

# Fertile Thinking or Thinking about the Fertility of Thinking

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**Abstract :** This semi-scientific paper (it does not answer any philological or hermeneutic question concerning Kristeva's writings) elucidates one of Kristeva's main ideas: that the symbolic order, as an order, is infertile, or that the symbolic is nothing, ineffectual, without its complement: the semiotic. Thus Part I of this essay discusses the difference between three concepts: productivity, creativity and fertility, and in this way tries to illustrate the enigma of fertile activities like philosophical thinking or psychoanalytical practice: that they lead to a product that is, again, a fertile activity. Part II deals with language and its labor of translation, assuming that translating the unconscious discourse into a conscious one is one of the main tasks of the talking cure and so may serve as a paradigm for its fertility. Finally Part III shows that this assumption proves to be wrong. For translation, as we shall see, is not only or not necessarily a symbolic process; it cannot be reduced to such a process. It is in itself a fertile product of *another* translation: a semiotic activity on the verge of nature and culture.

**Résumé :** Cette contribution semi-scientifique (parce qu'elle ne donne pas de réponses aux questions ni philologiques ni herméneutiques des écrits discutés) tente d'éclairer une des idées phares de Julia Kristeva: à savoir que l'ordre symbolique en tant qu'ordre est stérile, autrement dit: que le symbolique n'est rien, qu'il est simplement inefficace, sans son complément, le sémiotique. À cette fin, en première partie, l'essai discute d'abord les différences entre les trois concepts de "productivité", "créativité" et "fécondité" afin d'illustrer l'énigme de certaines activités censées être fécondes/fertiles/prolifères comme la pensée philosophique ou la pratique psychanalytique: c'est-à-dire qu'elles produisent elles-mêmes une activité féconde. La deuxième partie traite du langage et de son travail de traduction dans le cadre de la supposition que la traduction du discours inconscient dans un discours conscient est un des devoirs majeurs de la "talking cure" et peut ainsi servir de paradigme de sa fécondité. Enfin, la troisième partie montre que cette hypothèse s'avère erronée. Car la traduction, comme on le verra, n'est pas seulement et même pas nécessairement un procès symbolique: elle s'avère irréductible à un tel procès, étant en elle-même le produit fécond d'une *autre* traduction: d'une activité sémiotique aux confins de la nature et de la culture. [Traduction du titre : La pensée féconde ou penser sur la fécondité de la pensée]

**Keywords :** symbolic order – symbolic process – semiotic process – productivity – creativity – fertility – nature – culture – translation

## I. Productivity, Creativity, and Fertility

### 1. *A Beginning*

The central question of my paper is: What is fertile thinking? And a supplemental, implicit question will be: What does it mean to *think* about *fertile thinking*? Is there a fertile thinking *of* thinking? Or is any thinking *of* thinking, the philosophical activity, an infertile thinking, an infertile activity?

When I was invited to present my research at the Berlin congress “Kristeva in Process. The Fertility of Thought” I looked at its announcement and was deeply astonished, if not to say shaken or shocked. The subtitle of the congress theme read: “The fertility of thought – La pensée féconde – Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens.”

I asked myself: What was going on in the mind of the organizers of the congress to choose such a subtle subtitle? What was their intellectual or conceptual motivation for the choice of such a vocabulary? The subtitle of the conference could have been “The *productivity* of thought” (“La pensée productrice” / “Die Produktivität des Denkens”) or “The *creativity* of thought” (“La pensée créatrice” / “Die Kreativität des Denkens”), but in fact it ran as “The *fertility* of thought” (“La pensée féconde” / “Die Fruchtbarkeit des Denkens”).

As a philosopher whose one and only medium is language, I am bound to be precise in choosing my words. And so, in the use of English as a foreign language for me, as French has been a foreign language for Kristeva, one of the main purposes of my paper will be to propose an explanation of these words and to clear up their relevance for psychoanalytic discourse and my discussion of Julia Kristeva’s cultural theory.

And by the way, I do not want to scientifically interpret Kristeva’s writings. I am not interested in philological or hermeneutic questions. Kristeva’s writings are a constant inspiration for me to ask some fundamental conceptual – or you could say philosophical – questions, for instance concerning the ontological status of language.

