

Jacques Lacan's and Julia Kristeva's Views on Psycho-sexual Development of a Child

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Abstract:

The psychoanalytic writing of Jacques Lacan has given critics a new theory of the subject. Lacan considers that human subjects enter a pre-existing system of signifiers which take on meanings only within a language system. The entry into language enables us to find a subject position within a relational system. Kristeva shares Lacan's broad anti-humanism, his commitment to the primacy of language in psychical life and his understanding of the necessarily sexualized position assumed by the subject in the symbolic. The present article seeks to analyze the psycho-sexual development of a child and its impact on their personality.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Language, Subject, Symbolic, Semiotic, Patriarchy.

Lacan rewrites Freud's concept of unconscious using linguistic terminology and concepts. Lacan continues to be one of the most controversial figures within contemporary feminist theory. Many feminists use his work on human subjectivity to challenge phallogocentric knowledge. Some others are extremely hostile to it, seeing it as elitist, male-dominated, and itself phallogocentric. Like Freud's work, Lacan is also contradictory. The relations between his version of psychoanalysis and feminism remain ambivalent. It is never entirely clear whether he is simply a more subtle misogynist than Freud, or whether his reading of Freud constitutes a feminist breakthrough. The utility of psychoanalysis for feminist endeavours remain unclear. It is a risky and double-edged tool, for as a conceptual system. It is liable to explode in one's face as readily as it may combat theoretical misogynies of various kinds.

Lacan denounces the illusory mastery, unity and self-knowledge that the subject, as self-consciousness, accords itself. For him, consciousness is continually betrayed by the evasion typical of the unconscious. The subject, considered as natural individual, is problematized by Lacan. He proposes a theory of the socio-linguistic genesis of subjectivity which enables male and female subjects to be seen as social and historical effects, rather than pre-ordained biological givens.

Lacan's work also helped to introduce questions about sexuality to legitimized academic and political discourses. Although there may be a number of serious problems with Lacan's understanding of sexuality. His work does make it clear that patriarchal subjects acquire a social and speaking position only by confronting the question of castration and a sexual difference. "Sexual difference that feminists found in Lacan, a sexual difference born of treacherous signification, which, thanks to its very treachery, offered a way to read the insistence of its effects" (Rooney 2006: 270). Lacan inserts the question of sexuality into the centre of all models of social and psychical functioning. His work has been instrumental in demonstrating the centrality of systems of meaning or signification to subjectivity and the social order. The discursive/linguistic order constitutes human socio-cultural and sexual activity.

Lacan's great innovation was to emphasize the simultaneous acquisition of language and concept of one's self at the moment of the oedipal crisis. The child is catapulted at once into the symbolic world of language, law, and sexual difference. The big issue for feminist approaches to Lacan is the role of what he calls 'the phallus' in his theory of language and the subject. The three key areas in Lacan's work, the interlocking domains of subjectivity, sexuality, and language define broad interests shared by many French feminists. "Sexual instincts and identification processes having a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language, allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the Imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex" (Mulvey, 1975: 589)

Kristeva presents a series of internal adjustments or modifications to his position while remaining within his overall conceptual frame. Kristeva's conception of the semiotic and the symbolic functions is operating in psychical, textual, and social life. It is based on the distinction between pre-oedipal and oedipal sexual drives. The semiotic and the symbolic are two modalities of all signifying processes whose interaction is the essential even of unrecognized condition of sociality, textuality, and subjectivity.

Kristeva relates psychic repression to the actual structures of language. She describes the preoedipal stage as a play of bodily rhythms and pre-linguistic exchanges between infant and mother. Kristeva refers to what Plato, in *Timaeus*, called the *chora* as the site of the undifferentiated bodily space the mother and the child share. Within the Oedipus complex it is the symbolic that is dominant, the domain of united texts, cultural representations, and knowledge. This distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic is retrospective, as it is only through the symbolic that one has access to the semiotic.

The semiotic must be understood in its etymological rather than in the Saussurian sense. It can be correlated with the anarchic pre-oedipal component drives, and polymorphous erotogenic zones, and organs. The semiotic is the order of the sexual drives and their articulation. It provides the matter, the impetus, and the subversive potential of all signification. It is the raw material of signification. Infantile drives are indeterminate, capable of many aims, sources, and objects. In agreement with Freud, Kristeva describes the semiotic as 'Feminine', a phase dominated by the space of the mother's body. She defines this space as semiotic 'chora', "The semiotic, for Kristeva, is a pre-linguistic or symbolic space, the realm of the 'unspeakable' or the 'unnameable', or what Kristeva following Plato calls the 'chora' (Simons 2004: 138). It is a space or receptacle, an undecidably enveloped and enveloping locus from which the subject is both produced and threatened with annihilation. The *chora* defines and structures the limits of the child's body and its ego or, identity as a subject. It is the space of the subversion of the subject, the space in which the death drives, emerges and threatens to engulf the subject.

The space of the maternal chora is the pre-imaginary space from and in which the drives emanate and circulate. Their differentiation into component drives, and the emerging distinction between self and other also contribute to Kristeva's concept of the semiotic. Like Lacan's imaginary and Freud's preoedipal the semiotic is a 'feminine' phase dominated by the mother. The mother is always considered phallic.

The semiotic is pre-oedipal, based on primary processes and is maternally oriented. The symbolic is in contrast with semiotic. Kristeva regards the symbolic as the condition of ordered, regulated, and rule-governed signification. It consists in the procedures which establish unities. She relies largely on Lacan's model of the symbolic. For her, the symbolic is the stability which ensures a cohesive, unified speaking subject and a coherent, meaningful text. The symbolic is based on the 'repression' or subsumption of the chaotic semiotic fluxes, and their utilization under regulated conditions. "If the symbolic established the limits and unity of a signifying practice, the semiotic registers in that practice the effect of that which cannot be pinned down as sign, whether signifier or signified" (Grosz 1990: 152).

