

The Feminine Disruption of Speech and Refounding of Discourse: Kristeva's Semiotic Chora and Psychoanalysis

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Abstract : For Julia Kristeva, contra Lacan, the instinctive body refuses to go away within discourse. Neither is the pre-Oedipal stage of maternal fusion vanquished by the emergence of language and with it, the law of the father. On the contrary, Kristeva argues, the pre-symbolic ambivalently haunts the society of speech, simultaneously animating and threatening the very foundations of signification. Kristeva invents the term "the semiotic" to refer to this continual breaking-through of the material unconscious onto the scene of meaning. This presentation examines Kristeva's semiotic as a theoretical gesture that itself is a disruption of discourse, re-presenting the 'return of the repressed' body in theory—the breaking-through of the unconscious onto the science of meaning. Faced with linguistic theories concerned with abstract sign-systems as well as Lacanian doctrine privileging the linguistic sign unequivocally over the bodily drive, Kristeva's theoretical corpus issues the message of a psychic remainder that disrupts with a view toward replenishing theoretical accounts of language and sense. Reviewing Semiotic challenge across these two levels (the sense and science of language), the presentation suggests that Kristeva's offerings constitute a coherent gestalt, providing an account of the feminist nature of her dual intervention. In contrast to other feminist critiques, Kristeva's gesture hinges on its restoration of the maternal contribution to subjectivity. Against the backdrop of 'phallogocentric' and 'necrophilic' theories that strip language of a subject and strip the subject of a body, Kristeva recasts linguistic study through a metaphor of life and birthing. Yet the semiotic fragments the subject it produces, dialoguing with an unconscious curtailed by but also exceeding the symbolic order of signification. Linguistics, too, becomes fragmented in the same measure as it is more meaningfully renewed by its confrontation with the semiotic body. It is Kristeva's own body that issues this challenge, on both sides of the boundary between the theory and the theorized. The Semiotic becomes comprehensible as a project unified by its concern to disrupt and rehabilitate language, the subject, and the scholarly discourses that treat them.

Keywords : Julia kristeva, the Semiotic, french feminism, psychoanalytic theory, linguistics

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