

Developing a Messianic Account of Time for Feminist Theory:  
Derrida's Deconstruction and Kristeva's Archaeology

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## Abstract

The question of time is a cornerstone in feminist theory because the specificity of our time is its illegitimate foreclosure of temporal possibilities. In this paper, I try to thematize the specificity of this illegitimacy by first developing an account of time as messianic, which takes into account the entanglement of the feminist salvatory work and its foreclosure. Such an account of time calls for the question of the modalities and the structures upon which this unfolding hinges; I am mostly interested in the structure of language. Two approaches to the linguistic retrieval of the lost time are addressed in my paper; the deconstructive approach in Derrida's "Force of Law," and the archaeological approach in Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Deconstruction claims that the unfolding of time may never be outstripped by the power of language because of the aporetic structure of representation of language. Although Kristeva agrees with this point, her archeological framework nonetheless acknowledges that the symbolic order of language must represent a horizon for the feminist revolutionary work. To a stronger extent, I will try to show through Kristeva that there is a partial repudiation of language's timely power in Derrida's understanding of the place of the symbolic and representation in deconstruction. The power of language may instead be accounted for through the mode of production of meaning in language for Kristeva, which must take into consideration the structures of subject formation through psychoanalysis.

Keywords: temporality, messianic time, deconstruction, archaeology, language, law, justice, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva

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## 1. Introduction

This paper is mainly interested in reconceiving the question of *time* in feminist theory. More specifically, I work at developing a messianic account of time in order to better understand how time structures and orchestrates the “feminist revolution.” However, such an account of time may find itself at odds with other feminist accounts. Hence, I first want to go through a brief history of the outlook on time.<sup>1</sup> In short, the first wave of feminism works at giving similar opportunities to women that are given to man, which boils down to inserting the feminine experience in the forcible and linear temporality of the paternal law. Ultimately, this maintains an uncritical approach to temporality. Second wave feminism, on the other hand, rejects the paternal temporality in the name of the institution of a feminine “cyclical” or “embodied” time. This second wave represents a bigger challenge because it begs the question of the legitimacy of institutions and of the essence of the feminine experience. Indeed, these feminists defend their revolutionary position by grounding it in concepts like the “feminine experience” or the “feminine body,” which are considered more stable and legitimate footing for revolution. By doing so, they however tacitly essentialize and enclose the feminine experience in a specific revolutionary signifier, namely “embodiment” or “cyclical time.” Ultimately, second wave feminism falls short of providing a critical account of language through which this timely revolution may be articulated<sup>2</sup> without falling into a metaphysical domain of language, unhinged and disconnected from experience.

These critical expositions stage a third approach with regards to the question of time. Indeed, third wave feminism takes neither time nor language as a stable and certain ground for a feminist revolution. On the contrary, post-structuralist thought has specifically worked at thematizing these metaphysical tendencies of language that disconnect it from experience and essentialize its revolutionary aim. Language, by itself, runs the risk of disconnecting from the

very experience it sets out to articulate and reveals itself as unstable and dubious with regards to its revolutionary signifier. Hence, language rather accomplishes its revolutionary aim through the *mode* of retrieval of lost time by language, and not in the *content* of the language itself. The analysis of time will hence allow us to account for this instability and flexibility of language in order to achieve the revolutionary feminist aim. Furthermore, the specificity of the paternal law, against which feminist theory posits itself, is its illegitimate foreclosure of temporal possibilities. Indeed, feminist revolution must work at releasing these temporal possibilities while also acknowledging the fundamental impossibility of that claim. Ultimately, the analysis of time and revolution in the context of French feminist theory will lead to a theory of *revolt*, this is to say a theory that acknowledges the impervious character of language with regards to time and the subsequent intimacy of the temporal modalities of revolution. In order to do so, Jacques Derrida's text "Force of Law" (1992) and Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974) prove to be especially helpful, because they provide insight both on the question of time and on the question of the legitimacy of revolution.

First, I am interested in Derrida's messianic account of time as a yet-to-come (*à-venir*) in "Force of Law." In this text, Derrida renders and rearticulates two concepts from Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence*: law-preserving violence and law-founding violence. By doing so, Derrida works at developing an account of justice that may not outstrip the analysis of law at work in the structuring of our world while also being law's conditions of possibility. This aporetic structure of law withdraws justice in a yet-to-come dimension of laws and a messianic structure of manifestation. Furthermore, the mode of retrieval of this lost "just" time is deconstructive. Indeed, deconstruction acknowledges this undecipherable and unreadable dimension of laws with regards to their judicial aim while also working at fleshing out the illegitimate and metaphysical pretensions of laws. Then, to deepen and radicalize the idea of

messianic time, I turn to Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974), her most straightforward exposition of the semiotic and symbolic order of language. In order to understand the interaction of both these dimensions, we must first understand the structures of subject-formation. Indeed, in order for the semiotic to make its way to the symbolic, the subject must accept and assume its position as a fundamental lack. However, this position may only be fully assumed through metaphorical and unstable processes, withdrawing the retrieval of lost time to a messianic dimension. The retrieval, in turns, is archaeological because it follows the horizon of the *arché* of subject-formation through psychoanalysis.<sup>3</sup> This point will be further reinforced through later texts by Kristeva, namely *Powers of Horror* (1980). In this text, Kristeva addresses the question of the *agency* of the subject with regards to its own subject-formation and she reconceptualises the semiotic dimension of language as a bodily limit. This will further our point on the intimacy of revolution and reaffirm the paramount importance of the symbolic order in articulating the feminist revolution.

Furthermore, Kristeva reveals in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that the retrieval of lost time may only be articulated through language – a point that will also be addressed in Derrida's "Force of Law" (1992) and *Positions* (1974). Indeed, for Kristeva, the unfolding of time may only be accounted for in linguistic terms and, alternatively, language finds its essential aim through the accomplishment of a temporal revolution. French post-structuralism has thematized the problem of the linguistic retrieval of lost time and the differences between deconstructive and archaeological approaches on the question of this retrieval. What I aim to show is that at stake in the debate between the archaeological and the deconstructive approaches is the very status of the symbolic order of language and its representability. Considering this, my main goal in challenging Derrida's account of messianic time with Kristeva's framework of language is to reaffirm the importance of language as a symbolic order in the philosophy of time and as central

in operating the timely/awaited revolution in feminist philosophy. In other words, if we are to accept that the specificity of paternal law lies in its foreclosure of temporal possibilities, we should also accept that the feminist revolution must partly hinge on the symbolic order that instituted this law – or at least represents a horizon for feminist analysis.

