knows it is mortal, might withstand death. Of mothers. For an heretical ethics separated from morality, an *herethics*, is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable: herethics is undeath [*a-mort*], love . . .⁶⁷

Interestingly, the Catholic Church understood the necessity of a discourse on motherhood. The Virgin Mary was both an expression of maternity throughout the history of the Church, as well as, a focus for the cathartic drives of the semiotic.

The body of the mother is a nexus for the human being and subsequently for culture. It is the point where stability meets instability. It is the place that both launches the speaking being and threatens the speaking being. It is the boundary condition that launches the speaking being to the heights of joy and the depths of melancholia. It can crack the mirror that

⁶⁷Ibid., 262-263.

"Or, si une éthique de la modernité ne se confond plus avec la morale; si une éthique consiste à ne pas éviter l'embarrassante et inévitable problématique de la loi, mais à lui donner corps, langage et jouissance - alors sa reformulation exige la part des femmes. Des femmes porteuses du désir de reproduction (de stabilité). Des femmes disponibles pour que notre espèce parlante qui se sait mortelle puisse supporter la mort. Des mères. Car l'éthique hérétique dissociée de la morale, l'*hérétique*, n'est peut-être que ce qui, dans la vie, rend les liens, la pensée et donc la pensée de la mort, supportables : l'hérétique est amort, amour . . ." (*Stabat Mater*, "Histoires d'amour", 247.)

reflects back to us our beautiful narcissistic image. It impels us to live the plurality of our existence. Ethics emerges amid this razor sharp edge upon which our existence is built. Consequently, it keeps us from ever remaining complacent.

3.3 Psychoanalysis as a Model for Ethics

As maternity is a model for ethics because it reveals to us our alterity within - the plural condition of our interior existence - psychoanalysis models ethics in its capacity to *listen* to that plurality. It models ethics because we are allowed to speak from the semiotic regions of our existence without shattering into infinite pieces. We do not shatter because we are allowed to speak and the speaking is heard and accepted, both what is beautiful and what is abject; what is truthful and what is perverse; what is virtuous and what is criminal; what is life giving and what is murder. Through the psychoanalytic tools of transference and counter-transference the interactive relationship between analyst and analysand is constantly shifting. Kristeva calls this relationship *poiesis* because there is no stable or fixed position upon which interpretation relies.⁶⁸ There is a *productive* and creative element to psychoanalytic interpretation. The analyst is constantly asking questions,⁶⁹ continually keeping track of his or her own desire, incessantly analyzing both the patients discourse, as well as, his or her own discourse. Transference arises from desire for the other - in this case desire for the analyst. There is no cure and no transformation without transference. The *unnameable* (the

⁶⁸Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 95.

⁶⁹In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva, pushing beyond the historian of religions and the anthropologist, describes herself as an "analyst-semiologist" who never ceases asking questions. (92)

Sachverhalt) - origin of speech and interpretation - emerges in the transference relationship. For Kristeva, delirium comes because of lack of awareness of this unnameable origin of our speaking selves. Just as important is the analyst's awareness of countertransference. Psychoanalysis, *interactive* by definition, necessitates analysis not only of the patient's speech, but of the analyst's characteristics and unconscious reactions which may have a bearing on the psychoanalytic treatment. Cognizance of *this* desire plays an equally important role. The analyst is attentive to both the desire of the patient and his or her own desire. Hence, though not devoid of theory, analytic treatment is necessarily particular and specific. It "sets the interpretive machine in motion differently every time."⁷⁰

Psychoanalysis is a model for ethics because it reminds us of the incompleteness of any interpretation.⁷¹ It exposes fantasies, illusions and beliefs. It reveals the desires upon which these are based. It dissolves the belief in One Truth or One Meaning. It reveals the hidden motivations of our quest for One Meaning - a quest which rests ultimately on the image we have of ourselves, on our identity when faced with an other.⁷² Totalitarianism stems exactly from closure in interpretation. Hence, the shifting of levels of awareness that psychoanalysis effects creates an openness within the patient for what is irreconcilable about himself or herself and, subsequently, about the world. Kristeva states that "[p]sychoanalysis is . . . experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an

⁷⁰Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 95.

⁷¹Ibid., 99.

⁷²Ibid., 90.

ethics of respect for the irreconcilable."⁷³ It is this "ethics of respect for the irreconcilable" that psychoanalysis enables us to tolerate and, eventually, to find joy in (*jouissance*). When Kristeva asks "What good are psychoanalysts at a time of distress oblivious to itself?"⁷⁴ she is keenly aware of the difficulty of the task. Yet, where else, she asks, can men and women who cry out for meaning find something other than violence, naiveté in ideologies, or the anguish of utter chaos?

Julia Kristeva addresses often in her work the "position" from which she speaks. In *Nations Without Nationalism*, Kristeva explicitly elaborates on this in a section entitled "What Position Do I Speak From?"⁷⁵ Kristeva describes herself as a cosmopolitan. In order to grasp what she means by "cosmopolitan" one must subtend this self-definition with three other characterizations: an exile; a woman; and an intellectual.⁷⁶ As an exile (from Bulgaria, her country of birth) Kristeva experiences the condition of homelessness. Yet, the other side of this homelessness is a choice, made by Kristeva, to embrace "a transnational or international position situated at the crossing of boundaries."⁷⁷ The experience of exile is intrinsic to being a woman. In the essay "Women's Time" Kristeva elaborates upon three different experiences of time. One experience is linear time which signifies historical time - "time as project,

⁷³Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 182.

⁷⁴Kristeva, "Psychoanalysts in times of distress," *Speculations after Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture*, ed. Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow, trans. Michael Münchow (London: Routledge, 1994), 14.

⁷⁵Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, 15-17.

⁷⁶Lechte, *Julia Kristeva*, 79-84.

⁷⁷Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism*, 16.

teleology, departure, progression and arrival."⁷⁸ Linear time is linked to language; in fact, it is the time *of* language. Women, according to Kristeva's reading, threaten linear time because they are associated with cyclical time (repetition), and monumental time which signifies "a plurality of productions that cannot be reduced to one another."⁷⁹ The quality of Céline's writing, as we saw above,⁸⁰ which connotes an "eternal return to a place which escapes naming and which can be named only if one plays on the whole register of language,"⁸¹ situates one in monumental and cyclical time. This is the pre-linguistic time of the archaic mother and it involves an indefinite disrupting and dissolving. The depressed and melancholy person experiences this archaic "time" - it does not pass by, it is not ruled by before and after, it is devoid of goals.⁸² "Forgiveness" also connotes for Kristeva a timelessness. She states:

According to Dostoyevsky, forgiveness seems to say: Through my love, I exclude you from history for a while, I take you for a child, and this means that I recognize the unconscious motivations of your crime and allow you to make a new person out of yourself. So that the unconscious might inscribe itself in a new narrative that will not be the eternal return of the death drive in the cycle of crime and punishment and it must pass through the love of forgiveness, be transferred to the love of forgiveness. The resources of narcissism and idealization imprint their stamps upon the unconscious and refashion it. For the unconscious is not structured like a language but like all

⁷⁸Toril Moi's introduction to Kristeva's "Women's Time," *The Kristeva Reader*, 187.

⁷⁹Thomas Foster, "History, Critical Theory, and Women's Social Practices: 'Women's Time' and Housekeeping" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (1988) : 74.

⁸⁰See chapter two's section entitled "Third Stage: The Speaking Subject and the Human Psyche: Horror, Love, Melancholy" (page 94) and, in the previous section in this chapter which outlines *Powers of Horror*. (page 201)

⁸¹Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 102.

⁸²Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 60.

the imprints of the Other, including and most particularly so those that are most archaic, "semiotic," it is constituted by preverbal self-sensualities that the narcissistic or amorous experience restores to me. Forgiveness *renews the unconscious* because it inscribes the right to narcissistic regression within History and Speech.

These turn out to be modified by it. They are neither linear flight forward nor eternal return of the revenge/death recurrence, but a spiral that follows the part of death drive *and* of renewal/love.⁸³

Hence, poetry, the maternal and psychoanalysis all come together in Kristeva's understanding of ethics. The *chora*, the space of the feminine container, and abjection, the experience of separation from the horrifying and stifling archaic mother, underlie and condition our entry into language and subsequently into linear time. Kristeva seems to be saying to us: "Yes, there is movement, there is growth, there is creativity but the sky is empty." Perhaps the experience of *both* hope and horror will continue to be Kristeva's ethical legacy as she skips across the waters of psychoanalysis with all the intensity and passion she

⁸³Ibid., 204-205.

"Ce pardon dostoïevskien semble dire:

Par mon amour, je vous exclus un temps de l'histoire, je vous prends pour un enfant, ce qui signifie que je reconnais les ressorts inconscients de votre crime et vous permets de vous transformer. Pour que l'inconscient s'inscrive dans une nouvelle histoire qui ne soit pas l'éternel retour de la pulsion de la mort dans le cycle crime/châtiment, il lui faut transiter par l'amour du pardon, se transférer à l'amour du pardon. Les ressources du narcissisme et de l'idéalisation impriment leurs marques à l'inconscient et le remodelent. Car l'inconscient n'est pas structuré comme un langage, mais comme toutes les marques de l'Autre, y compris et surtout les plus archaïques, 'sémiotiques', faites d'autosensualités préverbaux que me restitue l'expérience narcissique ou amoureuse. Le pardon *renouvelle l'inconscient* parce qu'il inscrit le droit à la régression narcissique dans l'Histoire et dans la Parole.

Celles-ci s'en trouvent modifiées. Elles ne sont ni fuite linéaire en avant ni éternel retour de la répétition mort-vengeance, mais spirale qui suit le trajet de la pulsion mortelle *et* celui de l'amour-renaissance."

Julia Kristeva, *Soleil noir: Dépression et mélancolie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987) 214-215.

can muster, yet indifferent to the outcome, because anything other than indifference constitutes delirium.

The task is, instead, to record the *crisis* of modern interpretive systems without smoothing it over, to affirm that this crisis is inherent in the symbolic function itself, and to perceive as symptoms all constructions, including totalizing interpretation, which try to deny this crisis: to dissolve, to displace indefinitely, in Kafka's words, "temporarily and for a lifetime."⁸⁴

4. Conclusion to Chapter Four

In the present chapter, I consider some of the more "horrifying" implications of Kristeva's theory as these have been elaborated in *Powers of Horror*. This is *one* of the implications of Kristeva theory. Considering this implication in all its "negativity" facilitates our understanding of the deep psychic structure upon which the speaking subject is built. It helps us to understand both the pervasive denigration and marginalization of women in all cultures and the seeming insurmountable obstacles in addressing it. I, then, consider Kristeva's "transgressive" ethics committed to the irreducible heterogeneity of the speaking subject. The open structure of Kristeva's ethics acts as a catalyst amid the stifling "horrors" she presents in *Powers of Horror*. In chapter five we move explicitly to the theological horizon as I juxtapose the Christian ethics of Rosemary Radford Ruether with the psychoanalytic, linguistic, and "transgressive" ethics of Julia Kristeva.

⁸⁴Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," 103.

Chapter Five

A Comparative Analysis of Kristeva and Ruether

1. Introduction

In this final chapter, I will undertake a comparative analysis of the work of Julia Kristeva and Rosemary Ruether. The main purpose of this analysis is to facilitate our examination of the theological implications of Kristeva's work. The analysis will be double-edged. First, it will consider how Kristeva's elaboration of the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic might advance Ruether's understanding of sexism. Second, it will explore Ruether's contribution to Kristeva at the level of the transcendent dimension. There is a transcendent character to Kristeva's theory which prevents it from being deterministic. It is this aspect of her theory which opens out onto the creative dynamism within the human person. Kristeva's work evokes that transcendent dimension of reality in an original and exhilarating manner. She exposes an infinite creativity within the human person. It is this infinite creativity which engenders an ethical respect for the irreconcilability of all human beings. Yet, it is Ruether who, in her own exploration of this transcendent dimension of reality, is willing to acknowledge and name it without fear of reducing it to religious psychology or ideology.

Before exploring the correctives and contributions each has to offer the other and thus bringing forward the important theological implications of Kristeva's work, I will summarize the central points of chapters two, three, and four. I will also develop briefly Kristeva's linkages to Christian ethics. Following this, I will elaborate Kristeva's correctives and contributions to Ruether. This will lead us, finally, to our goal of highlighting the importance of Kristeva's work for the theological enterprise. This importance will emerge through an

exploration of Ruether's correctives and contributions to Kristeva.

