

Introduction

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Kristeva's varied and voluminous corpus is still growing, and critical commentary has not yet caught up with her most recent concerns. Focusing largely on Kristeva's most recent work, this collection of original essays examines a number of interconnected strands, in particular, Kristeva's reevaluation of the concept of revolt, crucial to her early work, in the context of the changing cultural and political conditions in the West; the questions of the stranger, race, and nation; Kristeva's reflections on narrative, public spaces, and collectivity in the context of her engagement with Hannah Arendt's work; and finally, Kristeva's development and refinement of the notions of abjection, melancholia, and narcissism, which proved so central to her work in the 1980s, in her ongoing interrogation of aesthetics. A particular focus of two essays in this volume is a hitherto neglected area of Kristeva's work, namely her contribution to film theory, within the parameters of these psychic states.

Kristeva's work has been often criticized for focusing primarily on the personal or the psychic maladies of modern Western subjectivity rather than on group formations or the political structures of oppression. Presupposing a rather stable private/public distinction, this criticism has failed to address, however, how Kristeva's work on affect, such as abjection, disgust, pleasure, or melancholia, not only challenges this distinction but also elucidates the process of constitution of the traversable private/public boundaries. By discussing Kristeva's new work in the light of her corpus as a whole, this collection argues that one of the central tasks emerging in the aftermath of feminist critiques of the private/public distinction is an inquiry into the role affect, fantasy, and negativity play not only in the formation of what Judith Butler has aptly called "the psychic life of power," but also in the emergence of collectivities and the transformation of social relations. In response to this task, a number of essays reinterpret the notion of abjection, which, with all of its ambivalence, is played out precisely on the borders of the self and other, the

private and the public, and the psychological and the political. Erupting along the fault lines of these supposedly discrete structures, abjection both constitutes and undermines the stable distinctions between the life of the psyche and the life of the *polis*. The failure to attend to the social and psychic consequences of this fluid in-betweenness necessarily involves a certain blindness, which is sometimes evident in the work of Kristeva herself—the thinker of abjection.

The question that this collection poses is: Under what conditions does abjection appear as a manifestation of the narcissistic crisis and under what circumstances can it lead to social transformation? Indeed, how can it sustain a “culture of revolt,” increasingly threatened in the West by the commodification of bodies and by the hegemony of what Guy Debord has called “the society of spectacle”? The question of abjection has led Kristeva to a brilliant reinterpretation of Freud’s primary narcissism, as a pre-symbolic ternary structure, where the emerging subject is neither absolutely fused with the mother, nor fully separated from her. The relationship is mediated through the identification with the paternal pole, a loving father who precedes the Oedipal symbolic father. Thus, primary narcissism is predicated on the existence of a brittle border between abjection (which, as Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, “is a precondition of narcissism”) and the primary identification with the idealized and loving Third Party (1982, 13). “A borderline case indeed” modern Narcissus, as Kristeva tells us in *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt*, is not sure of herself, of her borders, or of her identity; she is on the border between security and insecurity, between fusion and separation (see 1996, 46).

If abjection is one of the most painful and ambiguous manifestations of the narcissistic crisis, how can it be transformed into a revolt culture? That is one of the central questions this collection interrogates as a whole. How does the negativity of revolt inform Kristeva’s corpus, what are its nuances, and how does it change from her early to her later work? What are the promises and limitations of the revolt culture elaborated in Kristeva’s recent texts? One of the implications of Kristeva’s work is that the revolt culture has to redirect the aggressivity of drive from the abjection of the self to the transformation of the social relations. Thus, it must negotiate between the rupture of *signifiante* and the articulation of the existing social and psychic contradictions.

There are two consequences of this claim: The first consequence, stressed more strongly in her earlier work, is that the disregard for the negativity of the drive and the return of *signifiante* in the dominant theories of revolution, risks a paranoid reduction of the revolutionary process to a struggle of “a dilated, tenacious ego, armed with ideological and theoretical assurance, combating the old theses...the signifying process gives itself an

agent . . . that of the revolutionary who has no need of knowing and even less of closely examining the process of rejection that pulverizes . . . him" (1984, 206). By contesting this paranoid reduction of revolt and by articulating the revolutionary subject as a passageway of *signifiante*, where a struggle is as much rooted in affective relations of drives as it is in social conflicts, Kristeva, in her later work, argues nonetheless that the culture of revolt not only has to de-center but also to renew the psychic life and social bonds through symbolic rearticulation, which leads to the institution of new forms of social relations, collective identifications, and representations.

