

*Journal of the*  
A M E R I C A N  
**PSYCHOANALYTIC**  
A S S O C I A T I O N

VOLUME 62 NUMBER 1 FEBRUARY 2014

1  
2  
3

FROM THE EDITOR

BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE REDUX

---

LAWRENCE FRIEDMAN  
THE DISCRETE AND THE CONTINUOUS IN FREUD'S  
"REMEMBERING, REPEATING AND WORKING  
THROUGH"

ALESSANDRA LEMMA  
OFF THE COUCH, INTO THE TOILET: EXPLORING THE  
PSYCHIC USES OF THE ANALYST'S TOILET

JULIA KRISTEVA: MATERNAL RELIANCE

BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
INTRODUCTION TO JULIA KRISTEVA

RACHEL WIDAWSKY  
JULIA KRISTEVA'S PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

JULIA KRISTEVA  
RELIANCE, OR MATERNAL EROTICISM

ROSEMARY H. BALSAM / MITCHELL WILSON  
COMMENTARIES ON KRISTEVA

JULIA KRISTEVA FILM *RELIANCE* AND TRANSLATION  
FROM THE FRENCH

RESEARCH NEWS & REVIEWS

VARIOUS AUTHORS  
JOURNAL WATCH

KOREAN AND MANDARIN TRANSLATIONS

BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATIONS

TRANSLATIONS

JAPA REVIEW OF BOOKS

 SAGE

japa.sagepub.com

**FROM THE EDITOR**

- BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
CONTINUITY AND CHANGE REDUX ..... 6

- 
- LAWRENCE FRIEDMAN  
THE DISCRETE AND THE CONTINUOUS IN  
FREUD'S "REMEMBERING, REPEATING AND  
WORKING THROUGH" ..... 11

- ALESSANDRA LEMMA  
OFF THE COUCH, INTO THE TOILET: EXPLORING  
THE PSYCHIC USES OF THE ANALYST'S TOILET ..... 35

**JULIA KRISTEVA: MATERNAL RELIANCE**

- BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
INTRODUCTION TO JULIA KRISTEVA ..... 57

- RACHEL WIDAWSKY  
JULIA KRISTEVA'S PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK ..... 61

- JULIA KRISTEVA  
RELIANCE, OR MATERNAL EROTICISM ..... 69

- ROSEMARY H. BALSAM  
THE EMBODIED MOTHER: COMMENTARY ON  
KRISTEVA ..... 87

- MITCHELL WILSON  
MATERNAL RELIANCE: COMMENTARY  
ON KRISTEVA ..... 101

JULIA KRISTEVA FILM *RELIANCE* AND TRANSLATION  
FROM THE FRENCH: AVAILABLE FROM  
APA.SAGEPUB.COM

**RESEARCH NEWS & REVIEWS**

- VARIOUS AUTHORS  
JOURNAL WATCH ..... 113

**KOREAN AND MANDARIN TRANSLATIONS**

- BONNIE E. LITOWITZ  
INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATIONS ..... 121

- TRANSLATIONS AVAILABLE FROM  
APA.SAGEPUB.COM ..... NP1

- JAPA REVIEW OF BOOKS ..... 125**

## INTRODUCTION TO JULIA KRISTEVA

In 2011 Julia Kristeva presented a paper, “Reliance, ou l’erotisme maternel,” at the seventy-first *Congres des Psychanalystes de Langue Française*. In October 2013 she presented an English translation of that paper at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis. That translation, which appears in this issue of *JAPA*, was prepared by Rachel Boué Widawsky, a former student (and later a colleague) of Kristeva at Université Denis Diderot (Paris VII), and Perry Zurn, a doctoral candidate in French philosophy at DePaul University.<sup>1</sup>

As Anglo-American psychoanalysis has increasingly turned its attention to the study of the earliest developmental period—the one called “preoedipal”—our emphasis has been predominantly on the child’s experience of the mother. But what of the mother’s subjective experience of these momentous events—conceiving, carrying, giving birth to (separating from) and caring for her child? Kristeva’s essay is an attempt to rescue the subjectivity of the mother as a subject for psychoanalytic inquiry by directing our attention to the mother’s bodily responses to these most common experiences in a woman’s life.

Kristeva’s exploration of the mother’s body is rooted in her grounding in Freud’s writing but also incorporates her extensive reading of post-Freudian theorists—Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, André Green, Jean Laplanche, and others—with whom she has critically engaged in her own writing. She also brings to her exploration of maternal eroticism insights from her work across the many disciplines in which she is a scholar: linguistics, philosophy, literature, and religion. As a consequence, some aspects of her approach to her topic, including her conceptual vocabulary, may be unfamiliar to some *JAPA* readers. For example, terms such as *the semiotic* and *ab-ject(ion)* were coined by Kristeva in the course of earlier studies and now are brought to bear on this topic. In light of this intertextuality in her writing, we have asked one of the translators, Rachel

---

<sup>1</sup>The French text was published as “L’erotisme maternel” in *Pulsions de Temps* (Paris: Fayard, 2013, pp. 197–214).

Widawsky (a CORST candidate at the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis), to provide a brief synopsis of some of Kristeva's major writings. Not meant to be exhaustive, Widawsky's overview focuses on concepts and terminology relevant to the present paper but perhaps unfamiliar to many readers.

For those who would like to see and hear Kristeva speak on "La reliance maternelle," we encourage them to go to *JAPA Online*, where they will find an eleven-minute film, with accompanying English translation by Perry Zurn.

The questions that Kristeva's essay poses for us are provocative. Has the mother's body been denatured by object relations theories, turned into a holding/containing environment or sublimated (raised) to a place of reverie? Has postmodernism's attack on essences led us to reconceptualize the mother's biological body as merely a location for gender construction and cultural inscription? Kristeva's paper invites us to wonder what has happened to the mother's disappeared sexual body. Does Kristeva's claim that the early mother-child dyad is also oedipal—"Orestes before Oedipus"—make us uncomfortable? Has the mother's eroticism been too hot to handle?

At the end of her essay Kristeva makes clear that she feels more is at stake than clinical theories within our field. As befits her role as a public intellectual, her larger mission is to bring psychoanalytic insights to bear on popular conceptions in our culture, in this case those that may misrepresent the full complexity of a woman's subjectivity.

We have asked two prominent American psychoanalytic scholars to give us their responses to the issues and questions that arose for them on reading Kristeva's essay. Rosemary Balsam is a prominent contributor to a post-Freudian conceptualization of female psychology, with particular interest in the undertheorized pregnant body (2012, 2013). Mitchell Wilson has been actively engaged in bringing to American audiences key concepts from other psychoanalytic traditions, most notably from Lacanian and contemporary British authors (2006, 2013). Drawing from their own work, these American psychoanalysts help us enter into conversation with Kristeva's stimulating ideas.

#### REFERENCES

- BALSAM, R. (2012). *Women's Bodies in Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.

- BALSAM, R. (2013). (Re)membering the female body in psychoanalysis: Childbirth. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 61: 447–470.
- WILSON, M. (2006). “Nothing could be further from the truth”: The role of lack in the analytic process. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 54:397–422.
- WILSON, M. (2013). Desire and responsibility: The ethics of countertransference experience. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82:435–476.

## JULIA KRISTEVA'S PSYCHOANALYTIC WORK

Julia Kristeva is, after Simone de Beauvoir, arguably the most prominent French female intellectual of the twentieth century. As such, in 2004 she was the first recipient of the Holberg Prize, the humanities equivalent of the Nobel Prize. Kristeva presents herself as a European citizen of French nationality, Bulgarian by birth and American by adoption, having taught at U.S. universities since the mid-seventies.

Her cosmopolitan self-identification mirrors the history of postwar Europe. She moved to Paris from Bulgaria at the age of eighteen with a background in Russian literature and German philosophy. Over the course of her career she developed a unique and profound way of thinking by connecting linguistics, literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. In each of these fields, she has questioned established assumptions while grounding contemporary theories within the broader context of the Western cultural heritage. As the eminent French literary critic Roland Barthes wrote of her in 1970, "she changes the order of things" by always linking new theories or approaches to tradition (quoted in *Moi* 1986, p. 1).

However, her interdisciplinary thinking is no mere eclectism but an extensive exploration of the human mind that requires us to travel among disciplines and beyond frontiers. In her acceptance speech for the Holberg Prize (Kristeva 2004) she said, "the key to my nomadism, and my questioning of established forms of knowledge, is none other than psychoanalysis itself, understood as a journey in which the psychic identity itself is reconstituted."

If the first thread of her trajectory is, as Kristeva says, a journey among disciplines, it is led by an insatiable search for an empathic understanding of the human psyche and a relentless concern to safeguard a place for the subject in the human sciences. Whether Kristeva writes on

language, philosophy, art, or literature, psychoanalysis is always the underpinning and the inspiration of her thought.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), one of her major works on language, Kristeva introduces into the structural linguistic model—signifier/signified—the subject's nonreferential bodily drives (affects, emotions, sensations, and the like). She calls these nonsymbolized components of language *the semiotic*. For her the semiotic is a disruptive force in language. She deciphers it in modern literature and hears it in her patient's narratives through tonality, rhythms, contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, and silence.

But this formulation of the semiotic is not simply a linguistic addendum to structuralist linguistics; rather, it is an endeavor to rethink the Freudian model of how the biological and the psychical articulate. In this regard, Kristeva does not subscribe to the Lacanian axiom that the unconscious is structured like a language.

For Kristeva, the semiotic is not simply part of the signifying process; it is also a component of the identity and construction of the self. The semiotic is a representation of vocal and kinetic sensations from the preoedipal primary process. The paradigm of this concept is maternal holding and motherhood, the subject of the paper to follow. She writes in *Desire in Language* that “the semiotic with its maternal ties seems to be the farthest we can reach when we try to imagine and understand the frontiers between nature, or ‘physis’, and meaning” (Kristeva 1980a, quoted in Fletcher 2004, p. 43). For Kristeva the mother is the incarnation of the semiotic, which she calls *Khora*, a Greek concept from Plato signifying the preexistent status of things. For Kristeva the mother has this pre-organizing value, this presymbolic function. The mother represents something heterogeneous that can never be fully tamed because she is the source and the aim of the drives, because she is the foundation of the object relation, and because she is at the junction of the physical and the psychological.

On the one hand, the maternal presence represents, as in Winnicott's good-enough mother, the holding, nurturing environment. On the other hand, the mother is also the first agent of seduction, a phonic and kinetic envelope, and a transmitter of unconscious fantasies to the infant. In a

<sup>1</sup>I will restrict my review of her work to her contribution to the psychoanalytic literature. The scope of her intellectual productivity goes beyond psychoanalysis; she is by turns a linguist, a literary critic, a philosopher, and a novelist.

letter to Fliess dated December 6, 1896, Freud wrote that the mother is “the prehistoric, unforgettable other person who is never equalled by anyone later” (p. 180). Although Freud, as we know, did not pursue the theoretical implications of this insightful observation, he nevertheless acknowledged, in “Three Essays on Sexuality,” the encounter with unconscious maternal sexuality. The mother, Freud (1905) says, “strokes [the infant], kisses him, rocks him and quite clearly treats him as a complete sexual object. A mother would probably be horrified if she were made aware that all of her marks of affection were rousing her child’s sexual drive and preparing for its later intensity. . . . She is only fulfilling her task in teaching the child to love” (p. 223).

The mother’s unconscious sexuality (her desire for the father) is for Kristeva, and for many other French analysts, fundamental to the infant’s self-development. In her review of the role of motherhood through the cult of the Virgin Mary,<sup>2</sup> as in her study of Madonnas in art history,<sup>3</sup> Kristeva brings to the foreground the sexual ambivalence of the maternal role. She explores all these issues in the paper presented here.

In addition to elaborating the erotic component of the maternal role, Kristeva has explored the hidden fantasies of violence and destruction linked to the preoedipal mother, a topic Melanie Klein was the first to address. In an essay on Klein (Kristeva 2000),<sup>4</sup> in which she presents a critical review of Klein’s major concepts, she supports Klein’s position that depression, which follows the paranoïd-schizoid position, is a precursor of the ego’s structure and of the activity that will repair, in Klein’s formulation, the bits to which the loved object has been reduced. Here Kristeva adds her own concept, that of the *abject*.<sup>5</sup> What does this concept mean? It is the absent object, the lost destroyed object, proposed as a precondition to the development of mental activity. For the self and the object to be represented, the mother must be lost, separated from. Reviewing, after Klein, Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, which presents the maternal version of Oedipus’s murder, Kristeva contends that matricide stands at the origin of our capacity to think. Hence the subtitle of her book on Klein: *Matricide as Pain and Creativity*.

<sup>2</sup> See “Stabat Mater” in *Tales of Love* (Kristeva 1983, pp. 234–264).

<sup>3</sup> See “Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini” in *Desire in Language* (Kristeva 1980a, pp. 237–270).

<sup>4</sup> This essay is the second volume of a trilogy on female genius. The others are on Hannah Arendt and the French novelist Colette.

<sup>5</sup> In many of her books, Kristeva expands the theories of other thinkers with ideas of her own.



In another book, *The Powers of Horror* (1980b), Kristeva provides a much broader definition of the concept of abjection. The abject is, she writes, “radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (p. 2): “The Abject preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body to be” (p. 10).