## 2. *A Difference*

There is, of course, a certain difference between the terms *productivity*, *creativity*, and *fertility* (of thought); and each term, I think, could serve as an adequate subtitle for a symposium on Kristeva’s theory. But what exactly is their difference? And how can this difference be applied to psychoanalytic discourse? I would like to insist on the following three statements.

First, a *productive* activity is an activity that leads to something that is or becomes a substance of its own, that is independent from its origin and that we call the *product* of the productive activity. For instance, an industrial product is independent of the machine it was produced by and can be used by others. Thus, speaking is a productive activity insofar as it is producing words or signifiers that can be used and understood by others.

Second, a *creative* activity is also an activity that leads to something that becomes a substance of its own, but the product it leads to is entirely *new* and – at least for a

certain time – *unique* and *irreplaceable*, i.e., it has never been seen, heard, etc. before. And, because it is new, everyone wonders or wants to know how it could have been done. So, a creative activity is always already a productive activity, but a product must not necessarily be new and unique. It may be, for instance, the replaceable copy of a certain product-design, whereas the product-design itself may be the unique product of a creative activity.

And third, a *fertile* activity is also a creative activity (as a creative activity is also a productive activity), but the product it leads to is not only new, unique and irreplaceable but it also produces a new fertile activity that again leads to another fertile activity – and so on. So, a fertile activity leads to a chain of fertile activities that does not come to an end in any product, whatever it may be, and therefore is possibly *infinite*. While the product of a productive and creative activity is a static end of this activity, the product of a fertile activity – like, for instance, fertile thinking – is again an activity, which means that, in a certain respect, the activity and its product and, vice versa, the product and its activity are identical or one and the same.

### 3. *A Semantic Machine*

Unfortunately, by making up this trilogy of productivity, creativity and fertility – supposing its logical structure is clear and will be accepted – we do not really know what *fertility* or a *fertile* activity is. That a fertile activity is an activity that leads to another fertile activity may be a good formula to differentiate fertility from productivity and creativity, but it does not give us any hint as to the semantic question of what fertility *is*.

Let me take it like this: In the last section I constructed a little semantic machine with one term being the logical basis of the other: productivity being the basis of creativity, i.e., creativity as a specific mode of productivity, and creativity being the basis of fertility, i.e., fertility as a specific mode of creativity and productivity:

Productivity → Creativity → Fertility

But at the end of this machine, at the peak of its explanatory power, we are moving in a circle: fertility leads to fertility. The semantic machine may be productive and even creative, but it is – as any machine – *infertile*.

What is the reason for this particular embarrassment? I think that we are satisfied to hear that creative and productive activities lead to specific or non-specific products. But we are puzzled when we hear that there is an activity that leads to a *product* that is *not* a product but, again, an *activity*. For we are used to making a distinction between activity and product or – to say it in epistemological terms – between subject and object: the activity being the subject and the product being the object. But the identity of subject and object, as any identity of opposites, seems to be enigmatic to us or is, in a certain way, tautological.

#### 4. *An Alternative*

One possible option to avoid this difficulty would be to change the conceptual matrix and to refer to another difference: not to the difference between subject and object but to the difference between *nature* and *culture*. The advantage in doing so would be double.

First, what we are interested in when discussing the fertility of Kristeva's work and the concept of fertility in her work, are *cultural, not natural* activities, be they productive, creative, or fertile. Kristeva's main focus lies in cultural activities like speaking, writing, or making art; and so her theory, all in all, is a theory of culture.

But, secondly, speaking of fertile activities, even in cultural studies, implies or at least alludes to a certain – for instance, biological – concept of nature. Fertility in this naturalistic context means, as anyone knows, the *biological capability of giving life*. And supposing this is a necessary semantic component of the term, however figuratively it may be used, we have to acknowledge a certain *reappearance* or *persistence* of nature within culture, a certain *implemence*, as I would like to say.

