

# The Pedagogue and the Poetic

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*Kristeva and the Quest for Singularity in  
Education.*

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## Abstract

In this article, I argue that Julia Kristeva's concepts of *semiotization* and *transubstantiation* may contribute both to an understanding of the way in which the human subject might realize itself, and to the way in which educational institutions may serve as keepers of such a notion of humanity. To focus the human subject is urgent in a time of various neo-liberal pressures – including the area of education. Mechanisms of effectivization and standardization in education are unable to bring forth the *singularity* of the human being. Inspired by the Russian Futurists and their word-creation, I follow up on the theoretical discussion with a classroom exercise for students, that potentially provides them with a space to begin the process of exploring (regaining) their semiotic selves and their potential to experience and share human singularity.

Keywords: *language, subject, singularity, semiotization, transubstantiation, semiotic disposition, word-creation, Kristeva, Khlebnikov*

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## *Kristeva and the Quest for Singularity in Education.*

Synnøve Myklestad<sup>1</sup>

### Words Matter (I) – Introduction

Entering the new millennium involved a period of fundamental shifts in the Norwegian education system at all levels.<sup>1</sup> Just a few years earlier (in 1997), the starting age of formal schooling had been lowered from seven to six years old, and a few years later Norway joined international programmes of assessment like PISA and TIMMS<sup>2</sup>, resulting in the development of a national test- and report system.<sup>3</sup> In 2006, a new national curriculum was introduced<sup>4</sup>, and the political administration of kindergartens was moved from the social services to the education sector. During this politically ambitious period, several interventions and programmes were implemented at institutional levels to prepare practitioners for the new mandates.<sup>5</sup> These interventions demonstrated a shift in education ideology towards focusing more on testing and measurements in theoretical

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subjects. The new curriculum and its practical consequences in classrooms were heavily discussed. Was the Nordic Model of Education just a memory? This models tradition of progressive pedagogics, which focused on students' experience and collaborative learning, was over-shadowed by countability, individualization and competition.<sup>6</sup> Some have argued that knowledge turned into a product for sale by the mechanisms of the open market. On an institutional level institutions have adapted international standards "allowing for comparison and communication".<sup>7</sup> What counts at an individual level are competencies that can be measured and compared and which make humans productive and profitable.<sup>8</sup> The humanist tradition in philosophy of education which questions the values of dignity and which encourages reflections on the conditions of life seems to have been forgotten or dismissed as out-dated.<sup>9</sup> I will argue that these circumstances have put limits and poorer conditions for the human subject at all levels in the education system. I think time has come to act for humanizing educational institutions. A radical change is needed.

There might be several ways to frame a need for change in education. My motivation in this text is anchored in the experience of loss of meaning, identity and self through the neoliberal turn of educational discourse. To exemplify this need for a radical change, I *could*, as a pedagogue, have directed my attention towards the details of the already mentioned system of management, assessment and reporting procedures (systems to facilitate and process educational competition on individual, local, national and international levels and to segregate and make hierarchical lists of success). I *might* also have problematised the growing power of evidence-based research in education systems today, where teachers must portray themselves as evidence-based practitioners to demonstrate their competence as professionals (these professionals are not expected to ask questions about what is

pointed out by evidence or *how* it happens to do so). Or I *could* have allotted space to the critical voices that question digitalization in institutions at all levels (there are certainly quite extended interests – both technological, economic-logical and in the prospect of learning analytics).

However, instead of these options I focus on what it means to be a human subject in an educational context. Both students and educators have powerful potential to challenge what can be experienced as repressive, symbolic structures of education systems. As subjects, however, both students and educators are marginalized and their potential to thrive is threatened wherever systems emerge and tend to transform into strict social, ideological or political codes.<sup>10</sup>

New visions and ideologies introduce new concepts. Concepts bring forth ideas and meanings, but they might also signal power. Meaning and ideas might appear as open and clear or as vague and hidden. In the swirl of educational whitepapers, new curriculum, strategy documents, reports and guidelines, the power and possibilities of language has become a battlefield. Commenting on the importance of words, Øivind Haaland warned: “Fire in the hole!”<sup>11</sup> This short performative expression underline, in its own way, that words really matter. Together with Lars Løvlie, Haalands concern is how the core concepts in our vocabulary have changed the focus of the pedagogical discussions. Our vocabulary is the framework for our thoughts: “... we should reclaim for pedagogy the territory of discourse that has, over the past decades, been seized by contemporary management vocabulary.”<sup>12</sup>