Understood in this double sense, as a rupture and rearticulation, revolt culture is indispensable not only for the renewal of psychic life and social bonds, but also for creativity, freedom, and construction of meaningful lives, as long as revolt "remains a live force and resists accommodation" (2002, 38). The second consequence of Kristeva's analysis is that the erosion of the capacity to rebel "is the sign of national depression" similar to "what the depressed individual feels in his isolation" (83). In this case, the unbinding power of the death drive turns against the subject and its relation with collectivity. According to Kristeva, "Melancholia offers a striking representation of this: links with the others are cut, 'I' isolate myself from the word, 'I' withdraw into my sadness. . . . And this unbinding that has cut me off from the world will end up cutting me off from myself" (47). As this claim makes clear, Kristeva's analysis of "the new maladies of the soul" is not a retreat from the tasks of social transformation but precisely a demonstration of the psychic consequences of such a retreat.

To understand the changing emphasis in Kristeva's notion of revolt we need to situate her early work, in particular *Revolution in Poetic Language*, within the historical context of the workers' and students' rebellion of May '68 and the revolutionary politics of the *Tel Quel* group. As Kristeva points out, the enduring legacy of May '68 is "a fundamental version of freedom: not freedom to change or to succeed, but the freedom to revolt. Thirty years on, because of technology and liberalism, we're so used to identifying freedom merely with free enterprise that this other version doesn't seem to exist" (2002, 12). Thus, even though Kristeva calls for the transmission of the spirit of the May '68 rebellion, she also provides a diagnosis of the impasses of revolt in late modern European society. In this respect, she is in agreement with Foucault's analysis of the erosion of the juridical model of power, an erosion manifested by the weakness of law and absence of responsibility.

The replacement of the juridical model by the new procedures of normalization and commodification of bodies not only implies the demise of the Hegelian and Freudian model of revolt as dialectical political transgression, but also risks an erosion of the revolutionary subject by transforming Kristeva into a commodified "patrimonial person," dispersed into marketable organs.

This diagnosis of modern social deformation constitutes the basis of Kristeva's departure, from an early, dialectical conception of revolt based on the law/transgression model and founded on Freud's Oedipal account of patricide, as the obverse side of the paternal law. The crucial question, emerging here, is whether it is possible to formulate a non-Oedipal, nondialectical notion of revolt and what role femininity has in this model. Two possible lines for exploration that emerge at this juncture in Kristeva's work refer, on the one hand to the feminine ironization of the phallic logic of revolt (followed by Ziarek), and on the other hand, to the role of the pre-Oedipal loving father as a psychic support of revolt and forgiveness (explored by Oliver).

In order to prevent the limitation of the Kristevan notion of revolt either to the transformation of the psychic space or to aesthetic experimentation, several of the essays confront a question that is central to Kristeva's engagement with the work of Hannah Arendt: namely, the role of affect and narrative in the formation of a modern political community. Toward the end of her interview with Philippe Petit, Kristeva proclaims: "I revolt, therefore we are . . . still to come" (2002, 45). Yet, how are we to think of this collectivity to come? The essays collected here address this question in two different ways: first, by reexamining Kristeva's reflection on the formation of the skin as the first fragile container of the ego (see 2000, 53–54) and in the context of the alignment of individual bodies with the body of the nation—a process that often leads to the exclusion of racialized bodies from the national community. Second, Kristeva's revision of Arendt's notion of narrative is explored. According to Arendt, narrative provides a moment of articulation and public representation of the significance of an act in the political realm. Storytellers, whether historians or fellow citizens recounting a deed, finally make the actors who they are: for instance, Pericles was indebted to Thucydides for his own actualization as a political being. Narratives, or symbolic accounts, constitute retrospectively individual and collective identities.

Kristeva radicalizes this disjunction between the narrative and the political act—a disjunction, which as we have seen, characterizes the necessary tension between the two aspects of the revolt: between rupture and symbolic rearticulation. On the one hand, Kristeva argues that the act, deprived of the narrative rearticulation of collectivity, leads to collective and individual trauma. On the other hand, she claims that the necessary political role of rendering public, by means of narrative, memory, and testimony, has to be reformulated in the light of psychoanalytic conceptions of the heterogeneity of language, the split subjectivity-in-process, and the intertwining of recollection and anamnesis. Ultimately, both the formation of the "skin of the community" (discussed by Sara Ahmed) and the narrative rearticulation of political acts, demonstrate the fragility of the public space of appearance and political identities.

By exploring the contributions of Kristeva to political theory, this volume also underscores the limitations of her work, in particular in the context of race, racism, and colonialism. Ziarek's essay extends Kristeva's concept of the revolt by examining the inscription of antagonism on the black body in the work of Frantz Fanon, while Sarah Ahmed focuses on the concept of the stranger and the question of nationhood, asking how Kristeva's notion of the abject connects with her understanding of nation. Ahmed's essay dovetails with Tina Chanter's attempt to formulate the political logic of abjection, which can provide a model of thinking not only sexual difference but also racial and ethnic difference.