## 2. Messianic Time and Deconstruction in Derrida's "Force of Law"

I first want to turn to Derrida to deepen our understanding of the metaphysical pitfalls of language and develop a messianic account of time in "Force of Law."<sup>4</sup> In the second section of this essay, Derrida introduces two concepts, which he borrows from Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence*: law-founding violence and law-preserving violence. In short, the founding violence is the one that institutes and positions law (*die rechtsetzende Gewalt*) and the violence that conserves is the one that maintains, confirms, insures the permanence and enforceability of the law (*die rechtserhaltende Gewalt*) (Derrida 1993, 31). However, these can only be virtually<sup>5</sup> differentiated precisely because, on the one hand, a law is powerless if it is founded but never enforced and, on the other hand, a law is fundamentally tyrannical if it is enforced but never properly founded<sup>6</sup> (16). In order to show the very entanglement of these two violences at work in laws – or "*différentielle* contamination" as coined by Derrida – I will make two points. First, the claim of laws in their founding moment goes above and beyond the very scope of the laws in a quasi-ahistorical manner, withdrawing justice in an ungraspable dimension. Second, the reiterative structure of laws not only cheapens the founding of law, but it destabilizes and renders ineffective any possibility to develop permanent and proper channels (*passage*) to justice. The possibility of deconstruction lies at the intersection of the quasi-ahistorical, and the specific and experiential dimension of laws. Ultimately, I will address the articulation of difference between

the deconstructive work as foundation, and the symbolic order and the representative object it must hinge on.

## 2.1 Laws and the aporia of justice

In order to understand the (un)graspable status of justice, we must first understand the status of laws themselves. Indeed, I have mentioned that the analysis of justice may never outstrip the analysis of laws, precisely because laws are essentially established as such through monopoly. Derrida writes, “the monopoly doesn’t strive for any given just and legal ends [...] but law itself.” (33) This is to say, it is not the *content* of the laws that should be scrutinized in order to seek out a just end, it should rather be the status of the laws as monopoly. Indeed, the violence of law is precisely its claim to the monopoly of violence and world-structuring (*Gewalt*); the very existence of a law is an absolute – and hence violent – claim on the world. This does not mean that laws are inherently tyrannical, but rather that there is nothing outside of laws and their world-structuring violence upon which laws may ground themselves to insure their own enforcement and permanence. Furthermore, the foundational violence of the law is also a claim on time; although contingently positioned in time, the foundation of a law is always and must always be an a-historical claim. Indeed, as Derrida puts it, the “founding or revolutionary moment of law is, in law, an instance of non-law. But it is also the whole of history. *This moment always takes place and never takes place in the presence.*” (36) In this excerpt, Derrida reveals not only that the foundation of the law in a quasi-ahistorical claim, but also – and most importantly – that this timely dimension of the law is precisely what deems it ungraspable. Indeed, “there is this question of this ungraspable revolutionary instant that belongs to no historical, temporal continuum but in which the foundation of a new law nevertheless plays, if we may say so, on something from an anterior law.” (40-1) The very ungraspability or unreadability of the violence of the law lies in the twofold status it has with regard to time. On the one hand, the founding



violence of the law posits itself outside of the realm of laws and readability altogether. In other words, this founding violence is *before the law* and *anterior to the law*.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, this timeless dimension of laws may only arise in a specific legal context and builds upon anterior laws. In other words, this founding violence is indebted to its *prior laws*. Hence, paradoxically, in the instant of revolution, the law posits itself beyond the law – an “instance of non-law” – and claims more than what can be claimed by a law, while also building off pre-existing contingent laws. As a matter of fact, if the founding violence were *strictly* ungraspable, it would be graspable *as* ungraspable. What renders the founding of the law ungraspable is its perpetually aborted graspability. Derrida writes, the “unreadability of violence results from the very readability of the violence that belongs to what others would call the symbolic order of law.” (37) This fundamentally means that the justice at work in laws must always be played out in this (un)graspable dimension of laws, withdrawn from time and presence.<sup>8</sup>

However, the founding violence of the law does not disconnect the legal field from any critical work, nor does it entail that the just end of laws shall be carried through clear and identifiable channels. Indeed, the law-preserving violence, through its reiterative structure, undermines any work to establish a proper connection between laws and justice, to the extent where justice may never manifest as such at all times within laws. More specifically, this means that a specific concept never encapsulates the salvatory power of justice. On the contrary, Derrida argues “we are in the realm where, in the end, there are only singular examples.” (29) Indeed, an analysis of laws towards a just end may only be carried out in specific experience and through singular examples. This analysis must experience the very limit of the singular example of the specific laws at work in this context, in order for justice to properly manifest. In other words, it is only in the specific legal experience that the ahistorical field of justice reveals itself as such. Again, this ahistorical field of justice remains fundamentally indebted to the singular context within which it

arose<sup>9</sup> and may never posit itself as having reached justice as a pure concept: “nothing is absolutely exemplary,” Derrida writes.<sup>10</sup> At stake in this aporetic structure between specific legal examples and the generality and ahistoriality of justice is the very accomplishing of justice. Furthermore, Derrida writes, “justice is an experience of the impossible” (16). In order for justice to be effectively experienced, justice must first and foremost be experienced at the very limit of experience. This limit is precisely the infinity and groundlessness of justice as a timeless concept. However, the limit experience is precisely what cannot be experienced as such; justice is the impossible experience of the impossible. Indeed, the structure of experience itself prohibits the timeless experience of justice and keeps justice at an (un)graspable distance. Again, experience may not be the ground for justice to arise precisely because experience may only be accounted for within specific legal terms. This also begs the question of the institution and the specific legal context of the aporetic experience of justice. Derrida writes,

We are dealing with a double bind [...]. On the one hand, it appears *easier* to criticize the violence that founds since it cannot be justified by any pre-existing legality and so appears savage. But on the other hand, and this reversal is the whole point of this reflection, it is *more difficult*, more illegitimate to criticize this same violence since one cannot summon it to appear before the institution of any pre-existing law. (40)

The criticism of laws seems easier when directed to their foundational violence because it is untethered and hence uncomplicated. This hasty criticism, however, bypasses the essential institutions through which justice has historically been served. On the other hand, it is more difficult but also more illegitimate to criticize justice on the grounds of the historical legal institutions precisely because one cannot summon justice “to appear before the institution of any pre-existing law.” The point here, again, is the indistinguishable difference between the criticism of laws and the accomplishment of justice through legal institutions.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the timely (im)possibility of justice is twofold. First, it is impossible for any legal channels of justice to

reinstitute themselves and to perpetrate *through time*. Second, it is impossible for any legal channels of justice to fully grasp justice within laws *of all times at any given time*. The work that is set out within this double (im)possibility of timely justice is deconstruction. The deconstructive work fundamentally seeks out these ever-changing channels of justice within legal experience. Also, the deconstructive work “has no horizon of expectation” (27),<sup>12</sup> precisely because it may not rely upon any salvatory/ revolutionary concept – i.e., justice. The heterogeneity of justice and experience renders any horizon to the deconstructive work dubious and unstable. Rather, deconstruction may only be accounted work through differential work.

