



The International Association for Semiotic Studies
L'Association internationale de Sémiotique
Asociación internacional de semiótica
Internationale Vereinigung für Semiotik



NEW
BULGARIAN
UNIVERSITY



Southeast European Center
for Semiotic Studies

NEW SEMIOTICS

Between Tradition and Innovation

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12th WORLD CONGRESS OF SEMIOTICS

Sofia 2014 New Bulgarian University

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Abstract

As early as 1969 in *Semeiotiké* Julia Kristeva had already attempted a sort of short-circuit by connecting the linguistic and semiotic approaches to the psychoanalytical with her proposal of “semanalysis”. She compares the Cartesian ego, the transcendental ego theorized by Husserlian phenomenology and the self of enunciation linguistics with the doubling of the subject thematized by Freud and his theory of the unconscious. To focus on the unconscious means to modify the object of linguistics given that it implies describing signification as a heterogeneous process. Beginning from such topics addressed in this framework, Kristeva reflects on poetic language considering its implications for the question of the speaking subject. Moreover, she focuses on the I-other relationship, therefore on dialogue and inevitably on the Bakhtinian conception which on the basis of thematization of dialogue itself achieves a sort of Copernican revolution *à propos* the I-other relationship. Beyond poetic language and literary writing, beyond the theme of dialogue and of the *polylogue* and in relation to the question of the other, another central theme in Kristeva’s work is the foreigner, the stranger.

1. Language theory, literary writing and ethics

In an essay of 1974, “L’éthique de la linguistique”, republished in *Polylogue*, 1977, and subsequently in English as “The Ethics of Linguistics,” in *Desire in Language*, 1980, Julia Kristeva observes that the language sciences including linguistics should not ignore the question of ethics. Nor will it suffice, she continues, to simply add a few supplementary notions on the role

of ideology in language. The question of ethics concerns the speaking subject, that concrete speaking subject that each one of us is; and not, we might add, the “ideal speaker” *à la* Chomsky which Kristeva too readily critiques when addressing the question of transformational generative grammar.

No doubt the concept of speaking subject needs to be questioned in light of the Cartesian subject as thematized by authors like Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (cf. Kristeva 1980b: 22). The problem of the truth of discourse in linguistics requires that we verify whether there exists a correspondence between such discourse and effective speaking, that is, speaking not of the abstract speaker, but of the concrete, individual, singular speaker. Neither the Cartesian ego nor the Husserlian transcendental ego account for the speaking subject; neither account sufficiently for the speaking subject's loss (*perte*), for its outlay (*dépense*) (*Ibid.*: 24; and 1977: 358).

Kristeva makes the following observation:

...formulating the problem of linguistic ethics means, above all, compelling linguistics to change its object of study. The speech practice that should be its object is one in which signified structure (sign, syntax, signification) is defined within boundaries that can be shifted by the advent of a semiotic rhythm that no system of linguistic communication has yet been able to assimilate (1980b: 24).

To keep account of semiotic rhythm means to pass from the sentence, the unit privileged by language, understood as *langue*, to the utterance, a concrete unit of discourse endowed not only with meaning, but also with sense (meaning + direction). The field of language where rhythm emerges best is the poetic. The task is not to study poetic language separately from ordinary language (*langage courant*), but rather to reach a better understanding of how ordinary language functions. To obtain this requires that we explore the boundaries of language, its margins, those areas where language is exposed to upheaval, dissolution, and transformation: “Situating our discourse near such boundaries might enable us to endow it with a current ethical impact. In short, the ethics of a linguistic discourse may be gauged in proportion to the poetry that it presupposes” (*Ibid.*: 25).

For an approach to linguistics that keeps account of rhythm, accentuation of the utterance, therefore of poetic language, Freud's psychoanalysis is important. According to Kristeva, Freud's discovery of the unconscious provided the necessary conditions for reading poetic language in association with a linguistics of the utterance produced by the concrete speaking subject.

An important contribution to poetic language comes from twentieth century avant-garde movements. In “The Ethics of Linguistics”, for France Kristeva points to Mallarmé and Artaud, though she avoids naming the linguist she alludes to: “a most eminent modern linguist believed that ‘in the last hundred years’ there have been only two significant linguists in France: Mallarmé and Artaud” (*Ibid.*: 25). For the Russian avant-garde Kristeva names Mayokovsky and Khlebnov.