But the abject is not limited to the lost object; it is also a prelinguistic experience close to fear. Kristeva compares the abject to the “phobic object that shows up at the place of a non-object state and assumes all the mishaps of drives” (p. 35). When the abject recurs in our life as repulsion and/or fascination, it represents the threat that meaning is breaking down, that identity and order are disturbed. From her clinical experience Kristeva applies the concept of abjection to borderline or psychotic states, where the abject takes the form of hallucinations or obsessions.<sup>6</sup>

In her elaboration of the semiotic theory of language, which incorporates the abject, the nonsymbolized, Kristeva stresses that access to language is linked to separation and therefore to mourning—hence her theory of depression and melancholia, developed in *Black Sun* (Kristeva 1987). Based on her clinical observations and on literary examples, she claims that the depressed narcissist neither mourns the object nor confronts his concealed hatred of it, as Freud would have it. In her view, the depressed narcissist defends against the process of separation, for Kristeva the precondition of access to language. As a result, the discourse of the depressed or the melancholic is a complaint about lack of meaning, about the emptiness of the signifier.

Kristeva’s theories of the semiotic, the abject, matricide, and melancholia express her efforts to incorporate into psychic activity what André Green (1993) has called “the work of the negative.” Central to what the negative includes is the rejection of whatever is intolerable for the ego, even while being part of its development. The negative is the incorporation of absence and loss in our psychic structure, components at the core of our first experience of love, both maternal and paternal.

In *Tales of Love* (1983), Kristeva addresses the paternal forms of love and rewrites Freud’s oedipal model. The patriarchal authority and

<sup>6</sup> For her, modern literature is a privileged place for the abject, along with sublimation, because literature is often posed on the fine line (the borderline) between identity and its dissolution. For example, the themes of the double and of metamorphosis, as well as atrophied characters in Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and Beckett, can be understood as representations of the abject.

fear of castration that underlie superego formation in the Freudian model are, according to Kristeva, insufficient explanations for understanding deficiencies of the paternal function in a postmodern world. She observes, in delinquent acts that defy responsibility and guilt, a failure of identification with the paternal function. She considers this dissociation an impediment to being in touch with one's inner life and communicating about it. Such "new maladies of the soul" (Kristeva 1990) are for her the result of a deficient paternal function.

To remedy this deficiency, Kristeva proposes a model she calls the "imaginary father," a combination of the postoedipal symbolic father and the presymbolic one from our individual prehistory. The function of this imaginary paternal figure is to support new forms of identification and new object relations different from that with the forbidding oedipal father. This imaginary father is an idealized figure, founder of the Law, that Kristeva recognizes, after Freud, in the foundation of monotheist religions. I will return to this point below.

Between her insights on the maternal figure and her revision of the paternal one, Kristeva pushes the Freudian model forward and adapts it to the needs of patients in today's world. With her clinical expertise and acute sense of contemporary sources of discontent, she listens to her patients' expressions of pain and to their unconscious formulations. For her the listening dimension of the psychoanalytic dialogue is what defines psychoanalysis, not only as a psychology but, essentially and technically, as a hermeneutic between affects and drives and their representations, manifest in the transferential dialogue. Thus, the psychoanalytic dyad is the tangible expression of a calling for a listener, a receiver, as much as for an object, like the child afraid of the dark that Freud (1905) mentions in a note to *Three Essays*: "Auntie, speak to me, I'm frightened because it's so dark." "What good would that do?" answers the aunt; "You can't see me." "That doesn't matter," answers the child; "If anyone speaks, it gets light" (p. 224).

In her clinical practice, Kristeva values interpretation as an offering given to the patient to decipher his or her conflicts through transference. For her the analyst is engaged in providing the patient a structure that will enable him to create meaning, to use the symbolic world to prop up his affects. She argues, in *New Maladies of the Soul*, that the modern subject suffers from the incapacity to represent: "analysts come up with new classification systems that take into account wounded 'narcissisms,' 'false personalities,' 'borderline states' and 'psychosomatic conditions.'

Whatever their differences, all these symptomatologies share a common denominator—the inability to represent” (Kristeva 1990, p. 9). Raising the question of the aim of psychoanalytic treatment at the end of *Tales of Love*, Kristeva argues that with the contemporary patient psychoanalysis must foster the capacity to feel and signify, without necessarily healing the narcissistic void, lest an overly rigid self-concept result that might become a false self. The risk in normative healing of the patient is for Kristeva an ethical question. Her concern for respecting the subject as a producer of meaning, pathological or not, is at the root of her emphasis on the ethics of psychoanalysis.

The other component of that ethics, which she calls *heretical ethics*, or the *Herethic*, is an ethics of love understood as preoedipal maternal love (unconditional but doomed to separation) and as the imaginary father we believe in beyond the object of our oedipal, incestuous, and murderous wishes. As I have noted, Kristeva relates this universal need for idealization to the foundation of religious belief, a theme she explores, from an atheist perspective, in *This Incredible Need to Believe* (2006). In a continuation of Freud’s study of the psychological origin of religion (1930), Kristeva links certain psychoanalytic ideas to the Judeo-Christian representation, or nonrepresentation, of the father, as being both absent and sublimated. She first developed these ideas in a short pamphlet, *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* (Kristeva 1985).

On this sensitive question, I end my review of Kristeva’s psychoanalytic works. I have focused on what seems most relevant to the paper that follows and what might place it for the reader within the larger body of her work.

#### REFERENCES

- FLETCHER, J. (2004). The semiotic and the other: A response to Julia Kristeva. Holberg Prize Seminar, pp. 42–49. [www.holbergprisen.no/en/julia-kristeva/holberg-prize-symposium-2004.html](http://www.holbergprisen.no/en/julia-kristeva/holberg-prize-symposium-2004.html)
- FREUD, S. (1896). Letter to Wilhelm Fliess, December 12. In *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis: Letters to Wilhelm Fliess, Drafts and Notes, 1887–1902*, ed. M. Bonaparte, A. Freud, & E. Kris. New York: Basic Books, pp. 173–181.
- FREUD, S. (1905). Three essays on the theory of sexuality. *Standard Edition* 7:130–243.
- FREUD, S. (1930). Civilization and its discontents. *Standard Edition* 21:64–145.

- GREEN, A. (1993). *The Work of the Negative*, transl. A. Weller. London: Free Association Books, 1999.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1974). *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1980a). *Desire in Language: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Literature and Art*, transl. T. Gora. New York: Columbia University Press.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1980b). *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1983). *Tales of Love*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1985). *In the Beginning Was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith*, transl. A. Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1987). *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1993). *The New Maladies of the Soul*, transl. R. Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2000). *Melanie Klein: Matricide as Pain and Creativity*, transl. R. Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2004). Holberg Prize acceptance speech, December 3. Holberg Prize Seminar, pp. 9–12. [www.holbergprisen.no/en/julia-kristeva/holberg-prize-symposium-2004.html](http://www.holbergprisen.no/en/julia-kristeva/holberg-prize-symposium-2004.html)
- KRISTEVA, J. (2006). *This Incredible Need to Believe*, transl. B.B. Brahic. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- MOI, T., ED. (1986). *The Kristeva Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press.

431 West Eugenie Street, #3G  
 Chicago, IL 60614  
 E-mail: [rsboue@gmail.com](mailto:rsboue@gmail.com)

## RELIANCE, OR MATERNAL EROTICISM

### I. IN SEARCH OF RELIANCE

To live and to think the maternal as *erotic*, wouldn't that be as provocative as to speak of *infantile sexuality*? One might think so, in light of all the social crises that conceive of the maternal as just the fulfillment of all vital needs, while certain superficial interpretations of contemporary psychoanalysis suggest—quite wrongly—that psychoanalysis assigns sexuality exclusively to the lover<sup>1</sup> and the unbearable destiny of object relations to the maternal.

The principal reason for this difficulty in properly locating the maternal, which we will analyze here, is first of all the very concept of *eroticism*. This concept is rooted in the invention of the unconscious, before it takes on its definitive form in *eros* and *thanatos*, the binding and unbinding [*liaison/déliaison*] pair. Beginning in 1911, with “Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning,” Freud calls it the “psychic revolution” of materiality (p. 223).<sup>2</sup> In line with Jean-Michel Hirt (1998), I see in this Freudian development, contemporaneous with his other texts on narcissism and psychosis, a gradual differentiation between materiality and “psychization,” one that Lou Andreas-Salomé (1913a) would passionately reinterpret.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[Transl.] Throughout, *l'amante* has been translated as “lover,” but it refers exclusively to the female lover.

<sup>2</sup>[Transl.] What Kristeva here refers to as “révolution psychique,” drawn from Freud's “psychische Umwälzung,” is rendered in the *Standard Edition* as “revolution of the mind” (Freud 1911, p. 223).

<sup>3</sup>See also Andreas-Salomé's letters and journal, starting with her meeting Freud in 1895 and ending with her last *Lettre ouverte à Freud* (Mein Dank an Freud / My Thanks to Freud) in 1931. Freud will not endorse her, threatened as he is in 1911 (the year of the Weimar Congress, to which he invited her) by the disaffection of Sándor Ferenczi and especially of Carl Jung, who renounced any interpretation of sexuality anchored in Oedipus and incest.

Translated by Rachel Widawsky and Perry Zurn.

This essay was originally published as “La reliance, ou de l'érotisme maternal” in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* (Kristeva 2011). The translators thank Julia Kristeva for her very helpful comments on the translation, as well as Elizabeth Rottenberg for reviewing an early draft.

What exactly does Andreas-Salomé say? Several of her provocative works anticipate the *eros* of Freud's structural model. Recall that, without forsaking his earlier theory of sexuality, Freud (1923) defines *eros* as follows: "by bringing about a more and more far-reaching *combination* of the particles into which living substance is *dispersed*," *eros* "aims at *complicating* life and at the same time, of course, at *preserving* it" (p. 40; emphasis added). Thus, Freud paves the way for ontogenesis and phylogenesis. Within the context of this sense of eroticism, sexuality for Andreas-Salomé (who develops and amplifies the principles of the master) is "what ruptures the limits of our ego" (Andreas-Salomé 1913b, p. 418), "reestablishes . . . contact with our original, fleshly being" (1931), and reconnects us to our own "materiality," rather than "distinguishing" us from it. And she invites Rilke, Freud, and all her readers to "reach out, groping, into space . . . and into our very bodies with confidence, like *one hand stretched out toward the other* . . . with all the 'inwardness of a creature' for whom this relation is no longer obfuscated" (Rilke and Andreas-Salomé 1976, p. 291; emphasis added). She says all of this before attributing to the *maternal* precisely this capacity to *establish* and *overcome* the "pathological split," a capacity by which the maternal "actualizes the connection" between internal and external reality, matter and symbol, masculine and feminine, and "restores the loss from which the process of individuation suffers."

Within his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) used the same metaphor of two hands touching (p. 106)—one belonging to the *self* and the other to *objective reality*—to illustrate a subjective experience where the gap between interior and exterior, matter and spirit, finds itself re-handled [*remaniée*] by this "reciprocal insertion and interlacing of one inside the other" (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 138), something he ultimately calls "flesh," "the transition from the mute world to the speaking world" (p. 154).

Today, a century after 1911 (which I have taken to be emblematic of the encounter between Freud and Andreas-Salomé, and brought in Merleau-Ponty from there), the development of psychoanalysis allows us to have a real debate about my "theoretical tale" (2013),<sup>4</sup> without the risk of betraying psychoanalysis either with a detour into spiritualism or a

<sup>4</sup>[Transl.] Citing Adorno's claim (1951) that "nothing is true in psychoanalysis except its exaggerations" (p. 49), Kristeva levels several of her own "theoretical fictions," or narrative scaffolds, against Freud's (e.g., 1900, p. 604).

reduction of the libido to mere genetics. On the contrary, it allows us to attempt to give back to *maternal eroticism* its biopsychical complexity—for the well-being of the child no less than for the emancipation of the woman—in and through the maternal.

Biology itself is today confronted with maternal eroticism (and thus with psychoanalysis) when it tries to explain certain hormonal upheavals in the pregnant woman, even beginning with her desire to conceive. Could there be a “permeability” between biology and the psyche? While the medical literature points out the abnormally high rates of nonviable pregnancies in diabetic patients, as well as the severe risks to the fetus, isolated clinical experiments report that some diabetics, on an individual basis and with certain types of diabetes, actually improve their glycemic control during pregnancy. Here, then, is a new research question for psychoanalysis: what is the correlation between the intensity of phantasmatic and hallucinatory functions and certain biological changes in the pregnant woman?

Based on conversations with my colleagues and my own clinical and personal experience, I will try to sketch some basic elements of this maternal eroticism, which I will call *reliance*. I hypothesize that reliance is a specific economy of the drives such that, counteracted by psychical representation and thus *fixed* by psychic inscriptions, the energy of the originary split at once sustains and moves through primary and secondary repression. Without thereby displacing those drives into a psychotic regression, maternal eroticism renders the fixation of the life and death drives both problematic and available, and places them together in the service of the living as an “open structure,” related [*reliée*]<sup>5</sup> to others and to the environment. By analyzing maternal eroticism in this way, I can then quickly establish the extreme fragility of this economy and investigate its translatability.

I will be interested in the logics by which reliance functions for the mother (where, it seems to me, psychoanalytic advances have been more tentative), in comparison with the exploration of the child’s transitional object, where the autonomy of the future subject is elaborated.

<sup>5</sup>[Transl.] *Reliance* is a French neologism based on Latin and Old French etymology meaning binding or linking. Kristeva is playing on this etymology to speak of sensorial, physical, or mental links.

## II. LIFE'S "STATE OF EMERGENCY," THE LIBIDO, PRIMARY REPRESSION, AND THE SUBLIMINAL CYCLE

1. By reliance I mean *experience* in the double sense it has in German. Experience (in the sense of *Erlebnis*) is the eruption of a new pre-object: an emergence, a flash, or an immediate perception. Progressively, in its second phase, experience becomes familiarity [*connaissance*], a patient knowledge [*savoir*] that understands (*Erfahrung*). Whether or not the expectant mother is prepared by a desire to conceive, she is immediately gripped by biopsychic events (like pregnancy, labor, and breast-feeding) in such a way that maternal reliance must be understood not only as irreducible to a "symbolic function" (it is definitively social, like the "paternal function"), but also as a *passion*.