Another contribution of this anthology lies in the rethinking of Kristeva's long standing concern with aesthetics in the context of contemporary film. As signaled by her inclusion of a chapter on "Fantasy and Cinema" in her recent book, *Intimate Revolt*, the issue of film is one in which Kristeva has become increasingly interested. Yet it has so far been neglected by most Kristeva scholars, despite the fact that one of her earlier essays (which is reworked in *Intimate Revolt*) was included in a film theory anthology intended for use as a textbook. In *Intimate Revolt*, the second volume of *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*, Kristeva examines the cinematographic image, as a central place of contemporary imagination. She says that specular fascination reaches perfect and total accomplishment in cinema, and suggests that the cinematic representation of horror would be the specular par excellence. If the tragedies of Sophocles were the site of catharsis for the ancient Greeks, it is the films of Hitchcock, *The Birds*, or *Psycho*, that perform this role for us. Kristeva's work raises the following questions for film theory: Does the spectacle of cinema amount to an opportunity to engage in sadomasochistic fantasy? Is it the authorization of perversion? Is it a site in which, in a phrase Kristeva borrows from Arendt, the "banality of evil" is apparent? Or, on the contrary, does film allow for a "demystification" and critique of "the society of spectacle"?

The first section of the book, entitled "Femininity, Race, and Revolt" explores the changing conception of revolution in Kristeva's early and later work. It begins with Joan Brandt's essay, "Julia Kristeva and the Revolutionary Politics of *Tel Quel*," which examines the ways Kristeva's relationship to *Tel Quel*'s aesthetics and politics are reflected in the structure of her early work, particularly in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. The essay provides a welcome intervention into the reception of Kristeva, since her relationship to the avant-garde journal *Tel Quel* has often been neglected in the discussion of her work. Its reception in the English speaking world has been largely confined to the questions Kristeva raises with regard to feminist issues, and little attention has been paid to the highly politicized intellectual and social environment that initially fostered Kristeva's revolutionary project.

That environment was characterized not only by the theoretical upheaval wrought by the structuralists' and poststructuralists' interrogation of traditional philosophical and literary precepts but also by the political turmoil that erupted in the 1960's, particularly in the form of the student-worker uprisings of May, 1968. These social movements fueled the political radicalism that had been emerging at *Tel Quel*. Brandt's essay begins with a historical examination of *Tel Quel* and of Kristeva's relationship to the journal, before looking more directly at her theoretical texts. Brandt argues that Kristeva's tendency to formulate her theoretical distinctions in rather categorical terms can be attributed to the revolutionary politics that structured her writing during the militant period of *Tel Quel*, when the politicization of the semiotic, and the affirmation of its revolutionary potential, were part of a transgressive, dialectical model of revolt that Kristeva's recent texts call into question.

Sara Beardsworth argues that a significant shift takes place in Kristeva's work: the revolutionary stance of the 1970s gives way to a position in the 1990s that is marked by her profound engagement with psychoanalysis in the 1980s, which reveals "the failings of subject formation in Western cultures." Taking as her starting point Kristeva's diagnosis of the pervasive crisis in contemporary society, Beardsworth follows the implications of this crisis for the subject's relation to authority, law, and values. She traces how Kristeva's fundamental distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic develops from her early work to her later work. The symbolic has a tendency to repress semiotic processes, a repression that is effectively accomplished under capitalism as the repression of its process of production. By reconnecting the semiotic and the symbolic, art can achieve a transformation of meaning and subjectivity—a *Revolution in Poetic Language*, as Kristeva puts it in the title of her 1974 book.

The semiotic, which consists of the primary processes of condensation and displacement, is "heterogeneous to the symbolic order and the position of the subject within it, both of which are presided over by paternal law." As such, these primary processes constitute the possibility of transgressing the symbolic, paternal law, thereby disrupting the order of castration and sexual difference. The semiotic register, since it precedes the separation between subject and object that will be instituted through the paternal, symbolic function, is incapable of producing meaning at the level of signification. Through a certain refusal on the part of the symbolic, the semiotic is taken up by the symbolic in a way that forbids its existence outside the parameters of discourse as already predicated on distinctions between subject and object, and signifier and signified.

Nonetheless, through a process of reactivating the thetic phase in reverse, as it were, and from a position that is irretrievably symbolic, the sym-

bolic can be reconnected with the semiotic. Such reconnections open up the possibility of the transformation of meaning, which takes shape as the transgression of the symbolic order that art and literature can effect. As Beardsworth says, "Semiotic functioning exists in vocalic, gestural or kinetic differences. It can be inscribed in color, sound, forms, words. It can therefore be harnessed in the signifying chain. . . . Musical and poetic practices decompose the signifying chain of communicative discourse . . . and recompose them into some kind of 'totality' or integrity."