Indeed in my intellectual queries over the years I have long suspected that Kristeva's work is balancing on the verge of nature and culture. Like Freud's psychoanalysis, Kristeva's theory, especially her theory of the semiotic process, rests on a principal assurance: that the basis of this process, of the subject's activity – that which psychoanalysis calls *the drive* [*la pulsion/der Trieb*] – is situated on the conceptual borderline between psychic and somatic life, between culture and nature.

#### 5. *An Obstacle*

It would be a seductive alternative to follow this trace and to concentrate on this hypothesis during the second part of my paper. But the term *nature* is a problematic term for a lot of reasons. It is like the humpbacked dwarf in the chess-playing machine Benjamin speaks of in one of his "Theses on the Philosophy of History": it is hidden within the machine although the machine – like any machine – does not work without it, has to keep it out of sight ("Über den Begriff" 251).

In fact, no one who is engaged in cultural theory or cultural studies these days is talking about nature any longer. Although *nature* is the only antonym of *culture*, and vice versa, *culture* is the only antonym of *nature*, the concept of nature, and even the signifier *nature*, seems to be repressed – if not to say foreclosed – from intellectual discourse, especially from so-called poststructuralist, postmodernist, or neo-Lacanian discourse.

Even Kristeva, I think, is very cautious in using the term *nature*. I do not remember it to be central in any one of her publications, that is, I never really stumbled upon it. On the contrary, it seems to be incidental in her work and, if at all, a noteworthy term only in casual remarks – like, for instance, in a passage I found in one of her letters to Catherine Clément where she talks about the "sacred origins of our humanity" that are situated "at the crossroads of the self and the other, nature and

culture, drive and language” (Clément and Kristeva, *Versprechen* 200; Kristeva, *Fremde* 198).

### 6. *A New Beginning*

Although I think the difference between nature and culture is a central point in Kristeva’s work – which is open well beyond academic debates – I do not want to insist on it or stress it directly: I will make a detour. The whole remaining part of my text is such a detour. And it will be an *infinite* detour.

I would like to ask: As, in cultural theory, we are concerned with at least productive or even creative activities like learning and educating or, in general, speaking and writing, what are the necessary conditions for a fertile activity, for fertile thinking, or any fertility of thought?

One way to answer this question could be to set in motion once again our little semantic machine and to analyze the differences between necessary conditions first for a productive, then for a creative, and finally for a fertile activity. But, as I pointed out before, such a machine may be helpful for propaedeutic reasons but leaves us alone with the central question concerning a positive foundation of fertility. This machine is productive – even more than productive, perhaps creative – but it is not fertile.

Thus, instead of treating the trilogy of productivity, creativity, and fertility again – which is, all in all, infertile – I want to make the following statement that I hope to be fertile: There is no fertility, no fertile thinking without any transcendence or transgression of the subject, without *going* beyond or what *is* beyond it: its thinking, feeling, self, language, or whatsoever.

But what does that mean? To go beyond or to go beyond myself or my personal – linguistic, cognitive, emotional, etc. – context means to confront myself with strangeness – not only with *an* other, *the* other or *others* in general but with an otherness that is *foreign* or *strange* to me: first, with an *outer* strangeness that may be perhaps another life in another country or a foreign attitude and language, and second, with an *inner* strangeness that is my own unconscious life, the “dark continent of the soul,” as Freud designated it.

In the following, second, part of my lecture I want to deal with these alternatives – the foreign continent outside of me and the dark continent within – and try to present them as necessary conditions of any fertile activity – and fertile thinking in particular.

## II. Outer and Inner Strangeness

### 7. *An Outer Strangeness*

A good example for experiencing the first kind of strangeness is confronting oneself with the foreign attitudes in a foreign country and, especially, with a foreign language. I must confess that I was astonished to read in an interview with Françoise

Dosse (by the way: astonishment may also give way to fertile thinking) that for Kristeva French *was* but still *is* a foreign language (*Geschichte* 86).

And I was even more astonished to read in another text that Kristeva found that the “distrustful and cold hospitality” she was confronted with by her academic colleagues at the end of the 1960s when she came from Sofia to Paris was “nevertheless effective and trustworthy” for her. She writes : “The greater tolerance of the English and greater American capacity for assimilation doubtless offer more existential opportunities. But finally they are, because of their lower resistance, less favorable to the production of new thought” (“Mémoire” 42).