According to Kristeva we need to listen in the laboratory of the avant-garde, to understand its experience in terms of a relationship that could be qualified only as a “love relationship”. She perceives such an orientation in the path taken by Roman Jakobson: “It should not be surprising, then, that it is his discourse and his conception of linguistics, and those of no other linguist that could contribute to the theory of the unconscious – allowing us to see it being made and unmade (*poiein*) – like the language of any subject” (*Ibid.*: 26). Kristeva underlines the importance of Jakobson's contribution to establishing phonology and structural linguistics in general, to the study of Slavic languages and to problems of linguistic learning. But all this is based *first and*

foremost on his listening to poetic language. This is a leitmotif which pervades all of Jakobson's research and orients his approach to language, and which provides it with no less than an ethical dimension. Kristeva concludes that Jakobson's linguistics "appears to bracket the technical nature of some contemporary tendencies such as generative grammar" (*Ibid.*: 26).

Ultimately Jakobson's linguistics "has something to say about the speaking subject". He reaches phonology through his studies on poetic language, rhythm, the poetic verse with a special interest for the writings of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov. His early studies are dedicated to both these poets. In the words of Kristeva:

It is quite an experience to listen to Harvard University's recording of Roman Jakobson's 1967 lecture, "Russian Poetry of my Generation" – he gave a reading of Mayakovsky and Khlebnikov, imitating their voices, with the lively, rhythmic accents, thrust out throat and fully militant tone of the first; and the softly whispered words, sustained swishing and whistling sounds, vocalizations of the disintegrating voyage toward the mother constituted by the "trans-mental" ("zaum") language of the second. To understand the real conditions needed for producing scientific models, one should listen to the story of their youth, of the aesthetic and always political battles of Russian society on the eve of the revolution and during the first years of victory, of the friendships and sensitivities that coalesced into lives and life projects. From all this, one may perceive what initiates a science, what it stops, what deceptively ciphers its models. No longer will it be possible to read any treatise on phonology without deciphering within every phoneme the statement, "Here lies a poet". (*Ibid.*: 27)

Reading Mayakovsky when in "How are Verses Made" he says "you have to bring the poem to the highest pitch of expressiveness," Kristeva observes that at that point the code opens to the rhythmic body and forms another sense "à venir" in contrast to present sense, a future, impossible sense. The significant component of this "future anterior" is "the word perceived as word," which opens to the struggle between rhythm and sign system. But Mayakovsky's suicide, Khlebnikov's disintegration (see Jakobson 1931), and Artaud's internship prove that this struggle can be impeded. Nonetheless, Kristeva claims that

Linguistic ethics, as it can be understood through Jakobson's practice, consists in following the resurgence of an "I" coming back to rebuild an ephemeral structure in which the constituting struggle of language and society would be spelled out (*Ibid.*: 34).

Kristeva concludes her essay with the observation that though the currently dominant orientation in linguistics, generative grammar, may keep account of Jakobson's position in studies on the system of language, especially phonology, nonetheless it neglects all that part of his work as we are now describing it. Generative semantics, for example, tends to neglect such phenomena as elision, metaphor, metonym, parallelism (which Jakobson experimented in his studies on biblical and Chinese verse). In Kristeva's view:

the dramatic notion of language as a risky practice, allowing the speaking animal to sense the rhythm of the body as well as the upheavals of history, seems tied to a notion of signifying processes that contemporary theories do not confront (*Ibid.*: 34).

In an essay of 1977 entitled “Polylogue”, published in a volume by the same title and translated into English as “The Novel as Polylogue”, now in *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva most importantly evidences once again how the real object of linguistic studies is the utterance. In the part entitled “Beyond the Sentence: The Transfinite in Language”, she insists that to recover the utterance as the fundamental unit of language in linguistic analysis is to thematize what is fundamental in concrete speech: intonation and rhythm. She also mentions music as the material of intonation, that body in which intonation consists and takes shape.