2. Synopsis of Key Insights from Chapters Two, Three and Four

Let us first get our bearings by recalling the key insights from the work of Julia Kristeva, presented in chapters two, three, and four, concerning our topic of ethical discourse and the body. This will be done chronologically dealing first with some general insights (chapter two) and moving, then, to more specific insights encompassing Kristeva's dialectical methodology, her penetrating understanding of the role of the body in language and its consequences (chapter three). Finally, we will recall Kristeva's subsequent understanding of ethics and the ramifications of her insights into the "split subject" (chapter four).

2.1 General Insights

Kristeva's intellectual journey has led her through a myriad of paths and demanded of her an intellectual and emotional intensity. Through it, however, Kristeva has followed the traces of a central concern. Put simply, it is a concern for otherness, her own and that of all human beings. It is a concern that stems from Kristeva's own personal experience. It also stems from the suffering she witnesses in her analytic practice and in her commitment to exploring the crisis which predominates the world at this moment in human history.¹ The exploration of otherness led Kristeva to the deepest recesses of the human psyche. It led her to the *loss* on which all identity is founded. It led her to the discovery of the *split subject*, and

¹"[T]his problem of crisis is an enormous one. We formed a 'groupe de recherche,' a seminar, here at Paris VII, addressing this crisis. We tried to organize an interdisciplinary reflection across history, because the crises has multiple aspects." Julia Kristeva, "Cultural Strangeness and the Subject in Crisis," trans. and interview by Suzanne Clark and Kathleen Hulley, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 36.

the subsequent examination of the symbolic and semiotic. This, in turn, summoned her to realms of horror, of melancholy and love, and to examine the maladies of our era. Kristeva's concern for otherness goes hand in hand with her alarm in face of the potential violence of totalitarian and repressive forces. Her background makes her sensitive to the danger of those forces and she has grasped deeply the ubiquitous nature of totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is multi-faceted. It spans every form of discourse and lurks potentially in every speaking subject. Totalitarianism, from the psychoanalytic perspective, stems from too severe a repression of the semiotic. As we have seen, if, as individuals and societies, we repress one or the other of the two processes (the symbolic and the semiotic) which constitute who we are, it can lead to psychotic (there is no meaning) or totalitarian (there is only law and constraint - no creativity) states.² For Kristeva, and many others, totalitarianism is *the* evil of our age.

Kristeva's means of combating totalitarianism is subversive. For Kristeva, subversiveness, in fact, is the *only* means of undermining it. It is the *only* weapon we have to avoid the destructive pitfalls totalitarianism opens up to us. In Kristeva's view, subversiveness appears in the form of psychoanalysis and aesthetic practice. Kristeva is caught up in a revolutionary force when she faces an infinite strangeness both within the human psyche and outside the human psyche. Perhaps, Kristeva's greatest contribution in this endeavour is her penetrating and rigorous analysis of the unspeakable, unrepresentable dimension of language. Kristeva puts the speaking subject *on trial*. The speaking subject is not fixed, but is continually, forever, *in process*. The speaking subject is born through and in language not outside language. The "outside" of language, that is, the *other side* of language is archaic,

²See Kristeva's essay "What of Tomorrow's Nation?" in *Nations Without Nationalism*, 1-47, where she develops the linkages between the individual psyche and totalitarianism.

outside of time, and reaches the farthest recesses of the human psyche in its original fusion with the maternal container. Again, Kristeva's momentous effort at describing this other side of language stems from her own ethical imperative - the undermining of totalitarianism and the freeing of speaking subjects.

The tools of psychoanalytic listening and aesthetic practice are key for Kristeva in her task of undermining totalitarianism and relieving the suffering of speaking subjects in a time of crisis. For Kristeva, crisis is the norm. *It is* the condition of the speaking subject. But where can the speaking subject *express* the crisis of his or her divided condition? Indeed, where, in our technological and scientific age, when we continue to believe naively in progress, can the speaking subject *say* the fiction that constitutes his or her existence? And, more than this, what discourse will pull the speaking subject out of his or her stupor? What discourse will aid the speaking subject in recognizing the illusions on which he or she has been counting? Yet, how can this discourse avoid on the one hand, setting up another illusion or, on the other hand, "breaking the heart" of the speaking subject and leading to death? Such is the mandate of psychoanalytic listening and the cathartic potential of aesthetic practice. In *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, Kristeva describes the analytic sessions with a patient she calls "Paul." She states that,

Together, then, we created a world, which to the objective observer (for objective observation is also part of my role as analyst) is completely unreal and illusory, an amalgam of pretences, games, and masks. We are in a sense actors who take up our roles at the beginning of each session. But this imaginary relationship is able to accommodate the very real violence of Paul's memory, rendered mortal and lethal by repression.³

Kristeva's capacity to listen psychoanalytically creates an open space within the analytic

³Kristeva, *In the Beginning Was Love*, 17.

session where her patient is able to speak and live the *drama* of his repressions. Thus, he is able, at the end of the session, to walk away from the meeting "calm and neutral." Psychoanalytic listening is an attentive listening. It is a listening that hears the *meaning* of the words being expressed, yet also hears the wild, the inexpressible and the violent. It hears everything that cannot be expressed through the transparency of language; the customary mode of listening outside the analytic session. The subversive quality of psychoanalytic listening lies in its capacity to undermine the thetic break⁴ that constitutes the separation of the split subject. It allows for a dissolution to take place, albeit, temporarily. It frees up the rigid and severe repression of the thetic.

The subversive quality of aesthetic practice has a wider impact in that it is not confined to the privacy of the analytic session. Kristeva's own writing of novels is an attempt to mine the potentially subversive quality of that practice. In a more public manner, the novel has the potential to allow the barbarity and the criminality that lives in each of us to come to the surface and be cathartically *discharged* without, in fact, violence happening. The novel has the capacity, through its *style*, *drama*, and use of metaphor to reach that inexpressible region of the human psyche from whence rise the brutality, the violence *and* the creativity of desire. Like psychoanalytic listening, aesthetic practice has a cathartic affect, displacing violence and totalitarianism within the speaking subject, and allowing for a more flexible, *playful* engagement between the semiotic and the symbolic.

⁴Discussion of and a definition for the thetic can be found in chapter three. (See especially page 150.) Briefly, it is the thetic phase which establishes signification. It refers to the necessary condition of separation which all enunciation requires.

2.2 Kristeva's Dialectical Methodology

In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva demonstrates her penetrating analytic skills and methodological astuteness in linking the dialectical condition of the body with the dialectical condition of the psyche. She also, in turn, links both to the dialectical condition of language. The difficulty of Kristeva's task becomes clear when one realizes that the underlying condition of both the psyche and language lies outside consciousness. But, there are *traces* of this underlying condition within consciousness. It is these traces that Kristeva, like a relentless detective, is able to discern, follow and consequently map out for the reader.⁵ In exposing the underlying dialectical condition of both the human psyche and language, Kristeva reveals that this dialectical condition is not merely a step on the way to wholeness or unity. Rather, the dialectical condition is the productive force which *continually* brings into existence both the speaking subject and language itself. Kristeva's strategy, her dialectical methodology, is implicated in this underlying productive force. Kristeva taps into the productive force in order to better demonstrate it. This is what makes Kristeva's method *revisionary* and why she is able to continually utilize previous theories (for example, Marxism, Hegel's notion of negativity and Freud's notion of drives), yet not fall prey to a static employment of these theories. By drawing on the *productive force* that underlies all theory

⁵In Kristeva's second novel, *The Old Man and the Wolves*, she reveals the dialectic between the body and language as consciousness knows them and the realm of the body and language that lies outside of consciousness' reach. It is interesting to note that she juxtaposes the two realms in two sections of the novel and the second, more lucid, section of the novel takes the form of a detective story. Commenting on this aspect of her novel in an interview, Kristeva states, "So the 'twilight of the gods' that makes up the first part of the novel acquires a meaning in the second part, which is simply the setting of a course, the shaping of a plot: *it is possible to know*. Henceforth, an ethics of knowledge, let us say, is involved." Julia Kristeva, "Interview: *The Old Man and the Wolves*," interview by Bernard Sichère, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 165.

she is able to walk the razor's edge between a strictly biological reading of reality and a strictly metaphysical reading of reality. Kristeva avoids those two extremes by demonstrating how language and, hence, the speaking subject are *produced* through the drives, pulsions, instincts and energies of the human body. She avoids the extremes by demonstrating how this *production* is not mechanistic, but open to continual renewal, continual creation. This is how Kristeva allows *practice* to test theory, probe theory, unsettle theory and finally, recreate theory. Kristeva approaches all topics through the strategy of appropriation, clarification and subsequently, the creation of something new. Kristeva tests theory with *signifying* practice. In recognizing that the human subject is constructed in language the importance of signifying practice is paramount. Thus, for Kristeva, it is imperative to explore the two modalities that make up language, the semiotic and the symbolic. Both the social and the individual are constituted through the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic. Both the social and the individual repress this dialectical condition that constitutes them, yet both are subject, because of that dialectical process, to continual irruption.

Kristeva's task, simply stated, is to expose the heterogeneity that constitutes both the speaking subject and social institutions. Through her unique mode of analysis, which Kristeva calls *semanalysis*, she "x-rays" a process or a materiality anterior to signification or meaning. She draws our attention to a process which signification or meaning, in fact, represses, indeed *must* repress in order *to signify* or *to mean*. Thus, signifying practice is a heterogeneous practice (*signifiante*). It is the link between the body and language. From the very actions of controlling, ordering and directing the biological urges within the body an excess is produced. Yet, the unsettling, disruptive and recreative potential of signifying practice is only possible from *within* the symbolic realm.

The link between the semiotic, which Kristeva sees as generated through the bodily relationship between the infant and the mother, and the symbolic, which Kristeva sees as generated through the social, the institutional and the familial, is irrevocable. One is *impossible* without the other, even though each can *seem* to exist without the other, indeed, *battles* to exist without the other. This is the most significant aspect of Kristeva's contribution to an understanding of the body/psyche polarity discussed in chapter one. Her contribution relates to the infinitely determinate yet (paradoxically) infinitely creative dimension of the interconnectedness between the body and language. Kristeva transforms the discussion. She pushes it to the origins *and* margins of existence of *each* and *every* speaking being. The body of the infant is a divided body made up of drives and pulsions, instincts and energies. Yet, following Freud, Kristeva maintains that drives are heterogeneous. They not only divide matter, they "multiply" it; they pluralize it. Thus, although there is division and separation (continual repetition of matter) which constitutes the speaking subject in language, there is also heterogeneity (a *leap*, a *rupture*).⁶ The speaking subject is founded on both division and heterogeneity. Thus, desire is not merely desire for the lacking object which can never be reached (Lacan), it is also a continually renewed desire which is produced through heterogeneous drives. This pluralization of matter underlies and constitutes, for Kristeva, the signifying process.

As we have seen, even from its existence in the womb, the body of the infant divides and separates. The division and separation are *always* division and separation *from* the mother. The division and separation are what constitutes the rupture upon which language

⁶See the section "Heterogeneity" in chapter three (page 165) for reference to this.

is built. Language and thus culture (the social, the institutional and the familial) are founded on this originary separation of the infant's body from the mother's body. Yet, to repeat again, for it cannot be overemphasized, this rupture *continues* to underlie language. It is a continual, underlying rupture in *all* speaking subjects. Thus, the *process* of signifying practice, which brings the divided condition of the body into prominence as underlying and, in fact, as the very condition for the possibility of language, is uncovered through Kristeva's employment of semanalysis. Thus it is that Kristeva reveals both that language articulates a heterogeneous process and that the subject is never fixed or static, but always in process.

Kristeva's heterogeneous notion of negativity is fundamental in this process. In order to demonstrate that the symbolic function is produced through bodily drives of separation and division, Kristeva needs to link Hegel's notion of negativity to Freud's notion of expulsion. She does this through the term *rejection*. The potentially revolutionary force of negativity, as it has been demonstrated through Kristeva's analysis, is such that it literally is the process where the body and the psyche come together and split apart. That is, negativity is what links the bodily and psychical realms, yet it is also that which causes continual separation or splitting apart. Negativity both enables a subject in process to become an "I" and disrupts or dissolves that "I." Kristeva uses the term "rejection" because it demonstrates both heterogeneity and unity. That is, it is both tied to matter and it is the scission and expulsion of matter. Being connected in such a definitive manner to matter and, yet also sustaining culture, negativity as rejection appears within the symbolic realm producing a heterogeneous subject. The force of negativity as rejection pluralizes the symbolic function. This revolutionary force of negativity as rejection irrupts at both an individual level and a social or cultural level. Consequently, it not only continually subverts individual "identity," (the "I")

it continually subverts a unitary logic at the level of institutions.