Modern biology uses the term *passion* to designate the transformation of *emotions* (attachment or aggression) into *love* and its correlate: *hate*. From a psychoanalytic point of view, we can say that narcissism and/or the object relation, tenderness and depersonalization, even psychic breakdown—all of these indicate that passion is by no means "passive." It actively "suffers" and "endures." Ultimately, passion is integrated into the logics of the unconscious—but it is integrated so as to better puncture [*trouer*] them.<sup>6</sup> Like the "black holes" in modern astrophysical theories of the cosmos, which divide the universe into a *multiverse*, maternal reliance is naturally composed of the void and gravitational collapse of passion. The "I" created in maternal passion from then on becomes a multiverse.

However, this passion is also a *vocation*. Never deprived of significance for the mother as a speaking being, this passion is inscribed in the cultural heritage and in the imaginary and symbolic capacities of each individual mother, capacities that give meaning and significance both to the drives and to the pregnancy that transforms them.

*Passion/vocation.* This biopsychical zone that surrounds maternal reliance defies rationality. It haunts philosophy and literature. Plato alludes to it in the *Timaeus* when he apologizes for using "a kind of bastard reasoning" (52b,e). *Khora*, as he calls it, is a space before space, a nurturer-and-devourer at once, prior to the One, the Father, the word, and even the syllable. It is a modality of *sense* prior to *signification*, what I

<sup>6</sup>The woman is a "hole" [*trou*], *nekèva* in Hebrew. Mary, Queen of the Church, is really a "hole" in the Christian trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Sollers 2001).



call “the semiotic” (Kristeva 1974, pp. 19–106). Colette’s intuition is able to grab hold of the semiotic through the writing of *metaphors* that, charged with sensations and affects, become *metamorphoses*. She therefore “procreates” by writing the flora and the fauna of the country, her mother Sido, and even the *flesh* of the world.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this belonging of the speaking subject to materiality, or this *hatching* [éclosion], as Collette puts it, is not the flash of ecstasy in sexual orgasm, as Andreas-Salomé describes. Rather, the self-exile sketched here is a lasting ex-stasis. It regulates the time of death into a temporality of new beginnings: jubilatory affirmations and anxious annihilations that literally put me beside myself, outside myself, and, without annihilating me, multiply me.

In the face of this multiverse of maternal eroticism as reliance—facing its risks, its endurance, and its creativity—psychoanalysis seems to hesitate. We officially recognize its elements only through concepts that modify a *universal subjectivity* (originally masculine, of course), like narcissism, phallic assumption,<sup>8</sup> masochism, borderline states, psychosis, etc. It is our custom here to collapse *homo sapiens* into its internal double: *homo religiosus*. But when the clinic confronts us with the difficulties and unknown qualities of reliance, do we dare to propose new objects of analysis?

2. Before it becomes a “container” from which *psychic links* are derived (Brusset 2005),<sup>9</sup> maternal eroticism (passion/vocation), with its biopsychical horizon, is a *state*: a “state of emergency in life,” the “*Not des Lebens*” that Heidegger and Lacan talk about. It is a quality of energy always already psychosomatic within the speaking being, expended and recovered in such a way as to maintain the level “necessary for the conservation of life” (Heidegger 1962; Lacan 1959–1960, p. 46; cf. Kristeva 1987, p. 262 n. 10). Called *Das Ding*, the *Thing*, this state would be “foreign,” sometimes hostile (absolutely exterior to the subject), outside of the signified. It is a “gap” between me and the world, subject and object, an intervening space. Neither “I” nor “you,” but “behind us” and

<sup>7</sup>[Transl.] The flesh of the world (*la chair du monde*) is a term developed by Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, to refer to the reversible and reflexive (chiasmic) activity between perception and consciousness that characterizes our position in the world. For further elucidation, see Kristeva (1994, pp. 269–275).

<sup>8</sup>[Transl.] Phallic assumption is the act of identifying with the phallus, especially in its symbolic function.

<sup>9</sup>[Transl.] Brusset’s study is inspired by Fairbairn’s and Winnicott’s concept of the link.

Julia Kristeva

---

“beyond the object,” moving from one “in the direction of”<sup>10</sup> the other, it is an “affective attachment” that the subject experiences as a “primary affect, prior to any repression” (Lacan 1959–1960, p. 54).

Does this experience, accessible through hallucinations and phantasms, place the subject who witnesses it at the dawn of two corollary repressions, the *primal* and the *organic*? The analysand is sometimes led here through an analysis of the early mother-child bond, at which point he becomes psychosomatic by regressing into dependence upon the Thing, from which he must separate: melancholic *jouissance*, on the edge of repression. But what happens if the “I” experiences the Thing-itself, this foreignness, the “primary affect *fixated*” in “*primal repression*,” which moves in the “direction of” another, “secondary” repression, thereby establishing the signifying chain of language? What if the “I” is eclipsed, “is barred” in the “Thing”: what<sup>11</sup> is this woman/mother-subject, who *comes to light* at the frontier of primal repression and enacts her destiny?

With this enigmatic “primal repression,” Freud does more than identify a frontier; he also postulates an originary “split” (1915, p. 150; see also Laplanche and Leclaire 1972), which will later be developed as an anchoring of perception in the symbolic world. I hypothesize that maternal eroticism inhabits this split. Or, rather, it is a victory over the persisting split, which imparts to it this double aspect of “natural folly” and “natural maturity.” How is this possible?

It is possible as a result of the “paternal metaphor” (Lacan’s hypothesis<sup>12</sup>) or the “psychic revolution” of materiality (Freud’s idea, more biological and social). The unconscious, crystallized as it is at the threshold of primal repression, is not yet *verbal*, Freud states, but is composed of elements borrowed from the *imaginary*. Let’s say it conveys some *imagos*, some unconscious *fantasies*, some *complexes* that are capable of being translated into the maternal language, or, quite the opposite, that resist any translation.

<sup>10</sup> [Transl.] Kristeva implicitly refers here to Husserl’s concept of intentionality, the idea that consciousness points at or aims at something. Thoughts and perceptions are always *of* or *in the direction of* something.

<sup>11</sup> [Transl.] In the French original, Kristeva uses the Latin *quid* here to emphasize the obscurity of the line between object and subject in the mother.

<sup>12</sup> [Transl.] Lacan’s concept of the Father is neither the biological nor the oedipal father. It is the metaphoric representation of the Law and the organizer of the Symbolic order that introduces language into psychic life.

Maternal eroticism surfaces in this foreignness, this regression, this “state of emergency in life.” The various logics of maternal reliance, developed over the course of a mother’s life, testify to that eroticism; they reactivate its dynamics and transmit its traces. And what if *this* was it: what if the passionate “desire to conceive” tries (just as the rejection of motherhood refuses) to go beyond settling the score with the mother’s mother, denying castration and capturing the father’s penis (indeed the phallus), all on this side of the mirror stage? The “horizon” of the Thing, in the subject/object interval, evokes what Sophocles, in *Antigone*, calls *Até*<sup>13</sup>: the paradoxical frontier, prior to law, a fascinating and no less agonizing place. It is “agonizing” for a consciousness emerging into the “psychic revolution” of materiality, an agony from which the ego works to hide and defend us. *Até*. For Hegel and Lacan, this is the beginning of ethics (Hegel 1807, pp. 261, 284; Lacan 1959–1960, p. 264).

In another way, the lover’s libido never stops orienting this urgency of life—its discharges, negativities, investments, and subliminal cycles—toward the satisfaction of drives. This libido does not disappear in the mother. If the lover’s libido is lacking in the mother, her maternal eroticism would be merely defensive or operational, and it would result in some deficiencies in the sexualization of the child, including its ability to think. Conversely, when the lover’s libido turns (from *seducer*, to seduce<sup>14</sup>) on the child’s unsatisfied drives, it is *mère-version*<sup>15</sup> (to use Ilse Barande’s expression) that structures the child’s psychic life. But while the lover’s libido is dominated by the satisfaction of drives, maternal eroticism deploys (or “sprouts” [*fait tendre*]) its libidinal force as tenderness. Beyond abjection and separation, tenderness is the basic affect of reliance.

3. *Discharge* is the second component I choose to mention in what I take to be the multiverse of maternal eroticism. It is by discharge (*Ausstossung* and *Verwerfung*, rejection and negativity) that the Thing is

<sup>13</sup> [Transl.] *Até* is the Greek goddess of mischief or reckless conduct, often followed by ruin. In this context, *Antigone*, with her determination to bury her brother against Creon’s decree, represents a place, an “horizon” prior to law (see Kristeva 2010).

<sup>14</sup> [Transl.] Here Kristeva makes a free semantic analogy between the “turn” of the lover/mother’s libido, what she calls *mère-version* (*versio* = turn), and the concept of seduction (from the Latin *sub-ducere*) as being reoriented.

<sup>15</sup> [Transl.] *Mère-version* (*mère* meaning mother) is the French phonetic pun on *père-version* (*père* meaning father).

delivered from its state of Thing-ness and releases another living subject to the world. Freud notices discharges in the development of psychic representation,<sup>16</sup> in the child's acquisition of thought and of language. But it is maternal eroticism that bears the discharges from the beginning, starting with the violence of labor, in which the mother risks her own psychic and physical integrity, as much as that of the child.

4. This violence, which is always biopsychical and instinctual, perpetuates itself in the destiny of the death drive I call *ab-jection*: the inevitable process of fascination-repulsion, where there is not yet either a subject or an object, or even *objeux*<sup>17</sup> (Francis Ponge here anticipates Winnicott), but only "abjects" (Kristeva 1980). The child "loses" me ("kills" me) in order to leave me: Orestes<sup>18</sup> before Oedipus. From my perspective, in order to separate from the child and re-become an "I," I leave him by "abjecting" him. Simultaneously, I abject the Thing into which we were fused, the biopsychical continuum I had become. In order for psychization to be finalized, and for biopsychical negativity to ensure the creation of links, maternal eroticism lets the death drive loose in the vital process, all while binding [*reliant*] the two together: the maternal transforms the abjects (which the death drive has re-jected into the not-yet space of mother-child) into objects of care, into survival, and into life.

Always inside and outside, self and other, neither self nor other, an intervening space, maternal eroticism separates and rejoins [*relie*]: hiatus and junction.<sup>19</sup> Hence we get the "normal maternal madness" (Green 1986, pp. 245–247), but also the maternal influence that constrains the psychic and sexual life of its progenitor and often explodes in hate. There are multiple symptoms that manifest the paroxysmal disasters of this abjection, which is a "normal" psychosexual element of maternal eroticism.

<sup>16</sup>[Transl.] Kristeva refers to the discharge of primary affects that govern the psychical apparatus and are the precursors of thing-presentations and word-presentations in Freud.

<sup>17</sup>[Transl.] Francis Ponge's poetic pun on *ob-jeux/je*.

<sup>18</sup>[Transl.] On the psychoanalytic application of the Greek myth concerning Orestes' murder of his mother, Clytemnestra, see the distinction between Oedipus<sup>1</sup> and Oedipus<sup>2</sup> in Kristeva (1996).

<sup>19</sup>Baudelaire associates the "rotting carcass" with "sensual pleasure," an association of which Jean-Michel Hirt offers an exquisite analysis; Céline is torn between the graceful dancer and his "female companions who squander you *ad infinitum*"; and there are de Kooning's hideous matrons (among so many others) who testify to the same.

5. Is it because maternal eroticism is pregnant with abjection that we do not sufficiently notice its structuring role in the constitution of the ego-ideal? The father of primary identification (*Einführung*) is an ideal imago of the sexual partner, as identified and reconstructed by maternal eroticism—an eroticism that is invested in the sexual partner as the loved/loving father of their child (Kristeva 1983a, p. 24). The future subject's "I" is possible only because this "father in individual prehistory" signifies to me a cathexis/recognition, only if I am reconnected [*relié*] to him through the maternal investment in him.

*Cathexis* (English): *Besetzung* (German), *investissement* (French), and *credit* or *credo* (Latin, from the Sanscrit root *kred-*, *srad*).<sup>20</sup> Through the cathected paternity of a loving father, maternal eroticism *elects* the father of *election*.<sup>21</sup> Because she repeats and repairs the election that her own father has (or has not) signified to her, the maternal Thing adds to its aptitude for abjection a new capacity: that of electing the third for her/their child. It is a vocation or calling, in response to the Other (the father).

6. Overflowing its bounds, often de-subjectivated by the "state of emergency in life," by the labor of abjection, and by the exile in election, reliance is clearly the work of the negative.<sup>22</sup> But it couples with that negativity a *fabulous investment in the state of emergency in life*; it is linked [*relié*] to a cathexis on physical and psychical *survival*, on the *care* of the living and the *concern* for transmission. To put it simply, the negative is at work if and only if its *unbinding* is immediately recathected and reattached [*re-liée*].

This is all to say that maternal eroticism adds to its veiled but natural resemblance to *apoptosis*<sup>23</sup> (and we mustn't forget the masochism to which it so often gives way), a refusal to collapse, a refusal that cannot be reduced to some dubious act of resistance. *Stabat Mater: she holds* (Kristeva 1983b). Let's be careful not to interpret this hold or tenacity as

<sup>20</sup>[Transl.] Kristeva hints at the psychological connection between cathexis and faith. See her lecture "The Forces of Monotheism Confronting the Need to Believe" ([www.kristeva.fr/the\\_forces.html](http://www.kristeva.fr/the_forces.html)).

<sup>21</sup>[Transl.] The root of *election* is the Latin *eligere*, of *ligere*, from which *religere* and *relier* are constructed.