Let me repeat the remarkable key statement of this short passage: *Greater tolerance*, Kristeva says, because of its *lower resistance*, is *less favorable* to the production of new thought. Except for the fact that production of new thought means creativity and not necessarily fertility (although fertility *implies* creativity), the strangeness felt abroad is not only intellectually acknowledged (which is easily done) but, obviously, lived through. And this means: one has to labor under it – labor under it by translating one’s own language or transforming one’s own culture into another and, vice versa, by translating another language or transforming another culture into one’s own.

#### 8. *An Inner Strangeness*

Before I try to determine this two-sided, dialectical labor of translation and transposition (which is, I think, a paradigm for fertility) I first want to take a look at the inner strangeness we have to deal with in the case of our unconscious life. On the one hand, Kristeva states, we are strangers in a strange world – this is the outer strangeness – but on the other hand we are also strangers to ourselves: *étrangers à nous-mêmes*, as a well-known title of one of her books goes. “We are our own strangers,” Kristeva says, “we are split” (*Fremde* 198). Or : “The other, this is my (own) unconscious” (200).

That means we are not only confronted with an *outer world* that may be unknown or, at least, unaccustomed to us, but also with what was repressed or even foreclosed from our ego or consciousness into an *inner world* – which, for instance, is the case with mental illnesses or with our daily life practices that are often characterized by strange fantasies and desires, slips of the tongue and pen, fixations and false associations or parapraxis, acting-out, automatic anxiety, sense of inferiority, and so on.

All of these experiences form an *inner* strangeness that carries even a greater weight than the *outer* strangeness, for the person concerned with the *latter*, the outer strangeness, still has the opportunity to escape from it – finally, into the person’s inner world. But the person cannot, of course, escape from this inner world, the inner strangeness; and therefore the impulse or vital drive to translate one’s own foreign language (e.g., the language of a recurring nightmare) or the foreign attitude (e.g., a compulsion or an addiction) may fail, in most cases at the cost of an even deeper strangeness and more desperate efforts to cope with it – for instance in a psychoanalytic cure.

9. *A Plausible Assumption*

One may ask: How is such an inner strangeness possible? And what is fertile about it? Or what does it mean to transform this inner strangeness by translating the foreign, unconscious thought or attitude into a conscious one – and, perhaps, vice versa? So, what is this labor of translation about; what kind of fertile activity is it?

To answer these questions we have to take a look at the process of repression. As our language, according to Saussure’s view, is a certain signifier-signified unit (in a simplified manner written as S / s) it may be, at first sight, a plausible assumption that what is repressed from the subject’s conscious discourse is the signifier (S) and that a *certain* signifier, let’s call it the *first* signifier (S<sub>1</sub>) – in a metaphorical process (S / S) – is totally substituted by another, *second* signifier (S<sub>2</sub>/S<sub>1</sub>).

But obviously this is not a plausible assumption. For the conscious discourse of the subject is not minimized in its material, *signifying* part – the ego is still equipped with all formal possibilities of wording – but in its immaterial, *signified* part. What is obviously affected by the process of repression is to realize a certain meaning that, in a former discourse, was associated with the first signifier but cannot be associated with it any longer (Kupke, “Psychoanalysis” 753-54).

For instance, Little Hans, Freud’s young patient who is traumatized by his father’s hostile attitude toward him is, of course, able to use the signifier “father”: he is talking about his father with Freud (Freud, “Analyse der Phobie” 26ff.). But he is not able to associate the signifier “father” (S<sub>1</sub>) with the specific meaning of the danger (s<sub>2</sub>) he was exposed to by his father or with the signifier “danger” (S<sub>2</sub>) that represents this specific meaning (s<sub>2</sub>) for him.

$$\begin{array}{c} S_1 \leftarrow S_2 \\ \hline s_2 \end{array}$$

Simplified: S<sub>1</sub> (s<sub>2</sub>); read: S<sub>1</sub> as a function of s<sub>2</sub>.