Instead of serving as the upper limits of enunciation, the *sentence-meaning-significance* here acts as its lower limits. Through and in conjunction with these limits, but not below, there occurs a breakthrough of what may be called “primary” processes, those dominated by intonation and rhythm. (Kristeva 1980b: 167)

It is necessary to go beyond the sentence: more-than-a-sentence, more-than-meaning, more-than-significance. Always more: more-than-syntactic. What always operates in the enunciation/utterance is a *dépense*, expenditure. The live word is never less, but always more. Kristeva points out that to rediscover the relationship with rhythm and sound means to rediscover the relationship that each speaker had with its mother, as a child and before that as an infant. We might add that this approach helps recover mother sense as described by Victoria Welby (see her papers on the topic collected in Petrilli 2009: Ch. 6) in the relation with the word.

The point is to rediscover the intonation, scansion and rhythms preceding the signifier's position as the position of language (*langue*), to rediscover the vital relation with the mother before that relationship with the *undifferentiated (abstract) mother* from which there derives an entity that is just as undifferentiated (abstract): maternal language (*langue maternelle*). What is involved, as Kristeva says, is the possibility of the experience of early childhood; of recovering language in relation to the “body proper” (*corps propre, Leib*) within the symbolic logical system. On this account, Kristeva speaks of a “second birth”, the Dionysiac birth. We already find here delineated the difference that constitutes a central topic in Kristeva's conception, as expressed from her very first book, *Semiotiké*: that is, the difference between the semiotic, to simplify, the maternal, on one hand, and the symbolic, the paternal, the order of the father, on the other.

In an essay she originally published in 1975 and again in *Polylogue* (1977), entitled “D'une identité à l'autre” (pp. 124-147), in English (“From One Identity to an Other”), in *Desire in Language* (1980), Kristeva says that: 1) it is not possible to address poetic language without considering “the presymbolic and trans-symbolic relationship to the mother” (Kristeva 1980b: 137) as aimless wondering within the identity of the speaker and the economy of its very discourse; 2) Moreover, this relationship of the speaker to the mother “is probably one of the most important factors producing interplay within the structure of meaning as well as a questioning approach of subject and history” (*Ibid.*).

In fact, in this same essay Kristeva critiques the dominant conception of the subject, of the self as it has been described through three central authors in Western philosophical reflection

on the problem: Descartes, Kant and Husserl. Reference is to a tradition that proceeds from “I think” to the “transcendental ego”.

According to Kristeva the problem of the subject, in particular the speaking subject, is outlined more adequately in the linguistic theory of Émile Benveniste. This above all because the speaking subject is considered by Benveniste as the subject of the utterance and includes in the operating consciousness of this subject “not only logical modalities but also interlocutory relationships” (*Ibid.*: 131).

In this essay as well, “D’une identité à l’autre”, Kristeva evidences yet again the importance of poetic language for the language sciences as much as for the human sciences in general. As we know, to poetic language she dedicated a large volume of 1974 entitled, *La Révolution du langage poétique*. An understanding of language is not possible without considering “heterogeneousness”, the heterogeneous component in language (“*l’hétérogène*”), with respect to sense and signification: this is the same heterogeneousness “detected genetically in the first echolalias of infants as rhythms and intonations anterior to the first phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, and sentences” (Kristeva 1980b: 133). Once again this is a matter of the heterogeneousness that is traced in rhythms and intonations and in the glossalalias in psychotic discourse. And it is also the heterogeneous which in poetic language produces so-called musical effects, “but also nonsense effects that destroy not only accepted beliefs and significations, but, in radical experiments, syntax itself, that guarantee of thetic conscious (of the signified object and ego)” (*Ibid.*). And the examples that Kristeva gives on this account are particularly significant: carnivalesque discourse, Artaud, Mallarmé and certain Dadaist and Surrealist experiments (cfr. *Ibid.*).

To return to the question of the speaking subject, Kristeva thus points out that to correspond to this heterogeneity of language the notion of speaking subject as theorized by the sciences of language must concern the subject-in-process (*Ibid.*: 135; see also Petrilli 2013: 150–151). And she goes on to explain again the reason for her need to have semiotics encounter Freud’s psychoanalysis, an encounter she had already denominated “semanalysis” in the subtitle of her early book of 1969, *Sémiotiké*. “Recherche pour un sémanalyse”:

It is of course Freud’s theory of the unconscious that allows the apprehension of such a subject [subject-in-process]; for through the surgery it practiced in the operating consciousness of the transcendental ego, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalyses did allow, not for (as certain simplifications would have it) a few typologies or structures that might accommodate the same phenomenological reason, but rather for heterogeneity, which, known as the unconscious, shapes the signifying function. (Kristeva 1980b: 135).