<sup>22</sup>[Transl.] The negative includes the rejection of whatever is intolerable to the ego and refers to the pervasive destructiveness of the death drive, which operates against the backdrop of loss and absence (see Green 1993).

<sup>23</sup>[Transl.] *Apoptosis* is the natural, regulatory death of cells, which shapes or sculpts the living body. It is important that this process begins with life at conception, indicating the originarity of the negative (see Ameisen 2003).

merely a neurotic or even paranoid defense. Just as the “capacity to be alone” (Winnicott 1958) is not only a melancholic indulgence in solitude, but also an aptitude to sublimate loss, a wound, or even narcissistic deficiency, the same is true of maternal eroticism. Its capacity to accompany the living, through the threat of mortality and even death, seems to me an integral part of it. She holds: *Stabat Mater*. A phantasm, but it is erected on a psychic and somatic reality as fragile as it is indelible: maternal *reliance*.

7. There are two factors within maternal intersubjectivity that promote the metabolism of destructive passion through constructive [*reliant*] dispassionateness: first, what I call the “oedipal dyad” (Kristeva 1996, pp. 94–106; 2000) in the woman and, second, the maternal relation to language.

I will not go into the self-analytic or defensive potential of these repetitions and displacements of Oedipus<sup>1</sup> (primary homosexuality with the mother) and Oedipus<sup>2</sup> (access to a paternal third)—a potential that maternal eroticism inscribes and works through together with the loving father, as well as through the primary maternal preoccupation, according to Winnicott. Let’s just say a few words on the subject of the maternal relation to language.

The child’s language learning process involves the mother’s language re-learning process. By speaking the echolalia and the language of her child (and thus rediscovering the instinctual foundations of phonation, as Sabina Spielrein has demonstrated), each mother in her own way undertakes the Proustian search for “lost time.” And, step by step, she resolves the “incongruence” separating affect from cognition—a rift about which the hysteric endlessly complains.

8. A whole subliminal cycle is built on these two pillars: the oedipal dyad and the language learning process, according to which the mother stands out by differentiating herself from the newborn. I would like to compare this cycle (and reliance as well) to the subliminal cycle Freud (1905) observes in the telling and reception of jokes (1905): the pronouncement of “enigmatic signifiers” (Laplanche 1992, 1993), whether verbal or preverbal; the instinctual withdrawal of the mother, who disinvests in her own message but remains attentive to a single response from the child; the “incentives” to experimentation, to “word plays,” to “the right to error.” Ultimately, the mother gains in return, through this circulation (which is doubtless perverse in a certain way), a still greater *jouissance* stemming from the response of the child whom she idealizes and encourages.

9. On the other hand, the failure of dispassionateness replaces reliance with its opposite: possession. Neonaticide and infanticide do not *give* death: they are the work of *possession*. Incapable of giving, the female progenitor who commits these acts has scotomized reliance. She has seized life in order to make it a non-object, outside of time and place, and, in her totalitarian narcissism, has consigned life to its ultimate stage: “dead matter,” “dead nature,” anti-matter; a cadaver or frozen corpse, without a single bond, out of time and out of bounds.

More commonly, when the woman’s libido makes the child the ultimate goal of her drives, maternal reliance devolves into *enthrallment*. Would the mother’s death, therefore, be the only event capable of freeing the son from his incestuous fixation? Or perhaps, through his ultimate debt to maternal seizure, he senses “the right” to die in the guise of recovered freedom (Barthes 2009). On the other hand, the “good enough mother” (Winnicott 1971, p. 13) tries to inscribe mortality itself, her own and that of her children, in reliance. A dramatic reliance results from this, one of birth-rebirth and new beginnings. Colette (1923) describes it in the following way: “In hatching [*éclosion*]. . . . That is where the essential drama of existence is situated, to a far greater degree than in death, which is no more than a banal defeat” (p. 1732).<sup>24</sup>

It therefore seems justified to me to rehabilitate this word: *reliance*, in the back-and-forth between Old French, French, and English. *Reliance*: to link, to gather, to join, to put together; but also to adhere, to belong, to depend on; and therefore to trust, to feel safe, to share your thoughts and feelings, to assemble together, and to be yourself. After showcasing, with Winnicott, the dynamics of separation and the transitional object, it strikes me today as crucial not only to emphasize this specific aspect of motherhood that *maintains* and re-creates both the cathexis and the countercathexis of the libido, together with *thanatos* itself in more and more extensive psychosomatic links, but also to rethink it. This specific eroticism, which *maintains the urgency of life* up to the limits of life, I call *reliance*.

### III. AN UNREPRESENTABLE JOUISSANCE, WHERE VISIBILITY SURFACES

To ask, “How can we represent reliance?” is to ask, “How can we give it a place in the social contract?” Is this a psychoanalytic question? Not really? But still.

<sup>24</sup> [Transl.] This is Jane Marie Todd’s translation of the passage, as it appears in Kristeva (2002).

The eroticism with which this question is concerned, and to which public opinion denies sexual weight in order to retain only an idealized and pathological “love,” has a tenacity so vulnerable that only maximum tact can avoid the two recuperations that disfigure it across human history and from which psychoanalysis is perhaps the only real attempt at escape: *heroization* or *sanctification* and *mère-version*. On the one hand, we have heroization or sanctification, according to which the ancient mother-goddesses from thirty thousand years ago are “statuefied” because *homo sapiens*’ religious feeling demands that he pay his debt and settle the score with maternal eroticism. On the other hand, we have *mère-version*, according to which the mother in orgiastic Taoist rites is left with only one way out: to kill herself.<sup>25</sup>

Is man capable of desanctifying maternal eroticism? Women themselves bask in it, with patent libidinal benefits. Freud heroically ventures there, however, when he writes that the only way for a man to be “freed” from his “respect” for women is to “come to terms with the idea of incest” (1912, p. 186). I would add that, in order to detach oneself from the power of the phantasm, even the phantasm of a maternal sovereignty, it is necessary to go back, through incest, to *the* mirror stage itself.<sup>26</sup> Some risk it nonetheless. Lewis Carroll, for example. But, in order to get to the other side of the mirror, he transforms himself into a little girl, Alice: an aural near-anagram of Lewis—his maternal side? While Céline, brave explorer of a generalized abjection, immolates himself in political compromise and the God-less Apocalypse (Kristeva 1980, pp. 188–206).

Two versions of the maternal today play out the profound logic of maternal eroticism, without sanctifying it while nevertheless imposing it: (1) the Chinese mother’s gesture, in all its childlike freshness, which traces the movement of the flesh toward the image,<sup>27</sup> before and beyond sound, and (2) [the Biblical] Sarah’s laughter. This laughter alters her, shows her to be double: incredulous and/or confident. It keeps her suspended in the gap between believing and not believing. But Sarah,

<sup>25</sup> Bataille’s “My Mother” (1966) is but a distant echo of this figure.

<sup>26</sup> Man stays here religiously, because the fear of narcissistic collapse—an abyssal opening beneath castration anxiety—exercises literally a sovereign hold upon him. See Barthes (2009), entry of June 9, 1978: “To ask for nothing. . . . Nietzsche: not to pray, to bless. Is it not to this that mourning [my mother] should lead?”

<sup>27</sup> [Transl.] For Kristeva, motherhood in Chinese culture is a primary and wordless reliance between everything, one which calligraphy transcribes through a movement of the flesh (sight, movement, gesture, and dance) into image and meaning.



smiling at Isaac (who laughs), dies by taking on herself the death of the boy, who is himself saved because of the same alliance, *Akeda*.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore by fear of what is closest, most fundamental to the self that the maternal, according to Sarah, seals the covenant.

Civilization's discontent today rests in the hands of these two forms of maternal eroticism: the Chinese mother's calligraphic ease, in the globalized context, and the wisdom of Sarah, ready to die for laughing at fertility and immortality. Much as a line from *Antigone* foreshadows both Mary in Michelangelo's *Pietà* and the circle of smiles in da Vinci's *Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*.

#### IV. DETOTALIZED UNIVERSE

The blessedness of Mary, the promise of the nativity, and the maternal *jouissance* captured in the mother of men, all of which suffuse [*imprégnent*] Christendom's aesthetic sublime: have these ultimately vanished, as Max Beckmann's paintings *Birth* (1937) and *Death* (1938) attest?

In the year 1937, Freud had already published *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and Otto Rank *The Trauma of Birth* (1924). Melanie Klein had discovered the depressive position in 1934 and the paranoid-schizoid in 1936. Winnicott had begun his second analysis with Joan Riviere in 1936 and had published his first book, *Clinical Notes on Disorder in Childhood*, in 1931. Around the same time, in 1935, Bion undertook an analysis of Samuel Beckett, which would last only two years. Hearing Jung lecture<sup>29</sup> at the Tavistock Clinic, Beckett realized he had "never properly been born," left Bion (who pressured him to get some distance from his mother), and decided that he was "duty-bound to his mother" and to literature, and thus waited for Godot well into the dustbins of old age.

Today this deconstruction is defused (with Kleinian sociologists and novel-writing mothers). After turning sexuality into our Logos and our God, and converting the paternal Phallus into the guarantee of identity, psychoanalysis today invites us to revitalize our ambitions for freedom in more mobile, more archaic regions, which are nevertheless rich with potential: regions where the One (identity) does not achieve being, or is not content with being simply One.

<sup>28</sup> [Transl.] Here Kristeva uses the Hebrew word *Akeda*, which refers to the alliance or covenant.

<sup>29</sup> [Transl.] Beckett attended Jung's lecture on October 2, 1935, at the Tavistock Clinic (see Jung 1968).

People have thought that women wanted to be free by opting out of motherhood. We now see that women want to be free to decide to be, or not to be, mothers. Many who want to be mothers turn to medically assisted pregnancies, willingly and without reservation: is this because the presubjective form of feminine eroticism familiarizes them with the *self-dispossession* science requires at the most intimate level? To hear or to understand them, we have to find the appropriate balance between being attentive to individual demand, scientific prowess, and a given ethical moment of social tolerance.

By analyzing the history of established religions, Freud identified religious feeling, or the *need to believe*, as a universal element of psychic experience. He did so in order to endlessly deconstruct it through the *desire to know*—even among the “infidels,” as Jean-Michel Hirt analyzes in his trilogy.<sup>30</sup> The reliance specific to maternal eroticism reveals a biopsychical economy that is logically and chronologically prior, just as much as it is universal. Reliance is a distinct dimension of *religere*, which actually rebels against the latter’s laws and powers.

## V. HERETHIC

It is not because the secular world is the only civilization lacking a discourse on the maternal that religions and religious feeling contain the truth or the trace of reliance. These are rather *symptoms of its repression*, which psychoanalysis flushes out in our metaphysical heritage. It falls to us to create new metapsychological concepts in order to develop—by paying attention to the sexuality of the lover—the elucidation and support of maternal eroticism, in all its specificity. Without that, the emancipation of the woman-subject is fated to be only an ideology without ethics.

If love (according to Spinoza) is the intimate side of ethics, maternal eroticism appears to me as a *herethic* of love (Kristeva 1983b, p. 263)—in the sense that, far from being censored, the urgency of *eros* counter-cathects (it is fixated, psychized) on this new other (“my other”): the child. It frees the death drive (unbinding) itself, and gains its libidinal satisfaction only by reconnecting [*relier*] this instinctual disunification with the pleasure of vital care and the subliminal cycle.

“The free woman is just being born,” wrote Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949, p. 723). There will not be a free woman as long

<sup>30</sup>[Transl.] Kristeva refers to Hirt (2003), in which the religious feeling of atheists is studied.

as we lack an ethics of the maternal. But this ethics is just being born; it will be a herethics of reliance.

#### REFERENCES

- ADORNO, T. (1951). *Minima Moralia*, transl. E.F.M. Jephcott. New York: Verso, 2006.
- AMEISEN, J.C. (2003). *La sculpture du vivant, le suicide cellulaire ou la mort créatrice*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, L. (1913a). L'anal et le sexuel. In *L'amour du narcissisme*. Paris: Gallimard. pp. 127–130.
- ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, L. (1913b). *Suivie de journal d'une année, 1912–1913*. In *Correspondance [de Lou Andreas-Salomé] avec Freud, 1912–1936*. Paris: Gallimard, 1970.
- ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, L. (1931). *Lettre ouverte à Freud*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- BARTHES, R. (2009). *Mourning Diary: October 26, 1977–September 15, 1979*, transl. R. Howard. New York: Hill & Wang, 2012.
- BATAILLE, G. (1966). My mother. In *My Mother, Madame Edwarda, and The Dead Man*, transl. A. Wainhouse. London: Marion Boyars Press, 2000, pp. 23–134.
- BEAUVOIR, S. DE (1949). *The Second Sex*, transl. H.M. Parshley. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- BRUSSET, B. (2005). *Psychanalyse du lien*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- COLETTE, S.-G. (1954). 'Message' for *Le blé en herbe*. In *Oeuvres Complètes II*. Paris: Flammarion, 1988.
- FREUD, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams. *Standard Edition* 4/5.
- FREUD, S. (1905). Jokes and their relation to the unconscious. *Standard Edition* 8:9–236.
- FREUD, S. (1911). Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning. *Standard Edition* 12:218–226.
- FREUD, S. (1912). On the universal tendency to debasement in the sphere of love. *Standard Edition* 11:179–190.
- FREUD, S. (1915). Repression. *Standard Edition* 14:146–159.
- FREUD, S. (1923). The ego and the id. *Standard Edition* 19:12–66.
- GREEN, A. (1986). *On Private Madness*. London: Karnac Books, 1997.
- GREEN, A. (1993). *The Work of the Negative*, transl. A. Weller. London: Free Association Books, 1999.
- HEIDEGGER, M. (1962). *What Is a Thing?* transl. W.B. Barton & V. Deutsch. Washington, DC: Gateway Editions, 1968.
- HEGEL, G.F.W. (1807). *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A.V. Miller. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

- HIRT, J.-M. (1998). La 'révolution psychique' de la matière. In *Vestiges de Dieu: Athéisme et religiosité*. Paris: Grasset.
- HIRT, J.-M. (2003). *Les Infidèles, s'aimer soi-même comme un étranger*. Paris: Grasset, 2003.
- JUNG, C.G. (1968). *Analytical Psychology: Its Theory and Practice*. New York: Pantheon.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1974). *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1980). *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1983a). Freud and love: Treatment and its discontents. In *Tales of Love*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, pp. 21–56.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1983b). Stabat mater. In *Tales of Love*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987, pp. 234–264.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1987). *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1994). *Time and Sense*, transl. R. Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1996). *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, transl. J. Herman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2000). *Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, transl. J. Herman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2002). *Colette*, transl. J.M. Todd. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2010). Antigone: Limit and horizon, transl. E. Brians. In *Feminist Readings of Antigone*, ed. F. Söderbäck. New York: SUNY Press, pp. 215–230.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2011). La reliance, ou de l'érotisme maternel. *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* 75:1559–1570.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2013). Métamorphoses de la parentalité. Lecture presented at the 73rd Congrès des psychanalystes de langue française, May 9–12, 2013. [www.kristeva.fr/metamorphoses.html](http://www.kristeva.fr/metamorphoses.html)
- LACAN, J. (1959–1960). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, transl. D. Porter. New York: Norton, 1992.
- LAPLANCHE, J. (1992). The unfinished Copernican revolution, transl. L. Thurston. In *Essays on Otherness*. New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 52–83.
- LAPLANCHE, J. (1993). A short treatise on the unconscious, transl. L. Thurston. In *Essays on Otherness*. New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 84–116.