## 2.2 *Différentielle* contamination

Derrida’s concept of *différentielle* contamination (38) points to the very entanglement of the founding violence and preserving violence at work in law. As we have explained before, the law positions itself in a foundational act that goes *beyond* the scope of the law. This founding of the law is both contingent, as it is a positioning between an array of “possibilities,” and necessary, as it positions itself upon experience and obliterates any other “possibilities.” Derrida has proven once and for all that the reiterative structure of time cannot be the source of the forceful enforcement<sup>13</sup> of the law and, alternatively, a critical analysis of justice may not do away with this reiterative structure. Considering this, the claim of *différentielle* contamination is twofold. First, (1) the work laid out for deconstruction is the one of *differentiating* two dimensions of law that are fundamentally indistinguishable. It is only in this differentiating that the structures of law find their foundation. Second, (2) a thorough overthrow of the law may only be *deferred*, this is to say it may only be accomplished in a place beyond the law and in a time that is not ours. Ultimately, the claim of *différentielle* contamination is not that the aim of justice is strictly impossible in itself. Rather, the claim of *différance* is that the fundamental work of laws may

only be accomplished in a messianic dimension of time, manifesting itself in the mode of a *yet-to-come*: “Justice remains, is yet to come, *à venir*, it has an, it is *à venir*, the very dimension of events irreducibly to come.”<sup>14</sup> (27) If we have understood the radicalism of the differential (im)possibility and the symbolic instability of deconstruction, it should also be clear that the (un)graspable concept of justice is nothing but its timely and messianic unfolding. Indeed, in “Force of Law,” language is not a productive limit to time,<sup>15</sup> although it may participate in the unfolding of time. In other words, although language is an important factor in the unfolding of time, it does not hold an equivalent status as time. The necessary implication of this interaction of time and language is, as Derrida underlines through the voice of Benjamin, “to recognize [...] a pure and revolutionary violence as such, is a decision not accessible to man. [sic]”<sup>16</sup> (55)

### 2.3 Representation and the symbolic order of language

In this line of questioning, we may ask if the violence of law can be boiled down to the violence of symbolic representation of language. Derrida posits, “the concept of violence belongs to the symbolic order of law, politics and morals. And it is only to that extent that it can give rise to a critique.” (33) What is striking in this excerpt is that, for Derrida, the whole of violence is attributable to the symbolic order and not just the preservation of the law. Hence, to anticipate, there does not seem to be a perfect equivalency between law founding/preserving and semiotic/symbolic dimensions of language in Kristeva. Furthermore, the “unreadability of violence results from the very readability of the violence that belongs to what others would call the symbolic order of law.” (37) Conceptualizing the preservation of law as its pure readability through the symbolic order is, according to Derrida, erasing the fact that readability is always co-extensively unreadability.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the claim of the symbolic to any sort of logic or any sort of readability is hence unstable. For Derrida, the symbolic itself inaugurates the unavoidable

violence; the symbolic is the readability that makes the unreadability necessary and unsurpassable. The symbolic, just like justice, amounts to an aporia that may never be surpassed. This disavowal of the pure symbolic objects of language as proper channels of justice has, in my opinion, two main consequences. First, it repudiates and disconnects any sort of symbolic analysis from a pre-symbolic transformation as given. This would mean, for example, that a revolution or destruction of the paternal law would not have anything to do with the analysis of the signifiers at work in the symbolic order of the paternal law. Second, it disqualifies the existence of any transcendental signifiers or signified in language. These signifiers are, according to Derrida, dubious grounds for any kind of revolution and would rather bolster the metaphysical pretentiousness of such symbolic analysis. Hence, this limits the critical outreach of deconstruction to the fleshing out of illegitimate application of metaphysical “concepts” to non-metaphysical “objects.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, on the question of language, Derrida rather shifts his focus on presence and representation in order to avoid this problem of the symbolic. He writes:

Without being immediately present, [the violence that founds *droit*] is replaced (*vertreten*, ‘represented’) by the supplement of a substitute. And it is in this *différance*, in the movement that replaces presence [...], it is in this *différentielle* representativity that originary violence is consigned to oblivion. This amnesic loss of consciousness does not happen by accident. It is the very *passage* from presence to representation. (47)

Hence, representativity is for Derrida the problem of the originary and unsurpassable violence. The symbolic order that encapsulates representativity may not be outstripped by another dimension of language, precisely because nothing escapes representativity. Rather, the gap between presence and representativity inscribes *différance* at the very center of both presence and representativity.<sup>19</sup> Representation is not simply a doubling of the presence, it is the very distance that allows presence to be (un)graspable and (un)readable, this is to say the proper distance that allows presence to be experienced as such. Furthermore, the objects of language may never be

present as such and immediately, but rather always deferred through representation. The presence prior to representation is forever lost in oblivion, albeit always immediately present in representation as its mystical authority. This *différential* structure ultimately allows Derrida to evacuate the question of subjectivity from the problem of the possibility of deconstruction.

### 3. Kristeva's Archaeology and the Instability of the Semiotic-Symbolic

My goal in this section is to deepen our understanding of Kristeva's archaeological process of time by further exploring the logic of the interaction of the symbolic and the semiotic dimensions of language. I will first attend to this through Kristeva's early text *Revolution in Poetic Language* as an introduction to the openness of language and its modalities of transformation. This text is also Kristeva's first clear distancing from Lacan's theory of the symbolic unconscious and a return to Freud's theory of drives. I will then briefly explore her later understanding of the modalities of transformation of language – and subsequent subjectivities – in *Powers of Horror* and “Women's Time,” and address the shift from revolution to revolt. As mentioned before, Kristeva's account of language attempts to give voice to something “outside” the realm of the symbolic functioning, and so outside of the given structure of meaning and “values” (Beardsworth 2004, 42). In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva defends that the inauguration of the symbolic order of language can only be carried out through a necessary separation between the subject and its primary bodily drives, what she calls the “thetic phase” (Kristeva 1984, 43-6). The thetic phase is hence the necessary separation in order for a “subject” and an “object” to appear as such and consequently, an enunciation and an identification of the subject with these objects to be possible. The thetic phase implies both a rupturing of the pre-verbal subject and its drives, and is what allows the subject to build and produce a self-identification through its enunciation and object-relations. Interestingly, enunciations may only

refer to or represent their objects through specific meaning production – namely through metaphors or metonymies. However, the thetic phase itself precedes logically as the virtual fact of attribution of meaning to objects by the subject. Hence, the thetic phase may not be a strictly symbolic apparatus – like the mirror stage might be for Lacan, for example<sup>20</sup> – precisely because it logically precedes meaning production, which draws upon both symbolic and semiotic dimensions of language. We could say that the thetic phase may only manifest itself as a virtual presence in our meaningful world, which leads Kristeva to refer to it as the “deepest structure of enunciation” (42). Furthermore, Kristeva will argue that modern philosophy has exclusively worked at developing an account of representation – and consequently of the inauguration of meaning – from the standpoint of the transcendental ego. Freud, however, breaks with this tradition by shifting his focus away from the origin of the inauguration – which can only amount to the impossibility of the subject of escaping the symbolic it has itself inaugurated, in a Lacanian manner – and redirect it to the modes of production of that very meaning – where something above and beyond the subject may be found (43).