2. The speaking subject, dialogue, otherness, strangeness to self

The French translation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s monograph on Dostoevsky (1963), *La poétique de Dostoïevski*, appeared in 1970 with a presentation by Julia Kristeva entitled “Une poétique ruinée”. Kristeva had already turned her attention to Bakhtin earlier. In fact, the year before, she had already published the monograph mentioned above, *Sémiotiké. Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, 1969. An essay from this book, “Le mot, le dialogue et le roman” is dedicated to Bakhtin (the Eng. trans., “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, is included in *Desire and language*, pp. 64-91). This essay is also available in Italian translation in a volume entitled *Michail Bachtin. Semiotica, teoria della traduzione and Marxism*, edited by Augusto Ponzio (1977; see also Bachtin e il suo Circolo 2014). In her essay, Kristeva observes that Bakhtin evidences the dynamic character of the literary text, in which literary writing is elaborated, is in becoming in relation to another structure.

Bakhtin renders structure and structuralism dynamic because he considers the “literary word” as the intersection of textual surfaces and not as a fixed result, a fixed point. The literary word emerges from dialogue among different writings, that of the writer, the receiver, the hero (or character), current or antecedent cultural context, etc. (cf. *Ibid.*: 106).

Through Bakhtin Kristeva (see *Polylogue*, 1977) shows how dialogue and polyphony function in the literary text. Dialogism characterizes writing though it is manifested to different degrees in different literary genres. For example, by comparison to Dostoevsky, Tolstoj would seem to be a monological author.

In 1969 the book *Le langage, cet inconnu* appeared with the publishers SGPP, signed by Julia Joyaux, a pseudonym. The book was republished by Seuil in 1981 signed Julia Kristeva. The Italian translation by A. Ponzio appeared in 1992 and included an interview with Kristeva. Ponzio met Kristeva in December 1973, at a conference in Milan on *Follia e società segregativa*, promoted by Armando Verdiglione and organized by the collective *Semiotica e psicanalisi*. Other speakers present at what turned out to be an extraordinary event included Félix Guattari, Serge Leclaire, Jean-Joseph Gloux, Daneil Levy, Octave Mannoni, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Philippe Sollers. The proceedings were published by Feltrinelli (1974) and included an important text by Verdiglione himself, “La materia non semiotizzabile” (cf. Verdiglione, ed., 1974).

At this conference in Milan, Kristeva delivered a lecture entitled “Soggetto del linguaggio e pratica politica” (The subject of language and political practice). In it she speaks of “regression” with reference to the political and social situation of the time, a description that is still relevant today. By “regression” Kristeva understood submission to the law and identity. Dominant identity is national identity that cuts across and surpasses social contradictions in the name of a superior concern: nationalism. She maintained that from Plato’s time politics prescribes a *common measure* and in this way gives rise to a *community*. The common measure is language. Linguistics, including generative transformational linguistics contributes to this project by considering language as an object that can be measured, by evidencing its logical order, its character as a system, its manageability, its controllability, and all this in spite of Freud and of literary writing. “The discovery of the unconscious is preceded by and accompanies one of the most spectacular explosions of the ‘avant-garde’: Mallarmé, Lautréamont, Joyce, Kafka, Artaud. Their writings subvert the ideological code (family, religious, state mythemes), as much as the code of language (last guarantee of the unity of the subject)” (in Verdiglione, ed., 1974: 61).

The regression Kristeva registered at the time and which today is worsening is the constitution of systems that dominate practice: the allusion is to national identities. “National identity is precisely the common measure in language and in national identities”. The paranoia inflation of national identities is pushed to closure, to monologism. “What is excluded is the stranger – the other national identity, or (and above all) the one who, in the same country, does not speak the same language, the writer. Xenophobia reaches its peak”.

But Kristeva did not limit her discourse to national identity. She directed her critique at other forms of closure in identities such as belonging and difference, or better, difference that is exclusive and excluding. She even critiqued recent and what appeared to be radical movements like the feminist movements of the time when they committed to searching for their identity, “how to be nothing but a woman,” possibly with the Pope’s benediction. Kristeva criticized the tendency to search for one’s identity in some form of system, a closed unit, organization (*Ibid.*: 63-64).