- LAPLANCHE, J., & LECLAIRE, S. (1999). The unconscious: A psychoanalytic study, transl. L. Thurston and L. Watson. In *The Unconscious and the Id: A Volume of Laplanche's Problématiques*. London: Karnac Books, pp. 224–272.
- MERLEAU-PONTY, M. (1945). *The Phenomenology of Perception*, transl. C. Smith, New York: Routledge, 2006.
- MERLEAU-PONTY, M. (1964). *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. A. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.
- PLATO (1929). *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- RILKE, R.M., & ANDREAS-SALOMÉ, L. (1976). *Correspondance: Rainer Maria Rilke et Lou Andreas-Salomé*. Paris: Gallimard.
- SOLLERS, P. (2001). Le trou de la Vierge. In *Eloge de l'infini*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 921–933.
- WINNICOTT, D.W. (1958). The capacity to be alone. In *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. London: Hogarth Press, 1965, pp. 29–35.
- WINNICOTT, D.W. (1971). *Playing and Reality*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

## THE EMBODIED MOTHER: COMMENTARY ON KRISTEVA

Julia Kristeva is one of the very few psychoanalytic writers who regard the female essence as a central given in any viable theory of mind, not an add-on or “special” topic that can then be set aside to get on with the *real* work of analyzing the mind of the subject.<sup>1</sup> Females (and thus, using this term as meaning specifically the biologically *sexed* body, and thus implicitly the sexed bodies also of males, or in-betweens) are central to life, and the life of the mind. This truth was born into Freud’s original creation of psychoanalysis. Beyond Freud, I myself distinguish sex from gender, the former being biological and the latter being a fluid *mentalized* concept. Judith Butler (1993), say, believes that they are indistinguishable, and that the body’s actual biological sex is entirely animated by sociocultural construction or linguistic interpretation. In psychoanalysis I do believe that we are searching for the freedom to examine a maximal fluidity of human behavior and psychic capacity, but while recognizing the limits of our physicality—which can of course be radically altered, but only by external physical means. The work of the imagination, however, is boundless and far outranges anyone’s biological body.

We have strayed far from the centrality of libido in many of our newer theories. Not so Kristeva. She uses “motherhood” here to set ablaze its eroticism, and she complains (as do I) about modern theory’s preoccupation with the individual’s object relations, a focus so exclusive that often the body is forgotten (Balsam 2012). In her work Kristeva characteristically maintains a dialogue with Freud. She has broken the

<sup>1</sup>This is the first issue of *JAPA* under its new editor, Bonnie Litowitz, and the first time a woman has been at the helm. I greatly welcome her interest in this important paper of Julia Kristeva, as a vital topic for our attention and discussion.

Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, Yale Medical School; Training and Supervising Analyst, Western New England Institute for Psychoanalysis; Fellow, Royal College of Psychiatrists (London).

bonds of allegiance to her teacher, Lacan, if only by the sheer volume of words she has poured forth into her passion for expressing the intensity of female experience qua female. This is challenging to his theoretical dictum “la femme n’existe pas.”<sup>2</sup>

In addition to her knowledge of psychoanalysis, Kristeva is proficient in many European languages and has expertise in linguistics, literary theory and criticism, religion, and politico-cultural analysis, as well as philosophy, art, and history. Thus, her sensibility on the topic of “maternal eroticism” is far too worldly, unbounded, and intellectually and emotionally appetitive to confine itself to the abiding psychoanalytic apology (frequently implicit and, likely, still unconsciously phallogocentric) for women’s experience and their bodies.

Kristeva sings a hymn to the loving ferocity of life. Her mind refuses neat compartmentalizations. Reading her texts is not always easy, for her style can be turgid, obscure, gnomic, and, above all, privately, leapingly associative. She has said that she is not attempting, however, to create a special new “female” language to express things female<sup>3</sup> (the *écriture féminine* suggested by French feminist critics such as Cixous [1975] or Irigaray [1974], in protest of phallogocentrism). The music of Kristeva’s language, even in translation from the French—and I believe Rachel Widawsky and Perry Zurn have done a beautiful job of aiding its communication into English here—the rhythm, flow, eddy, and plunge of her pen’s output is compelling.<sup>4</sup> Kristeva is an excited and excitable writer who gets into my brain and under my skin, and makes me feel both “understood” but at the same time frustrated and wanting more.<sup>5</sup> In tonality it is not unlike what apparently Lacan aimed for, as described by Bailly (2009): “Lacan’s mode of communication was effective for his audience because it employed the device of ‘realization’: just as in analysis, an individual has to arrive at a realization by him/herself, and that realization has a force far greater than if it was received as ‘information’ from another party. Lacan led his audience, sometimes by provocation,

<sup>2</sup>This dictum refers, I think, to his reading of the unconscious at work in shaping the linguistic rules of significance of the phallic “I.”

<sup>3</sup>*Écriture féminine* privileges use of a language that almost mimics body experience, and employs a nonlinear, cyclical writing that is supposed to escape discourses ruled by phallogocentricity (Cixous 1975).

<sup>4</sup>When she lectures in person, one emerges enthusiastic, feeling that one knows more. In specifics, later, I confess that one can be left questioning.

<sup>5</sup>This experience is not unlike listening to Jacques Lacan, whom I had the good fortune to hear during his 1975 visit to Yale University.

sometimes by fuzziness, to think along a certain path till they reached of their own accord the conclusion he wished to bring them to" (p. 16).

In many of Kristeva's writings, as in this current paper, maternity has been an elemental aspect of femaleness: the archaic mother, the mother of sorrows, the Virgin, the mother of horror; the mother of *jouissance*, the mother of black depression; the mother of courage (mothers of the handicapped); the childless would-be and would-not-be mother. Whatever the outcome of inhabiting that female body, she seems to acknowledge, having a child or not will preoccupy a woman unconsciously, if not consciously. It is invaluable that she centers on the power and experience of woman herself, as influencing the duo, more than on the baby.

Kristeva's use of instinct theory is close to Hans Loewald's development of Freud's ideas.<sup>6</sup> For example, Loewald holds that instinct "is a force within or of the psychic apparatus; a force which represents stimuli originating in the body in a . . . (psychical) form. . . . [Instincts] act as dynamic forces of the mind and not *upon* it from the outside. . . . [Thus] mental . . . representatives of a lower order can be re-represented—not necessarily in the form of ideas—on higher mental levels. This is implied when . . . Freud speaks of thing presentations and word presentations and of the hypercathexis of the former by the latter (1915, p. 201)" (Loewald 1971, p. 117). Kristeva similarly weaves together body and mind. Like Loewald, she holds mother and baby, their bodies and psyches, in one cradle. This is where the mutuality of erotics springs to life. "It is a 'gap' between me and the world, subject and object, an intervening space [entre-deux]. Neither 'I' nor 'you,' but 'behind us' and 'beyond the object,' moving from one 'in the direction of the other,' it is an 'affective attachment' that the subject experiences as a 'primary affect, prior to any repression' (Lacan . . .)" (pp. 73–74). Kristeva hypothesizes that "the maternal eroticism inhabits this split" (p. 74), which is a kind of crossroads between the "thing" aspect of what is abject, needs to be extruded, and the dawning of the separated object and identity, where erotics marks a triumph over the split—a Lacanian paternal metaphor, "a 'psychic revolution' of materiality (Freud's idea, more biological and social)" (p. 74).

In a 2005 piece that is more conventionally lucid than her customary writing, Kristeva says: "After Freud and with Lacan, psychoanalysis has

<sup>6</sup>Kristeva, like many European analysts, seems unaware of Loewald's work.



largely been preoccupied with the ‘paternal function’—its need, its failures, its substitutes and so on and so forth. Philosophers and psychoanalysts seem less inspired by the ‘maternal function’, perhaps because it is not a function but more precisely, a *passion*. The term ‘a good enough mother’, coined by Winnicott, who took this theme further than Freud, nevertheless runs the risk of playing down the passionate violence of the maternal experience” (Kristeva 2005). For me, bodily “function” is enmeshed with passion (Loewald 1960, 1971). As Kristeva actually seems to assume, in spite of distancing herself from the idea of “function,” that “the maternal” encodes the physical use of the body in conception, pregnancy, and birthing, she thus logically situates herself fundamentally in the anatomical and physiological equipment’s “function”—with all its mentalized elements alight and its physical and emotional participation in both tenderness and violence. (For example, the hormone oxytocin flows to afford bonding and tenderness, while, for example, the vagina may be ripped open violently as the baby’s head appears.) Emotions are integral to every aspect of corporal functionality. I applaud Kristeva’s ownership of maternal “passion” in the fullest sense of this word. Since her first publications, she has been writing about it one way or another.

I believe that it is new here for Kristeva specifically to use the word “eroticism” together with “maternal.” It is a particular variety of her more generically familiar use of the word “passion.” A previous mention of eroticism, for example, occurs in her depiction of the Virgin Mother, where “orality . . . is displayed in the area of the breast, while the spasm at *the slipping away of eroticism* is translated into tears . . .” (Kristeva 1983, p. 249). But in this present development of the psychic integration of motherhood, *erotics* does not slip away. She connects this up with another recent concept, that of “reliance.” This is Kristeva’s way of keeping the mother’s eroticism still closely knit into mutual dependency in the service of her procreation and her vibrant, interactively communicative, *sexually stimulating* care of the infant. These ideas are in tune with aspects of Deutsch (1944, 1945), Loewald (1960), Laplanche (2007), Stein (2008),<sup>7</sup> and Hilferding—so long ago, in her presentation to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1911 (see Balsam 2003). How strange

<sup>7</sup>Laplanche (2007) wrote of the normative seduction of infants by their parents’ sexuality. Stein (2008) talked of the enigmatic “excess” and interactive element in sexuality.

it is that the woman's power in this state of inhabiting femaleness, often transformative in many ways that abide long after the birth of a child and early caregiving, is largely ignored in our field! It is rarely mentioned in psychoanalytic texts, unless a woman patient is talking of being pregnant in-the-moment. Kristeva recovers this state for our rapt attention. In a textual repetition of an ever deepening phrase, she declares active procreation a "State of Emergency" in large capital letters, in a heading (p. 72). Two pages later, the phrase expands to "a state of emergency in life." By page 77 it thunders into italics for emphasis: a "*fabulous investment in the state of emergency in life*; it is linked [*relié*] to a cathexis on physical and psychical *survival*, on the *care* of the living and the *concern* for transmission." This crescendo echoes Kristeva's exquisite sensitivity to the semiotics (more below) of the pregnant woman.

Perhaps the general erasure of these states of being, as manifest in our literature, reflects an out-of-touchness with this special human tonality that Kristeva detects in communication and calls "the semiotic"—a level of linguistic code deeply embedded in the brain and mind, preverbal and embodied from the acoustic rhythms of mother-child interactions from within the body and surrounding the cradle. We are often deaf to this music and to Kristeva's intuition of this quality of translated imagery in our language. She believes that these sound patterns become part of the communicativeness of humans, and inform and transform more integrated and sophisticated sounds and meanings. (Signification, in contrast to semiotics, essentially carries the meanings that are transmitted by way of these sounds and ascribed to environmental referents.) Listen to an analytic writer who *is* tuned in to the topic, if in a more modestly poetic way than Kristeva. And not that Marion Milner is claiming—as do Kristeva and a few other theory builders—any commonality of this experience beyond the personally unique: "when the pains of labour were beginning, I had at first been rather frightened, but then had plunged deliberately into a lower darker level of awareness, dimly feeling myself part of a dark swirling current, sinking down into my body, with half thoughts of dark earth and bursting seeds, the bark of trees, the strains of rising sap. I had gone to sleep thinking of the hot smell of mud by the river where cows have trodden, muddy water seeping into each hoof-mark, and the smell of trampled reeds. With the next spasm of pain had come the smell of wet charlock fields, deep lanes in chalk country, wet fields and beeches on the downs blown with a wet wind. . . . imagined

smells . . . became absorbing, whereas at ordinary times I found the memory of smells very hard to recall” (Milner 1937, pp. 18–19).