### 3.1 Castration and the Metaphorical Dimension of Language

In the Freudian theory, the mirror stage and castration are both moments that instantiate this overarching power of the thetic phase between the symbolic consciousness and the unconscious drives; and they may be the key into the mode of production of meaning itself. Castration is neither the history of a particular subject relative to its own experience – and a relic of Freud’s sexist past – nor is it the definite enclosing of the subject under the phallic signifier – and the inauguration of the symbolic order of the paternal law. Rather, castration holds a twofold status with regards to meaning production; it is both (1) a specific metaphor for the fundamental lack at the origin of the meaning production, and (2) in itself is the sole introduction into the symbolic

order it institutionalizes. This double status is inscribed in the very ambiguity of the thetic phase: Kristeva will say that it is both an “a priori supposition,” and a “logical necessity” as well as an “imaginary construction” (Kristeva 1981, 22-3). Hence, castration for Freud is the completion and the fulfillment of this separation (Kristeva 1984, 44); it is the necessary tipping over of the subject into its symbolic, while also staying entirely dependent upon metaphoric castration. In other words, castration is the necessary metaphor for the *lack*. The metaphoric representation of that lack through the fear of castration inscribes for the subject the lack as being fundamentally and solely a lack of the phallus and consequently inscribes the phallus as the empty signifier of the symbolic order. We must not forget that for Freud and for Kristeva, the signifier at the origin of the symbolic order metaphorically finds its foundation in a pre-symbolic and unthematizable dimension of experience of lack and, hence, draws its meaning partly from a semiotic dimension of language.

The discovery of castration, however, detaches the subject from his dependence on the mother, and the perception of this lack [*manque*] makes the phallic function a symbolic function—the symbolic function. This is a decisive moment, fraught with consequences: the subject, finding his identity in the symbolic, *separates* from his fusion with the mother, *confines* his *jouissance* to the genital, and transfers semiotic motility onto the symbolic order. (45)

Hence, the symbolic is not a burden to the semiotic expression or vice versa; rather, it is the boundary and the limit where meaning is produced. The splitting of the thetic phase has been revealed as the very condition of possibility of signification itself. The thetic phase, as the condition of possibility of significance, hence reveals a *transcendental* dimension of language (48). However, precisely because this dimension of language may only be revealed at the *limit*, or can only be revealed metaphorically, the thetic phase may only transcendently reach out in a partial manner, with a remainder. In other words, in coping with the metaphoricity of language, the status of the thetic phase forever remains *quasi-transcendental*. Kristeva puts it in the form of



a question “is this to say, then, that such a theoretical undertaking transcendentalizes semiotic motility, setting it up as a transcendental Signifier?” (46)

Furthermore, the resulting subject of this newfound symbolic order will be, as Kristeva puts it, absent. Indeed, with regards to the manifestation of the semiotic motility in the symbolic order, the subject may only fill a space that is fundamentally absent and empty, or rather, that has fundamentally assumed its emptiness. We have seen previously that the fundamental lack may only manifest itself to the subject through a metaphor or a metonymy, namely castration.

Castration fills both a transcendental and a specific position in the subject formation. However, the pre-Oedipal drives, albeit analytically unthinkable, remain operating for the subject, precisely because they fuel its signification-production. In order for these drives to find some kind of accomplishment, Kristeva will argue that the subject must assume its fundamental lack and must consolidate the castration trauma,<sup>21</sup> and a failure to do so might result in excessive fantasy or psychosis. In other words, the libidinal energy transmitted to the subject as pre-Oedipal drives may turn against the subject and become a destructive force of the subject (as psychosis, etc.) if the castration complex was only partially inscribed unto the subject, which in turn fundamentally implies that the castration must have been fundamentally experienced as a problem, as a trauma, as a drama (49). This is the space opened up to the subject to transform destructive and reactive forces into productive ones:

This is the crux of the matter: [...] the completion of the Oedipus complex [is] needed for the *Aufhebung* [relève] of the semiotic in the symbolic to give rise to a signifying *practice* that has a socio-historical function (and is not just a self-analytical discourse, a substitute for the analyst's couch) (49)

Kristeva reaffirms in this excerpt the necessity for the Oedipus complex to be completed – and hence experienced as problematic and as revealing the fundamental lack – to be effective in concerting subjectivity as absent and allowing signification to arise. She goes a step further; at

stake in the thesis of the semiotic dimension of language is the very possibility of language to reach out to something like reality and enact transformation – in its limited outreach.<sup>22</sup> In short, the thesis of the semiotic is necessary for significance; losing sight of the semiotic is also losing sight of the possibility for language to deliver anything practical, transformative and significant. It is also interesting to notice that, for Kristeva, the Oedipus complex is not released in an identifiable and discreet moment in the psyche's history,<sup>23</sup> but must rather be reaffirmed in every meaning-production practice. Hence, Kristeva's thought converges in this very aim: the possibility of meaning-production practice to have a "socio-historical function," a fundamentally ethico-political aim.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the analysis of the subject as absent has opened up a political space within significance, however virtual it is. The political agency of the subject, however, does not directly regard significance production – as liberal subjects would assume – but rather regards the position of the subject in the process of significance production.<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is within the agency of the subject to unlock historical possibilities that have been foreclosed by narcissism and the bolstering of the ego in Western thought. Before getting into the finer details of the political and historical aspects of Kristeva's thought as well as its interaction/contradictions with the subject-formation theory, I want to address a parallel but nonetheless paramount point: mimesis.