2.3 Ethics

To repeat, Kristeva develops an understanding of drive activity in the human body that accounts for the emergence of the signifying process, yet also continually unsettles, disrupts, and pluralizes the signifying process. By demonstrating the *force* of the *drive activity* in language, particularly poetic language, she is able to bring that force to the surface without undermining its subversive potential. Kristeva's contribution to ethics comes at exactly this point. Ethics, for Kristeva, has to do with what is marginal and with what breaks down identity because through marginality and the shattering of identity, totalitarianism is undermined. Ethics is the subversive capacity within language which has the unsettling force (a shattering and explosive force at times) to constitute changes in the subject-in-process at every level of his or her relating - to his or her body, to others and to objects. In addition, Kristeva unearths a connection between the biological and social spheres which renders them inseparable. One implicates the other, continually, without exception. That connection is the interdependence of the semiotic and the symbolic which constitutes the dialectical condition of the speaking subject. Consequently, Kristeva's is neither a biologist reading of reality, nor an idealist reading of reality. She establishes through her semanalysis *both* the loss or the lack *and* the excess that the symbolic function is founded on. She brings to the surface, albeit subversively, both the lack and the excess, both the determining factor of our condition as speaking subjects and the creative renewal which is possible because we are speaking subjects.

The ethical, for Kristeva, is aligned with practice. Practice is ethical, because it both

posits and dissolves meaning and the unity of the subject. Practice has ethical implications, because it subverts absolutes, it undermines ideology exposing a heterogeneous realm which overthrows One Meaning or One Truth. The signifying process succumbs to One Meaning and One Truth in its socio-symbolic manifestation. Yet, like Capitalism, according to Marx, its own destruction is carried within the signifying process in the form of subversion through pluralization. The ethical function of practice exposes the precariousness of the signifying process and, hence, of the speaking subject, because it reveals that the subject *in process/on trial* is not the master of thought and language. Rather, the subject *in process/on trial* is continually produced through language. Kristeva's concern for our inability to tolerate otherness and difference as individuals, religions, races, etc. accounts for her insistence on the *ethical* function of practice. It also accounts for the reason she sees practice as ethical. Practice unsettles identity (whether individual or group) and undermines the primal impulse to destroy difference. It does this by exposing the precarious condition upon which our identities are founded. Our identities are not founded on Truth in the all-encompassing sense. They do not constitute One Meaning. Rather, our identities are founded on both loss and excess. Destroying otherness, in whatever form that takes, amounts to the *futile* attempt to destroy the condition upon which all human persons are founded.

Kristeva's dialectical methodology unearths important insights with regard to the corporeal and instinctual roots of language and the speaking subject. She contributes significantly to the debate concerning the body and ethical discourse. Kristeva does not merely speak about the body as an addendum to this or that topic or as an important *component* in a line of reasoning. Rather, for Kristeva, the body *is* the determining factor in the appearance of the speaking subject in language and in the evolution of language in the

speaking subject. The body, as drive, instinct, pulsion and energy has a determining impact in Kristeva's work. It is not an object. It is a process and, again, it constitutes the subject-in-process. The body, as drive, instinct, pulsion and energy underlies a subject always in the making; a subject which is "alive only if it is never the same."⁷ The subject is always in crisis; a permanent, radical crisis. The subject-in-process is never an entity. The subject-in-process is a continual appearance brought about through the interaction between the body and language. Kristeva's work never strays far from this dynamic. She uses language, exploits it, unsettles it, all in order to bring to awareness the divided condition of the speaking subject and the determining role of the body in that divided condition.

2.4 Ramifications of Kristeva's Insights for Feminism and Christian Ethics

What are the ramifications, for feminism and for Christian ethics, of the necessary and irrevocable link between the body and the psyche? More to the point, what are the ramifications of the role of negativity in the production of the speaking subject? In my view, the ramifications are integrally related to what Kristeva sees as the *limits* of primal repression. Primal repression connotes repression of the maternal body. It connotes the repression of that from which we all must separate in order to enter the symbolic realm and become speaking beings. The limits of primal repression are exposed with the manifestation of abjection. Abjection, connoting all that threatens, repulses and disturbs, calls to mind indirectly, unconsciously, indeed, preconsciously, the maternal, and by association, the feminine body. The ramifications are like an epiphany. That is, they appear, as though divinely inspired,

⁷Julia Kristeva "My Memory's Hyperbole," *The Female Autography*, 220.

through the manner in which any culture and the various religions encompassed in a culture, encode the abject. This, by association, has had staggering consequences on the way women have been represented and signified throughout history, particularly in ethics. In fact, the repudiation of the feminine manifested in all cultures and in all religions, is poignantly clear even if rather perplexing to most. Although these consequences regard the way women are represented because of the proximity of women with maternity and, thus, with the primary separating process of each human being, the potential of a failure of complete separation, indeed the condition of failing to completely separate lies within all human beings, women and men. So, although it is women who bear the brunt of the violence and desire that emerge from the earliest recesses of human existence, *all are implicated (as potential victims and perpetrators) in this primal human condition.*

As has been demonstrated in the preceding chapter, Kristeva's analysis of psychoanalytic theory, the history of religions and literature reveals the manner in which all these modes of discourse repudiate the feminine. Again, for Kristeva, this repudiation is cathartic and necessary in the sense that it allows the speaking subject, religions and culture in general to cope with the horrors and prohibited desires that emerge and threaten their very identity. Interestingly, the manifestation of phobia in analytic theory becomes the key link to how that discourse deals with abjection. For phobia is a borderline condition. It separates and links the symbolic and the semiotic. It turns the unnameable abject (the pre-oedipal mother) into a (phobic) object. All that causes phobia can be traced back to that unnamable abject at the origins of identity. Phobia signifies the insignificant maternal remainder, a surd, which cannot be totally subsumed within any system of thought. It brings to consciousness a *bodily* anguish at the separation from and desire for the (pre-oedipal) maternal body.

Separation from the maternal body is elicited in Kristeva's analysis of three religious discourses; polytheism, Judaism and Christianity. These modes of discourse code the abject through defilement, taboo and sin respectively. Thus the repression of the feminine/maternal comes to be aligned, in religious discourse, with that which is profane. The logic of exclusion to enhance separation and differentiation performs the dual task of assisting the human being in his or her entrance into the symbolic realm and providing a means for societies to deal or cope with the more threatening and base aspects of human existence. For Kristeva's purposes, it is Christianity, more than polytheism or Judaism, which achieves a coding of the abject, yet allows some small but significant lifting of the repressed. For polytheism and Judaism, the repression is severe. But it is Judaism, moving beyond the purification and defilement rites of polytheism, which establishes a *law* of exclusion. It is through the "Law" that the symbolic order is set up and maintained and the semiotic severely excluded and repressed. Without completely breaking with that Law, Christianity inverts it and exclusion becomes introjected into the speaking subject. Division connotes the sinful condition of humanity. "I do the very thing I do not want to do and can't do the thing I want to do." (Romans 7:15) "You say you will not betray me but before the cock crows three times you will betray me." (Mark 14:30) "Can you not stay awake with me? The spirit is strong but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:38) The human condition of being separated and divided becomes, with Christianity, the sinful condition of each human person. Sin and holiness become implicated with the body and spirit respectively in a more pronounced and irrevocable manner. Yet, paradoxically, (and brilliantly according to Kristeva with her concern for a lifting of the repressed abjection), Christianity permits a mingling of the holy and the profane, of the symbolic and the semiotic. This mingling, a scandal to polytheism and Judaism, becomes one of the most significant aspects

of Christian theology. For it is the "sinful" condition of humanity which elicits Christ's salvation. Yet, the intermingling of the sacred and the profane, of abjection and beauty, fails to keep in check the human propensity to be threatened and repulsed by the danger of abjection. Thus, the battle between the body and the spirit is made manifest in Christian theology even from the earliest Christian teachings. Consequently, in theology, sin becomes associated with the flesh in a pronounced manner and, although not excluding the male, the female becomes implicated in that fleshly sin in an exceedingly pronounced manner.

Although the potential for a less severe repression of the abject is potentially, if not actually, present in Christianity, it is art, and specifically literature, that Kristeva sees as the greatest hope in the "twilight" of Judeo-Christian religion. As we have seen repeatedly in this exposition of Kristeva's work, the artistic experience brings the abject to the surface. Yet in doing so, the artistic experience can loosen the rigid repression which leads to the will to power and, thus, to the ideologies of totalitarianism.

In conclusion, the work of Julia Kristeva, as it has been elaborated in chapters two, three and four, offer both enlightening and startling insights into the body/psyche polarity identified in chapter one. Kristeva has pushed that polarity to the limits of consciousness and beyond. She has elicited a profound and originary body/psyche interaction that accounts for the confusion and difficulties experienced in various interpretations of that interaction. She has manifested some of the more "horrifying" ramifications of that interaction especially as they affect women. Yet, she also places ethics exactly in that place of horror (of loss and excess) and reveals how all human beings, women *and* men, are implicated here. She demonstrates that ethics does not reify and represent, it dynamizes. Ethics makes room for that process which continually creates the speaking subject.

3. Key Concerns and Contributions of Ruether

Let us now recall Ruether's position vis-a-vis religious discourse and the feminine. There is a particular perception in Ruether's feminist theology that predisposes her to the thought of Julia Kristeva.⁸ It has to do with Ruether's recognition of the importance of recovering the negative, the oppressed, the repressed, indeed, even the "evil" dimension of existing social order whether it be the Church or society at large. For Ruether, it is negation that causes theoretical struggle and practical struggle. This is so, because it exposes the cracks in a "unitary vision" and allows the repressed side of religion and culture to "speak." It is for this reason that negation, for Ruether, must be part of healing. Healing is not possible without negation. Ruether's predisposition to Kristeva's thought also has to do with Ruether's willingness to "descend" into that underside condition, to enter the gaping tension created by a dualistic reading of reality. She is willing to enter the "madness" and "alienation" of an expanded consciousness⁹ which exposes the pervasiveness of sexism and other forms of domination and oppression. Ruether's openness to ambiguity, to the negative and to the gaps in ideologies accounts for her dialectical methodology and is displayed in her feminist theology. Given this, there are a number of important consequences manifested in Ruether's strategy.

First of all, Ruether accesses a fuller, more inclusive reading of reality through the

⁸As far as I know, Ruether has not utilized Kristeva's theory in any of her work. Nor have I seen any reference to Ruether in any of Kristeva's texts. My comparative analysis of their thought is based on my own interpretation.

⁹Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p. 187-188.

dialectical interplay between a theory's dominant and repressed dimension and the subsequent resurrecting of the repressed. This allows for the emergence of what is missing in the history of the Church and the history of civilization - women's experience. It avoids the dangers of one-sided thinking which does not give a voice to the repressed other. It, in effect, is a strategy that emerges from an unwillingness to be tempted by totalitarian thinking. In bringing to the surface the repressed aspect of ideology, Ruether attempts to demystify all claims to absolute truth through unearthing the historical condition of all systems of thought. Yet, for Ruether, this does not lead to a reversal. Rather, it enlarges our understanding and so makes it less possible, indeed, less desirable to continue to adhere to a static, narrow reading of reality.

Second, Ruether's methodology gives her a predilection toward recognizing the role of the unconscious and false consciousness as she surveys the historical roots of sexism and misogyny and attempts to unearth its causes and correctives. It also helps her to realize that the recovery of the repressed is *both* positive and negative. Ruether understands the complexity of repression - the need for it, yet its potential totalitarian ramifications and subsequent loss of freedom. This recognition leads Ruether to utilize the tools of psychoanalysis in her effort to unmask what she sees as sexism's *irrational* dimensions. The primitive and incredulous tendency of juxtaposing women and evil becomes even more pronounced as Ruether grapples with these unconsciousness dimensions of the human psyche. This juxtaposing of women and evil exists in a pronounced manner in the Church due to the continued male dominance of positions of authority and power. It is manifested in the Church through males projecting onto females intolerable aspects of their own identity. This results in women representing the sinful, base side of being human and males representing the

virtuous, pure dimension of being human. This psychopathology forces Ruether to look deeply to uncover the *real* threat which motivates this pervasive tendency. It forces her to realize that healing and liberation are only possible if one is willing to resurrect the repressed, go through it and hopefully come out the other side. Yet "coming out the other side" leads only to partial healings, partial resolutions. Growth and development, for Ruether, are ongoing, never static or final.