Whereas in 1974, psychoanalytic theory itself is powerless to transform the rigid symbolic structures of dominant signifying practices, in the 1980s, with the publication of Kristeva's trilogy, *Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, and *Black Sun*, the status of psychoanalysis changes. It is no longer simply a theory that "makes artistic practice intelligible," but is also a practice in its own right. It is a resource for subjects who suffer the malaise of the disjunction between affect and representation, between semiotic and symbolic. In this crisis ridden era, the capacity of the symbolic to represent drives as heterogeneous is undermined, as the forms of authority, both secular and religious, have an increasingly tenuous hold on individuals. Whereas previously Kristeva emphasized the destabilization of the subject, now she emphasizes the need to symbolize, or stabilize the semiotic. Beardsworth shows that what is at stake in Kristeva's rethinking of the semiotic is a recasting of the semiotic as a suppressed maternal authority. She suggests that the fragility of paternal law permits the recognition of this latent authority, which was already present in its nascent form in 1974, as the maternal ordering of drives. Kristeva recasts narcissism in a diachronic way, such that abjection, love and melancholia are articulated as the moments of primary narcissism. The question is "how the symbolic function impacts on the preverbal child who is hardly dissociated from the other—the mother's body—on which it is dependent for its life." What is decisive is that, prior to the subject's entry into language, that is, prior to its inauguration as a subject, produced by the symbolic lack of castration, the infant encounters loss or emptiness. This loss is inscribed in the "stream of drives articulated through primary processes: the semiotic," and not through the signifying function. It is initiated by the failure of the maternal figure to meet the infant's demand that it constitute "the site of all gratification." In abjection, the infant must initiate a border between itself and the mother, such that it can delineate its emergent ego from the drives that bind it to the maternal body. In love, or in idealization, the site of the mother's desire is designated as the imaginary father, a figure who, like Freud's father of individual prehistory, occupies an ambiguous position in relation to sexual difference. The mother-child dyad is thus transformed into a pre-Oedipal triangle, whereby loss is figured by this third term, a loving father, not yet the prohibiting Oedipal father, but

one who compensates for loss. In depression, the subject is imprisoned with the primal affect of loss. Divorced from symbolic expression, the semiotic appears in “outbreaks of abjection, or the instability of the inside/outside border; in the inability to idealize, which is the inability to innovate; and in a depression/melancholia that afflicts modern subjects, where the violence of the drive is locked up in isolated individual suffering.” Because political institutions and discourses fail to address such suffering, that task is left up to art. The “symbolization of abjection, primary idealization, and loss is produced . . . in symbolic discourses in the imaginary register, such as literature and art. The 1980s trilogy unfolds the literature of abjection, love stories, and artistic works of mourning that bring the semiotic into the light of day.” Thus, the task of reconnecting the semiotic and the symbolic is infused with a different meaning than it bore in 1974, when the revolutionary potential of the semiotic lay in relation to its capacity to disrupt the stable symbolic system of capitalism. Now, “the semiotic is a weight of non-meaning that intensifies the experience of the loss of meaning, leading to the downfall of the subject and death. That is why, in the trilogy and especially in *Black Sun*, Kristeva seeks out the artistic instances that bring that weight of non-meaning into symbolic form, removing it from a subjectivity that has become the site of suffering.”

One of the questions raised by Beardsworth’s analysis is how far Kristeva lapses into what could be called an “aesthetics of malady.” If it falls to art to reestablish a connection between the semiotic and the symbolic, does Kristeva succumb to a view of art that values it only insofar as it plays a therapeutic role? As Beardsworth points out, “artistic forms themselves arise in the conditions of nihilism and are affected by the tendency for the semiotic and symbolic to fall apart.” Yet the question remains as to whether Kristeva privileges certain forms of art over others, as a consequence of the therapeutic value that it embodies. Such a privilege is suggested by Kristeva’s preference for a “culture of words” over a “culture of images.”

Ewa Płonowska Ziarek’s essay works out the political logic of revolt in modernity and the role of the sexed, racial subject in that logic by juxtaposing two different thinkers writing in different historical circumstances. Frantz Fanon’s reflections on the revolutionary process of decolonization, and Kristeva’s recent assessments of the insights and the limits of the Freudian discussion of revolt in the context sexual difference serve as her major reference points. By taking Frantz Fanon’s controversial theory of revolutionary violence as her point of departure, Ziarek rethinks political antagonism in the context of the drive, and the rupture of the real, on the surface on the body. Fanon’s reactivation of antagonism for the sake of decolonization inscribes the traumatic rupture of violence on the surface of the skin. Thus, the black