A strong connection emerges in Kristeva’s work between her theoretical interests and social and political commitment. A. Ponzio underlined this aspect of her work at a presentation in the series “Giovedì letterari” (Teatro Piccini, Bari), when he had the pleasure of presenting her personally to an enthusiastic public. In her own words: “To address theory of languages and signs

in general today is not at all an innocent gesture.” Through this connection she questions mental habits, common places, behaviour considered obvious and natural, through which the subjects that adopt them contribute, mostly without realizing, to reproducing the dominant social system with its contradictions and inequalities.

With “semanalysis” Kristeva proposes a science of “signifying practices” connected with linguistic and sign work which each one of us performs within given social relations of production; therefore, it is the study of social ideologies, of the formation of the conscious (also viewed in its coercive function toward otherness relegated to the unconscious), of texts reflecting official communication, dominant logic and the common places of discourse.

Linguistics during the 1960s became a guide science. This was a consequence of its functionality to the social order. To understand this we need to look at the connection between linguistics and a tradition that developed in terms of generative grammar, defined with Chomsky as Cartesian grammar.

In her book of 1969, *Le langage, cet inconnu*, Kristeva outlines the field of linguistics, indicating limits, its incapacity to include and consider certain aspects of language. These limits are due to the history itself of linguistics and of its relations to European culture, with phonocentrism, with the priority or exclusivity attributed to alphabetical writing, etc. Instead, Kristeva reserves an important place for non alphabetical writing systems in this book.

Subsequently, in the years that followed, linguistics enriched its analyses with reference to reflection on language in the fields of philosophy of language and semiotics. There is an epistemological orientation in linguistics today that to an extent can be reconducted to Kristeva among others. This epistemological orientation has developed at the same pace as the linguistics of the utterance.

Linguistics of the utterance emerges alongside linguistics of language (*langue*) and keeps account of discourse as an act, and therefore of the speaker, the receiver, their explicit and implicit intentions, of the implied, the unsaid.

However, in an interview with Kristeva by Ponzio, included as an introduction to the Italian edition of *Le langage, cet inconnu* (1992), as in other places of her writings, she observes that though there have been developments, we have not gone far on an epistemological level from a philosophical tradition that witnessed the rise of linguistics. Though the linguistics of the utterance implies the notion of the subject, it does not question it nearly thoroughly enough.

As from 1969 with her book *Semeiotikè* Kristeva attempts a short-circuit by connecting linguistics and semiotics to psychoanalysis and proposes what she calls “semanalysis”. In this perspective she compares the Cartesian ego, the transcendental ego theorized by Husserlian phenomenology and the self of utterance linguistics with the doubling of the subject (identity/alterity) theorized by Freud and his theory of the unconscious. To focus on the unconscious means to modify the object of linguistics given that this implies to describe signification as a heterogeneous process.

Consideration of the unconscious fundamentally modifies the object of linguistics leading to a description of signifying processes in terms of heterogeneity. But Saussure had already claimed as much in his own terms, and in spite of his interpreters who searched for the system in his writings: in language (*langue*) there are only differences, and the speaker is not at all master of the word given that “his” language (*langue*) is “arbitrary”.

In the second edition of *Le langage, cet inconnu* (1981: 23), Kristeva adds a note in which she refers to Jacques Derrida and his concept of *écriture* and to the question of the predominance of the *trace* over the *phoné*. Kristeva observes that the concept of writing allows us to think of language, including its manifestation in terms of *phoné*, as *différance* (a neologism he introduces for the process of deferral/differentiation). Language (*langue*) is presented as writing on the basis

of “gramma-différance”. Writing is inherent to language (*langage*), and the phonetic word can be considered as writing.

Consequently subjectivity and objectivity can both be considered as the effect of difference; the subject depends on the complex of differences, on the system of *différance*, its very constitution consists in its capacity to divide itself and differentiate itself.

In an interview with Jacques Derrida, “Sémiologie et grammatologie” (1971), Kristeva asks Derrida (p. 19) “Qu’est-ce que la *gramme* comme ‘nouvelle structure de la non-présence’? Qu’est-ce que l’écriture comme ‘différence’?”. Derrida responds as follows:

Le gramme comme différence, c’est alors une structure et un mouvement qui ne se laissent plus penser à partir de l’opposition présence/absence. La différence, c’est le jeu systématique des différences, des traces des différences, de l’*espacement* par lequel les éléments se rapportent les uns aux autres. [...] C’est aussi le devenir-espace de la chaîne parlée – qu’on a dit temporelle et linéaire ; devenir-espace qui seul rend possible l’écriture et toute correspondance entre la parole et l’écriture, tout passage de l’une à l’autre.