Third, she makes linkages between the devaluation of women and the devaluation of nature that allows her to grasp something of the deeper motivations underlying both. That is, she recognizes an underlying connection between women and nature - due to women's role in reproduction - as the true threat to the patriarchal order. This accounts for its bias against women. Ruether does not think it is possible or necessary, from a theological perspective, to understand the deep underlying reasons why this is so or how it came to be. She does recognize, however, in the correlation between the devaluation of both nature and women, as well as, in the need to order a seemingly chaotic and uncontrollable element in nature and, by association, in women, that both represent a powerful threat to patriarchy. For Ruether, that threat has to do with the inescapable fact of the mortality of all living things, including human beings. Also implicated in the theology of the Church is a phobia concerning sexuality which, it is believed, links humanity with a bodily, "natural" realm and, thus, sabotages humanity's true greatness in transcending and dominating nature. Thus, the link between death and sexuality, from a male perspective, has ominous implications for women. Women continue to bear the brunt of a world-hating and body-hating heritage.

Fourth, Ruether recognizes a plural reading of reality which creates an openness to a subjective, human, particular authority counteracting belief in an objective, totalizing divine

and universal authority. This plurality leads Ruether to posit a more flexible, permeable theology open to otherness and devoid of hierarchical bias. It emerges from Ruether's seeking a synthesis in her dialectical method. However, the synthesis is not static. Rather, it is continually fluid and changing because it arises from the concrete experience of women in different cultures and different religions. Thus, this plurality demystifies what Ruether calls the "single root pattern" found in social issues such as sexism and racism which justify and sacralize "the existing social hierarchy and system of power . . . by defining them as the order of creation and the will of God."¹⁰

Fifth, Ruether identifies a corrective within the Judaic roots of the Christian tradition which can potentially undo the bias of sexism. She names the corrective the critical prophetic principle and asserts that this principle is the self-critique that opens the way to conversion and a "new" reading of reality. This principle manifests itself best in the dialectic between theory and practice, between tradition and how it is lived out in concrete situations. In the case of feminist theology, the concrete situations of women's experiences test the truth-value of tradition using the critical prophetic principle as a scriptural base for the critique.

Finally, Ruether highlights the importance of women being able to "retell" the story of God/ess' gracious action in history. She advocates the healing potential of a feminist base community which facilitates the telling of women's stories in an effort to overcome the wounds inflicted by an androcentric reading of reality. Women need to construct images from their own experience in order to counteract or move beyond images that men have placed on them throughout the history of the Church. Such images are, for example, whore, wife, and

¹⁰Ruether, "Retrospective" in *Religious Studies Review* 15, no.1 (January 1989) : 2.

virgin - always defined in terms of someone else's experience and always related to women's sexuality yet only as women's sexuality affects men - never an identity in themselves, never a self-identity. The myths of female evil, the blame placed on women for the loss of paradise can only be transcended through women writing and speaking new myths which come, not from an androcentric perspective, but through a feminist perspective.

Ruether is aware that all human beings, male and female, are conditioned by sexism. She is aware of the pervasiveness of sexism at an individual level and at a social level. The systemic nature of sexism accounts for its ubiquitous, seemingly inescapable quality. Christianity, as Ruether sees it, is fraught with sexism. In part, Christianity inherited sexism from Judaic and Greek thought. In part, Christianity, through its complex history of theological debate, devised new manifestations of sexism. Yet Ruether is not without some hope that this situation is redeemable. Sexism may appear determined and inescapable, but Ruether realizes that for women to *experience* the injustice of sexism, means there is an opening. The strategies, outlined above, that Ruether uses to mine that opening - the resurrecting of the repressed, the unmasking of false consciousness, the linking of a devaluing of nature with a devaluing of women due in part to the threat of human mortality and sexual phobia, a plural reading of reality with an openness to otherness, the potential subversive capacity of the prophetic critical principle for the undoing of sexism, and the need for women to tell their stories - all suggest that it is possible to overcome sexism albeit through an indirect route. In face of the pervasiveness and ubiquitousness of sexism, Ruether's insights into overcoming sexism through an indirect route is perhaps one of the most important aspects of Ruether's feminist theology. It provides us with a key for exploring the relation between Ruether and Kristeva.

4. Kristeva and Christian Ethics

Before proceeding to this next stage of our conversation between Kristeva and Ruether, a few words need to be said regarding linking the work of Julia Kristeva to Christian ethics. Our primary concern centres around how Kristeva's work contributes generally to Christian ethics and more specifically to feminist Christian ethics. One wonders initially how the work of a poststructuralist, nonbelieving, psychoanalyst can be linked to a discipline (ethics) which emerges from a Christian context. More to the point in terms of our topic, what are the linkages between Kristeva's thought and feminist Christian ethicists grappling with issues concerning embodiment and ethical discourse, given the challenge that postmodern views have aimed at the theological enterprise? The claim, throughout this dissertation, has been that Kristeva's work makes a contribution that lies well beyond the deconstructive undercurrents of her thought. My contention, and I have tried to demonstrate it throughout this work, is that Kristeva not only "shatters" the subject, she contributes to "putting subjects together," albeit, in a very different fashion than has been done in the past. In addition, unlike other poststructuralists, Kristeva has not entirely rejected theology. She has worked with theological texts¹¹, used religious discourse as a means to display her psychoanalytical technique and position¹² and has privileged the contribution of both Judaism and Christianity

¹¹For example, "Ego Affectus Est. Bernard of Clairvaux: Affect, Desire, Love" and "Ratio Diligendi, or the Triumph of One's Own. Thomas Aquinas: Natural Love and Love of Self" in Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, 151-169 and 170-187 respectively.

¹²For example, "Reading the Bible" in Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 115-126.

to the formation of the speaking subject.¹³ Thus, I will now make explicit these links between Kristeva's work and the theological enterprise with a specific focus on Christian ethics. Let us initially look at Kristeva's assertions concerning the value and crisis of theology.

Kristeva's interpretation of theology is ambiguous. On the one hand, she values it as offering a cathartic effect. On the other hand, she clearly believes that religion in general and Christianity in particular are in decline. In a 1980 interview, when asked if she would welcome the possibility of reproduction taking place outside the womb, Kristeva reflects a general concern with scientific advancements that do not have guarantees and pose ethical and ontological problems. Yet she is also aware that this reaction is "a defensive attitude, which [she] cannot help." However, she goes on to state:

But I think that nothing will stop "progress" and that . . . this will be the case someday. Assuming that, the question to ask ourselves is, "How will sexual roles be distributed? What will fathers do and what will mothers do when the child is no longer carried in the uterus?"¹⁴

What needs to be highlighted here for our purposes is the *manner* in which Kristeva deals with this issue, for there is a parallel with the way she deals with theology. Kristeva's question is never one of apologetics. Rather, she approaches theology in the same manner she approaches the issue of reproduction *in vitro*. With the issue of reproduction *in vitro*, she attempts to move beyond her own "defensive" reaction or "moral scruples." She poses the question, given that it will probably become a reality someday, how will it change the way we understand ourselves and our roles? How it will affect that reality? Kristeva approaches

¹³For example, "Semiotics of Biblical Abomination" and ". . . *Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi*" in Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 90-112 and 113-132 respectively.

¹⁴Julia Kristeva, "Feminism and Psychoanalysis" interview by Elaine Hoffman Baruch, trans. Brom Anderson, *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, 120.

theology from the same psychoanalytic stance. Paying attention to her own defences and reactions, she attempts to move beyond an initial critical interpretation to see the contribution theology has made to the formation of the speaking subject throughout history. She also explores the limitations it has presented the speaking subject. For Kristeva, psychoanalysis and aesthetic practice supersede theology. However, the former have not rendered the latter obsolete. Rather, psychoanalysis and aesthetic practice have moved beyond theology in exposing its illusions. Yet, for Kristeva, these illusions are necessary. They benefit humanity. They reflect accurately the desires of the speaking subject. It was Freud's project to identify the "secondary" gains which illusions provide. Kristeva takes up that project but from a different position. She states:

The analyst today is in a position different from that of Freud. He is less scrupulously a rationalist, or perhaps one should say less guilty in the face of rationalism and still less optimistic about the beneficial powers of reason. What today's analyst must do, I think, is restore to illusion its full therapeutic and epistemological value. Does this mean restoring value to religion as well? Not altogether.¹⁵

Religion has the capacity to provide the needed illusion. For Kristeva, it is from the position of psychoanalysis (a position which, to avoid its own form of fideism, must adopt a "vigilant listening and strict adherence to interpretive logic"¹⁶) that she sees religion's value. Kristeva's ambiguous "not altogether" concerning the value of religion emerges from her reluctance, indeed her aversion, to what she considers religions' totalitarian tendencies. She is critical of any belief system, political or religious, that posits One Meaning, "an

¹⁵Julia Kristeva, *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, 20-21.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

uncriticizable ultimate Meaning, to human behaviour."¹⁷ Although Western technological civilization *appears* to be living in a post-religious era, Kristeva is not convinced of the accuracy of this humanist and postmodern assertion. Rather, she maintains that our civilization continues to operate from the deep psychic instincts and drives that animated the great religions of the past and that now express themselves in different forms. Certainly, for Kristeva, feminism is perhaps the most obvious expression of this. She states:

As it stands today, is feminism not about to become a sort of religion? Or will it manage to rid itself of its belief in Woman, Her power, and Her writing and support instead the singularity of each woman, her complexities, her many languages, at the cost of a single horizon, of a single perspective, of faith?¹⁸

Thus, there are clear and understandable linkages between the work of Julia Kristeva and Christian ethics. Kristeva is both wary of theology and appreciative of theology. She sees its cathartic effect in providing a vehicle of expression for deep psychic instincts and drives, but warns of its dangers when it brackets out or disposes of otherness.

5. Kristeva's Correctives and Contributions to Ruether

Kristeva's strategy, as we have witnessed throughout this thesis, pushes issues concerning women and embodiment to an extreme, to a limit, hardly envisioned by Ruether. Ruether may ask, just as Kristeva herself asks, "What good are psychoanalysts at a time of distress oblivious to itself?"¹⁹ One would certainly be justified in speculating that Ruether's

¹⁷Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis," in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, 90.

¹⁸Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" in *New Maladies of the Soul*, 221.

¹⁹Kristeva, "Psychoanalysts in times of distress" in *Speculations after Freud*, 14.

history of social activism - certainly in feminist issues, but also in racist and ecological issues - would perhaps not predispose her to Kristeva's seemingly apolitical, psychoanalytic stance. But, in fact, Kristeva's "politics" encompasses a much more subversive quality than Ruether's. Roland Barthes understood quite well Kristeva's potentially political upheaval.

Julia Kristeva changes the place of things: she always destroys the *last prejudice* the one you thought you could be reassured by, could take pride in; what she displaces is the *already-said*, the *déjà-dit*, i.e., the instance of the signified, i.e., stupidity; what she subverts is authority - the authority of monologic science, of filiation. Her work is entirely new, exact, not by scientific puritanism, but because it takes up the whole of the site it occupies, fills it *exactly*, obliging anyone who excludes himself from it to find himself in a position of resistance or censorship (that is what we call, with a very shocked expression, terrorism).²⁰

So, Kristeva's penetrating insights into the human condition deepen, heighten, and push Ruether's strategies almost beyond recognition. The struggle for sexual identity (which has risen in importance significantly since the women's movement) has taken a back seat to the postmodern challenge of the very possibility of identity. For Kristeva, the importance of her work as *the work of a woman* has more to do with her *practice* than her *gender*. For, what is implicated in that practice is her inclination to "pay close attention to the element of avant-garde practice that eradicates identity (including sexual identity)."²¹ Consequently, Kristeva approaches issues concerning women such as the feminine, maternity, the mother's relationship to her child, women's writing and art, etc. using a very different *strategy*. Most significantly, Kristeva wanted "to celebrate women's singularity and uniqueness without

²⁰Roland Barthes, "Kristeva's Semeiotike," *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 168.

²¹Kristeva, "Woman is Never What We Say," interview by the Psychoanalysis and Politics group, trans. Ross Guberman, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 98.

reducing them to a generic category of "women" comparable to "the proletariat" or to "men."²² Kristeva's signifying subject is an ambivalent subject. To align certain identities with women and certain identities with men is to neglect this ambivalence. Representation, whether of "Woman" or "Man," eclipses the heterogeneity of all human beings. Bringing to consciousness that heterogeneity is Kristeva's subversive, ethical strategy.

So, a rereading of Ruether's strategies through the lenses of Kristeva demonstrates both the import of the route Ruether has taken and the limitations of her development of that route. Let me elaborate utilizing Ruether's six strategies outlined above. The first and second strategies are linked. Resurrecting the repressed stems, for Ruether, primarily from the realization that the voices of women have been silenced. Yet, it entails more than merely giving women the opportunities and authority to speak. It also involves the realization that patriarchy, like all forms of systematic domination, is founded on a false consciousness. To expose this false consciousness, one must bring to the surface all the negative aspects from which humanity wants to separate itself. In the particular case of patriarchy, men are implicated more than women. However, in terms of false consciousness, *both* men and women are implicated. All human beings have within them the potential for false consciousness. All human beings have the potential to repress the unwanted, horrifying, negative dimensions which lie inside themselves. They have the inclination to project that negative dimension onto something or someone else. In the case of patriarchy, the repressed has been women and the negative has been placed on women. Ruether's astuteness in recognizing this and her unwillingness to follow the path of many feminists who set up

²²Kristeva, "Julia Kristeva in Person," a France-Culture radio broadcast, trans. by Ross Guberman, *Julia Kristeva: Interviews*, 8.

oppositional strategies in order to attempt to repress men and to posit the negative onto men, demonstrates the creative potential of the route she has chosen to follow. It links her in a definitive manner to Kristeva.