### 3.2 Mimesis

Mimesis for Kristeva is first a repetitive structure of language, but is foremost a weakening and a dissolving of the structures of the symbolic and semiotic by effectively instating the thetic phase of language as a mere virtual presence and preventing the thetic from becoming "theological" or "unitary" (58). The aim of Kristeva's argument on mimesis is the fundamental "figurability" of language (60), which is to say the very plasticity and malleability of language with regards to the

transcendental dimension of the thetic. In a similar manner to repetition, mimesis is a fundamental structure of the symbolic dimension of language. As clarified above, the denotative function of language has been revealed as one fulfilled solely through metaphors and metonymies. On the one hand, the syntactic form of denotation as metaphor and metonymy makes up for the very unpredictability and unfigurability of this linguistic function. Indeed, if language is to rely upon a semiotic dimension – which is to say an “outside” and unpredictable dimension – then its syntactic structure of meaning-production may not be fixed and stable. On the other hand, mimesis also shakes the core of subjectivity as lack. Indeed, we have found that subjectivity as well is consolidated in the metaphorical identification with lack through castration. Castration, in order words, may only enact its power upon the subject through metaphorical and unstable grounds. Mimesis cheapens/displaces the very identification of the subject with lack and hence jeopardizes the blooming of the pre-Oedipal drives through the subject.<sup>26</sup> This point is a paramount one: mimesis reveals not only the unstable basis of the expression of drives, but further reveals that the expression of these drives is nothing but the underlying syntax – metaphors and metonymies – that allows their expression. In Kristeva’s words, “we find the principles of metonymy and metaphor indissociable from the drive economy underlying them.” (28) Again, the possibility of the expression of pre-Oedipal drives does not precede the syntax that allowed them to be, rather they are the syntactic structure in themselves, “the inseparability of the thetic and syntax” (55). Indeed, for the subject, the expression of drives always manifests itself as such... or as such... The motility of the very object of drives forces us to latch onto the symbolic object of these drives (e.g., the fascination for the phallus<sup>27</sup>) as well as keeping a fundamental flexibility and plasticity with regards to future objects of libidinal expression (the Phallus). Both approaches are necessary for and co-extensive in the completion of drives, and for that we must not think them as contradictory. Hence, demystifying the semiotic dimension of

language and the pre-Oedipal drives implies necessarily to both embrace the fundamental relativity of the object of the drive for the subject, and to recognize the transcendental thetic function of language which locates the symbolic object of drives. This is why Kristeva argues that mimesis both works at maintaining and at subverting the unity of the thetic (60), it is both the enemy of language and its only resource. Mimesis, then, paradoxically participates in the figurability of language, what Kristeva calls poetic language. Poetic language is the propensity of language to go above and beyond its mimetic repetition as well as use mimesis to achieve its linguistic aim.

Furthermore, the mimetic structure of language forecloses the possibility of any pure signifier and rejects any possibility of language to definitely accomplish its revolutionary aim. Kristeva writes, “to note that there can be no language without a thetic phase that establishes the possibility of truth, and to draw consequences from this discovery is quite a different matter from insisting that every signifying practice operates uniquely out of the thetic phase.” (59) Indeed, the thetic phase has been recognized as fundamental for signification, but its presence has also been revealed as virtual by mimesis. This fundamentally means that its power is never instantiated in a single and unitary signifier, and as well is never released in a definite and discreet moment in time. In other words, the revolution may never be encapsulated in a single signifying object – e.g. the body, the Mother, God, language, etc. On the contrary, the idea of a pure revolutionary signifier distances us from the actual revolutionary aim, which is “a signifying *practice* that has a socio-historical function.” Chiefly, Kristeva argues that every signifying act both (1) is fundamentally possible because of the thetic phase and (2) is one that never fully reaches out and accomplishes the revolutionary aim of the thetic phase. This *double bind* of the thetic phase renders its presence as only virtual in language, a “theoretical supposition” (67). She goes on, “no pure signifier can effect the *Aufhebung* (in the Hegelian sense) [*relève*] of the semiotic without

leaving a remainder [*reste*]" (49). The condition of possibility of significance and meaning is the existence of an outside dimension to language; the semiotic. However, the very unpredictability and unfigurability of the semiotic forecloses any possibility for language to fully grasp it and hence enact a full-fledged socio-historical revolution, and leaves language in a double bind with regards to its own signifying power. The "remainder" of the semiotic may only virtually appear in significance as a "trace" or a "*reste*."

#### 4. Derrida against Kristeva

The point Kristeva makes through mimesis is similar to Derrida's previous point on *différentielle* contamination. Indeed, the double bind of the law with regards to justice might easily be paralleled with the double bind of significance with regards to the semiotic dimension of language. Justice, for Derrida, is an (un)graspable concept at work in laws without ever actually manifesting within laws. The presence of justice, just like the presence of other metaphysical entities like deconstruction or democracy, may only make its way to laws by the messianic structure of time. Significance for Kristeva also follows a thoroughly messianic structure of time. Indeed, the mimetic structure of language has revealed that the semiotic dimension of language may only make its way into the symbolic order as the releasing by the subject of pre-Oedipal drives. Significance may never fully rely upon the semiotic dimension of language in order to fully reach out to its object. Hence, revolution – i.e., the retrieval of lost time by significance<sup>28</sup> – is never fully completed and always to come.

##### 4.1 Deconstruction and Archaeology

However, along the exposure of the concept of language, a "transcendental" dimension of language in the thetic phase as well as an ethical and a political space of subjectivity have been

shown to underpin the linguistic double bind of significance. Indeed, for Kristeva, the very possibility of significance hinges both (1) on a radically exterior dimension of language and (2) a fundamentally figurable and transcendental dimension of language, without which we lose the very possibility of language to signify. Hence, a considerable difference remains between Kristeva's approach to language in *Revolution in Poetic Language* and Derrida's approach to justice in "Force of Law" regarding the *mode* of retrieval of lost time within language. On the one hand, Derrida's approach to the retrieval of lost time is *deconstructive*. For Derrida, asking the question of the *mode* of retrieval is asking the question of the *media* within which this retrieval is (im)possible. Unsurprisingly, he underlines a paradox on this question. First, (1) justice "is required immediately" (Derrida 1993, 26), which means that every situation asks for an immediate just decision. Second, (2) a just decision has no horizon. Indeed, it is precisely because of this "overflowing of the performative, because of this always excessive haste to interpretation getting ahead of itself, because of this structural urgency and precipitation of justice that the latter has no horizon of expectation." (27) Hence, the urgency of time both calls for justice and destroys its very horizon of accomplishment. The aporetic structure of time renders its retrieval impossible. Deconstruction, just like justice, is the accomplishment of that judicial aim, and hence is enthralled in the aporetic work of fleshing out the illegitimate yet unavoidable application of metaphysical logic to non-metaphysical objects.