colonized body in Fanon's work is not only associated with the traumatic epidermalization of oppression but also with the epidermalization of revolt. Ziarek argues that Fanon's rethinking of the rupture of antagonism leads from the absolute opposition of Good and Evil to the extimacy of "violence just under the skin." However, if the encounter with the real of the body, experienced as a traumatic rupture of the symbolic structure of the colonial world and of bodily identity, is to have an effect in the possible, the revolutionary practice has to redirect the aggressivity of drive—"that violence which is just under the skin" (Fanon 1963, 71)—from self-destructive abjection to the transformation of social relations. In other words, Fanon's conception of revolution negotiates between the spontaneity of violence (the rupture of the real) and its sublimatory rearticulation. By drawing on Laclau's notion of hegemony, Ziarek argues that the necessary moment of symbolic articulation of revolutionary violence is based on the conflicting relation between the universal and the excluded particular, between the impossible moment of reconciled society (Fanonian new humanism) and the black historical subject aiming to realize it. In contrast to Sartre's assessment of Negritude, such an antagonistic formulation of the universal calls for the paradoxical preservation of race in the struggle for universality rather than its dialectical self-destruction.

Although Kristeva fails to explicitly elaborate the political logic of revolution, Ziarek argues that there are two important implications of her analysis of femininity and revolt in this respect. First, Ziarek points out that the struggle of the excluded particular for the hegemonization of the universal (for the inclusion in the social bond) all too frequently follows the quasi-religious, dialectical path of the Oedipal rebellion, sustained by the promise of phallic *jouissance*, implied in the impossible fullness of the universal. Second, Ziarek points to the role of feminine ironic play with illusion, its adherence and non-adherence to the phallus, which precisely sustains the gap between the universal and particular, preventing a transformation of the revolutionary imaginary into another form of political myth. By letting go of the psychic defenses against finitude and the contingency of the social order, the ironic play with illusion not only opens the symbolic to ongoing transformation but also cultivates what Fanon calls "the subtlety of thinking" within hegemonic practice. This ironization of the hegemonic articulation enables us to move from the all too common game of the feminization of the excluded particular to the feminine ironization of the universal.

Oliver argues that the intimate or psychic revolt Kristeva advocates as necessary for the psychic health of individuals is associated with identification with the imaginary father (Freud's father in individual prehistory). Revolt has become progressively difficult, according to Kristeva's analysis of contemporary society, as the authorities against which we used to revolt have

become more diffuse. Oliver argues that “While in her earlier work Kristeva was concerned with a revolution within language analogous to political revolution, in her later work she emphasizes the affects of the sociopolitical context on the possibility of individual revolts necessary to psychic life and still dependent upon language and its semiotic drive force.” “Revolt, then, is not a transgression against law or order but a displacement of its authority within the psychic economy of the individual.” The imaginary father as plays the role of the third, facilitating the progression of the infant from its immersion in the abject, thereby providing a “counter-balance to the abject mother.” The imaginary father is “a conglomerate of the maternal and paternal, needs and demands, drives and law.” As such, he combines the functions of the loving father with the paternal law. The coexistence of these two aspects of the imaginary father as both loving and stern, allows the representation or signification of affect, or at least their forgiveness. Forgiveness is understood as a communication or “form of transference or a transfer of affects” rather than as symbolic. Forgiveness gives meaning but it is a meaning that “takes place of the level of the semiotic.” As a creative restructuring of psychic space, forgiveness operates as a kind of reactivation, and therefore as a revolt, as a renewal.

The second section of the book, devoted to the questions of the public space of appearances, affect, and collectivity, begins with Sara Ahmed’s contribution. In her essay, “The Skin of the Community: Affect and Boundary Formation,” Ahmed examines the question of collectivity from a different angle by focusing on the role of affect and racialized bodies in the formation of subjective and national boundaries. Focusing on Kristeva’s work on abjection in *Powers of Horror*, and her concern with strangeness in *Strangers to Ourselves*, and also the reflections on race questions that are scattered throughout her work, Ahmed argues that “we need to consider the relation between the forming of the subject and the nation as metonymic as well as metaphoric, as involving the proximity or contact between bodies.” It is the way in which “bodies come into contact with other bodies that allows the nation as a collective body to emerge.” Kristeva’s argument “moves from the national idea to a ‘national ideal’ via an analogy with the ego ideal.” Ahmed suggests that Kristeva appeals to an idea of nation that “takes the shape of a particular kind of body, which is assumed in its ‘freedom’ to be unmarked. The ideal is an approximation of an image of ‘Frenchness,’ as an ideal that is deferred, but which nevertheless depends on being inhabitable by some bodies rather than others.” Ahmed argues that for Kristeva “strangeness is universalized as belonging to everyone” but cautions that “some others are recognized as stranger than others and as already ‘not belonging’ to the nation in the concreteness of their difference.” An example Ahmed develops is Muslim women’s scarves, understood as a veil that symbolically marks them as Other.