Yet, Kristeva goes even further on that road. She exposes the radicalness of that negativity. She exposes the irrevocable link between negativity and the embodied condition of being human. Kristeva facilitates an understanding of the pervasive tendency, indeed the absolute necessity, in human beings to bracket out the negativity upon which they, as speaking subjects, are founded. Kristeva aligns the negativity with the semiotic which, if not repressed, shatters the identity of the speaking subject. The need to lift that repression is crucial for Kristeva. However, the lifting of the repression must always be partial. There can never be a total lifting, a total exposure of the negativity that leads indirectly, through repression to false consciousness. As Kristeva has demonstrated, total exposure leads to total annihilation of the symbolic realm.

Related to this, Ruether's insight into the linkages between the devaluing of nature and the devaluing of women are significant. For Ruether, these linkages stem from the patriarchal culture defining "women as being 'closer to nature,' as being on the nature side of a nature-culture hierarchical split" and is manifested in women being "identified with body, earth, sex, the flesh in its mortality, weakness, and 'sinproneness'."²³ They also stem from rather pragmatic socio-economic motivations in terms of exploiting women's bodies and women's labour to enhance the wealth of the ruling-class males.²⁴ They reflect, on the part of

²³Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, 3.

²⁴For Ruether, this in no way diminishes the reality that gender exploitation falls within the larger picture which includes class and race exploitation.

patriarchy, fear of mortality which results in the desire to flee our bodies and flee any resemblance or dependency on nature. They reflect the need to suppress nature, to repress the body and by extension to repress women. They lead to deep alienation which in turn is the cause for the relational imbalances between humanity and the earth and between men and women. Yet, the linkages between nature and women also indicate, for Ruether, something imperative. That is, that we *are* part of nature, we are linked to our bodies and the earth in an irrevocable manner. This is so not only for women but for all human beings. Alienation from nature is having disastrous effects not only on women but on all humanity. For Ruether, humanity cannot afford to continue this scenario without risking, indeed, being sure of, the ultimate demise of our world.

This analysis is advanced and further developed by Kristeva. Kristeva states that we now live in a permanent crisis. The permanent crisis that she refers to and which, according to Kristeva, was inaugurated with the French Revolution is now manifesting itself in "the problems of authority, of democracy, of religion, and of language in its relationship to sexual identity."²⁵ Just as the semiotic threatens identity, so nature threatens identity. This is so because of the archaic links that the speaking subject has with nature. It is demonstrated in primitive societies which "marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it from the threatening world of animals or animalism . . ."²⁶ In the same way that the abject confronts the speaking subject with the violent breaking away from the maternal entity and the constant risk of falling back under its sway, nature and the animal world confront culture

²⁵Kristeva, "Cultural Strangeness and the Subject in Crisis," 37.

²⁶Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 13.

with its archaic origins. The terror or horror that falling back elicits at both an individual and a cultural level, from Kristeva's perspective, is justified. It is not fear of death that grips the speaking subject and causes its flight from nature and from woman. Rather, it is the fear of losing its very identity, of being swallowed up into the semiotic realm where everything that we *know*, everything that is *familiar* is lost.

Kristeva goes beyond Ruether in three additional instances which need to be highlighted. The first has to do with plurality. Ruether insists on embracing plural interpretations and Kristeva offers a radical plurality of the subject. As noted, Ruether's insistence on a plurality of voices stems from her concern for those who are repressed and left voiceless by those in power. Ruether strives "for a continually expanding definition of inclusive humanity - inclusive of both genders, inclusive of all social groups and races."²⁷ However, Ruether's openness to the other spreads out into an infinite openness when taken up into Kristeva's insight that otherness and difference in fact constitute who we are. Kristeva offers an explanation of the psyche of the human person that reveals the plural condition of the speaking subject. With this, Kristeva's notion of "otherness" pushes Ruether's categorizations to the extreme. Otherness is no longer a series of categories relating to differentiation between people. With Kristeva, otherness is now the very condition of being human. It *is* the condition of human beings.

The second instance relates to Ruether's use of the "subversive" prophetic critical principle as a tool to undermine the domination and injustices of sexism and Kristeva's positing of the subversiveness of poetic language. If the critical prophetic principle is the

²⁷Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 20.

inbuilt corrective that undoes bias within the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is revolution in poetic language that accomplishes a permanent undoing of all static forms of thought which fear anything or anyone that threatens an identity that is founded on One Truth and One Meaning. Thus, Kristeva's theory of the subversive quality in poetic language augments Ruether's critical prophetic principle radically. It exposes the precarious foundation of all forms of domination. Even more than this, it undercuts that precarious foundation bringing to the surface the irreconcilable and ambiguous condition of the speaking subject. It is ethical in its facilitation of a respect for the irreconcilable.

The third instance relates to Ruether's stress on the need for women to tell their stories and Kristeva's penetrating understanding of the importance of psychoanalytic listening in this time of permanent crisis. Ruether's vision of the creation of a space for women to "retell" the impact of God/ess' gracious action in their lives and for women to discover new myths which relate their own understanding of goodness and evil in the world has pronounced importance when seen against the backdrop of psychoanalytic listening. The cathartic effect of being given the space to speak the horrors and the joys of our inner world is the contribution of psychoanalysis in a time of distress. Through this, human beings are able to cope with the unsettled and split condition of the psyche and the incompleteness of all interpretation. This is perhaps especially so for women as they, collectively, face the injustices and horrors of their past. Yet, the vehicle of psychoanalytic listening permits all human beings, women and men, to speak the injustices and horrors of their inner lives. It is a vehicle for the expression of rage without violent consequences. It permits words to emerge which are like salve for a wound. Thus, it is a vehicle which allows life to flourish. It allows new discoveries of the goodness and evil inside ourselves. It allows for the creative creation of new worlds and new

possibilities set free from the constraints of old wounds and rigid systems.

I would argue that just as both Ruether and Kristeva make use of a dialectical methodology in each issue elaborated above, so one can detect a dialectic between the two methodologies themselves. Kristeva, I would argue, takes Ruether to a new moment in the dialectical unfolding. Let me elaborate. Just as Ruether tests tradition against the concrete experience of women (Ruether's dialectical methodology), so Kristeva tests theory against the *productive* force of signifying practice (Kristeva's dialectical methodology). Yet, Ruether's thought and her insights, when placed in dialectical relationship with that of Kristeva, undergo a radical shifting. Kristeva's thought acts as a revolutionary force itself. It presents itself as a catalyst to Ruether's thought affirming it yet unsettling it. It is an exigence summoning Ruether to the depth and the limit of the road she has chosen.

Rosemary Ruether envisions a feminist theological reconstruction calling all human beings to harmonization beyond domination and exploitation. She envisions a world not torn apart by division, but embracing differences. It is a world that is both grounded in the material reality of which we are all part and striving for the realization of transcendence which we are all capable. Like Julia Kristeva, Ruether is neither mechanistic nor idealistic. She seeks a balance between those two poles. For Ruether, "[s]pirit and matter are not dichotomized but are the inside and outside of the same thing."²⁸ Human beings are spirit *and* matter. To realize liberation from sexism and all forms of domination is both possible and an on-going process. It can be realized but never fully. It is not that Ruether expects an end time, a parousia, when it will finally be realized once and for all. Rather, Ruether sees the process itself as part of the

²⁸Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 85.

realization. To live is to be in process. All creation is in process, striving toward an ever-expanding and infinite transcendence, yet grounded in the reality of a limited existence. Indeed, human beings *are* subjects-in-process.

Kristeva and Ruether are united by an ethical imperative that underlies their work. There are many overlapping aspects of that ethical project, but many pronounced differences. Ruether's work has been criticized for its naiveté in face of the pervasiveness of evil²⁹ One wonders if it is not, rather, that Ruether has not grasped the radical nature of the *subject-in-process*. Kristeva's ethics emerges from the boundary condition of the speaking subject. Ethics is brought about through the negativity that continually disrupts our ethical "codes" forcing us to remake them "temporarily and for a lifetime."³⁰ Her ethics breaks down identity, exposing the fluidity and the heterogeneity of a subject who is *in process/on trial*. It exposes a violence which underlies desire and is absolutely necessary to psychic life and to innovation.³¹ Ethics, for Kristeva, is an open system, somewhat akin to the "productive

²⁹Sontag, "Crucifixion & Realized Eschatology," 72.

³⁰This is a quote Kristeva draws from Kafka. Speaking about the ethical task of psychoanalysis, Kristeva states that:

"The task is not to make an interpretative summa in the name of a system of truths . . . The task is, instead, to record the *crisis* of modern interpretative systems without smoothing it over, to affirm that this crisis is inherent in the symbolic function itself, and to perceive as symptoms all constructions, including totalizing interpretation, which try to deny this crisis: to dissolve, to displace indefinitely, in Kafka's words, 'temporarily and for a lifetime'."

Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis" in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, 103.

³¹Kristeva, "A Conversation With Julia Kristeva," interview by Ina Lipkowitz and Andrea Loselle, trans. Ross Guberman, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 25-26.

openness" or the "open psychic structure"³² she speaks of when describing a capacity in certain novels. So, ethics, for Kristeva, continually undoes the rigid and totalitarian propensities of individuals and societies. For Kristeva, ethics is relational in that it is an open system; open to the otherness within and by extension open to all otherness. Thus, ethics is an imperative in the sense that it impels us to live the radical heterogeneity of our existence. It impels us to respect that which is irreconcilable, both in ourselves and in others.

Commenting, in a recent book, on her experience of cross-cultural communication, Ruether writes:

My own experience of "crossing worlds" between affluent and poor, white and people of "color," and between "first" and "third" world has been revelatory and transformative for my understanding and my life. By viewing the ruling classes of my country from the underside, its evils and lies are revealed and put in the context of a larger reality and call for justice.³³

The crossing of boundaries that Ruether refers to, the "crossing worlds," reflects something of the transformative and unsettling condition of our position as boundary subjects. Ruether, however, is referring to a condition outside herself, outside her own person. Kristeva has demonstrated that, in fact, this condition of otherness lies within each one of us. The "crossing worlds" is within ourselves. This is the contribution that Kristeva brings to Ruether's feminist theology. Ruether's feminist theology attempts to address the ubiquitousness of sexism and to offer something of an initial attempt at a corrective. She is deeply aware of the dialectical condition upon which all life is founded. As well, she has glimpsed something of the ambiguity of the situation confronting women in their attempt to overcome the sins of

³²Kristeva, "The Adolescent Novel," 8. See chapter two, the section entitled "Third Stage" for further elaboration of this. (page 94)

³³Ruether, *Women Healing Earth*, 1.

sexism. However, I would argue that Kristeva offers a reading of the dialectical and ambiguous condition that is more comprehensive and penetrating than that of Ruether's. Therein lies the important contribution and corrective that Kristeva's insights make to Ruether's work.

The tension that Ruether has identified which women need to overcome and move beyond, according to Kristeva's reading, lies not only in patriarchy. It lies, albeit in different versions, inside all of us. Kristeva has demonstrated the inescapable character of this human condition, that it is irrevocably part of the condition of being a speaking subject. It is not that Kristeva believes that "resistance is futile." Rather, the opening or the hope in this sombre picture lies in the subversive quality of Kristeva's ethics. For Kristeva, subversion is the *only* tool, the *only* strategy women (and men) can use to undermine the irreversible condition of being a speaking subject. For Kristeva, an opening and a hope is found in the singularity and uniqueness of each woman and not from women as a group. It emerges from the realization that woman cannot be named, "woman is never what we say." Kristeva continually undermines any attempt to reduce women to a category. Ruether in her theology of immanence, of the primordial experience of God, attempts to *resolve* the underlying negativity of the speaking subject. Ruether, despite her rigorousness in continuing to enter the tension to discover a larger reading of reality, falls prey to what Kristeva describes as a "naive romanticism and a belief in identity."³⁴ So, to paraphrase Roland Barthes somewhat, Julia Kristeva continues to change the place of things, she continues to destroy the *last prejudice*, the one we thought we could be reassured by, could take pride in . . .

³⁴Kristeva, "Woman is Never What We Say," 98.