I am not the only one struggling to reconcile the bureaucratic and market-oriented language of official documents with my core values as a pedagogue, researcher and human being. It has, however, been little commented upon, and needs to be illuminated from a theoretical point of view, that takes the impact of

language into account. How is the situation and what are the options for the human subject/educator/student when the 'living language' becomes 'barren and stale'? There are several theorists troubling language – the symbolic order – in different ways and for different purposes, such as Hélène Cixous (transgressing the limits of academic language by and with poetic language), Donna Haraway (with her 'material-semiotic actor' which actualize both the empirical and the figurative in her analyses and refigurations) and Judith Butler (about 'material-discursive practises' which is about the role of context and situation in meaning). This article argue that bureaucratic and market-oriented language signifies an experience of loss in language. From this perspective, it actualizes Julia Kristeva's perspectives and work. Countering the loss of meaning, identity and self which, in the analysis of Kristeva, is a potential risk in today's society. Kristeva introduce complex concepts of language – and an understanding of poetic language – that might give resonance: words matter.

## Words Matter (II) – Julia Kristeva – Singularity in Language

Julia Kristeva is a contemporary French-Bulgarian linguist, psychoanalyst and philosopher. As a linguist she theorizes language, and as a psychoanalyst and philosopher she continuously challenges any theory of language, including her own. In this regard she repeatedly questions the subject of our time, namely the singularity of the subject and its conditions for realization and life. Society, with its *symbolic order*, is complex, multifaceted and massive. To be realized as a subject is challenging in times where 'thinking-as-calculus' is the dominating logic, both in economics and politics as well as in science and technology.<sup>13</sup> Kristeva identifies a crisis of the subject. As a speaking being, the subject is to be realized in language. For this to happen, we need to under-

stand language as per Kristeva's conceptions. Language is not a mere system of symbols and grammatical rules. Language is a process of signification and symbolization where the subject's singularity must also more or less be realized. Kristeva explores this process of language, *the signifying process*, in perspectives of psychoanalysis, art and philosophy. Like the Futurists of the early 19th century, she points to the constantly ongoing processes of/in language. She defines this process as decisive – both for the individual and for human society - for singularity to come into being and to be shared. Individuals capacities to express and share such processes of language is vital for social and cultural developments. In the perspective of psychoanalytic theory, the human subject is split, and unconscious impulses interrupt and challenge rationality. Words still matter for human singularity to be shared. I return to the Russian Futurists later. I first perform a close reading of Kristeva's conceptions of language, the subject (as a *split* speaking subject-in-process/subject-on-trial) and the role and power of poetic language. The discussion then moves towards an examination of Julia Kristeva's concepts of *semiotization* and *transubstantiation*. The study proposes that there might be a double transgression in the signifying process to be aware of. The question explored in this text is as follows:

How do Kristeva's concepts of *semiotization* and *transubstantiation* correspond to her concept of *singularity*, and how can these phenomena contribute to radical change in education?

## The semiotic disposition – A threat or a chance

Teachers and educators can, to a large degree, be defined as speaking subjects. It is, however, not obvious that an experience of the split Kristeva is talking about will be welcome. Professional expectations prescribe acting rationally and determinedly pursuing final goals. The position of the educator is crucial for the educational system

and its ideologies. As such, educators ought to be loyal and devoted. I think this position of loyalty in the educational system should be questioned.

In psychoanalytic theory, the split, as a symptom of the unconscious, is identified as a non-fundamental entity in every subject because it is unknown and impossible to control. But still 'fundamental' in the subject's existence. In Kristeva's theoretical universe, this phenomenon is called the *semiotic disposition*. All human beings, including educators and students, contain their own unique, idiosyncratic semiotic disposition – a potential of/for singularity. Our singularity may fundamentally challenge our deepest need for belonging and connectedness. The urge for connectedness may prompt an emphasis on sameness rather than differentiation. We may therefore repress our impulses of uniqueness in order to fit in, connect and belong. To display what is repressed involves a risk. The semiotic disposition might appear as a threat. According to Kristeva, a key for emancipation and change is given in our own language, our eagerness for representation and utterance. How could a *semiotization* of language, through the power of the poetic, bring about a *transubstantiation* that might reveal unforeseen and unknown potentials for change?