On the other hand, Kristeva's approach to the retrieval of lost time is *archaeological*. Unlike deconstruction, the archaeological approach acknowledges a distinction between the *mode* of retrieval, – i.e., archaeology –, and the *object* of retrieval – i.e., the *arché*. This is not to say that the archaeological object may be fully retrieved as such by language, but it is to say that archaeology has a *horizon*. The horizon of archaeology is supported by the conception of language as well as subject-formation. Indeed, according to Kristeva, the reintroduction of the

previously repressed maternal drives is a break from the previous syntax and inaugurates a new symbolic order. The horizon may be cleared out by the psychoanalytical work on denegation and refusal for the subject.<sup>29</sup> In short, the horizon of archaeology reveals itself through a radical acceptance by the subject of its negative foundation as lack. Any other position by the subject is imbued with narcissism, ego's self-bolstering and a token of Western metaphysical thought (Beardsworth 2004, 40). Again, we might see some clear resemblance with Derrida's deconstructive work with regards to metaphysics. However, a radical difference remains: the archaeological work is carried out through language and the analysis of its signifiers, because lack always reveals itself as such or as such – i.e., metaphorically. For example, for the subject, psychoanalytical work may be done through the specific metaphor of the mourning of a departed loved one, the acceptance of the lust for the phallus previously repressed or the independent distancing from a smothering parent. These are all metaphorical representation that reveals the symbolic necessity for semiotic work. Representation, for Kristeva, is not just the bastardized doubling of an originary presence; it is a second nature within which the psyche lives.

#### 4.2 Kristeva and the Problem of Agency in Subjectivity

Sara Beardsworth argues in her *Julia Kristeva* (2004) that the underlying claim of *Revolution in Poetic Language* is political. According to her, a paramount goal for Kristeva's conceptualization of subject-formation is to criticize bourgeois societies and answer the Marxist materialist dialectic (40). Bourgeois societies, for Kristeva, are structured around narcissistic fixations of the psyche and hence are fundamentally inflexible and foreclosed to "revolution."<sup>30</sup> In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, it has yet to be determined what in our twisted bourgeois societies has to do with a syntactic (legitimate) foreclosure of the semiotic and what has to do with a historic ("human-made" or illegitimate) refusal and disavowal of the thetic phase, insofar as the subject is

said to be “absent.” For Kristeva, significance must have a socio-historical function in order to be significance to be revolutionary. However, if the socio-historical function of significance may only arise as a break or a breaching within the narcissistic fixations of the psyche, then narcissism is a condition of possibility of significance itself. If narcissism is necessary for significance, how can it be fully fleshed out in order for significance to arise? It would seem like a Derridian aporetic structure reveals itself within the Kristevian framework, leading back to the very inaccessibility of metaphysical structure and its divorce from the symbolic dimension of language.

To Kristeva’s defense, she does mention in *Revolution in Poetic Language* that negativity in itself tends to foreclose the thetic phase (Kristeva 1984, 68), which seems to provide delineation between what we might call a “legitimate” foreclosure of the thetic phase and an “illegitimate” one. Regardless, Kristeva argues that “only a subject, for whom the thetic is not a repression of the semiotic *chora* but instead a position either taken on or undergone, can call into question the thetic so that a new disposition may be articulated.” (51) On this point, Söderbäck writes, “what is at stake here is renewal, not absolute destruction. Later in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, she reminds us that while the thetic is ‘absolutely necessary’, it is nevertheless ‘not exclusive: the semiotic [...] constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all the various transformations of the signifying practice” (Söderbäck 2011, 86f18). In order to answer these burning questions, I want to briefly turn to *Powers of Horror* (1982), which will further our understanding of the conditionality of revolution and ultimately consolidate our work from *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Indeed, the transformation of revolution into revolt in later texts will muddle the distinction between the semiotic and symbolic dimensions of language while preserving the radicalism of the transcendental signifying order.



#### 4.3 Kristeva's Later Conceptualization of Revolution in *Powers of Horror*

Kristeva operates this transformation in *Powers of Horror* by reconceptualising the manifestation of the semiotic authority not anymore as an *act* – either linguistic or socio-political – but rather as the mapping out of bodily schema through *scription*.<sup>31</sup> In short, scription is defined by Kristeva as “an inscription of limits, an emphasis placed not on the (paternal) Law but on (maternal) Authority through the very signifying order.” (Kristeva 1982, 73) This is to say that language, through its signifying power – which arches over both the symbolic order and its semiotic unfigurable dimension –, reaches out to the bodily dimension of subjectivity that is outside of language. However, this new bodily schema may only be understood through language as scription and may only be retrieved to language as archaic. Indeed, past linguistic and cultural rituals have inscribed the limits and the border of our symbolic order as bodily partial objects and are “the *translinguistic* spoor of the most archaic boundaries of the self’s clean and proper body [*corps propre*].” (73, my emphasis) Hence, there remains this transcendental dimension to language, but it is radically preceded by this archaic bodily work. Moreover, what we see in scription in Kristeva’s later text is partly an answer to our previous questions we have framed as Derridian criticism. Indeed, scription veers away from an agential handling of the semiotic authority by the subject through the acceptance of lack and rather inscribes this authoritative power of the semiotic at the level of (*à même*) and within the condition of possibility of subjectivity itself, the incorporeality of the body.

If this new conceptualization of the semiotic order opens up a whole new theory of the body and its interaction with the forces of language, I rather want to quickly focus my attention on the subsequent modalities or conditionality of the revolt of the symbolic order unto this semiotic authority. As we already know from *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the reintroduction of previous repressed maternal drives in language not only shifts the symbolic order, but also

“introduces a new sort of rupturing conditionality for language” (Angelova 2020, 551). The “new” semiotic authority in *Powers of Horror* must underpin and support these symbolic changes while also giving full range to its revolution. Kristeva does so by shifting her analysis of language away from its (monolithic) dimensions and towards their limits, borders and interactions with one another. On this topic, Angelova writes, “transgressing boundaries here is especially a matter of processing the residual negativity of the semiotic and thus what only appears *retrospectively* as anterior to ‘limits’ and ‘borders’.” (552, my emphasis) Hence, by this shift, Kristeva operates the final archaic movement in understanding the retrieval of lost time. Indeed, because the limits of symbolic language may only reveal themselves in the *I* that takes into consideration or “poses” the Other— without the shadow of a monolithic semiotic dimension —, their force over language may only be released in a *retrospective* manner. The very retrieval of lost time may only appear in a retrospective manner because it may only appear when effective in the symbolic order. These very effects prove retrospectively the power of the symbolic order to reach out to something that is prior and anterior to itself – its limit with the semiotic. Furthermore, Angelova goes on, “the very force of conditionality of ‘binary logic’ [of the symbolic paternal and semiotic maternal] is anterior to the symbolic and yet in no sense pre-exists it” (552, my addition). This articulation of the symbolic and its conditionality of revolution further deepens the archaeological character of time. Indeed, the conditionality of revolution is anterior to the symbolic order precisely because it is its condition of possibility. However, this conditionality in no way pre-exists the symbolic order precisely because only the latter has the power to overturn it, by retrospectively revealing the effects of revolution within language. In sum, this is what I call the delayed “effect-dependency of revolution,” which is to say that the symbolic may only be granted the efficiency of its revolutionary potential retrospectively, again, reinstating the importance of the symbolic order in revolution. Finally, this new archaic mode of retrieval of lost time is more thoroughly

messianic precisely because its effectivity may only be revealed in the future, in retrospect, effectively bringing the later Kristeva in a Derridian direction, without giving in on the importance of the symbolic order for revolution.