My own Irish American patient’s account (“the mother as a speaking being” [Kristeva, p. 72]) also joins in this commonality of Kristeva’s semiotic—rhythms of the body within the imagery drawn from earth and sea, verbally rendered in resonance also with the mother’s internalized mother’s voice: “my patient gave birth that night while in a drugged haze, reliving in a slightly stuporous state the lives of the fishermen in their currachs, going to sea herself in that storm, feeling the disequilibrium of crashing with the waves, and letting go as the surf trailed up the granite chips of the shore, letting the forces of nature take her over and trusting to her curragh bark. And through it . . . she heard her mother Maggie’s voice when the heavy fishing net was finally recovered and the powerful tide went out over the sand: “Och now sure, sure we’re all right, after all” (Balsam 2013b, p. 467).

Kristeva is well known for three concepts, two of which are particularly relevant here. Besides *semiotics*, there is “the *abject*.”<sup>8</sup> Kristeva uses the term to designate a universal human fascination with states of horror and all things disgusting, leading her to locate this interest necessarily in the mother’s body (a situation that I insist be also considered *biologically* “functional,” to keep a basic attunement with Kristeva’s own apt and earthy sensibility, which is an integral part of her brilliant psychoanalytic expressive theorizing). Here she has quoted Lou Andreas-Salomé’s vision and plea to keep Freud and Rilke grounded in the origins of eros: “sexuality . . . is ‘what ruptures the limits of our ego’ . . . ‘reestablishes . . . contact with our original, fleshly existence’ (Andreas-Salomé 1931, p. 97), and reconnects us to our own ‘materiality,’ rather than ‘distinguishing’ us from it” (Kristeva, p. 70). Kristeva reminds us that Andreas-Salomé enjoins us to “reach out into space . . . and into our very bodies with confidence” (p. 70). She notes, but does not bother to argue with, the disappearance in modern psychoanalysis of any interest in such relational elements—she simply asserts for psychoanalysis elements of Freud’s early originality that she has brought forward into new levels of integration that grasp the significance of the female body, qua female, in the foundational implications of the psyche.

<sup>8</sup>Intertextuality is the third, which she exercises in this paper with multiple cross-disciplinary references, from Merleau-Ponty to Colette.

The field of psychoanalysis following Freud and following his death has, of course, been the scene of a pitched battle for the primacy of the oedipus complex, as that myth's understanding carried the core values of patriarchy (e.g., Rudnytsky 1987; Makari 2008). Analysts centrally interested in the female, and in maternal essences (e.g., Jung, Hilferding, Horney, Klein, and Rank), were extruded from the system for many, many years. A few writers in the last century were able to see mothers and their subjectivity as distinct from the commonly studied "mother-and-baby" unit. Helene Deutsch (1944, 1945) did in her clinical studies, although the flagrant biological essentialism in her proposed metapsychology of "female" narcissism and masochism left much to be desired. There are still, though, but a handful of writers who actually see females qua female as central to the mind's work. In Argentina the late Marie Langer (1951) also did, by stressing "sexuality" alongside "motherhood" in her thinking. In the anglophone world, the late Denora Pines (1993) did, as also Joan Raphael-Leff (1993)<sup>9</sup> of the British middle group. I would like to ally myself with this list. The general topic of sex and gender (which also keeps central and illuminates female mental life) is represented mostly by North Americans such as Nancy Chodorow and Adrienne Harris. Melanie Klein's work now has been rehabilitated in the United States and throughout the psychoanalytic world, and thus also her once controversial attitude of theoretical equality regarding sexed bodies. Unfortunately, however, her current followers are not these days' much interested in sex or gender per se. Horney's work continues to develop, and in more general directions; Bowlby's inheritors, the attachment theorists, never particularly interested in sexuality, have only very lately noted the precipitous general falling off of interest in sexuality in psychoanalysis, and have begun to pay attention (Fonagy 2008). The relational school, influenced heavily by postmodernism, has contributed most of all to an awareness of sex and gender in the U.S. (see the journal *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, founded in 2000), but some of their feminist deconstructive efforts to delete bias, alas, involve radically overthrowing biological dichotomies (as they are perceived as indistinguishable from problematic psychological dichotomies), for which, after Foucault, they blame medical science. These efforts have inadvertently created a new

<sup>9</sup>In 1998 Raphael-Leff founded COWAP, a committee of the International Psychoanalytical Association whose charge it is to pursue the study of females. Many books on these topics have appeared over the years and the work is ongoing.

problem of neglect of the material body as a functioning entity. Biology has been treated as a contaminant of psychology in the postmodern era, inadvertently driving a repetition once more of the old Cartesian dichotomy between mind and body.<sup>10</sup> Kristeva, postmodern poststructuralist thinker though she is, does not seem to bother with this fight but, refreshingly, moves effortlessly straight from Freud's sense of biological instinct as representable in the mind, to dwell in the lived moment of the psyche's occupation of the body.

Kristeva in this paper tackles the erotics of maternal existence by startling us. How taboo the notion of a mother driven by erotic aims is, she says (p. 69)—as taboo as childhood sexuality once was! We thus are drawn right back to our familiarity with Freud's earliest struggles in fin de siècle Western society. We can now imagine the massive resistance we are up against with this topic. We can see that for Kristeva the common erasure and exclusion of fecund femaleness of the woman's body comes as no surprise. The theory of abjection explains it. The abject concerns disgusting and horrific materials—what is rejected by or disturbs social reason. Kristeva coined the word to conjure up an existence somewhere between an object and a subject, representing unmentionable elements of the self that are vigorously to be kept subliminal (Kristeva 1980). Kristeva writes that the abject is situated outside the symbolic order of civilization. Being forced to face it is therefore an inherently traumatic experience. She invokes the repulsion in confronting filth, waste, or a corpse: “the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses” (p. 2). “It is death infecting life. Abject” (p. 4). Thus the sense of the abject complements, for her, the existence of the superego, the representative of culture, of the symbolic order, as in Kristeva's aphorism, “To each ego its object, to each superego its abject” (1980, p. 2).

It becomes clearer, if we delve into Kristeva, how the body of pregnancy and birthing and mothering, with all its erotic ties to the infant, is

<sup>10</sup>Neither Therese Benedek's pioneering “Parenthood as a Developmental Phase” (1959) nor Daniel Stern's *The Motherhood Constellation* (1995) can be included here because in these works the female body qua body is silenced by conceptually overemphasizing its “results,” that is, the offspring. Thus birth itself gets very little special emphasis and is hardly distinguished from “becoming a mother” (in contrast to Kristeva's accounts, which vitally include the woman's inner experience of her body). These works, important though they are, describe simply one phase in a woman's life cycle.

vital. But it is simultaneously problematic for its evocation of powerful elements of the abject. She might suggest that the mission to bring this forward into consciousness could retraumatize the subject and the listener, and create further neglect and ignorance of the experience of maternal embodiment, which seems to have come about over the years of psychoanalysis. Consider that in 1911 the first female admitted to the Vienna Psychoanalytic society, Margarete Hilferding,<sup>11</sup> stated to a highly resistant male audience that “it is by way of the physical involvement between mother and child that love is called forth” and that “certain changes in the mother’s sexual life are brought on through the child” (Nunberg and Federn 1974, p. 114). There “exist between mother and child certain sexual relationships which must be capable of further development” (p. 115). Hilferding suggests that fetal movements awaken the mother’s love and pleasure, and that these may be sexual. The loss of bodily pleasure because of the baby’s birth may cause aversion to set in: “It can be said that the infant’s sexual sensations must lend a correlate in corresponding sensations in the mother” (p. 115). Hilferding generalizes: “If we assume an oedipal complex in the child, it lends its origin in sexual excitation by way of the mother, the prerequisite for which is an equally erotic feeling on the mother’s part” (p. 115; see Balsam 2013a). *None* of these elements was easily assimilated into the theories of our field.

Kristeva brings no comfort about the project of helping our profession (re)member the female body! (Balsam 2013b). We *must* abject the maternal, Kristeva says, the object which has created us, in order to construct an identity. The power of Kristeva’s present thesis that includes eroticism is that it lifts us beyond “abjection” to incorporate a maturely honed aspect of female sexuality into theory and experience, driving the mother through her experience of the creation of life in her belly to her emergent identity that encompasses the live baby. The abject proceeds from “Thing” status—together with its abjected placental parasitic invasion of the female body—into a semiotic universe of life out of death, to the “one” within the “One.” Kristeva creates in words the drama of potentially deadly forces pulled forward into life. The separation of birth is also the propulsion of a life. This is reminiscent too of Sabina

<sup>11</sup> Being a follower of Adler, Hilferding left the society when he was extruded by Freud in 1912. How much Freud’s society missed out on in her well-grounded views about women, ideas gleaned from observations in her medical practice.

Spielrein<sup>12</sup> (Balsam in press), another early member of the Vienna Society, whose first lecture before it, in 1911, was heavily influenced by and attuned to Jung. Titled “On Transformation,” it was a shortened version of her long paper “Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being” (Nunberg and Federn 1974). This was the paper that referred to a death desire, which Freud later cited in his work on the death instinct. Kristeva writes: “The child ‘loses’ me (‘kills’ me) in order to leave me. . . . From my perspective, in order to separate from the child and re-become an ‘I,’ I leave him. . . . I abject the Thing into which we were fused. . . . In order for . . . biopsychical negativity to ensure the creation of links, maternal eroticism lets the death drive loose in the vital process, all while binding [*reliant*] the two together: the maternal transforms the abjects (which the death drive has re-rejected into the not-yet space of mother-child) into objects of care, into survival, and into life” (p. 76).

I recommend watching the short film written by Kristeva to accompany the online French text of “Reliance” (Kristeva 2011). The opening scene shows the actual birth of a baby. We are immediately situated in maternalization of the semiotic *Khora*—a word in ancient Greek that for her means the earliest stage of psychosexual development of the senses, and that encodes the mother as she is (and has been) possessed by the fetus. Kristeva (2006) has said of herself, in an interview with John Sutherland of *The Guardian*, “I belong to the tendency, or school, in French philosophy which developed in the 60s, in which conceptual work is deeply involved with the personal and in which notions, or ideas, are sutured by style. There is a lot of imagination, rhetorical figures, subjective expressions and so on that often bother the so-called Anglo-Saxon reader because they consider this French ‘stuff’—theory—to be somehow indigestible.” Nowhere may this be more likely to be the response of some readers than the following excerpt from an essay in her *Tales of Love* (1983). It is called “Stabat Mater,” and I like it very much—even if I do value Anglo-Saxon clarity of writing! I believe it brings the erotic, maternal, semiotic archaic music into the “speaking

<sup>12</sup>Spielrein’s question in her longer essay was why, so often, the positive forces of sexual connection are repressed, and only its destructiveness seen in consciousness. The short excerpt delivered in Vienna took up some aspects of this problem. As Kerr’s account (1993) has shown, Jung’s and Spielrein’s work had been entirely enmeshed. Both writers were fascinated with life and death and what a contemporary analyst might call sublimation. Both valued sacrifice as a form of transcendence, and they shared a culture of symbols and mythology.

mother's" birthing experience—ultimate *jouissance*. Running down the margins of this essay is a seamless, breathless prose poem, printed in boldface, that is reminiscent for me of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in Joyce's *Ulysess*. The reader may be aware that the "Stabat Mater" is a thirteenth-century Latin hymn to the Virgin, "Stabat Mater Dolorosa": the Mother of Sorrows stands by her dying son mourning. Remember that Kristeva grew up in Bulgaria in the Greek Orthodox Church and she says her early experience of masses were formative in her theorizing "the semiotic." Here are two verses:

Savior, when my life shall leave me,  
Through your mother's prayers receive me  
With the fruits of victory.

Let me, to my latest breath,  
In my body bear the death  
Of your dying Son divine.

Kristeva (1983) asserts in her essay that the mother "stands," by which I think she means the woman is stalwart and unwavering in her task of birthing, in her triumphant, joyful, painful, and joyfully painful entry to motherhood. She says of the Virgin Mother, "This . . . [*consecrated*] motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory: . . . it involves . . . an idealization of primary narcissism" (p. 245).

The prose poem alongside the essay shows how very personal her "semiotic" communication is, how it sweeps the reader into the physically mental process and struggle of the experience of bringing life into the world. To conclude, I want to leave you with Kristeva's own words: Nothing is directly said in the following excerpt about "eroticism" or "reliance," but the following phrases, printed boldface in the original, are integral to the basis of this aspect of maternity:

Scent of milk, dewed greenery, acid and clear, recall of wind, air, seaweed . . . it slides under the skin . . . detaches skin from bones, inflates me like an ozone balloon, and I hover with feet planted firmly on the ground . . . to carry him, sure, stable, ineradicable, while he dances in my neck, flutters with my hair . . . slips on the breast, swingles, silver blossom of my belly and finally flies away on my navel in his dream carried by my hands. My son . . .

. . . smiles in the blackness of dreams, at night, opaque joy that roots me in her bed, my mother's, and projects him, a son, a butterfly soaking up dew from her hand, there, nearby in the night. Alone: she, I, and he.



. . . Forgetfulness . . . Like the fog the devours the park, wolfs down the branches, erases the green . . . and mists up my eyes.

Who calls this pleasure *jouissance*? It is the pleasure of the damned. . . motherhood destines us to demented *jouissance*, that is answered, by chance, by the nursling's laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean. . . it is a music from which so-called civility tears away suddenly through violence. . . .

Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH [pp. 235–263].