## The need for a radical change in education (I)

In the introduction of this article I pointed out circumstances that had put limits and poorer conditions for the human subject in the education system. I argued that time has come for a radical change, and I will elaborate on the possibilities that take as its point of departure Kristeva's subject-in-process. This process might be understood as a complex process that is decisive for humanizing institutions and realizing singularity. It is a process that seems to be suppressed or neglected in the dominant approach to thinking and acting in education. For that reason this process must be investigated, and the circumstances for it to expand must be examined critically. For Kristeva, the scene of the subject-in-process is situated in language. Just as other systems (including



the educational system), language is a part of the symbolic order. I will show that language is more, and perhaps something different, than just a system for representation and communication. It is also a phenomenon that construes a scene where decisive events take place; events that are both intrapersonal and interpersonal and that affect environment, both social and cultural. As a central and dominating code in society, language as a phenomenon must be 'deciphered'. With all its structures, systems, traditions and cultures, education can be conceptualized, in terms of Kristeva's work, as a kind of symbolic order. From her perspective, every *symbolic order* represents a structure harbouring repressive tendencies. Decisive spaces for singularity to be carried out are reduced.

## Semiotization and the poetic in education? (I)

I approach the concept of semiotization, through Kristeva's semiotic subject-in-process and this subject's effort to make meaning in the *signifying process*. In the signifying process, the subject is active in the creation and symbolization of meaning, and in this process the subject is realized through continuous constructions, deconstructions and reconstructions. Kristeva identifies two main modalities in this process: *the symbolic* and *the semiotic*. To be realized as a speaking subject in language, requires entering the signifying process with sensitivity and engagement. To be a speaking subject-in-process is not to reproduce existing modalities of language, or to reproduce formulas that are expected, but rather it is to watch and re-evaluate each moment and step in the signifying process whenever one is challenged or invited to participate in conversation, dialogue or discussion. Kristeva states that in verbal discourse, there are three types of signs of representation: "representation of words (close to the linguistic signifier), representation of things (close to the linguistic signified), and representations of affects"<sup>14</sup>.

To become aware of, and respect, these different aspects of representations in language – that is, the relationship between the signifier and signified – is to grow a conscious awareness of one's language: 'What is *the issue* here?', 'What do I *really* want to say?', 'What *concepts* will be able to bring out what I will share?' And when ones colleagues respond: 'Was *this* what I meant to say?' This awareness also occurs when listening to other subjects-in-process. When the signifying process is focused in this way, a sensible awareness of the borders and nuances of meanings and their challenges for representation in language might be developed. Some nuances are always left out. The semiotic disposition disturbs the symbolic order and signals that something is repressed or rejected. This experience brings in a poetic dimension of language. After Kristeva introduced the third type of representation, she further explained "[Affects mean] labile psychic traces subject to the primary processes of displacement and condensation, which I have called *semiotic* as opposed to the *symbolic* representations inherent in, or derivative of, the system of language".<sup>15</sup> Here, Kristeva anchor her work in psychoanalytic theories. With these two modalities of representation in the signifying process – the symbolic and the semiotic – there are borders and restrictions to be identified which define the system of language in the symbolic order. As a system constructed and stored in the space of consciousness, the symbolic order is, according to Kristeva, based on a logic of rejection. It is not possible to manage the unconscious with this rejective logic of the symbolic, and what is rejected is reserved for the poetic.

## The semiotic subject-in-process

As mentioned, Kristeva's concept of the subject is rooted in psychoanalytic theories. The unconscious is given significance because it has decisive and radical implications for the quality of the signifying process. Kristeva's term the semiotic disposition<sup>16</sup> points to an unconscious, drive-governed, heterogenous materiality that marks the

signifying process: “We thus develop a powerful model of the human in which language is not divorced from the body; ‘word’ and ‘flesh’ can meet at any moment, for better and worse”.<sup>17</sup>

According to the psychoanalytic theory formulated and used by Kristeva, every individual has undergone primary processes in their early history of development, which results in primary inscriptions, or idiosyncratic patterns of an unconscious materiality of repression and rejection. What is repressed and rejected makes an echo back to the individual’s starting point as a physio-biological organism surrounded and protected by the mother-substance of the uterus. Kristeva names this state chora. It is a state of belonging and togetherness: “In the beginning was love”, Kristeva states.<sup>18</sup> This unmediated experience of connectedness is universal for every human being and plays a central role in primary processes and the formation of idiosyncratic inscriptions. This echo of the physio-biological origins of life constitutes Kristeva’s conception of the unconscious as a semiotic subject, which can be described as a drive-governed desire to reach out and participate – always longing for this forgotten true, real connection and jouissance. The connection is ‘forgotten’ because it is not located in the conscious mind but in the body. Kristeva places affect “at the centre of the content of the Unconscious”.<sup>19</sup> Idiosyncratic impulses from the semiotic disposition disturb and reveal something missed in the signifying process when the rational, symbolic modality dominates.