Drawing on Kristeva's earlier development of the notion of abjection in *Powers of Horror*, Ahmed argues for a different conception of nation than the one that Kristeva offers in her more recent *Nations without Nationalism*, and *Strangers to Ourselves*, one that takes into account the way in which emotions "allow for the very surfacing of bodies and collectives." Feelings, Ahmed suggests 'affect' the very distinction of inside and outside, such that we can think of:

the skin surface itself, as that which appears to contain us, but as where others impress upon us. This contradictory function of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that the skin is simply already there, but begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others.

Developing this point in relation to abjection, Ahmed goes on to discuss the sense in which "borders need to be threatened in order to be maintained." Abjection can illuminate the tendency of the Western body politic to constitute itself as white, maintaining itself on the basis of racism, at the expense of certain bodies that become marked as dirty or disgusting, as Ahmed shows with reference to Audre Lourde's *Sister Outsider*. It is through processes of intensification that surfaces and boundaries, such as the skin itself, are both formed and undone. Such alignments are crucial to the racialization of bodily and social space.

The next two essays in this section are concerned with Kristeva's reading of Arendt. Noëlle McAfee's chapter, "Bearing Witness in the *Polis*: Kristeva, Arendt, and the Space of Appearance," focuses on the key concepts in Kristeva's engagement with Arendt: political subjectivity, narrative, and the space of appearance. For Hannah Arendt, human beings are very much as Aristotle thought: political animals who come into being as such through their sharing of words and deeds in the polis. We are not mere *homo faber*; we are potentially actors in the public realm shared by others. Those who step into the polis and act become who they are, not just by their own actions, but through the stories that others tell of their actions.

Reading Arendt through Kristeva's analysis of her, McAfee's contribution focuses on a tension in Arendt's understanding of the relationship between narrative and action. "Arendt denigrates *poiesis* as mere fabrication (done for the sake of something else), the stuff of work and production, not true praxis or action (carried out for its own sake)." Yet, narrative is essential for the disclosure, through storytelling, of the meaning of action. McAfee stresses that narrative cannot be adequately understood as merely mimetic reportage, but must be understood as "a testimony that draws on the experiences and the

psyche of the narrator to give meaning to events.” As McAfee comments, “Arendt would like to consider narrative as action not production, but here the line between these two activities blurs, especially given the fact that the kind of narrative that interests her is the one that is ‘memorializing’ and to remain so must be recorded, a story turned artifact.” Developing her point, McAfee recalls that Arendt conceives of the narrator as crystallizing the meaning of events, appealing to Kafka as a model, since she believes his prose is pared down to the minimum, letting the meaning of the events come through unfettered. Yet, as McAfee contends, Kafka’s minimalism cannot be reduced to a purging of style, but is itself a style.

McAfee’s consideration of Kristeva and Arendt focuses on Arendt’s preference of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) over *sophia* (intellectual or theoretical wisdom), a privileging that responds to Heidegger’s reading of the Greeks, which rests on the elevation of *sophia* over *phronesis*. Peg Birmingham’s discussion of Arendt and Kristeva uses the work of Melanie Klein to establish a bridge between them, arguing that in her reading of Klein, Kristeva significantly revises her conception of abjection. According to Birmingham, “rather than understanding abjection as the border conflict between the semiotic drives and symbolic processes,” as she does in her earlier work, “Kristeva’s reading of Klein relocates the border conflict of abjection in the conflict between the inherent destructiveness of the sadistic aim (the paranoid-schizoid position) and reparative aim of gratitude (the depressive position).” Birmingham notes the importance of Montesquieu’s conception of politics for both Arendt and Kristeva, in particular his understanding of the political bond that cements a community as animated by affect. She reads both Arendt and Kristeva as thinkers of natality, and her contribution follows through how each of them understand fear and violence in relation to the event of natality. She shows how “gratitude for the given” in both thinkers facilitates a new understanding of the political bond. Instead of relegating foreignness outside the political sphere, as Arendt does, Birmingham suggests that Kristeva takes up the foreigner as excluded Other, which “becomes a challenge or call for the gratuitous embrace of the alien.”