One can hear the yearning tonalities of the later, explicitly theorized eroticism, and at times fierce longing and possession of the erotics of the child and with the mother's mother in this poem that accompanies Kristeva's text on the cult of the Virgin Mother. The eroticism of Kristeva's "reliance" had yet to break forth in its fullness, as it does in the paper under discussion, emerging to be expressed, for her, within the moral ethic of "une hérétique de l'amour" (Kristeva 1977).

Kristeva is outstanding among writers in her attention to the sweeping power of femaleness—Sutherland (2006) quotes her expressing her desire (proven successful) to be "synthetic"—and her forceful focus on the embodied mother and full-bodied motherhood, a focus nowhere duplicated in our field. It behooves us to learn—as we are able—from her work.

#### REFERENCES

- BAILLY, L. (2009). *Lacan: A Beginner's Guide*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- BALSAM, R.H. (2003). Women of the Wednesday Society: The presentations of Drs. Hilferding, Spielrein, and Hug-Hellmuth. *American Imago* 60:303–342.
- BALSAM, R.M. (2012). *Women's Bodies in Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge.
- BALSAM, R.H. (2013a). Freud, females, childbirth, and dissidence: Margarete Hilferding, Karen Horney, and Otto Rank. *Psychoanalytic Review* 100: 695–716.
- BALSAM, R.H. (2013b). (Re)membering the female body in psychoanalysis: Childbirth. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 61:447–470.
- BALSAM, R.H. (in press). Sabina Spielrein, muse or nemesis? In *Sabina Spielrein: Forgotten Pioneer of Psychoanalysis*, ed. C. Covington & B. Wharton. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.

- BENEDEK, T. (1959). Parenthood as a developmental phase: A contribution to the libido theory. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7:389–417.
- BUTLER, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* London: Routledge.
- CIXOUS, H. (1975). The laugh of the Medusa. In *New French Feminisms*, ed. E. Marks & I. de Courtivron. New York: Schocken, 1981, pp. 245–256.
- DEUTSCH, H. (1944). *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation. Vol. 1. Girlhood.* New York: Grune & Stratton.
- DEUTSCH, H. (1945). *The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation. Vol 2. Motherhood.* New York: Grune & Stratton.
- FONAGY, P. (2008). A genuinely developmental theory of sexual enjoyment and its implications for psychoanalytic technique. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 56:11–36.
- FREUD, S. (1915). Repression. *Standard Edition* 14:146–158.
- IRIGARAY, L. (1974). *Speculum of the Other Woman*, transl. G.C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- KERR, J. (1993). *A Most Dangerous Method: The Story of Jung, Freud, and Sabina Spielrein.* New York: Knopf.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1977). Hérétique de l'amour. *Tel Quel* 74:30–49.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1980). *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1983). Stabat mater. In *Tales of Love*, transl. L.S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2005). Motherhood today. Available from <http://www.kristeva.fr/motherhood.html>
- KRISTEVA, J. (2006). Interview with John Sutherland. *The Guardian*, March 14.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2011). La reliance, ou de l'érotisme maternel. Available from <http://www.kristeva.fr/reliance.html>
- LANGER, M. (1951). *Motherhood and Sexuality.* New York: Other Press, 2000.
- LAPLANCHE, J. (2007). *Freud and the Sexual: Essays 2000–2006*, transl. J. Fletcher, J. House, & N. Ray. New York: International Psychoanalytic Books, 2011.
- LOEWALD, H.W. (1960). On the therapeutic action of psychoanalysis. In *Papers on Psychoanalysis.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. 221–256.
- LOEWALD, H.W. (1971). On motivation and instinct theory. In *Papers on Psychoanalysis.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, pp. 102–137.
- MAKARI, G. (2008). *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis.* New York: HarperCollins.

- MILNER, M. (1937). *An Experiment in Leisure*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- NUNBERG, H., & FEDERN, E., EDS. (1974). *Minutes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society: Vol. 3. 1910–1912*, transl. M. Nunberg & H. Collins. New York: International Universities Press.
- PINES, D. (1993). *A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- RAPHAEL-LEFF, J. (1993). *Pregnancy: The Inside Story*. London: Sheldon Press.
- RUDNYTSKY, P.L. (1987). *Freud and Oedipus*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- STEIN, R. (2008). The otherness of sexuality: Excess. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 56:43–71.
- STERN, D.N. (1995). *The Motherhood Constellation: A Unified View of Parent-Infant Psychotherapy*. London: Karnac Books, 1998.

64 Trumbull Street  
New Haven, CT 06510  
E-mail: [rosemary.balsam@yale.edu](mailto:rosemary.balsam@yale.edu)

## MATERNAL RELIANCE: COMMENTARY ON KRISTEVA

In “Reliance, or Maternal Eroticism,” Julia Kristeva conveys, as throughout her work on the maternal, a persistent desire to speak from a forbidden place (an “outlaw” place), at least within the context of normative psychoanalytic theory. With hints of the alchemical, she mixes a deeply scholarly sensibility with wisdom, sobriety, and passion. In my remarks I will situate her work within the basic Lacanian categories—especially the *symbolic* and the *real*—because it is within this psychoanalytic context that Kristeva’s project emerges. Kristeva, with only symbolic tools at her disposal, seeks the *real*, which she associates with the feminine, the maternal. By way of Freud and Lacan and the specimen dream of psychoanalysis, the dream of Irma’s injection, I’ll consider why the *real* and the *feminine* as forbidden object are so intimately linked. Next I’ll discuss (all too briefly) Kristeva’s picture of *maternal passion*, not only in relation to the *real*, but also in connection with contemporary ideas about maternal capacities such as holding and containing. Maternal passion involves an ethical position, what Kristeva calls *herethics*. This heretical position has direct implications for the analyst as a subject of responsibility. I conclude with a postscript that is meant to be more allusive than assertive, more provocative than definitive.

For French analysts especially, and many Freudians more generally, the structuration of the mind, family, and society-writ-large rests on the father’s role, on what is typically called the *paternal function*. The mother, as French analysts like to emphasize, already instantiates thirdness via identification with the “father of individual prehistory” (Aisenstein 2012). Thirdness evolves as the mother-infant dyad is gradually triangulated by the father. This triangulation, instituted by the prohibition of incest (the father’s “no”) is, of course, the oedipal situation. Thus, the mother as primary, primitive object is forbidden. It is important to appreciate that the oedipal situation is symbolically structured. Freud’s story of

---

Faculty, San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis.

the fort/da game is exemplary in this regard. Freud's grandson symbolizes his mother's absence through play, and by means of language: "fort"—"da."

The oedipus complex is fundamentally paternal, because the Father's Law establishes difference—sexual, generational, linguistic, and cultural.<sup>1</sup> Desire, based on difference, loss, and lack, circulates within these nested structures. Again, one must remember this basic paternal aegis: the name/law of the father structures Western society.<sup>2</sup>

This is the standard Freudian/Lacanian narrative regarding the emergence of subjectivity and the psyche. Kristeva is interested in the very beginnings of this emergence, in experience logically prior to the structuring of the mind (id/ego/superego) and the structuring of subjectivity (real/imaginary/symbolic).<sup>3</sup> As Kristeva writes here, hers is an exploration into "pre-object" relations (p. 72), the place of an "eruption," "a flash" (p. 72) that begins "a gradual differentiation between materiality and psychization" (p. 69). That Kristeva is interested in describing and theorizing an origin is audacious, because this origin, in fact, cannot be named, as it is beyond, or behind, or before the paternal aegis of the symbolic order.<sup>4</sup> Kristeva argues that if the mother cannot know this place directly, she can sense it, from the inside, by her maternal experience. This place can be invoked by speech that partakes of the libidinal, an amorous discourse that taps into "the sensory substratum of language as a relay between signs and drives (Kristeva 2007, p. 425). Hitherto forbidden territory can be given voice.

This territory is basic to the deep structure of psychoanalytic theory. It cannot be emphasized enough that Kristeva's work, though redolent of all the markings of "high theory," gives the lie to the facile distinction between "abstract theory" and "clinical experience," or as, Lacan says in his *Ethics* seminar (1959–1960), "The fallacious opposition between

<sup>1</sup>The father is "agent of the law and of the forbidden" (Kristeva 2009, p. 58).

<sup>2</sup>"What does Freud say? Societies are founded on the *incest prohibition* . . . and on the *murder of the father*" (Kristeva 2009, p. 56).

<sup>3</sup>Let us note that this is arguably an impossible task. Derrida (1967), for example, argued that the origin within any structured system is "under erasure," always already "deferred," simultaneously marked and obscured by the "trace." Kristeva (1974) offers an extensive critique of Derridean deconstruction in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

<sup>4</sup>This is why Kristeva writes: "To ask, 'How can we represent reliance?' is to ask, 'How can we give it a place in the social contract?' Is this a psychoanalytic question? Not really? But still" (p. 79).

what is called concrete and what is called figurative" (p. 120). In Kristeva's hands theory is as indelible as personal style—passionate, embodied, thoroughly grounded. Kristeva does this better than most: writing theory from that place of the flesh.

### THE DREAM OF IRMA'S INJECTION

Lacan's gloss on the specimen dream of psychoanalysis, "the dream of Irma's injection" (Freud 1900, pp. 96–122), nicely illustrates the categories of the *symbolic* and the *real*.<sup>5</sup> The *real* (to be distinguished from commonsense reality) is that which in human experience resists symbolization.<sup>6</sup> Trauma is the most common example of the *real*, because trauma, by its very nature, evokes both awe and terror, overwhelms the ego, and resists metabolization in thought. Less commonly appreciated forms of the *real* include the *jouissance* of the symptom (its pleasurable misery), and the aesthetic/sublime. In other words, the *real* involves any libidinally invested experience that extends beyond the pleasure principle and traffics in the death drive. The Irma dream also stages political and disciplinary dynamics: the urgent male gaze into the opaque (or is it recalcitrant?) female body. This political aspect is no less important than the theoretical stakes involved. For Kristeva it is a question of what can be spoken, by whom, and from what place such speech can emerge.

In the specimen dream, Freud seeks out Irma at once, "as though to answer her letter and to reproach her for not having accepted my 'solution' yet. I said to her: 'If you still get pains, it's really only your fault'. . . . I took her to the window and looked down her throat, and she showed signs of recalcitrance. . . . I found a big white patch; at another place I saw extensive whitish-grey scabs . . ." (p. 107).

Let's imagine the scene, and block the actors in it: an anxious Freud seeks out his ailing and recalcitrant patient, a young woman of childbearing age, and takes her to the corner of the room. Worried and guilt-ridden (as he is surrounded by colleagues and guests), he remonstrates with her. Then he asks her to open her mouth and examines her. Freud, the master, the scientist, the healer, is outside looking in, and while peering in he experiences a version of horror.

<sup>5</sup>Of course Lacan spends much time on the category of the *imaginary* as well, but I will not be focusing on this aspect here.

<sup>6</sup>In another psychoanalytic idiom, Bion's concepts of beta elements and, later in his theorizing, *O*, are roughly synonymous with the Lacanian *real*.

Freud's associations are as follows: "The white patch reminded me of diphtheritis and so of Irma's friend, but also of a serious illness of my eldest daughter's . . . and of the fright I had had in those anxious days. The scabs on the turbinal bones recalled a worry about my own state of health. I was making frequent use of cocaine at that time to reduce some troublesome nasal swellings, and . . . one of my women patients who had followed my example had developed an extensive necrosis of the nasal mucous membrane" (p. 111).

Lacan (1954–1955) helps us in articulating the nature of the horror Freud experiences: "Having got the patient to open her mouth . . . what he sees in there, these turbinate bones covered with a whitish membrane, is a horrendous sight. This mouth has all the equivalences in terms of significations, all the condensations you want. Everything blends in and becomes associated with this image, from the mouth to the female sexual organ . . ." (p. 154).

Here Lacan, following Freud, is pointing to relatively obvious symbolic equivalences and substitutions the image of Irma's mouth offers, the stuff of any conventional reading of this dream or any dream. But there is more to this moment in the dream, something that the symbolic, structuring tools we use to understand dreams and symptoms—condensation, displacement, substitution, and the like—cannot domesticate, cannot capture. This is Freud's encounter with the *real*. "There's a horrendous discovery here," Lacan continues, "that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face . . . the flesh from which everything exudes . . . is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety" (p. 154).

A little later in the seminar the description of this horrendous sight is extended and deepened: "The phenomenology of the dream of Irma's injection led us . . . to the apparition of the terrifying anxiety-provoking image, to this real Medusa's head, to the revelation of this something which properly speaking is unnameable, the back of the throat, the complex, unlocatable form, which also makes it into a primitive object par excellence, the abyss of the feminine organ from which all life emerges, this gulf of the mouth, in which everything is swallowed up, and no less the image of death in which everything comes to its end . . ." (p. 164).

The object—the fleshy insides of Irma's oral cavity—is "properly speaking" unnameable. It is that which cannot be symbolized; it is as basic, primitive, and feminine as you can get. And it marks the boundaries of any life, in that that life will come to an end. Kristeva's project

is to give voice—no less passionately than theoretically—to this unnameable, prior, fleshy, and feminine place. “Maternal reliance,” she writes, “must be understood . . . as irreducible to a ‘symbolic function’ . . .” (p. 72).

In summary, we have two converging lines of force that must be specified. The first is the externality of the male, physicianly gaze upon the opaque, “resistant” woman. This is the paternal function as *paternalistic and static*—a discourse on women from the *outside*. The second line of force, clearly connected to the first, is theoretical: the *shrinking* of effort in psychoanalytic theory-building in the face of the *real*, especially the *real* as flesh, the feminine, the maternal. The maternal is the source of both primary narcissistic union and fundamental difference, as mother and fetus become mother and baby; the mother both succumbs to and manages the bringing into life while alert to the ever present specter of death. This is the *real* prior to fantasy, prior to the imagos of the mother’s body, their damage and repair (à la Klein).