But Kristeva’s main interest is writing in the stylistic sense of the term, literary writing, writing as “verbal art” (Bakhtin): Mallarmé, Céline, Proust, Nerval... In literary writing aspects of the word emerge that are not evident in the ordinary use of language. What in terms of Freudian theory may be identified as drives unfolding on the margins between the biological and the symbolic. “Poetic” style as understood by the Russian formalists, that is, with reference to literary language, can be considered as a modification of the discourse of daily genres under the effect of drives or “primary processes.” Signification as a heterogeneous process is manifest in literary writing where heterogeneity of the speaker himself finds full expression.

The text, through its rhythm even, vehicles messages that are heterogeneous with respect to what it expresses explicitly. Kristeva’s interest in this kind of message, that is, for what she calls “the semiotic” dimension distinguished from “the symbolic,” involves a shift of attention to rhythm, but also to the subdivision, the *découpage*, of fixed lexemes in the linguistic sign. This induced her in *La révolution du langage poétique. L’avant-garde à la fin du XIX^e siècle* (1974) to address the literary text, with special reference to Mallarmé. This approach explains Kristeva’s dual interest for writing and psychoanalysis where the latter is developed at both a theoretical-methodological and a therapeutic level. Writing and analysis both address the limit-states of language.

In *La Révolution du langage poétique*, Kristeva introduces the distinction between *symbolique* and *sémiotique*. The *symbolic* designates language as it is described by linguistics and the tradition it belongs to, that is, what in language is the “common basic measure of the community”, what in language belongs to the order of the sign, to the time of nomination, syntax, signification and denotation. The *semiotic* defers to primary processes and drives that enter into contradiction with the symbolic. *Literary writing* is produced on the margin between *symbolique* and *sémiotique*, or simply *writing* (understood as the practice of the writer, distinct from transcription and the mnemotecnical-communicative function).

Writing thus described is associated with the semiotic in search of its verbal translation into the symbolic. Writing is a completion of the semiotic; it invests the semiotic with the word. Its value consists in enhancing the experience of significance, of the heterogeneous in the process of signification. The literary text, in its very own rhythm, vehicles heterogeneous messages with respect to what it expresses explicitly. From this point of view, literary writing extends the horizon

of questions about language. And these questions engage the dynamics of the speaking subject.

Kristeva develops the distinction between semiotic and symbolic on the level of psychoanalysis. In analytical encounter we face the difficulties of the word or sense which testify to the difficulty of living. From this point of view, understanding the semiotic in a situation where it is suffocated or neutralized by the symbolic, is a way for the analyst to listen to the word of the other. Kristeva analyses these different situations that evidence the heterogeneity of signification, which analytical practice experiences directly in such books as *Folle vérité* (a collaborative volume of 1979), *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essais sur l'abjection* (1980), *Histoires d'amour* (1983) et *Soleil noir, dépression et mélancolie* (1987).

Literary writing aside, when a question of analytical listening, intonation and listening are as important as they are in writing. *Soleil noir* offers examples of attention, of listening toward the mad word, at a suprasegmental level of language – as the linguists would say – this is not the level of the signs of the symbolic but of the pre or trans-verbal which for Kristeva constitutes the semiotic. This repropose an issue that is central in *La révolution du langage poétique*, that is, the question of retrieving the semiotic through a focus on rhythm and attention as much as on the *découpage* of lexemes.

Writing and Freudian analysis share the propensity for listening to the word of the other: the other's word in its *uniqueness, singularity*. Thanks to such practices, we escape the perspective of a civilization that no doubt has produced the rights of individual, the Human rights. But this civilization is not capable of overcoming these abstractions. Prior to recognizing human rights is recognition of the rights of *singularity*. Singularity manifests itself to differing degrees in two types of encounter among words, in two types of listening: 1) encounter among words in writing and listening by the writer, 2) encounter among words and listening in analysis.