6. Ruether's Correctives and Contributions to Kristeva

However, in face of this seemingly *final* and *irrevocable* undoing, this limit-situation that Kristeva forces us to confront,³⁵ Ruether remains important. Ruether's importance stems, very simply, from her willingness to name the realm of the divine. It stems from her willingness to acknowledge the sphere of transcendence as intricately related to the very struggle which so fiercely animates Kristeva. There are many linkages in the thought of Ruether and Kristeva, not the least of which is their contact with a dimension of the human person that "defies all grasp," that aspires toward a creativity, an innovation, indeed, a transcendence. Both Ruether and Kristeva have tapped into that *productive* force and have exhibited something of the creative potential that it engenders. Kristeva especially opens up infinite and breathtaking dimensions of the human psyche and facilitates within her readers the *experience* of an irreconcilable otherness. Yet the melancholy, the horror, and the love that Kristeva so skilfully brings to the surface in her writings and in her patients - who say to her "Give us the meaning of our inner disaster, relieve us from it!"³⁶ - is produced under an "empty sky."³⁷ Kristeva's refusal to *name* the realm of the divine and her propensity to continually and incessantly unmask illusions "temporarily and for a lifetime" need to be

³⁵As Kristeva puts it, "By the quirks of biology and family life we are all of us melancholy mourners, witnesses to the death that marks our psychic inception." *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, 41.

³⁶Kristeva, "Psychoanalysts in Times of Distress" in *Speculations After Freud*, 15.

³⁷In *In The Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, Kristeva writes: ". . . the therapist . . . gives meaning to the "emptiness" of the "borderline" while teaching the patient to cope with the emptiness within self-understanding that is the original source of our anguish and moral pain." (34-35)

explored. Rosemary Ruether's contribution is made manifest against this backdrop of Kristeva's refusal to name the realm of the divine and her *continual* unravelling of the precarious foundations upon which "truths of all kinds" are built.

The term "limit-situation" connotes a boundary condition. It is a condition in which the human person is faced with, on the one hand, the finite limits of his or her situation. On the other hand, paradoxically, through those finite limits, the human person becomes aware of transcendence. Thus, the limit-situation as a boundary condition of the human person is both shattering and liberating. In the work of both Kristeva and Ruether, the reader is confronted with the limit-situation of human existence. As I have elaborated in the major portion of this thesis, Julia Kristeva probes that limit-situation in a manner much more extensive, much more definitive, indeed, much more *final* than Ruether. Yet, paradoxically, in reading Kristeva, one experiences a notion of transcendence and infinity that seem *anything* but final. Indeed, as I have tried to convey through my analysis of her texts, Kristeva draws her readers towards the infinite, open-ended and liberating experience within the human psyche. This, as we have seen, paradoxically comes about through Kristeva's profound insights into negativity. Kristeva touches upon the paradox of a limit-situation, at once, finite *and* transcendent. However, despite Kristeva consistently, in her prolific writings, touching upon that *revolutionary* dynamism within the human psyche which has the potential to take her readers to a transcendent dimension of existence, Kristeva refuses to acknowledge that transcendence. Her refusal stems from her aversion to totalizing systems. Kristeva rightly correlates radical evil with totalitarianism. Concomitant with this correlation, Kristeva rejects all religions as ultimately ideological and, hence, potentially totalitarian. Yet there remains a salutary openness towards the transcendent dimension that keeps coming through in

Kristeva's work *despite* her continual renunciation of transcendence. To grasp the logic behind Kristeva's renunciation of transcendence and her refusal to name the realm of the divine, we need to return briefly to Kristeva's psychoanalytic analysis of the human condition.

For Kristeva, psychoanalysis brings to the surface and unmask's humanity's illusions. Kristeva, like Freud, recognizes religion's role in providing individuals and groups with a focus for their deep (mostly unconscious) desires. Kristeva appreciates this aspect of religion's role. She acknowledges religion's role in providing a sense of meaning for individuals. Yet, from a psychoanalytic perspective, religion facilitates an individual's devotion to illusions. For meaning is found in direct correlation to belief in or faith in these illusions. Psychoanalysis perceives the meaning as a *fantasy* which, in the human psyche, relates to the incurable wound brought about by the separation of the infant from the maternal container.³⁸ *Meaning* alleviates the pain and anguish caused by this split which constitutes the deepest regions of the human psyche. Thus, the desires of the human psyche are irrevocably linked to illusions.

Still, if we are not aware that the focus of our desires which give meaning to our lives are illusions, than we are chained to dysfunctional and, at times, violent behaviour in the name of these illusions. Psychoanalysis, although aware of the *necessity* of these illusions, is a vehicle for bringing to the surface the *roots* of illusions. Its purpose is not to do away with illusions. Illusions, from a psychoanalytic perspective, provide human beings with the necessary psychic focus to stave off the melancholy and depression implicated in the underlying split condition of the human psyche. Rather, psychoanalysis' mandate is to expose

³⁸See *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, especially the sections entitled "Credo" and "Credo in Unum Deum", 29-35 and 37-44 respectively.

illusions for what they are - transitory and ludic.³⁹ Its purpose is to free patients from dogmatic *belief* in fantasies. Its corrective is to bring a patient to the point where he or she can *knowingly* draw energy from fantasies without falling prey to the seductive temptation of totalizing systems. Psychoanalysis, as Julia Kristeva advocates, frees the patient from dogmatic adhesion to illusions and facilitates the patient's *productive* use of illusions in tapping their "playful" energy which is, ultimately, without direction and without purpose.

Thus, in the technological and bureaucratic age of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis emerges, for Kristeva, as the *only* fruitful and living discourse. In Kristeva's view, it subverts religion and supplants theology. There are redeemable aspects to religion and theology. Yet, for Kristeva, religion is basically regressive, masking from human beings the unbearable knowledge of their condition as split subjects and mortal beings. And theology, in Kristeva's view, rationalizes that repression. Psychoanalysis is fruitful and living because it draws on the symbolic capacity of human beings without falling prey to what Kristeva sees as theology's inclination to "make an interpretive summa in the name of a system of truths."⁴⁰ Psychoanalysis is in some sense a lay version of religion.⁴¹ It draws on the human person's need of and capacity for symbols, yet it does so without teleology. Psychoanalysis provides a vehicle for that need and capacity, but does not fall prey to totalizing systems. As Kristeva puts it, "[L]et others continue their long march toward idols and truths of all kinds,

³⁹Kristeva, *Psychoanalysis and Faith*, 9.

⁴⁰Kristeva, "Psychoanalysis and the Polis" in *Transforming the Hermeneutic Context*, 103.

⁴¹"... analysis is not less than religion but more - more, especially, than Christianity, which hews so closely to its fundamental fantasies." Kristeva, *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, 52.

buttressed with the necessarily righteous faith for wars to come, wars that will necessarily be holy."⁴²

Kristeva ponders the crisis of meaninglessness which, in this time of the "twilight of the gods" is a *permanent* crisis with only *moments* of equilibrium.

[O]ne could describe melancholia as an unnamable and empty perversion. Our [psychoanalysts'] job is to raise it to the level of words - and of life . . . The melancholic who rejects life because he has lost touch with the *meaning of life* prompts us to search for ways to bring back meaning: for our sake, for his sake, but also for the sake of civilization itself. So a clinical matter - of grave proportions in depressed people, who link meaning and life - also affects the formerly religious roots of culture itself. I believe this notion touches on another question: is a civilization that has abandoned the meaning of the Absolute of Meaning a civilization that needs to confront depression? Here is another question: is atheism inherently depressed? And yet another: where might we find the optimistic immanence of an implicitly morose atheism? In Form? In Art?⁴³

Kristeva's reflections and her questions touch the deep, ethical concerns of her work and her responsibility as a psychoanalyst. Yet, in her relentless effort to not fall prey to "idols and truths of all kinds", to circumvent the possibility of totalitarian violence, to lift temporarily the repression of the volatile semiotic modality of the speaking subject, Kristeva refuses to name and acknowledge the transcendent which, in my view, *underlies the dynamics and aspirations of her whole ethical endeavour*.

Let us consider Ruether's contribution more carefully in order to return to and clarify this aspect of Kristeva's work. As we have seen, Ruether names the divine *indirectly* through the unpronounceable term God/ess. She does this in order to go beyond the God of Judaism

⁴²Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 210.

⁴³Kristeva, "Black Sun: Melancholia and Creation," interview by Dominique Grisoni, trans. Ross Guberman, *Julia Kristeva Interviews*, 80-81.

and Christianity, yet without entirely severing the link. She uses this term because it serves "as an analytic sign to point toward that yet unnameable understanding of the divine that would transcend patriarchal limitations and signal redemptive experience for women as well as men."⁴⁴ It is Ruether's effort to remain linked to past traditions and yet move forward toward "new redeemed possibilities." It is a dialectical strategy which, I would argue, embraces what Kristeva calls the split condition of the human psyche. For, as Ruether claims, God/ess "embraces both the roots of the material substratum of our existence (matter) and also the endlessly new creative potential (spirit)."⁴⁵ Ruether's naming of the divine, God/ess, is in line with her awareness of the need to continually critique religion's propensity toward ideology, toward setting up false gods which serve as a vehicle to unleash the barbarous potential of human beings. The divine, as Ruether contends, leads to "higher and higher truths whose final compass is incomplete."⁴⁶ The divine, for Ruether, is open-ended, not closed or fixed. One could say that the divine, for Ruether, is akin to an open heuristic whose *existence* humanity can *acknowledge* without knowing *what* that existence is. For Ruether, there is "no adequate name for the true God/ess, the 'I am who I shall become.'"⁴⁷ Rather, knowledge of the divine opens up as we move forward following the inner dynamism which constitutes the human spirit.

Ruether draws on the prophetic literature of the Old Testament in her attempt to

⁴⁴Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, 46.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁶"Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography", 46.

⁴⁷*Sexism and God-Talk*, 71.

critique the ideology of patriarchal religion. The prophetic principle constitutes the fail safe within Biblical faith. It is "the tradition by which Biblical faith constantly criticizes and renews itself and its own vision."⁴⁸ It is the built-in Biblical self-critique aimed at undermining religious ideology which results in oppressive and totalitarian systems of unjust social orders. Ruether appeals to this prophetic tradition as the open, guiding heuristic which goes ahead of us leading us toward authentic encounters with the ever-new divine. This accounts for Ruether's recognition of the importance of remaining linked to the living faith of the biblical people. This living faith as it is expressed in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament, as well as, in the appropriation of that literature in the New Testament, transforms us as it guides us beyond the bias of ideology. Prophetic thought is dialectical in that it both denounces the evil of our ideologies and calls us toward conversion and salvation.

Given the critique Kristeva has levelled against religion, one may question the validity of Ruether's contention vis-à-vis the divine. How would Ruether defend her feminist theology against the critique of fantasy and illusion that Kristeva levels at religion which she describes as:

this phantasmatic necessity on the part of speaking beings to provide themselves with a *representation* (animal, female, male, parental, etc.) in place of what constitutes them as such, in other words, symbolization - the double articulation and syntactic sequence of language, as well as its preconditions or substitutes (thoughts, affects, etc).⁴⁹

Why is Ruether's God/ess not merely another projection of humanity's need to represent an

⁴⁸Nicholas John Ansell, *"The Woman Will Overcome the Warrior:" A Dialogue with the Christian/Feminist Theology of Rosemary Radford Ruether* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 63.

⁴⁹Kristeva, "Women's Time," *The Kristeva Reader*, 208.

aspect of their own psyches which they find unbearable? Is there not an inherent contradiction or reversal in stating that Ruether's willingness to *name* the divine offers an important corrective to Kristeva? In my view, one must shift "levels" in order to grasp the import of Ruether's contribution without falling into contradiction. Let me elaborate by dealing with two related points that bring clarity here.

In *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, Kristeva asks, "Is psychoanalysis a form of nihilism?"⁵⁰ Although Kristeva ultimately answers no to this question, she does so in a qualified manner. Psychoanalysis, "viewed as a theory of knowledge of psychic objects (consciousness, the unconscious, instinct, desire, etc.), is part of the nihilist effort to objectify man's being."⁵¹ Yet, the analytic process is an *unfolding* of language which ultimately cannot be objectified because it takes place between two subjects. In this sense, psychoanalysis is not nihilistic because of this "metaphysical"⁵² component which escapes reduction. Yet, in escaping reduction, the subject (along with the subject's ideologies) is pluralized (indeed, exploded) infinitely. This is Kristeva's own fail safe against the ideological and totalitarian ramifications of metaphysical categories. Psychoanalysis, as Kristeva proposes, maintains a "fragile equilibrium between hedonism and concern for transcendent meaning, which can annihilate the self but also lead the self to annihilate others."⁵³ Thus, Kristeva supersedes nihilism through, as Leon Roudiez describes it, an "affirmative negativity"

⁵⁰Kristeva, *In The Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, 59-63.