So, as a result, the only danger he can talk about is the danger that comes from the “horse” (S<sub>3</sub>) – which is then over-determined as it is also associated with the danger (s<sub>2</sub>) that comes from the father.

$$\begin{array}{c} S_2 \rightarrow S_3 \\ \hline s_2 \end{array}$$

Simplified: S<sub>3</sub> (s<sub>2</sub>); read: S<sub>3</sub> as a function of s<sub>2</sub>.

### 10. *A Signifying Machine*

So, what we have here again in order to explain what fertile activity is is a little machine: a signifying machine. For now we are able – or seem to be able – to explain what the labor of translating a foreign language into one’s own and one’s own language into a foreign language really is. This labor consists of a double-sided, complex activity. On the one hand Freud and his little patient have to translate each other’s language into their own. That is, Freud tries to understand that, in his patient’s language, the specific danger ( $s_2$ ) that *was* connected with his father ( $S_1$ ) *is* now disconnected from  $S_1$  and connected with or displaced to  $S_3$ . And, vice versa, his patient tries to understand that, in Freud’s language,  $s_2$  *is* connected with  $S_1$  and *not* displaced to  $S_3$ . They try to understand that what in the patient’s conscious language is meant by “the horse” is the father in Freud’s language and in the patient’s unconscious language:

$$S_3 \rightarrow S_2 (s_2) \rightarrow S_1$$

But on the other hand Freud and his little patient have to translate their own language into each other’s language too. That is, Freud tries to understand that even in his own language  $s_2$  *can be* disconnected from  $S_1$  and displaced to  $S_3$ . And, vice versa, his patient tries to understand that even in his own language  $s_2$  *can be* connected with  $S_1$  and *does not have to be* displaced to  $S_3$ . They try to understand that what in Freud’s language or the patient’s unconscious language is meant by “the father” is, in the patient’s conscious language, the horse:

$$S_1 \rightarrow S_2 (s_2) \rightarrow S_3$$

It seems that this is, in principle, the labor of translation that goes on in every psychoanalytic cure. But, surprisingly or not, this is not the case. For, although Freud’s patient may understand that in another language  $s_2$  *is* connected with  $S_1$  and *not* displaced to  $S_3$  and even in his language *can be* connected with  $S_1$  and *does not have to be* displaced to  $S_3$ , it does not mean that, for him, it *is* connected with  $S_1$  and that it *is not* displaced to  $S_3$ . “The intellectual admission of what is repressed,” Freud says, “does not suspend the process of repression. It preserves what is essential with it” (“Verneinung” 374).

### III. Language as an Effect of Repression

#### 11. *Another Obstacle*

So, what we have here is another obstacle: Once again we are trapped in a cage, in a kind of linguistic pitfall. The little machine we tried to bring in motion – now a signifying machine – has again failed. It proved to be as infertile as the semantic



machine we tried to use before. That means, such a machine is helpful in a certain way – I said: for propaedeutic reasons – but leaves us alone with the decisive question: What does it mean to translate one language into another? And what is fertile in this activity?

One may argue that the specific labor of translation in a psychoanalytic cure cannot be described or analyzed by the usual linguistic term *translation*. For, in such a cure it is not only necessary to understand what in another language is a *possible* diction and is even a *possible* diction in one's own – this is merely the technical meaning of translation – but to realize that what *seems to be possible* is already *real*: that the subject's language is always already *another* language.

This realization means that on the one hand Freud's patient, Little Hans, is not able to associate the signifier "father" with the meaning "danger" or with the signifier "danger" that represents this specific meaning for him. But on the other hand his whole discourse is already characterized by the *reality* of this very association, by the fact that even for him the signifier "father" is, nevertheless, associated with danger. For, if it were not associated with danger there would be no need to defend himself against the reality of it.

