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LAUDATION

on Occasion of Awarding the Prize of
Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation

VIZE 97

to

Julia Kristeva

Prague Crossroads

5th October 2008

When Julia Kristeva came to France, in the middle of the 1960's, to finish her doctoral thesis, which she started at the University of Sofia, it was, without a doubt, a breakthrough in her life; however, this was also the first step. What followed was an aggressive entry into the intellectual world of Paris of that time; from the very beginning, even her first published articles and books exhibited a distinctive voice – and not just because that time's popular interest in the philosophy of linguistics was, in her opinion, nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs, and cannot match the revolution in poetic language, from which today's literature largely draws, because it particularly strives to obscure that revolution wherever it threatens the traditional ideas of language and its relationship to the speaking subject. This voice clearly stood out mainly because it introduced a different experience and different inspirations into French through; because Julia Kristeva was able to connect East and West by finding the common denominators or predecessors where she came from: Russian formalism, Prague structuralism or Mikhail Bakhtin. However, if we were about to find her contribution in her ability to work as a mediator between different intellectual environments, it would not be enough; and it would be banal.

However, Julia Kristeva is also unique in this regard, because she could reflect her mediating experience and turn theories into practice. While she considers crossroads to be the most intrinsic place of her thought, it is more than just a stylish metaphor; it is also a precise and almost literal description of the style of her thought, consisting in productive transformation and combination. Let me cite one of numerous examples: while Mikhail Bakhtin understands novel and even word as such, in a novel, as a sort of a dialogue or text interactions, this is, for Julia Kristeva, a reference to what is the intrinsic subject of the exploration of language: not the word alone, not the text, but the *intertextuality*. Nevertheless, this is actually no subject: every text is an intertext, is constantly transformed by other texts, with which it interacts while being coined and received; thus, what the theory needs to grasp and understand is the process, not the object. Understanding what sign or meaning is entails understanding the sign and the meaning from the process of signage. A crossroads is a place of production, which is, however, also the movement that extends beyond the logic of what has been already codified. Within this movement, however, even the idea of the speaking subject, as something unitary, something situated outside crossroads, is disputable. And if sense is alleged to arise by one text transforming another, it may be viewed as a response to Bakhtin's book on carnival but, with Kristeva, this response opens the way that leads to a different concept of subject; a concept where its bio-social or biological and psychical aspects are not reduced. In other words: it opens the way that does not ignore what is happening before the subject is actually engendered as a subject. It does not reduce its heterogeneity; consequently, it does not reduce certain indissoluble heterogeneity of theoretical speech either. The semiotic is criticism of the semiotic. The revolution in poetic language leads to the revolution in theoretical discourse.

Since the very beginning, all Julia Kristeva's texts have been difficult to label easily, e.g. with post-structuralism, deconstruction, structural semiotic or feminism; they cannot even be labelled as "theory", because she views theory as a specific method of practice. And when she speaks of the semiotic, she means a complicated game of semiotic and symbolic, a game that reaches the dimension of physical parent materialisation, which 'engenders' signs, although, in the symbolic level, the signs keep denying it. Hence, in her approach to language exploration, she uses the term "semanalysis", which indicates that speech, meaning, sense may again be grasped at a crossroads of somatic and psychic, structural and psychoanalytic

aspects. And if theory is a specific method of practice; if the semiotic is necessarily also a critical review of the foundations and boundaries of the semiotic; and if subject is not a natural instance of utterance, and is something irreducibly heterogeneous instead, because it is stability in the field of destabilising energies, in the field of acceptance and rejection, construction and destruction, then it is evident that, to grasp this unison, all possibilities of the language polyphony need to be mobilised. In this complicated manner, I only wish to say that it is absolutely natural if Julia Kristeva is an author of numerous theoretical treatises and novels without the possibility of labelling these genres quite literally in either way. For example, her *Tales of Love* are the history in its original meaning of exploration as well as a method of narration, elucidating the unique experience, with both psychoanalysis and motherhood. Certainly, something similar could be said of *Depression and Melancholia* and of the books so obviously novel-like such as *The Samurai* or *The Old Man and the Wolves*.

I do not assert that Julia Kristeva is ‘beyond categories’ – because even this would be banal. All writers know that they write, and even this alone makes them ‘categorised’, i.e. engaged – in terms of both the obligation to the thing itself and the obligation to themselves. When Julia Kristeva was awarded the Holberg Prize, she said in her acceptance speech that literature and psychoanalysis were opening, in a new way, the understanding of what is known as human adventure, because experiences, which they study, are the laboratories of new forms of humanism. It is evident what humanism Julia Kristeva means: humanism that accepts the sense together with everything that undermines it, because it is difficult to imagine human life without the struggle with what tries to enclose the life back within the primitive monologue. Human existence may only resound in polyphony – and it does not matter at all whether we strive for this polyphony as a principle of artistic work, theoretical thought or political life. May be, the humankind has found itself at a crossroads, but crossroads is the same as solution for those who are lost; provided that we understand that there are no simple solutions.