## The signifying process – signifi<sup>2</sup>ance, transubstantiation and singularity

How can a quest of singularity be actualized in the area of language? The social discourse of communication is disciplined and regulated by mechanisms indicating what is proper and what is not in different contexts. As social beings, humans adapt

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2 **Signifi<sup>2</sup>ance** – this is not a misspelling, but an important nuance of meaning.

to what is expected. Social mechanisms of exclusion are always at work. Any speech-act will or will not harmonize with a social code. Language is an agent of indication and is a visible sign not only of communication but also of position. A position which make possible social acceptance and inclusion or condemnation and exclusion. Social regulations and mechanisms limit the possible space of utterance for the subject-in-process, but language and its symbolic order also represent borders.

As stated, Kristeva regards language not as a system but as a process, that is central for human existence as well as complex. The signifying process is the subject's process of making meaning and to symbolize this meaning in language (in the symbolic order). The process needs material to process, and production occurs. Human conditions and contexts are numerous, mutable and provide different materials of different qualities. The present-day environment is one of endless amounts of information, fragments, signs and symbols. At the same time individuals are part in socio-historical and political systems of already given meaning, structure and rationality. The realm of the unconscious, the unknown or wordless impulses rising in our body are given less status or relevance. Kristeva, thus maintain that there is a risk for the subject in our time to be absorbed into the symbolic order. This threat is serious and pressing if the semiotic aspect is omitted from the subject's signifying process. If a subject is absorbed in this way, the subject is not in-process. Singularity evaporates. The drive-governed desire for real re-connection will not be vital, and the language will be empty with no production – only reproduction. At first it might look like everything is just fine, but the subject will end up in a state of automatization and mechanical responses. This is what might lead systems and societies to end up mechanistic and inhuman, unable to care for humans. The loss is real. Therefore, a reconnection of the relationship between the signified and the signifier is needed.

In her dissertation, *Revolution in Poetic Language*,<sup>20</sup> Kristeva puts herself in a critical position with regards to the establishment of rationality and the dominant philosophies of language. On the first page she states:

... this thinking points to a truth, namely, that the kind of activity encouraged and privileged by (capitalist) society represses the process pervading the body and the subject, and that we must therefore break out of our interpersonal and intersocial experience if we are to gain access to what is repressed in the social mechanism: the generating of signifi~~ance~~<sup>ance</sup>.<sup>21</sup>

This *generating of signifi~~ance~~<sup>ance</sup>* is crucial. This term points to this deeper dimension of the signifying process. To generate signifi~~ance~~<sup>ance</sup>, the signifying process processes 'materials' of *both* semiotic and symbolic modalities. However, for the subject-in-process to realize the semiotic disposition through language is not an easy task. The resistance is massive – both inside and outside. As Kristeva states, there might be both “interpersonal and intersocial” resistance.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, we must break out both of our conscious self and of social mechanisms. Since the semiotic is rooted in the unconscious body's drives and desires, a massive transformation is needed to create a connection or relationship with the symbolic. This idiosyncratic sphere of unknown, unconscious ~~realities~~ appears from time to time as an affective resonance – unpredictable and without rational explanation.<sup>23</sup> As this deep affective impulse enters the sphere of consciousness, it reminds the subject of the fact that the social is not coherent with the individual. The subject might sacrifice its own deep impulses to adapt and obtain inclusion and acceptance. These deep impulses make the subject a foreigner both for itself and for the social. The semiotic subject is expelled in a double sense.

As I have shown, the prize of welcoming the semiotic impulse might be high as it represents a risk in the social context but also in the subject's own signifying process; this is where Kristeva challenges the common concept of language. The urge to express what is entering the threshold of symbolization makes alternative signifying sys-

tems inevitable. To gain insight at the threshold of meaning and signification places the subject to a new position with regards to aesthetic practices. The signifying system of the symbolic order might reveal itself to be insufficient, and other signifying practices might be needed. Where can they be found? Here, Kristeva turns to creative expressions of art such as painting, dancing and music as well as to the poetic function in language. The poetic function is not necessarily about poetry, but an exploration of “the infinite possibilities of language”, where all “language acts are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in ‘poetic language’”.<sup>24</sup>

With the semiotic disposition, generated by drives and desires, we see that the body is actualized. The impulses from the body make the semiotic subject like a foreigner in a society ruled by language and rational logic. These impulses of the body must undergo transformations, or radical changes, from physical-sensual-emotional characteristics to conscious-logical-symbolic characteristics. I suggest these impulses to represent singularity. To share singularity is for the subject to expose his/her inner foreigner/semiotic disposition, and let it affect the signifying process. I will argue that when this ‘foreigner’ stir the signifying process, the subject is generating signifi**ance**. I think the importance of this moving force is what Kristeva points at when she suggests ‘the foreigners’ transformation into ‘a pilgrimage’. In her essay “Paul and Augustine: The Therapeutics of Exile and Pilgrimage” she introduces the concept of transubstantiation, exploring the concept of foreignness and questioning the possibility for foreigners to position themselves in the world.