The last section of the book, “Abjection, Film, and Melancholia,” examines the psychic and political stakes of abjection and melancholia by extending Kristeva’s long standing concern with aesthetics to the realm of contemporary film. Taking Kristeva’s reflections on art and film as its starting point, Chanter’s essay, “The Exoticization and Universalization of the Fetish, and the Naturalization of the Phallus: Abject Objections” suggests that Kristeva’s notion of abjection can provide an alternative model for feminist film theory. One of the reasons Chanter contends that the abject can serve as a powerful tool of film analysis is that it can illuminate difference and discrimination not simply along the axis of sexual difference, but also in the

context of race, class, sexual preference, and sexual identity. Furthermore, the concept of abjection represents a challenge to the privileged role castration anxiety enjoys both in the analyses of Freud and Lacan, and in Mulvey's analysis, which has acquired an almost canonical status for feminist film theorists, who feel obliged to cite it even if only to mark their disagreements with it. By shifting the focus from castration to abjection, Kristeva rewrites the Lacanian paradigm in a way that directs the emphasis away from the mirror image and Oedipus, and toward the pre-Oedipal history that leads up to the mirror stage. Kristeva's analysis of abjection provides resources for correcting the tendency of film theorists, who pursue what has come to be called apparatus or gaze theory, to neglect the pressing question of how to account for diversity. It also answers to a problem that many of Mulvey's critics point out, namely, her failure to take seriously the question of women's pleasure. Abjection is situated in a pervious relation to pleasure and pain, fascination and disgust, and to attraction and repulsion. When Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, "so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones," one could almost imagine that she is describing the much lamented fascination that female cinema spectators are supposed to experience in the face of masochistic identification with women in films who are objectified and represented as passive, helpless victims. The ambiguity of abjection neither situates the subject as entirely in thrall to the image (as if cinema spectators passively and uncritically consume the idealized and ideologically loaded visions that confront them, unwittingly colluding in their victimization, as upholders of the status quo), nor does it entirely negate the powerful fascination of the image, its capacity to seduce, and its ability to fascinate. Kristeva describes "a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant" (1982, 9). Pleasure and danger are inseparable here.

Chanter explores the possibilities opened up by Kristeva's notion of abjection for an interpretation of Atom Egoyan's *Exotica*, a film that both employs and interrogates the trope of fetishism. Along with the mirror stage, castration theory and fetishism have taken center stage in the transcription that Freudian and Lacanian ideas have undergone in film theory. Not only is the specular aspect of Lacan's mirror stage thereby taken up, but also the moment of recognition in which the child takes the image for itself, is understood in terms of a set of preestablished codes that situate the speaking subject in relation to others. Since the inception of language is bound up for Lacan with the recognition of sexual difference, and since the castration complex is construed by Freud as a resolution (albeit incomplete) of the Oedipus complex, castration theory becomes an indelible part of the story that film theory tells itself about the cinematic experience. This narrative assumes the experience of the male subject as paradigmatic, and consequently one might have expected the

status of castration to become a focal point for feminist critiques. Curiously, feminist critiques have been driven by a dynamic that has remained, for the most part, within the confines of masculinist film theory discourse, insofar as fetishism—one of the defenses exhibited by the masculine subject against castration anxiety—has remained a centerpiece. This puts feminist film theory in a somewhat awkward position vis-à-vis the masculinist discourse it seeks to contest. On the one hand, the assumption that the spectator is male needs to be upset, but on the other hand the privileged role that castration theory has accorded to fetishism has gone unquestioned. The explanation for the apparently ubiquitous legacy of fetishism lies in part in the apparent inseparability of the acquisition of language from the recognition of sexual difference, and in part in the way in which the concept of disavowal that the trope of fetishism privileges has been transcribed by film theory. The inseparability of the subject's entry into language from the acceptance of sexual difference concerns the role of the phallus, as symbolic of the penis *and of its lack*—and the status of this lack in relation to the recognition of sexual difference needs to be parsed out carefully. The phallus has been understood as the emblem of language, as the very possibility of representation. In order to interrogate the precise ways in which the phallus has come to stand in for the conditions under which it is possible to conceive of a speaking subject, the mimetic processes by which the phallus substitutes for the penis—the significance of which is itself dependent upon an already constituted set of sedimented meanings—need to be revisited. In particular, Chanter is concerned with the suppression of racial significance that is effected by fetishistic, phallic discourse. By revisiting feminist critiques of Lacan's dependence on Lévi-Strauss, whose notion of the symbolic rests centrally on the exchange of women, she uses Marx to illuminate the sense in which the symbolic remains dependent upon women's use-value in a way that it fails to acknowledge. By relegating women to the real, as presupposed by the social contract but unthought by the processes of symbolic exchange thereby facilitated, Lacanian psychoanalysis makes unavailable for interrogation the preparatory role played by women, and the racial imaginary assumed by the figuration of femininity as the dark continent.

Pleshette DeArmitt's contribution, entitled "On the Border between Abjection and the Third: The (Re)Birth of Narcissus in the works of Julia Kristeva," addresses abjection in the context of Kristeva's theory primary narcissism. From his first appearance on the scene in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction," and beyond, the figure of Narcissus has repeatedly flourished and faded in the Western imagination, as the myth of Narcissus has died out and been reborn so many times, in so many configurations. The Western subject's fascination with the figure of Narcissus has been an ambivalent one, a true love-hate relationship. From

Ovid and Plotinus to Freud and Levinas, there has been an attraction to, and a harsh repudiation of, this shimmering figure, who is infatuated with mere images. Narcissus is not only condemned for loving appearances instead of reality, but also for closing himself off from the outside, in particular from others, and remaining morbidly enclosed in a symbiotic structure where the same is vertiginously and infinitely reflected back on itself. Narcissus is rejected because he fails to fully individuate, to become a subject, and hence to truly live, as he is wholly given over to the death drive.