It is no accident that Kristeva (2007) subtitles another of her papers, “Speech in Psychoanalysis,” “From Symbols to the *Flesh* and Back” (p. 421; emphasis added). It is no accident—given that maternal reliance, in partaking of the *real*, resists symbolization—that Freud (1900), in his gloss on the Irma dream, evokes the image of the navel, the “spot in every dream . . . that is its point of contact with the unknown” (p. 111 n. 1).

### MATERNAL PASSION

One might think, with some justification perhaps, that psychoanalysis has done quite well in describing key maternal functions and their role in the development of the human subject. After all, Winnicott’s and Bion’s papers are widely read, and concepts such as the good-enough mother and the holding environment, and Bion’s maternal reverie, containing, and alpha function, are the lingua franca of contemporary psychoanalysis. These are ideas that help us imagine the baby’s world emerging in conjunction with, or ushered in by, the mother via particular kinds of maternal activity. But in these pictures of childhood development, the mother’s subjective experience remains opaque, under-imagined. Kristeva (1983) writes: “There might doubtless be a way to approach the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a woman; one needs to listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today, through their economic



difficulties and . . . through their discomforts, insomnias, joys, angers, desires, pains, and pleasures . . ." (p. 179).

Throughout her work, Kristeva has argued that in place of giving detailed voice to maternal experience within psychoanalysis and our larger thought-culture, one finds symptoms of its lack: religious idealizations, no matter how sublime and foundational, and, within psychoanalysis, an arid, constricted picture of the maternal. *Holding, containing, linking*, and the like risk becoming two-dimensional psychoanalytic slogans, descriptions of maternal experience that seem to come from the outside, as asexual as they are third-person. The mother, in other words, is pictured as a full presence in the service of ushering her child into the object world as subject. Or we get a *negative* of this picture: André Green's *dead mother*. Whether a full or an empty presence, these are idealizations or sanctifications, to be sure.

Kristeva wishes "to give back to *maternal eroticism* its biopsychical complexity—for the well-being of the child no less than for the emancipation of the woman—in and through the maternal" (p. 71). In speaking for this biopsychical complexity Kristeva offers a metapsychology of the maternal—a "multiverse"—with eros, discharge, passion, vocation, and responsibility its key features (all of which she subsumes under the term *reliance*). Conception is a physical, biological process born of a particular feminine desire to have a baby. Pregnancy, labor, and birth (the "originary" split<sup>7</sup>) are irreducibly of the flesh and in that basic sense erotic. But erotics for Kristeva is not only sexual; it is grounded in eros, the binding, life-generating force of which Freud writes. Thus, the mother inhabits and facilitates "the transition from the mute world [of the flesh] to the speaking world" (Merleau-Ponty, in Kristeva, p. 70), the "fixation of the life and death drives" (p. 71). Here Kristeva emphasizes two crucial points: this inhabiting of an originary split and fixing the drives through the capacity for representation is "in the service of the living as an 'open structure,'" and the economy of maternal reliance is one of "extreme fragility" (p. 71).

This dynamic picture of the mother living as an extremely fragile "open structure" lends weight—first-person and on-the-ground—to some of Bion's and Winnicott's key ideas. As I mentioned, some of these ideas can take on the pallid hue of empty slogans. For example, the *containing function* of the mother is, upon reflection, surprisingly underdescribed

<sup>7</sup>Though Kristeva designates the moment of "primal repression" as "originary," she also suggests that the birth experience is, in fact, *more* originary.

and conceptualized.<sup>8</sup> If we wish to take the metaphor of the container seriously, containment implies a *lacking space* in the mother. That is, the mother is in a state of *desire* relative to her infant in that she is *open* to what her infant may be experiencing. This openness also involves the mother's capacity to say no. More generally, it is difficult to imagine meaningful maternal capacity in relation to the other without maternal desire motivating it. This passion or desire involves a willingness to wonder, an expectation to engage, and the transformation of hate into an embodied sense of caring that enacts "knowledge" of life and death and the fragility of the entire arrangement. The mother, in short, is not a full presence. Instead she brings into being a split, and instantiates an essential (not potential) space of lacking. Hence Kristeva's emphasis on the mother "who disinvests in her own message but remains attentive to a single response from the child" (p. 79); a mother who experiments, plays with words, and is willing to err. Containment, then, is a complex, dynamic process that involves maternal *dispassion* as well as *passion*, an eros that "inscribe[s] mortality itself" (p. 79).

Embedded in "Reliance, or Maternal Eroticism" is a typology of maternal failure. This is a direct consequence of "the failure of dispassionateness" (p. 79) and takes us into the realm of psychosis and perversion. Kristeva contrasts *reliance* with *possession*. The mother in these circumstances "has seized life in order to make it a non-object, outside of time and place, and, in her totalitarian narcissism, has consigned life to its ultimate stage: 'dead matter,' 'dead nature,' anti-matter; a cadaver or frozen corpse, without a single bond, out of time and out of bounds" (p. 79). More commonly, she tells us, maternal reliance is reduced to *enthrallment*. This is a fundamental aspect of the perverse structure, in which the child is the imaginary "phallus" (i.e., fetishized object) for the mother.

Rather than a closed-off, overweening "knowing," or an intense anxiety that freezes the desiring capacities of the mother, maternal *passion* is a practice of faith in which the mother "actively 'suffers' and 'endures'" (p. 72), as she straddles haltingly a series of emerging and tenuous coordinates, and manages forces as best she can without attempting, in a desperate way, to control them.

<sup>8</sup>A notable exception is Cartwright (2010). However, he does not connect, in any robust way, *containing* and *alpha function* with maternal passion and desire.

## HER/ETHICS AND THE SUBJECT OF RESPONSIBILITY

In Lacan's seventh seminar, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959–1960), he situates the ethical in relation to duty and judgment, but not, however, in relation to the Good or the “moral.” Instead one's duty is in relation to one's desire, especially desire that partakes of the *real*. As we know, the *real* cannot be symbolized as such; the forbidden object, what Lacan calls *das Ding* (the Thing), is lost, gone. All the subject has are refracted representations of *das Ding*. In the *Ethics* Lacan discusses a series of matchboxes, a vase, the idealized feminine object in courtly love, and the dead body of Antigone's brother, among other signs of the *real*. These are representations of the *real* that place, to varying degrees, an ethical demand on the human subject. Because the ethical calls for the subject to act beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the Law, outside the symbolic order, Lacan at times associates the ethical with the feminine object, at other times with psychosis.

We can see why for Kristeva pregnancy, as a kind of “temporary feminine psychosis” in which mother and baby, self and other, cannot be separated, partakes of the *real*. “The various logics of maternal reliance . . . ,” she writes, develop

over the course of a mother's life . . . and . . . go beyond settling the score with the mother's mother, denying castration and capturing the father's penis (indeed the phallus), all on the side of the mirror stage. . . . The “horizon” of the Thing, in the subject/object interval, evokes what Sophocles, in *Antigone*, calls *Até*: the paradoxical frontier, prior to law, a fascinating and no less agonizing place. It is “agonizing” for a consciousness emerging into the “psychic revolution” of materiality, . . . from which the ego works to hide and defend us. *Até*. For Hegel and Lacan, this is the beginning of ethics” [p. 75].

Kristeva's claim is that the mother can, and does, live in this supposedly forbidden place, the place of *das Ding*. “Maternal eroticism surfaces in this foreignness,” she tells us, “this regression, this ‘state of emergency in life’” (p. 73). This is not a narcissistic battle, characterized by the “penis envy” of Freud, or the rivalry of Lacan's mirror stage. The child *really is* and will in some ineluctable sense continue to be part of the mother's flesh. This *real*, this Maternal Thing, is the source of Kristeva's perspective on ethics, what she terms *herethics*—a maternal/feminine place of passion, caring, vocation, and responsibility that is beyond not only the pleasure principle, but beyond the *paternal* principle. Its fragile,

though indelible status only makes the mother's active living all the more precious, as she orients herself to "this urgency of life" (p. 75).

As Kristeva stresses, the mother's inhabiting this "paradoxical frontier" is only the beginning of ethics; the mother seems to be witness to its source. But, as she says, "the various logics of maternal reliance develop over the course of [a] mother's life." Hers is a particular twist on the Lacanian perspective on ethics, one that I believe resolves a certain ambiguity. Lacan's view, as we saw, foregrounds the subject of desire. But his emphasis is ambiguous at best, because, in the end, one's ethical duty seems to be to give *no ground* relative to one's desire. Does this mean, do *whatever* you have discovered you desire? Otherwise you'll be rife with guilt? This conclusion appears, on the face of it, to fall far short of satisfactory.

A more nuanced view resists taking desire to be a unitary concept. *Desire* is in fact a composite term that encompasses being the subject of one's history, choices, and fantasies, as well as actions taken, not taken, and to be taken. Like Kristeva's maternal reliance, *desire* is a "multiverse" that involves "various logics." The crucial point is that this picture of the subject of desire requires, in turn, a *subject of responsibility*.<sup>9</sup> That is, the ethics of psychoanalysis involves the assumption of responsibility for one's desire in all its complexity, in all its "problematic" (Lacan 1959–1960, p. 300).

Kristeva's notion of the ethical is much closer to the subject of responsibility than to a more one-dimensional subject of desire. By clearly implanting the maternal at the heart of the ethical, she resolves the basic Lacanian ambiguity in her emphasis on care and responsibility. The subject of responsibility is responsible not only for his or her desire, its various logics, its twists and turns. The subject of responsibility is, as Kristeva tells us repeatedly, responsible *in relation to the other* in its various personal incarnations—one's child, partner, and community—as well as to oneself.

Herethics has direct implications for the analyst's position of care and responsibility within the clinical encounter. For Kristeva, reliance is a form of love within the transference-countertransference situation. Chetrit-Vatine (2011), using some of Kristeva's ideas, writes of the "ethical seduction of the analytic situation," in which the analyst, by virtue of offering analysis, thereby takes on a *passionate responsibility*

<sup>9</sup>For a more extensive discussion of this issue, see Wilson 2013.

for the other, the patient. The promise of analysis places the patient, necessarily, in an asymmetric position of desire in relation to the analyst. This position is both necessary and emotionally risky. The analyst takes care to attend to the analytic frame; she takes responsibility for the ways in which her desire affects the frame and the patient's transferences to it. Through this asymmetry, protected but not controlled by the analyst, a "veritable work of the negative, even a renaissance" (Kristeva 2000, p. 84), may be possible.

### POSTSCRIPT: "STEPHAN'S CHOICE"

Consider the moral plight of Sophie Zawistowska, the protagonist of William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. The complexities of her dilemma are seemingly universal, as Styron intends, in that we can all of us put ourselves in her shoes and feel *our own* desperation—not just hers—in a situation in which she must act immediately. This universality is, however, not total. The moral dilemma staged by *Sophie's Choice* is gendered in a basic way. To appreciate this aspect, let's say that the sadistic Nazi officer approaches not Sophie and her two children, but the children's father, Stephan, and his two children. Sophie is not in the picture. In other words, let's imagine that the "forced choice" is imposed on the *man*, the father. At the very minimum, the moral weight and pathos of the entire scenario is altered. In what way? It has something to do with the ever present if rarely asked question of paternity: Who is the father of this child or these children? Are they of his flesh, his loins, or was another man involved instead? With the mother this is never a legitimate question.<sup>10</sup> More generally, the man wanders; as father he leaves in a manner and with a frequency that the mother does not. As Kristeva says, the mother "holds."

It seems to me that Stephan's ethical position is inherently compromised: he may decide on one child or another, or give up on the task altogether (in which case both children will be killed). Whatever the decision and outcome—however tragic—would we feel the same depth of horror we feel for Sophie and her impossible position? Might we not say, because he is the father, that somehow we don't expect as much of him? And does not this thought experiment put into question the legitimacy of the so-called paternal function?

<sup>10</sup> The exception, of course, is the case of "egg donor" pregnancy and other instances of new reproductive technologies.

After the war, Sophie lives with a psychotic lover and, in the end, kills herself. As mother of these children, she had gotten wind of *das Ding*; she knew the *real*, this “emergency in life,” in her bones. Then the horrible side of the *real* returns, the agony, as her daughter is carted off to her likely death. That Sophie touches psychosis and eventually ends her own life speaks to this knowledge of the *real*—uncontainable, beyond symbolization, some *Thing* that can only be repeated.

## REFERENCES

- AISENSTEIN, M. (2012). A particular form of paternal identification in women. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 81:27–38.
- CARTWRIGHT, D. (2010). *Containing States of Mind: Exploring Bion's 'Container Model' in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy*. London: Routledge.
- CHETRIT-VATINE, V. (2011). The frame, the analyst's passion, and the ethical seduction of the analytic situation. *European Psychoanalytic Federation Bulletin* 64:247–260.
- DERRIDA, J. (1967). *Of Grammatology*, transl. G.C. Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.
- FREUD, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams. *Standard Edition* 4/5.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1974). *Revolution in Poetic Language*, transl. M. Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.
- KRISTEVA, J. (1983). Stabat mater. In *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986, pp. 160–186.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2000). *Melanie Klein*, transl. R. Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2009). *This Incredible Need to Believe*, transl. B.B. Brahic. New York: Columbia University Press.
- KRISTEVA, J. (2010). ‘Speech in psychoanalysis’: From symbols to the flesh and back. In *Reading French Psychoanalysis*, ed. D. Birksted-Breen, S. Flanders, & A. Gibeault. London: Routledge, pp. 421–433.
- LACAN, J. (1954–1955). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, transl. S. Tomaselli. New York: Norton, 1988.
- LACAN, J. (1959–1960). *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, transl. D. Porter. New York: Norton 1992.
- WILSON, M. (2013). Desire and responsibility: The ethics of countertransference experience. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82:435–476.