⁵¹Ibid., 60.

⁵²In using the term "metaphysics", Kristeva understands it "in the dual sense of separate Ideality and potential Objectification . . ." Ibid., 62.

⁵³Ibid., 62.

and a "productive dissolving."⁵⁴ As we have seen in chapter three, language is built on negativity, it is a negative operation. Yet, the negativity from which the speaking subject emerges *creates* and *renews* the speaking subject continually. It is precisely the *creating* and *renewing* that, in my view, entail an implicit affirmation of the realm of the divine. The experience of *creating* and *renewing* runs throughout Kristeva's work. I have cited ample evidence of this in the thesis. We see it here again, in Kristeva's "metaphysics" which escapes reduction and, thus, circumvents totalitarianism. Kristeva implicitly affirms the transcendent dimension which she refuses, explicitly, to acknowledge as anything more than a projection of the psyche.⁵⁵

For Ruether, the importance of the prophetic literature will not wane over time. Rather, it remains an important tool to critique religious idolatry in whatever form that may take. Hence, Ruether does not share Kristeva's fear of acknowledging the divine as the infinite otherness towards which we aspire and which dynamizes this struggle. Ultimately, what gives Ruether the courage and audacity to attest to this is her notion of the divine as the open-ended otherness towards which the human spirit continually, incessantly aspires. Thus, if acknowledgement of the divine represents, for Kristeva, precarious illusions that continually lead to the radical evil of totalitarianism, this is because Kristeva neither fully understands the underlying trajectory of her own endeavour, nor does she grasp the open-ended character of the divine as it is articulated by Ruether. In my view, the underlying trajectory of Kristeva's

⁵⁴Roudiez, "Introduction," *Desire in Language*, 17.

⁵⁵One can link, I believe, Kristeva's unwillingness to affirm the transcendent dimension with an unwillingness in her work to affirm anything. This is the underlying reason for her ever-elliptical mode of expression. Kristeva continually circles around an issue zeroing in on something only indirectly so as not to become a victim of the very critique she levels.

endeavour lies in the continuing (and partial) liberation of the authentic human capacity for ethics. This ultimately is Kristeva's goal. It is an open-ended goal, but it is a goal nonetheless. As open-ended, I would argue that it aims at the realm of transcendence.

Despite the limitations in Ruether's work, despite the importance of Kristeva in pushing Ruether toward the finality and the limits of her critiques against patriarchal religion, Ruether continually grants herself permission to acknowledge a truth about her own and, implicitly, Kristeva's effort. That is, Ruether acknowledges that the capacity within the human person for creativity and renewal stems from his or her orientation towards an open-ended transcendent which can be affirmed as such. This underlying positive exigence within the human person, Kristeva will not acknowledge.⁵⁶ Yet, with Ruether's understanding of the divine as "zealous only to lead us out of . . . antagonisms to higher and higher truths whose final compass is incomplete - the final compass that can embrace all people's histories without having to negate the identities of any of them,"⁵⁷ we have a radically open-ended notion of the divine. The divine, for Ruether, is not the projection of the human being's capacity for symbolization. Rather, the divine is open-ended reality towards which the human spirit struggles and which dynamizes that struggle.

⁵⁶ This leads us to the epistemological question concerning an innate goodness or evil of the human person. Kristeva's Freudian perspective inclines her toward the assertion that human beings essentially tend toward the negative (or evil) and not the positive (or good). This is not the question I am dealing with here although it is related. Rather, I choose to deal only with the realm of the divine or the transcendent dimension toward which the human person is oriented and which, despite her claims to the opposite, comes through in all of Kristeva's work. The epistemological issue needs to be dealt with but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I suggest that this thesis has taken a step in the direction of that epistemological issue and could be used as a springboard for the complex engagement that the issue requires.

⁵⁷Ruether, "Beginnings: An Intellectual Autobiography," 44.

There is a second point of clarification regarding the need to shift levels to grasp how Ruether's understanding of the divine does not reverse or contradict Kristeva's contribution. It has to do with what I have called earlier, the open heuristic. The open heuristic allows humanity to *know* that something exists without knowing *what* that something is. This capacity of the human person to seek what is unknown through what is known is the basis of all human progress. Indeed, Kristeva utilizes this method in a very deliberate manner. This can be seen in her attempt to lift the semiotic from repression. As we have seen, the semiotic is eclipsed by the symbolic but continually circulates beneath the symbolic, affecting it in a variety of ways. Kristeva's task, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, is to unearth the underlying dialectical condition of both the human psyche and of language. Despite the fact that this underlying dialectical condition is beyond the reach of human consciousness, there are traces which indicate to Kristeva its existence. It is these traces which Kristeva follows to accomplish her task. In order to grasp something of Kristeva's method, I employ, in separate sections above,⁵⁸ two metaphors which assist in understanding Kristeva's strategy for getting at something that is not available to us at a conscious level. The first metaphor is that of the astronomers discovering two new planets. The new planets cannot be detected directly through any of the sophisticated equipment available to science today. Rather, it is through fluctuations in the light patterns picked up from the sun around which these planets revolve that give the astronomers their first indication that something exists which was making those fluctuations. Through a series of intricate testing, two new planets are discovered. In fact, these planets have never been seen in themselves. Rather, everything that

⁵⁸See chapter three (pages 147-148) and chapter five (page 222).

is known about these planets (and that amounts, astonishingly, to a great deal) has been gathered through a series of measurements and calculations. In similar fashion, Kristeva traces the semiotic which remains hidden from consciousness, yet is detected through the traces it leaves and through Kristeva's vigilance to those traces. Through her vigilant piecing together of the "mystery" of the semiotic, Kristeva is able to present a study that asserts the semiotic's existence and describes that modality in intricate detail.

Earlier in this present chapter, I employed a second metaphor to describe Kristeva's method. The second metaphor is that of a detective. Like a relentless detective, Kristeva, in her search for knowledge about the underlying dialectical condition of the human psyche, follows the clues that are left by the semiotic. These clues, as we have seen with the first metaphor, come in the form of traces which serve as evidence of the influence of the semiotic on the symbolic. I drew this metaphor from Kristeva's use of it in her novel, *The Old Man and The Wolves*. In an interview concerning this novel, Kristeva is questioned about the novel's "dark, negative dimension" which portrays a pessimistic outlook on the world. The "wolves" are symbolic of "the establishment of totalitarianism" but, more sinisterly, "[t]hey symbolize everyone's barbarity, everyone's criminality." Finally, they "signify the invasion of banality, which erases the entire criterion of value amid the racketeering, corruption, wheeling and dealing."⁵⁹ This "evil" appears in the novel both as a result of the symbol of the "wolves" and also as a result of the "narrative fragmentation" which is the strategic *style* of the first part of the novel. However, there is a distinctive shift in the second part of the novel. The shift revolves around a character named Stephany Delacour and her investigation of the wolves.

⁵⁹Kristeva, "Interview: The Old Man and the Wolves," 164-65.

According to the "old man" (and despite the dismissal of the old man's fears by the residents of the seaside resort in Eastern Europe where he lives) the wolves are killing off members of the community. Part of Kristeva's strategy in this novel has to do with her recognition of the importance of *vigilance* in the human spirit.

So the "twilight of the gods" that makes up the first part of the novel acquires a meaning in the second part, which is simply the setting of a course, the shaping of a plot: *it is possible to know*. Henceforth, an ethics of knowledge, let us say, is involved. . . . Consequently, I feel that to call my novel pessimistic is inaccurate. As long as the investigation is being carried out, the crime is challenged, and death does not prevail. Stephany introduces the vigilance that is the resistant force of life, if not of hope.⁶⁰

This shift from "the oneiric, confused universe of the novel's first section" to the plotting of a course toward the unravelling of a mystery and the discovery of the truth, resembles the shift that is necessary in order to understand the importance of Ruether's willingness to name the divine. In fact, both metaphors display Kristeva's astute awareness of and employment of the human capacity to progress from what is known toward, but never exhausting, what is unknown. Kristeva's fear of the "wolves" who represent the terrible brutality that lies within totalitarian systems and whose ominous presence in Eastern Europe was experienced first hand by Kristeva, stems from her profound realization that this terrible brutality lies within each one of us and has the potential to erupt at any moment given the right set of circumstances. Psychoanalysis remains, for Kristeva, the tool to dismantle that violent potential within individuals with the hope that it will eventually dismantle the larger macrocosmic violence. However, what Ruether realizes, and what Kristeva does not seem to allow herself to admit, is that the human person's capacity to "set a course," to come to know

⁶⁰ Ibid, 165.

the truth about something, is intricately linked with the open-ended transcendent dimension of the human person. Thus, Ruether can confidently assert that not only can we *name* evil, we can *name* the good. Indeed, our knowledge of one (evil) seems to precondition our knowledge of the other (good) as the negative side - the obverse of this evil. The capacity of the human person to distance herself or himself from something in order to "investigate" it (as in the two metaphors employed above) exhibits the capacity of the human person to continually move toward the transcendent dimension of existence in order to discover truth about that dimension. However, that capacity is never exhausted within the human person because the human person is *incapable* of exhausting it. Despite our more unethical and ignorant tendencies to attempt a premature synthesis of knowledge, ethics and wisdom (religious authenticity) continually dismantle our will to power. This orientation to the divine is built into our very beings. This is what Ruether has recognized and why, despite her full knowledge of the abuses brought about in the name of "God", she is able to continue to acknowledge the divine.

Authentic human living corresponds to our capacity, indeed our willingness, to remain ever vigilant and open to the exigence within the human being that manifests itself in a desire to know, and a desire for truth and value. In an essay dealing with feminist theology and authentic knowing, Cynthia Crysdale asserts that:

In religious terms, authenticity lies in the openness of the human subject to the ultimately transcendent, to that which draws human persons into their own self-transcendence and transforms that self-transcendence into a communion with the divine. This may or may not involve conformity to an institution, a rule of life, a set of principles. It certainly will involve an ongoing openness to further "conversion," to a further confrontation with the scotosis of bias

that has limited one's vision or lifestyle.⁶¹

Is not this authenticity, which "is grounded in a given person's orientation to know truth and create value,"⁶² intrinsically linked to Kristeva's own insistence of the importance of vigilance and analytic listening? The strategy Kristeva employs in order to analyze both poetic texts and the speech of her patients follows the same line of inquiry as the open heuristic structure understood as progression from the known to the unknown. Indeed, Kristeva's recognition, as she identifies it in her novel *The Old Man and the Wolves*, that "as long as the investigation is being carried out, the crime is challenged, and death does not prevail. . ." is crucial in showing that, notwithstanding her "affirmative negativity" and "productive dissolving," Kristeva appeals to the transcendent dimension within the human person which reaches, continually, for the ever-open-ended divinity of transcendence.

⁶¹Cynthia Crysdale, "Horizons that Differ: Women and Men and the Flight from Understanding," *Cross Currents* 44, no. 3 (Fall 1994) : 360, endnote 18.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 356.

Conclusion To Thesis

The underlying question that has implicitly guided this thesis exceeds a strictly academic interest. The question emerges from the concrete, embodied experience of being in the world. More specifically, it emerges from the experience of being a woman in the world. I chose to explore the question utilizing academic tools. The discipline involved in this exercise has been more liberating than restricting. It has, in the end, helped me to partially answer the question and, at another level, to partially live with the question. In order to bring some clarity and control to the underlying question, I chose to articulate it in the following manner: what is the significance of the body in ethical discourse? A different question might have been: what does being a woman have to do with ethics? Or, why does it necessarily have anything to do with ethics? However, I chose to articulate it in a broader context since I did not want to narrow its scope, but rather open it up. Yet, the tremendous problem of violence against women, marginalization of women, misogyny and fear of women is the major concern here. And perhaps the most authentic question, to put it simply, is: what is the reason for this condition? A subsequent question naturally emerges: how is ethics involved?