The patient's *incapacity* to connect  $S_1$  with  $s_2$  is therefore the – somewhat paradoxical – result of the fact that it is *already* connected with  $s_2$  and cannot be disconnected from it again. It is an active denial, a defense strategy of a psychic *reality*: What is unconscious : "It is my father who is dangerous" ( $S_1$  ( $s_2$ )), is not unknown but already known to the psychic system, it is a kind of knowledge. And this *original* knowledge is just blocked off from conscious discourse by the anticathexis of *another* knowledge : "It is (not my father but) the horse that is dangerous" ( $S_3$  ( $s_2$ )).

### 12. An Implemental Symbolization

Now we have a first hint of what went wrong with our signifying machine. We tried to translate, i.e., to understand what, in the discourse of Little Hans,  $S_3$  means: it means  $S_1$ . Or, in other words, we tried to understand a certain process of equation:  $S_1$  being equated with  $S_3$  by the meaning of  $S_2$ , i.e., by means of  $s_2$ . This is the *process of symbolization*, by which  $S_3$  ("the horse") became the *symbol* for  $S_1$  ("my father").

But in reconstructing this equation with our little machine ( $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$  ( $s_2$ )  $\rightarrow S_3 \rightarrow S_2$  ( $s_2$ )  $\rightarrow S_1$ ) we did not take into account that, with the process of repression, this translation has already taken place or that this process of symbolization – as any process of symbolization – is inseparable from a process of repression that has already taken place (Kupke, "Andersheit" 101ff.).

For, what has happened to the psychic system cannot be undone. And although this rule (what is done cannot be undone) seems trivial, it is absolutely fundamental to understanding the ontological status of language: its impotence and delay. It is an indication of our naturalness, especially our temporality and mortality.

This means that the fact that what has happened is denied in an implicit conscious discourse ("It is not my father") does not prevent it from actually being

present to the psychic system. What is true (“It is the father”) reappears and persists *within* the negative statement (“It is not the father”) and its positive displacement (“It is the horse”). It is an unconscious *implement* of the subject’s conscious discourse. And it seems that it is this *implemence* that is able to explain what the labor of translation is and, especially, what its fertility is.

### 13. *A Fertile Activity*

Let us first take a look at this unconscious implement as the basis of fertility. As it is an unconscious effect of the process of repression and this process is a process of translation the process itself must be an unconscious process. Although what has happened is totally present to the psychic system there is no consciousness of what has happened *to* and what has happened *within* the system: trauma and translation. Both trauma and translation, are *masked* by our conscious thinking; and as they are masked by our conscious thinking – that serves as a kind of anticathexis here – they remain unconscious.

Yet every mask, more or less, shows the features of the face it tries to hide. That is, while on the one hand the masquerade involves a certain *split* within the subject: what is unconscious is unknown to the ego, on the other hand it involves a certain *unity* too: what is unconscious is, nevertheless, known to the psychic system as a whole. And as it is known to the psychic system as a whole, this system is obviously unable to strictly separate what is unconscious from what is conscious.

First, what is unconscious is represented in the denial of the conscious discourse (“It is not my father”). This negation, as any negation, is, as Freud says, a certain acknowledgement of what is present to the psychic system or what is part of the psychic reality. And second, what is unconscious is even represented and acknowledged in its displacement (“It is the horse”) as this constitutes a *new* symbol, which is a usual signifier charged with an unusual meaning that, as it is unusual, serves as a hint to or a trace of the unconscious process, as a symptom.

So, to translate here constitutes a double activity – and this double activity, I think, is a fertile activity. First, to translate here means to point out the *gap* between conscious and unconscious thinking or to *separate* what is unconscious from what is conscious. It is realized through *defense*. And second, it means to point out the *unity* between conscious and unconscious thinking or to *combine* what is unconscious and what is conscious. It is realized through *admission*.

As Freud says: every symptom is a compromise-formation between two psychic tendencies: defense and admission, it is a condensation of these tendencies, a metaphor, as Lacan would say. And we may perhaps conclude: Every conscious discourse is such a compromise, such a condensation. It is an effect of the fertile activity of translation that is both defense and admission. And this translation is an unconscious activity.