Although Kristeva believes that Narcissus runs such a risk, as he exists on the perilous border between love and death, she maintains in *Tales of Love*, and *The Sense and the Non-Sense of Revolt*, that Narcissus remains a necessary figure, and that primary narcissism is an indispensable structure, for the modern subject. DeArmitt asks why Kristeva seeks to rehabilitate the controversial figure of Narcissus as the model for the modern subject. In order to address this question, DeArmitt turns to Julia Kristeva's *Tales of Love*, to examine her charge that there is a crisis in contemporary love and, by extension, a crisis for the psychic life of the modern individual. Kristeva analyzes this crisis, which is fundamental to our lives as speaking subjects, by reading and interpreting the stories of, and about, love that Westerners have told themselves since the time of Plato. In her analyses, one figure reappears, time and again, in various incarnations—Narcissus—as lover, child, artist, pervert, psychotic, and so forth. However, it is today's Narcissus that concerns Kristeva—a Narcissus who is in exile and deprived of psychic space, as he/she is in want of love. According to Kristeva, Narcissus remains an essential source for the formation of the Western individual, given that he is neither a god nor a hero, just every man in the "the banality of his person." Through a provocative and original rereading of the notion of narcissism in Freud, Kristeva claims that our modern crisis of love is directly linked to "our inability to respond to narcissism" (1987, 381). Thus, what Kristeva describes as the "abolition of psychic space" and the demise of love discourse reveals our failure "elaborate primary narcissism" (374). The essay examines the reasons why Kristeva believes this fragile, pre-symbolic border from which Narcissus is born is critical for the (re)birth of the modern subject as a loving subject.

In her essay, "Black and Blue: Kieslowski's Melancholia," Frances Restuccia continues to examine the psychic, political, and aesthetic effects of melancholia by focusing on the *Colors Trilogy* of Krzysztof Kieslowski, an Eastern-European film maker. Approaching Kieslowski's work from a Kristevan point of view, especially as articulated in *Black Sun*, Restuccia argues against Žižek's interpretation of Kieslowski's films as performing the "work of mourning." Žižek claims that at the end of *Blue* Julie's tears signal that her work of mourning performs a reconciliation with the universe and

leads her to the acceptance of the mystery of life. Yet, is the melancholia of *Blue*, *White*, and *Red* so easily resolved? Are the final tears shed at the denouement of each of these films as upbeat as Žižek assumes? Or does the melancholia (over multiple, subjective, and social losses constituting the very fabric of Kieslowski's films) that these tears might be said to point to persist in aesthetic form? Master of ambiguity—itself akin to melancholia, as Kristeva notes—Kieslowski would seem to be more faithful to sadness than Žižek's reading allows, more similar to Marguerite Duras in Kristeva's conception of her as an artist who perpetuates rather than overcomes the malady of grief.

Blue epitomizes this point, cultivating depression rather than exhausting it, disseminating the pain—as Kristeva argues about the work of Duras. Julie, in *Blue*, would also seem to be, like Duras' heroines, a crypt inhabiting a living corpse—the primary model for which is apt to be Julie's mother, confined to a nursing home, incapable (now, as always?) of recognizing Julie. In this film, as in all of Kieslowski's work, a feeling of abandonment blankets everything—as if everyone has been orphaned—and in *Blue*, it is (again, as Kristeva proposes about Duras) formed about the maternal figure. Rather than a triumph of mourning, of agape, of love, melancholia and a complicity with death prevails.

The essay ends with an important question about a political role of Kieslowski's melancholia. In *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieslowski, Between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001), Žižek observes that “a fidelity to the Real...compelled Kieslowski to abandon documentary realism” and that Kieslowski began, like “all cineasts in the socialist countries,” with “the conspicuous gap between the drab social reality and the optimistic, bright image which pervaded the heavily censored official media.” Although Žižek is making a subtle point about Kieslowski's turn from an initial authentic documentary approach to a less invasive fiction, it still can be objected that the affirmation of life, the “Yes!” that he attributes to Julie, has a way of seeming disturbingly similar to the supposed communist euphoria, so well depicted in the writing of Milan Kundera (where angels dance in a circle), that Žižek himself acknowledges Kieslowski was improving upon. Is, then, the political function of melancholia, an ironic antidote to lightness of being and to the utopian promise of social reconciliation?

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