Thus, I began this thesis, in chapter one, by delineating the current debate, within feminist Christian ethics, around the significance of the body in ethical discourse. The debate revolves around the question of whether one needs to privilege the body (thus bringing to the fore sexual differentiation and the significance it plays in ethical discourse) or discount the body (transcending differences and approaching ethical issues from a perspective which moves beyond the historical and cultural constructs of the body which identify men and women too literally with their bodies) when approaching issues in Christian ethics. I initially examine three levels of responses to this issue. I organize my consideration of these responses

from the least differentiated to progressively more differentiated approaches. I identify both contributions and limitations of each approach. First, I consider those (Carol Christ and Naomi Goldenberg) who advocate an extreme physicality or privileging of the body. In attempting to overcome the problematic mind/body dualism, this approach amounts to an extreme polarization on the side of privileging the body. Because the transcendent dimension of human existence is bracketed out, this position leads to a reversal of the mind/body dualism it critiques. This view appears to embrace an undifferentiated state of consciousness. It does not address the complexity of the problem. The solution of a primal re-connection with nature does not exhaust the complexity of the mind/body dualism or address its problematic ramifications especially as they pertain to women. I next explore the work of those (James Nelson, Paula Cooley and Susan Ross) who also privilege the body yet, recognizing the problematic nature of the first approach, consciously move beyond the latter's extremism to offer a more nuanced corrective. This more moderate approach struggles to highlight the imperativeness of an experientially-based theology. However, despite the attempt to offer a corrective that will assist theology in moving beyond the mind/body polarity, the correctives continue to operate within the mind/body dualism, and, thus, do not help us to move beyond the polarization itself. Finally, I consider the response of those (Lisa Sowle Cahill, Margaret Miles and Paul Dinter) who attempt to get beyond an either/or solution. Thus, this response takes us deeper into the complexities of the problem. Still, I argue that, despite the subtlety of the arguments and the recognition of the need to transcend the either/or polarity, the arguments of this approach fall short in providing tools for Christian ethics in its struggle with ethical issues concerning the body. This approach, in my view, fails to probe the complexity of human embodiment or demonstrate a sufficient grasp of the impact of embodiment in

ethical discourse.

I then move to a consideration of Ruether's work. Through her extensive research and her willingness to *enter* the dialectical condition of the human person, Ruether uncovers the pervasiveness of the polarization and the subsequent ubiquitousness of sexism in a manner more extensive and more definitive than the three responses outlined above. Yet, I argue that Ruether's analysis also falls short. She uncovers a limit-situation of human existence but fails to push her analysis further in order to explain the underlying cause of the polarity or to offer a corrective that takes us beyond that polarity. Thus I maintain that Ruether's work acts as a vector pointing to the need for Kristeva's psychoanalytic and linguistic approach.

In chapters two, three and four, I give an account of the work of Kristeva. Chapter two presents an overview of Kristeva's work. The overview attempts to clarify three aspects of Kristeva's methodology and overall strategy. First, there is a fluidity to Kristeva's thought which defies categorization. Second, Kristeva's thought does not follow a strict "logic." She is not a systematic thinker. This, in large part, has to do with the subject matter she is dealing with - the preconscious, prelinguistic world of the speaking subject. Subsequently, it also has to do with the strategy she adopts to investigate this world and articulate it in a manner which is illuminating without being reductive. Third, there is an underlying concern for ethics in all of Kristeva's thought. She understands ethics in relation to the open structure of the heterogeneous speaking subject. It is the underlying concern for and respect of that open structure that is the inner dynamism which Kristeva does not stray from throughout the variety of subjects she broaches. In terms of the *content* of her theory, I focus on and clarify her original contribution to understanding how the human subject is constituted in language and how that constitution is founded on the "loss" of the mother at the "place" where the

symbolic overshadows the semiotic without the semiotic ever totally disappearing.

Following this clarification, the way is made clear for presenting the theoretical part of Kristeva's foundational book *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In my presentation of this most important section of the book, I demonstrate its significance in clarifying and justifying Kristeva's theory concerning the semiotic and symbolic realms within the speaking subject. It is here that the body's significance in language is seen. I focus on the intricate connection between the body and language. Kristeva clarifies the body as "divided" and how that dividedness continues to influence the speaking subject as a "split subject." Language, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and the speaking subject is *in process/on trial*. Kristeva's reworking of "negativity" through Hegel and Freud affords an understanding of negativity which neither diminishes its force through subsuming it under the presence of consciousness nor augments its power ("biology is destiny") in ruling out creativity. Rather it exposes the precarious foundation upon which the speaking subject is founded. It undermines consciousness seeming "mastery." Thus, my focus is also on the ethical function which emerges in Kristeva's text. Ethics is precisely that undermining of consciousness' mastery keeping the subject from, what Kristeva calls, "narcissistic fixations." I lay the foundation, in chapter three, for clarifying Kristeva's contribution to the problem set out in chapter one. Clarification of Kristeva's contribution is taken up in chapter four.

In chapter four I highlight the *ramifications* of Kristeva's theory which I elaborate in chapter three. I do this by exploring Kristeva's phenomenological study of the condition of *abjection* in her book *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. It is Kristeva's contention that the human experience of abjection connotes, in all cultures, the failure of the speaking subject to repress fully the maternal container - that originary relationship with the mother.

The abject confronts us with the primal separation from the maternal body which constitutes the origin of every speaking being. At the preconscious level of the psyche, the maternal body is, according to Kristeva, at once both desirable and repulsive and underlies our condition as divided beings. Following this, I highlight again, Kristeva's distinctive understanding of ethics. Ethics, for Kristeva, is heterogeneous and connotes an undoing or an unravelling. Ethics, for Kristeva, appears at a point where it is least expected. It appears at the boundaries of civilization where moral codes break down and give way to what Kristeva calls the free play of negativity. This free play permits the speaking subject a partial escape from the totalitarian (hence unethical) enclosure of the symbolic realm. It is from this perspective that the connection between ethics (as Kristeva understands it) and the body - specifically, although not exclusively, the maternal body - emerges.

In chapter five I undertake a comparative analysis of the work of Julia Kristeva and Rosemary Ruether. The purpose of this comparative analysis is two-fold. First, it concretizes Kristeva's contribution to the significance of the body in ethical discourse in the context of moral theology. I demonstrate how Kristeva's elaboration of the dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic advances Ruether's insights into the pervasiveness of sexism. This dialectical relationship has ramifications on attitudes toward the body in general and women in particular. Thus, important implications emerge vis-à-vis the debate within moral theology which is identified in chapter one. It is the advancement of our understanding of these implications which constitutes one of the most important contributions of Julia Kristeva to moral theology. I argue, in chapter one, that Ruether takes us to the margins of the polarity but her analysis is inadequate for two reasons. First, she does not identify the underlying body/psyche dynamics which are responsible for the divisions she has named.

Second, she does not provide a means to move beyond the problems she delineates. Ruether envisions a better world but does not offer a way of reaching it. Kristeva's contribution, I argue, is in addressing both these inadequacies. First, as I demonstrate in chapter three, Kristeva provides an analysis of the body/psyche dynamics which reveals the continuing and determining influence of the *divided* body on the speaking subject. She identifies the underlying influence of the semiotic on the symbolic as well as the semiotic's reliance on the symbolic. She aligns the semiotic with the "feminine" and "maternal." She aligns the symbolic with the paternal function. She identifies the symbolic's (necessary) repression of the semiotic and yet demonstrates the semiotic's continual irruption into the symbolic. She aligns the semiotic and symbolic with a *generating process* within language underlying the existence of all persons. She warns us of the devastating effects of this generating process when we remain ignorant of its force and power. Second, Kristeva's offers an understanding of ethics which, as I demonstrated in chapter four, provides the potential for creative renewal amid the seeming inescapable confines of language and the body. For it is exactly in the dialectical interplay between the body and language that movement (creative renewal) is possible. These are the *deeper* insights that Ruether's analysis does not recognize. Thus, Kristeva's contribution lies exactly here. On the one hand, she provides an analysis of the dialectical relationship between the body and language, how each influences the other, which affords the startling and profound realization that, due to the necessary separation of the infant from the mother, the marginalization and denigration of women is rooted in the deep psyches of *all* human beings. In chapter four, we saw some of the ramifications of that "breaking away" in Kristeva's penetrating analysis of the *separation* upon which culture and religion are founded. We saw how the *excluded, abject* remainder harkens back to the *horrifying*, maternal function

as stifling as it is compelling. On the other hand, Kristeva provides amelioration in her presentation of ethics. Within the inescapable, dialectical condition of the speaking subject fraught with horrors of *unnameable* proportions lies a creative force as exhilarating as it is liberating. For Kristeva, realizing that creative force is the ethical imperative. In chapter four we saw how Kristeva refers to poetry, maternity (for Kristeva, the abject mother is also, at another level, the manifestation of ethics) and psychoanalysis as models for ethics. It is precisely in realizing Kristeva's ethics that Ruether's vision of a better world is possible.

The second purpose of this comparative analysis between Ruether and Kristeva is to unearth a significant contribution that Ruether makes to the work of Kristeva. This contribution revolves around Kristeva's refusal to *name* the infinite she has so relentlessly tracked. Kristeva's wariness of the destructive capacity of totalitarian systems of thought prevents her from recognizing that within her "never abandoned effort to take transcendence seriously and to track down its premises into the most hidden recesses of language" and in her belief "that God is analysable. Infinitely,"¹ she is implicitly *affirming* the transcendent dimension of reality. It is precisely that transcendent dimension of reality that prevents Kristeva's theory from being deterministic. It is that aspect of Kristeva's theory which opens out onto the creative dynamism within the human person and the human species. Kristeva's work evokes that transcendent dimension of reality in an original and exhilarating manner. She exposes the infinite creativity within the human person which generates an ethical respect for the irreconcilability of all human beings. Yet it is Ruether who, in her own exploration of this transcendent dimension of reality is willing to acknowledge and name it without fear of

¹Kristeva, "Mémoire," 44.

reducing it to religious psychology or ideology.

I chose to work with Kristeva's texts because she pushes our understanding of the body, language and the relationship between the two to a foundational level. She demonstrates how that relationship is linked to ethics. Thus, the body, language and ethics are integrally related. Ethics does not restrict the actions of human beings. Rather, ethics liberates human beings *to act*. Yet, Kristeva's analysis of the inescapable dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic and the connection of these modalities to the body and to language can appear imprisoning, but this is the paradox of her work. Kristeva draws our attention to the emergence of the speaking subject from the underlying dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic. The speaking subject emerges from this dialectical condition which *both* circumscribes and frees her or him. Kristeva takes her reader to a narrow gate where the determined condition of being embodied in the world appears oppressively inescapable. She maps out a scenario concerning the infant's relation to its mother that significantly enhances our understanding of the consistent marginalization of women across cultures and across time. The ramifications, for women, of this embodied condition are, as the title of one of Kristeva's book indicates, horrifying. Yet if one persists, Kristeva takes her readers *through* the gate. For, it is precisely the *determined* condition of the body and of the dialectic between the semiotic and the symbolic that brings about a liberation and enables creativity. The crisis of subjectivity that Kristeva so definitively maps out opens onto an infinite creativity. With Kristeva, the subject is at once both shattered and salvaged. The subject is *produced* in language and yet links language (and thus meaning) to the body.

Paul Ricoeur wrote; "I am convinced that the full acceptance of the non-historical character of the myth - non-historical if we take history in the sense it has for the critical

method - is the other side of a great discovery: the discovery of the *symbolic* function of the myth."² With Ricoeur, I can say that the full acceptance of the divided condition of the split subject is the other side of a great discovery: the discovery of the *creative* function of the split subject. With Kristeva's work, we are confronted with the *permanent* crisis of the split subject. We are confronted with the "shelter-less" condition of being human. Yet, it is precisely the permanent crisis that makes change possible, that enables human beings to act and to act ethically.

Kristeva shifts our thinking about issues concerning women, as well as, issues concerning singularity and difference. She helps us to understand the deep psychic structure that produces the beauty and the horror that all human beings are capable of. She shakes us out of our complacency in revealing to us the illusions upon which our inherited systems of thought are built. A new kind of meaning emerges from the boundary condition that Kristeva advocates for herself and for anyone concerned with ethics. It is a meaning that calls us continually forward to a metamorphosis with all the terrors and joy that brings.

When Kristeva discounts theology as "an interpretive summa" she understands neither theology's task nor the transcendent underpinnings of her own work. Theology's contribution to the world is intricately connected with meaning (faith seeking understanding). In this, it has something in common with psychoanalysis. Both theology and psychoanalysis are concerned with loss of meaning (and the nihilism and depression which results). Both strive to enter into or to stand in the middle of the "horror" of our boundary condition. In doing this, they endeavour to remind us of the hope that lies in the heart of each person. Yet theology, as I

²Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. E. Buchanan (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 235-6.

try to show through my analysis of Ruether's work, recognizes something that psychoanalysis refuses to acknowledge. The "illusions" that create meaning are, as Kristeva shows indirectly, the other side of a great discovery. That is, and Kristeva demonstrates this, they reveal a deeper truth about humanity. This deeper truth I have called an open heuristic, a dynamism within the human person that reaches both in and beyond itself for meaning. It reaches for the transcendent, which, despite Kristeva's fear, can never be circumscribed.

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