#### 14. *An Effect of Repression*

Now, let us take a look at the conscious discourse that results from this unconscious fertile activity. It is phenomenologically characterized by two logical aspects : an implicit negation and an explicit position, for what the patient Little Hans constantly affirms is that “it is *not* my father *but* the horse.” While the implicit negation (“It is *not* my father”) is the logical and linguistic descendant of the pleasure principle and of the first psychic tendency – defense – the explicit position (“It *is* the horse”) is the logical and linguistic descendant of the principle of reality and of the second psychic tendency – admission.

As noted above, both tendencies are opposites and nevertheless combined or unified within conscious discourse. This combination or unity here appears as the unity of *implication*. That the negation is an *implicit* negation means that it is the logical condition of the *explicit* position, for to say “it is the horse” in the patient’s discourse logically implies that “it is not the father.” So the character of conscious discourse all in all is positional. But as any logical or linguistic position of conscious discourse is part of a contextual meaning, its symbolic order is totally characterized by the possibility of negation – by the negativity of language.

So, I think, what is indeed remarkable about conscious discourse is its implicit negation. For as there is no language without any negation we may conclude first that language, although it seems to be the medium of translation, is itself dependent on the very process of translation which is identical with the process of repression as analyzed above. That means that any language – although it is our main principle of reality – seems to imply a certain defense against reality. It appears to be an effect of repression. And second, it seems to be our conscious thinking that is structured like a language and not – or not necessarily and primarily – the unconscious. For there is no negation within the sphere of the unconscious, Freud says, and therefore any negation is and has to be part of conscious discourse.

In fact, to say “it is the horse” in the *conscious* discourse of Freud’s patient logically implies that “it is not the father.” Negation and position constitute a logical unity, a unity of implication : any position is an implicit negation, or, as Spinoza says: *omnis determinatio est negatio*. But this logic, of course, is not the logic of the *unconscious*. To say “it is the horse” *does not* imply that “it is not the father”; and to say “it is the father” does not imply that “it is not the horse.” It is only our conscious thinking, its language and its symbols that are characterized by a defense against reality. What is unconscious, that “it is the father,” is characterized by a general principle of reality – an admission without any defense.

#### 15. *A Résumé*

Although these theses (and especially the last one) need further explication, let me now take a look at the results of my analysis. Any fertile activity, I stated, leads to another fertile activity and – starting from one of Kristeva’s proposals – to confront

oneself with an inner or outer strangeness provokes a labor of translation that in and of itself is fertile. The analysis then concentrated on the psychoanalytic experience of strangeness and revealed a certain ongoing process of translation that constitutes the difference between, and at the same time the unity of, our conscious and unconscious thinking. This ongoing process of translation has a specific character.

On the one hand it is the – natural – reaction to an outer strangeness that, as it is a traumatizing event, prolongs itself, extends to an inner strangeness. That means a process of repression takes place by which the subject tries to reduce this strangeness in a double compromising strategy: in a strategy of defense and in one of admission. But on the other hand this double strategy constitutes a symptom – a symbol of what is repressed – and so again leads to an experience of strangeness which may cause the subject to look for help, for instance, in a psychoanalytic cure. Thus, indeed, the process of repression is – without any irony – a fertile activity, a translational act, that leads to another fertile activity : for instance, a psychoanalytic act, a talking cure.

But this is not the only result of my analysis; it is just the surface of an observation that deals with the deeper concept of subjectivity, thinking, language, and self on the whole. As the process of repression is a double process of translation that constitutes a symbolic relation, and as any symbol is part of a symbolic order, it seems that there is no symbolic order without this process of repression or, in other words, any symbolic order seems to be an effect – a unique and irreplaceable product – of repression. In short, language is a symptom. A symptom of what? Of our close encounter with the real.

What does this mean for the status of translation? Translation then is not, or not necessarily, a symbolic process. Although we are in the need to explain translation as an act of language because we do not have any other model to explain it, it cannot be reduced to such an act. For language in itself is a – fertile – product of translation. It is dependent on a non- or pre-symbolic process that reappears and persists within its logical chain of negation and position. Or to say it with a term that is a constant point of reference in Kristeva's work: it is the *semiotic* process that is the fertile basis of language. The symbolic order, as an order, is infertile. It is nothing, ineffectual, without its complement: the semiotic.

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