## 5. Conclusion

My main goal in challenging Derrida's account of messianic time with Kristeva's framework of language is to reaffirm the importance of language as a symbolic order in the philosophy of time and as central in operating the timely/awaited revolution in feminist philosophy. As we remember, this was precisely Derrida's aim in "Force of Law"—to reimagine the locus of the unfolding of justice. Justice, for that matter, is played out on the grounds of the very laws, without referring to justice as an outside and exterior concept. Hence, any judicial aim within these laws must be found through a process of timely deconstruction. Moreover, the only path towards justice within oppressive and violent laws is a deconstructive one, which implies to tackle these limits of experience while grappling with the illegitimate metaphysical residue of that movement. At stake in this aporetic structure of experience, I argue, is for justice to have a "social and historical function" in experience, a phrase borrowed from Kristeva. Indeed, the excitability of experience at its judicial limit is the very life of experience. However, for Derrida, this "life" or "excitability" may not be ever recognized as such precisely because it can only manifest itself on the grounds of the laws and is always enthralled in the deconstructive work of distinguishing illegitimate application of justice and its legitimate aim.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Derrida argues in *Positions*<sup>33</sup> – a foreshadowing text of the questions at hand here – that metaphysics' illegitimate application to non-metaphysical objects is the shadow of the transcendental signified (Derrida 1972, 41). Indeed, the shadow cast by the possibility to refer to something transcendently bolsters language to an illegitimate metaphysical level and misleads experience

regarding its limits. This point is supported in “Force of Law,” “the injustice supposes that the other, the victim of the language’s injustice, is capable of a language in general [...] in the sense that we, men, give to this world language.” (18) A central pitfall to language is its general address to the other, that obliterates that “justice always addresses itself to singularity, to the singularity of the other.” (20) Thus, language, in “Force of Law,” is essentially an unspecific address to the other and falls into the trap of reducing presence to representation. Although this deconstructive path reveals the metaphysical quandaries of our world, I argue that this relocating of justice was done at the expense of the symbolic order and obliterates its necessary power in feminist revolution. Indeed, I argue that Derrida’s differential framework is not fully suited to account for the specificity of the patriarchal order as an illegitimate foreclosure of temporal possibilities. Derrida’s framework disqualifies, in a sense, the radicality of the patriarchal order and hence undermines the feminist work.

*Revolution in Poetic Language* gives us a shining example of how they could go hand in hand. To follow the same line of questioning, experience was thematized by Kristeva as fundamentally relating to the structure of subjectivity as lack. Indeed, the narcissistic fixities of the subject are partly responsible for the destructive forces at work in our world. Hence, a critical analysis of laws and justice must take into account the formation of subjects, the structure of the subjects as lack and chiefly the symbolic order that brought the subject to be with regards to their own lack. Indeed, for Kristeva, the metaphoricity of language allows for representation of the unfigurable into language to the extent that the struggle of language is played out in the subject as a struggle of the self. In order for the subject to accomplish this deed, the subject must seek out and unearth these very objects of language – metaphorically-charged – that will allow the subject to reaffirm itself as lack in the face of impending drives of the subject. According to Kristeva, the castration principle – the necessary metaphorical representation of the subject as lack – must be

experienced as a problem and as a tragedy by one and all in order for the semiotic to manifest itself and for significance to truly arise. Thus, castration is the principle of *singularity* in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, a principle Derrida was looking for in the unfigurability of the other. This is how, according to Kristeva, the question of law and justice reaches out to the field of subjectivity and subject-formation, previously unaddressed by Derrida.

As my concluding remarks, I want to underline two main differences between the two approaches I have compared in this paper. First, a fundamental difference that I have quickly mentioned regards the *mode* of production of significance in language. Indeed, where Derrida looks at the originary and inaugural moments of language and law, Kristeva, through Freud, is rather interested in production of meaning – significance.<sup>34</sup> For Kristeva, the conceptualization of the semiotic dimension of language is endorsed and proven by the capacity of language to reach out and produce signification. In order for language to denote and to refer to “new things” – however virtually (im)possible that may be –, it must be fundamentally figurable and plastic. Second, Kristeva has shown us that representation mustn’t necessarily live in the shadow of an original presence; rather representation must disentangle itself from that shadow.<sup>35</sup> For her, this would mean to embrace that representation is not just the bastardized doubling of an originary presence, but is the second nature within which the subject lives. If the articulation of presence and representation is important as *syntax*, then the subject must have a *mournful* approach to the “original presence” in order to fully live in representation and accept itself as lack. As a matter of fact, the Derridian aporetic structure of representation is productive in showcasing the pitfalls of the application of laws towards justice. However, for Kristeva, representation must not be thought through the prism of its originary presence but rather in the present modes of production of a significant and meaningful representation. Hence, Kristeva’s psychoanalytical detour on the question of linguistic revolution is not a random one. Psychoanalysis does not aim, like Derrida

might argue, for pure agency of the subject over its conditions of possibility. It consolidates the subject as a hinge in meaning-production and in the unravelling of time.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see Fanny Söderbäck 2012, 304-9.

<sup>2</sup> Kristeva interestingly qualifies this approach of second-wave feminism as the ‘future perfect’ (Kristeva 1981, 202), meaning that it relies on a pre-determined future in order to guide revolution, hence disconnecting it from the present experience and oppressions.

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see Söderbäck 2012, 313-20, where she thematizes the limit of language as an *arché*. I mainly draw from this text in building my account of archaeology in this paper. By archaeology, I mean a mode of retrieval of lost time that follows an *arché*. The status of the *arché* is one that is hidden and must be retrieved in order for time to unfold as such. It might take the form of a linguistic or a bodily trace or remainder (*reste*). This fundamental *reste* implies that the oppression and dominance of the laws of language may never fully repress the power of language to signify “new” things. Even though the symbolic status of the *arché* is unstable and dubious, it nonetheless constitutes a *horizon* for the work of time retrieval by *representing* the limit of time in language.

<sup>4</sup> The scope of this paper is limited to this text and its specific conceptualization of time and language. I do however refer and interact with other texts from Derrida to back up and refine my arguments – e.g., Derrida 1967, 1974, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> Here and henceforth in this paper, I mean by “virtually” nearly possible, as in theoretically possible but practically impossible.

<sup>6</sup> To be clear, purely powerless or purely tyrannical laws are not laws *per se*, which is the paradox I underline here.