With Kristeva we can ask how to elaborate a theory that is sufficiently refined to account for singularity, for singular difference, for “singular inflections of the word”: this is theory of language as *mathesis singularis*. We are dealing with a word that calls for listening whether a question of writing and reading a literary text or of analytical practice. According to Kristeva this is a question of the relation of hospitality and welcome. And this relation presents what we can call an “ethical” dimension, as understood by Lévinas, which studies on language cannot ignore.

The title of Kristeva's 1969 book, *Le langage, cet inconnu*, proposes a motif in her subsequent research with the adjective “inconnu” centred on the concept of “étrangeté”; this motif recurs in the linguistic conscious and concerns relations between the speaker and the language that speaker speaks, between one language and another language, one culture and other cultures.

When in *Le Vieil Homme et les loups* (1991) she writes that our times recall the end of the Roman empire, Kristeva (as she says in her interview with A. Ponzio) is not thinking only about the moral crisis, but also the loss of values in linguistics and cultural tradition characteristic of western culture. She believes that the task of intellectuals, humanists and above all of linguists and semioticians is to recover the past in order to rianimate and renew it, and certainly not to transform and deposit it in some museum for the sake of identity sclerotized. Tradition offers a source of wealth to the subject through which to express one's singularity, difference, quality, cipher. The more the code through which the individual expresses itself is restricted, the more the possibility for creativity is reduced. Enhancement of tradition goes together with “hybridisation”. Grafts on tradition concerning experience, behaviours, values, feelings represent the effective possibility of growth and enrichment.

As Kristeva writes in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988: 9):

Étranger: rage étranglée au fond de ma gorge, ange noir troublant la transparence, trace opaque, insondable. Figure de la haine et de l'autre, l'étranger n'est ni la victime romantique de notre paresse familiale, ni l'intrus responsable de tous les maux de la cité. Ni la révélation en marche, ni l'adversaire immédiat à éliminer pour pacifier le groupe. Étrangement, l'étranger nous habite: il est la face cachée de notre identité, l'espace qui ruine notre demeure, le temps où s'abîment l'entente et la sympathie. De le reconnaître en nous, nous nous épargnons de le détester en lui-même. Symptôme qui rend précisément le 'nous' problématique, peut-être impossible, l'étranger commence lorsque surgit la conscience de ma différence et s'achève lorsque nous nous reconnaissons tous étrangers, rebelles aux liens et aux communautés.

Extraneity of one's language is extraneity of one's own conscious, extraneity of the unconscious. "Tell me the language you speak and I will tell you what your unconscious is": the Freudian postulate recalls that the conscious and the unconscious speak the same language that the subject speaks. Vološinov develops this position in *Freudianism*, 1927 (see Chapter IX on language, unconscious and ideology).

But the situation in which signification manifests itself glaringly as a heterogeneous process, as nomadism and extraneity, is that of the subject that does not speak its own language, but another language, or better, that speaks a language which, though one's own, resounds all the same as foreign, while the language of origin lives in the nocturnal memory of the body, as a language of other times which, even if it withdraws from possession by the subject, never abandons that subject. Kristeva analyzes this situation in a section of *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* entitled, "Le silence du polyglotte".

The subject that speaks a new language can perfect itself as to how to manage a new instrument, but his or her word remains the word of others. In this situation as a speaking subject placed between two languages, in "cette anesthésie de la personne happée par une langue étrangère", in this "mutisme polyforme" of the polyglot, heterogeneity of the process of significance itself evidences the doubling of the "unitary" subject, hidden in the normal use of language.

In literary writing the "silence of the polyglot" is transformed into "silence" of the writer, as a listening position, a position that characterizes the writer, that becomes the possibility of distancing, typical of the writer: as Bakhtin says in his 1970-71 notes (in Bakhtin 1986), the writer dresses in silence and uses a language while standing outside it. The writer gives up mastery over the word which is delusory, goes into the listening mode and resorts, through writing, to the "different forms of silence": irony, allegory, parody, metaphor, parable... Between two languages, as Kristeva observes, the foreigner knows what the loquacious and arrogant native speaker does not know, that it, that nobody is master of one's "own" language (nor is it possible to statalize, to nationalize language, in spite of the "reality" of national languages, on the basis of which identities are established, exclusions are justified and conflicts triggered).