The symbolic is an order superimposed on the semiotic. It leads to the acquisition of a stable speaking, desiring position, and the regulation and systematization of vocalization and libidinal impulses. The semiotic is dominated by the figure of the mother the symbolic is governed by the law of the father. The first stage relates to what Jacques Lacan calls the 'mirror stage'. This is the stage at which the child is able to distinguish its reflection in a mirror. A fear of his/her own castration then ensues. For children of both sexes rejecting the mother and for Kristeva, the maternal sphere of this semiotic is crucial in allowing the child to enter the symbolic sphere. It is the sphere of language and paternal authority.

The child's entry into language marks the repression of the semiotic into the unconscious. For Kristeva that repression is never complete or absolute, instead the relation between the semiotic and symbolic is a dialectical relation. This is significant in several ways. The relation between the semiotic and symbolic is a dialectical relation this has profound implications for subjectivity.

The oscillation between semiotic and symbolic mean that the speaking subject is not stable and his/her identity is not secure. For Kristeva, the mirror stage and the castration complex are the two moments provide the necessary condition for the subject's acquisition of a speaking position. The mirror stage provides the conditions for the child's detachment from its lived experience. This is necessary if signification is to be possible or desirable for the child. Castration complex provides a second order threshold or condition for the constitution of the speaking subject. If the mirror stage detaches the child from its lived experiences of fragmentation, the specular image provides it with a representation that is based on wholeness and unity. The constitution of the ego in the mirror phase, is the precondition of the semiotic, the order of the signifier.

Kristeva takes psychoanalysis as itself symptomatic of a socio-political and intellectual tradition dominated in our culture. Unlike Lacan, Kristeva remains insistent on the historical and social specificity of signification and subjectivity. The social and historical determination of individuals and signifying practices is always essential. In contrast to Lacan, for whom the imaginary order functions in a visual register, for Kristeva, the dual narcissistic and identificatory structure of imaginary relations is synaesthetic. If the imaginary is the visual order, it is also organized by the structure of vocalization, and of touch, and taste. It provides the conditions not only for language acquisition, but also for all signifying practices. Lacan, in short concentrates too heavily or exclusively on verbal language at the expense of other modes of signification.

Lacan insists on a definitive break between the imaginary and the symbolic. They are separated by the rupture caused by castration the intervention of the third term, and the repression of oedipal/pre oedipal desires, Kristeva posits more of continuity. "A repression that one might call 'primal' has been effected prior to the springing forth of the ego, of its objects and representations. The later, in turn, as they depend on another repression, the 'Secondary' one, arrive only a posterior on an enigmatic foundation that has already been marked off...." (Grosz 1990: 158).

Kristeva posits an imaginary father, distinct from Lacan's symbolic father, which represent the ideal possibilities of love for the child. The imaginary father provides the link between the child's semiotic immersion in maternal care, and a social position, by opening the child to a world of love. Instead of Lacan's subsumption of the loving relation under maternal care and incorporation of the phallus into the mother's unconscious, Kristeva separates nurturance from love. Kristeva will place within the pre-oedipal, maternal phase all of the preconditions for symbolic functioning. Her notions of objection, amorous-desire, negativity, the semiotic, the maternal chora, etc, testify to pre-oedipal, and in some cases, pre-mirror stage process and relations. These concepts generally neglected in psychoanalysis, and left unelaborated by Freud and Lacan.

Kristeva considers the semiotic as a feminine and maternally structured space. It pre-dates the imposition of sexual identity. It is a pre-patriarchal or proto-patriarchal phase in which the phallic mother is pre-eminent. This period is the precondition for and the object sacrificed by the child in establishing a position as a speaking subject within the symbolic. Instead of androgyny, Kristeva presumes Freud's postulate of a fundamental bisexuality in all desiring subjects. It ensures that men too remain in a relation to the feminine, pre-oedipal phase. In this sense, although it is feminine relative to the symbolic order, the semiotic has no special relation to women. The subject of maternity exists nowhere. Maternity affects a subject annihilation, the fading of sexual identity. It is the establishment of the grounds of space for the child. The chora is a nameless receptacle, an enveloping ground of identity which has no identity of its own. The maternal body during gestation, and the maternal chora during the child's infancy are conceived by Kristeva as subject less corporeal spaces. They are not identities or roles for women. Yet they are the essential ingredients or elements required by the child's psychical movement from the imaginary to the symbolic. Kristeva suggests that the child most fantasize these pre-imaginary spaces as if they were inhabited by a subject. This is her explanation of the child's recognition and acceptance of the mother's phallic status.

Woman remains unable to speak her femininity or her maternity. She remains locked within a mute, rhythmic, spasmodic, potentially hysterical, and thus speechless body unable to accede to the symbolic because she is too closely identified with the semiotic. "In spite of her overall adherence to women's castrated and secondary position, Kristeva does not claim that her material, semiotic contribution is incapable of any representation. Like the contents of the unconscious, it is capable of indirect or oblique expression or evocation" (Grosz 1990: 165). The position of avant-garde transgressor is not without its risks for those men who undertake it. It is fraught with psychical dangers ranging from fetishism to psychosis. A result of the boy's unwillingness to accept his mother's 'castration', fetishism is his refusal to separate from the mother according to the father's demand.

Kristeva seems to regard only men as writers or producers of the avant-garde. When she takes about women's writing, she claims that women tend to write in one of two ways. They may either produce books that are largely compensatory substitutes for a family, and they produce stories, images or fantasies in place of an actual family. Or else, women write as hysterical subjects, bound to the body and its rhythms.

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