<sup>7</sup> Derrida uses the expression of “before the law” (Derrida 1993, 13) (Derrida 1985) to refer both (1) to being before the law as being prosecuted by the law and (2) to being before the law as being prior to the law. In the former sense, the law as prosecutor is impenetrable to the singularly accused “subject,” in an almost frightening manner, just like Kafka finds this in his *Before the Law*. This mode of singularization through fright will produce “subjects” that deem law impenetrable and encourage the disconnection of the “subject” from its social world. In the latter sense, the anteriority to the law maintains the ambiguity with regards to the enforcement of the law and may refer to its legitimate founding moment.

<sup>8</sup> “Ungraspable” here does not mean “illegitimate.” Indeed, Derrida mentions, “the founding violence is not ‘properly destructive’.” (52) Ungraspability can be both productive – i.e., when properly applied to justice – and representing a pitfall for language, as metaphysics. This second iteration could be defined as the consequence of the illegitimate application of metaphysical “concepts” to non-metaphysical “objects.” The question remains as to what will allow us to distinguish these two instances.

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<sup>9</sup> Hence, the *quasi*-ahistorical status of justice.

<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the structure of “Force of Law” itself is a token of that claim; in order to make his point about the metaphysical status of justice, Derrida chose to analyze specific cases of contemporary legal problems such as striking, the death penalty, war, the police, Wall Street and so on.

<sup>11</sup> However, what is clear in Derrida’s description of legal institutions is that there exists a virtual possibility of illegitimately bypassing the historicity and institutionalization of justice in its criticism. This virtual possibility represents the metaphysical pitfall of language.

<sup>12</sup> To be fair, it is not that deconstruction has no horizon, it is rather that the horizon of deconstruction is the horizonlessness of critical thought, or rather the deconstruction of the horizon of critical thought.

<sup>13</sup> This is a rewording of the previous problem of metaphysics: reiteration is not forceful in itself. Rather, a critical approach to forcefulness must flesh out the forcible application of reiteration.

<sup>14</sup> Or, as Derrida puts it in his famous French catchphrase “*encore devant et devant venir*.”

<sup>15</sup> In the same way that experience is a productive limit to justice, for example.

<sup>16</sup> What does Derrida mean by “man” in this excerpt? The agential subject conception of liberal societies? The transcendental ego of phenomenology? The subject of the symbolic order of language? If it is the latter, how is it that subjects may be illegitimately singularized by law – e.g., Kafka in his *Before the Law*? How may *différance* account for it in the mode of singularization? In short, is there a “subject” to the critical work for Derrida in “Force of Law”?

<sup>17</sup> To be fair to Kristeva, Derrida is here referring to Lacan’s concept of symbolic: “this ‘unreadable’ is also very much ‘illogical’ in the order of *logos*, and this is also why I hesitate to call it ‘symbolic’ and precipitately send it into the order of Lacanian discourse” (Derrida 1993, 37). The question of the similitudes between the law-preserving violence and Kristeva’s concept of symbolic, then, has yet to be fully answered.

<sup>18</sup> Julia Kristeva holds a very similar argument to mine while discussing *Of Grammatology* in her *Revolution in Poetic Language* (140-6). According to her, the conditions of possibility of *différance* is heterogeneity, which tacitly reproduces the metaphysical pitfall it is trying to avoid. Hence, heterogeneity becomes the disavowed “constitutive outside” of deconstruction. She writes, “grammatology remains silent when faced with its destruction and renewal” and “*différance* neutralizes productive negativity.” (142) I do not go as far in my argument.

<sup>19</sup> We could say that there is a *différentielle* contamination between presence and representation.

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language, meaning that the unconscious is fully under the aegis of the signifier, i.e. the Phallus. However, for Kristeva, there always remains significance

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between consciousness and the unconscious. Thus, Kristeva's unconscious may not be fully structured by a signifier and significance does not fully rely upon the symbolic; there is always a remainder (*reste*).

<sup>21</sup> The subject must assume this position of absence because this is what the subject fundamentally *is* with regards to its drives, which is not to say that the subject is a slave to its own drives.

<sup>22</sup> Which is to say, the denotative function of language

<sup>23</sup> Which would lead to a Lacanian position: the inauguration of the symbolic order by the Oedipus complex may not be outstripped and may never be reverted.

<sup>24</sup> This point will be further detailed and strengthened through Beardsworth's book.

<sup>25</sup> This positioning through thethetic phase will later be revealed as unstable.

<sup>26</sup> The liberal subject epitomizes this paradoxical position of mastery over the very unmasterable and metaphorical lack.

<sup>27</sup> Or any other "objet petit a" for Lacan, such as feet, underwear, etc.

<sup>28</sup> See Kristeva 1998 for a parallel between the archaeological retrieval and Proust's literary concept of lost time.

<sup>29</sup> For further details, see Kristeva 1984, 63-4.

<sup>30</sup> For further details, see Beardsworth, 39-52

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to Emilia Angelova's "Abjection and the Maternal Semiotic in Kristeva's Intimate Revolt" in *The Philosophy of Julia Kristeva* (2020) for this idea.

<sup>32</sup> A point with which, we have seen, Kristeva would not disagree.

<sup>33</sup> More specifically, "Sémiologie et Grammatologie: Entretien avec Julia Kristeva" in Derrida 1974

<sup>34</sup> Derrida's point of view on Freud in "Before the Law" does not take this dimension of Freud into consideration, in my opinion. Indeed, for Derrida, the murder of the Father in Freud inaugurates the psyche and permanently institutes morality as the righteousness of the psyche (45-6). This uncritical Freudian approach to time is exemplified in the position of "standing upright," which separates the nose from the anus and its smells. This effectively prevents Freud to sniff or trace back (*flairer*) the very origins of this moral law (38). Hence, for Derrida, Freud's morality necessarily amounts to a metaphysical disconnection from the primal (anal) drives. This is not the direction I have taken with Freud through Kristeva.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, I think, this formulation mirrors Derrida's previous formulation of the "shadow of transcendental signified" in *Positions* (41). Again, Derrida and Kristeva's works are closer than they seem;

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both are trying to build a framework of language and time in order to flesh out “destructive forces” and the metaphysical pretentiousness of language, while also understanding that this work must cope with the fundamental ambiguity and metaphoricity of language. However, the question remains as to what effectively cast a shadow on the work of the retrieval of lost time. On the one hand, Derrida argues that entertaining the idea of language’s (un)attainable possibility to transcendently signify is this shadow. Kristeva, on the other hand, recognizes this as an essential foundation of language – and hence, her central concept of significance. The shadow for Kristeva would rather be this rampant refusal of the language’s power as a mode of production. Interestingly, we could argue through Kristeva that Derrida’s stance on the shadow runs the risk of turning against itself by crystallising itself in a denegation of language’s power. The difference between refusal and denegation here is to be made on the level of the *mode* of production of meaning. Can this difference be an account for in Derrida’s *différance*? I argue in this paper that Kristeva’s framework is better suited to account for it.