The foreigner knows that with respect to the language he speaks, the language that speaks him, that silence is not only imposed upon him, but is part of him, in him. Here then comes the refusal to say, nothing to say, no reply, no answer to interrogation, to wanting to hear. Not to say anything, there's nothing to say, nothing can be said, the unspeakable (cf. Kristeva 1988: 28-29). With respect to this situation, the way out is writing.

With Kristeva we can address the problem of the relation between the national and the foreigner, which today assumes violent forms, with the following formulation: how to conciliate the intermingling of nations in states, on one hand, and maintaining national differences, on

the other. The assertion of linguistic and cultural difference can translate into the arrogance of identity (Giambattista Vico's "Boria delle nazioni").

A typical example of such arrogance is offered by Kristeva when she states with reference to her experience as a novel writer that the French can eventually accept discourse that presents a mirror of society like that in *Samourais* (a novel she published in 1979). However, they perceive the novel which reveals a condition of suffering, of pain, a sort of hell, as an attack on good taste.

Étrangers à nous-mêmes analyses the presence and destiny of the foreigner in European civilization, underlining the hybrid of his past and of his cosmopolitan future. Kristeva traces the role of "inquiétante étrangeté" in various authors (Rabelais, Montaigne, Érasme, Montesquieu, Diderot, Kant, Herder, fino a Camus e Nabokov) and in various moments in history: the Greeks with their "meteci" and their "Barbarians"; the Hebrews including Ruth the Moabite at the basis of the David's lineage; St. Paul who chose to predicate to immigrants to transform them into the first Christians, etc.

The question of "étrangeté" (straneità – "stranierità") is also present in one of Kristeva's more recent works, *Le temps sensible. Proust et l'expérience littéraire* (1994). Kristeva does not fail to evidence the role carried out by foreign-ness (racial: jewishness: sexuality: homosexuality) in the *Recherche* whenever the occasion presents itself. Extraneity, psychoanalysis, writing:

La psychanalyse m'a conduite à penser que c'est l'exil qui me constituait, et non pas une appartenance. Que la vérité [...] n'est pas dans notre appartenance à une origine – bien qu'elle existe et qu'il faille la reconnaître – mais dans notre capacité de nous exiler, c'est-à-dire de prendre une distance par rapport à l'origine. L'origine est une mère, une langue et une biologie, mais tout en les reconnaissant, nous devenons nous-même lorsque nous-nous en libérons (Kristeva 2001: 24).

Writing, that is, literary writing can enhance the understanding of extraneity, with its tie to the heterogeneity of signifying and with alterity. Writings allows us to perceive alterity in the use of language and as such can contribute to welcoming extraneity. The more we recognize extraneity-foreignness to ourselves, the more we can capture the extraneity of others:

La rencontre équilibre l'étranger. Croisement de deux altérités, elle accueille l'étranger sans le fixer, ouvrant l'hôte à son visiteur sans l'engager. Reconnaissance réciproque, la rencontre doit son bonheur au provisoire, et les conflits la déchireraient si elle devait se prolonger. L'étranger croyant est un incorrigible curieux, avide de rencontres : il s'en nourrit et les traverse, éternel insatisfait, éternel noceur aussi. Toujours vers d'autres, toujours plus loin (Kristeva 1988: 22).

To the book *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, originally published in 1988, Kristeva adds a new introduction as results from the new Italian edition of 2014, published with Donzelli in Rome. Returning to the problem of living together with the foreigner, of extraneity and difference, Kristeva here makes considerations that are of great topicality today. Fundamentally she refers to European humanism where at its foundations she finds figures like Erasmus, Diderot and Freud. But it is up to us to continue constructing it – this unending construction. No doubt, this heavy responsibility involves politicians as well, but it mainly falls upon intellectuals, artists and writers.

In the concluding page to this introduction, Kristeva writes the following:

Heir to Christianity (catholic, protestant and orthodox) and to its source which is Judaism, compatible with the massive transplant of Islam, humanistic Europe is called today to engineer bridges *among three monotheisms*, and with the other religions.

To achieve this tolerance and fraternity are necessary, but not sufficient. Humanism is not the “Spanish quarters” where to haphazardly stack all credos. In light of philosophy and the human sciences which have originated with secularization, republican laicity invites believers and non believers to consider that, if “nobody is the repository of truth”, it is the duty of each one of us to reconsider our ideas and go beyond fratricide dogma (p. xii).

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