By referring to Augustine’s contrasting of oppression and freedom, “estrangement and reunion, want and desire – and never the one without the other”<sup>25</sup> Kristeva draws a picture of oppositions and struggles for belonging. In being “faithful to the Psalms”, Kristeva writes that Augustine was studying the sufferings of the Jewish people, moving both in time and space, based on a close reading of the Psalms: “What I sing is over there and does not originate here: for I sing not with my flesh

but with my heart ...”<sup>26</sup> This tearing oneself apart from the despondency of the flesh into the enthusiasm of the heart is what Kristeva expresses as constituting “a true transubstantiation, which Augustine precisely called a pilgrimage”.<sup>27</sup>

Earlier in the same essay, transubstantiation is explained as “a journey between two dissociated but unified spheres that they could uncover in themselves: a journey between body and soul, - if you like – a ‘transubstantiation’ ...”<sup>28</sup> Based on this I will argue that transubstantiation describe a complex, challenging, inner transformation to manage the process where signifi**ance** is generated, and the semiotic enters the signifying process; this underlines an existential aspect of Kristeva’s subject-in-process: an affective basis, unclear and unpredictable, will have decisive impact. To be a subject-in-process is a manner of being in the world, struggling for genuine singularity, in a continuous transformation where certain affects need to be transformed. Affects that might appear as ‘foreigners’, unknown and unpredictable, should be met with curiosity and respect. To accept the foreign affects and phenomenon as friendly ‘pilgrimages’ passing, bringing and leaving traces of something different. Are such pilgrimages welcome in our classrooms and meeting rooms? In our discussions and dialogues with students, colleagues or other collaborative partners? Do we allow time and space for this inner semiotization and transubstantiation of our common educational discourse to happen? Kristeva’s conception of the subject-in-process, with such potentials and capacities, ought to put a mark on our signifying practices. The acknowledgement of this subject raises a central quest in education: is there room for this singularity to occur? Is it possible to welcome this ‘foreigner’? It might be a question of mental and cultural ‘hospitality’.

To bring this kind of hospitality to our institutions, I suggest several language-exercises to rediscover the semiotic dispositions “sleeping in our bodies”. However I first present some of the artists who inspired this exercise.

## The pedagogue, the Russian Futurist and the poetic in language

The Russian Futurists knew that words matter, and this fact was the foundation of their efforts in writing. As a group of avantgarde artists in early 19th-century Russia, they sought different ways to affect the mainstream mentalities of their time. Certain ideologies had to be disclosed in the present society and mechanisms of power and repression had to be unveiled. These motivations caused their art to be regarded by suspicion by the authorities. Some of these artists undertook their disruptive activity through language. They wrote poems and prose, dramas and other texts that experimented with words, letters, sounds and rhythm. They discussed the aesthetics of language and the poetic function, the moving force of the word transgressing its meaning. As the later Russian formalists argued, the poetic function was not limited to poetry but was related to a wide spectrum of effects in language itself.

Velimir Khlebnikov introduced his theory of the perpetual double life of the word: “the word leads a double life. [...] sometimes sense says to sound ‘I hear and obey’; at other times pure sound says the same things to pure sense”.<sup>29</sup> This concept of ‘purity’ is significant in Futurists’ search for the perfect combination of sounds and rhythm to disclose a hidden meaning, a transrational dimension of the word, a moving force as a potential for emancipation. Khlebnikov states that “A word is particularly expressive (*zvuchit*) [...] when a different ‘second sense’ shines through it, when it serves as a glass cover for the vague secret which it encloses, and which is hidden behind it. Everyday meaning is just clothing for the secret”.<sup>30</sup> My suggestion is that this secret might correspond to Kristeva’s semiotic disposition.

The most extraordinary experiments in the Russian Futurists’ activity appear as “zaum, beyond-sense [language ...], an extension of poetic language that rejected the mediation of common sense and deemphasized denotative meaning”.<sup>31</sup> Some Futur-



ists created their zaum/beyond-sense through “devices such as intuitively invented neologisms, grammatical confusions, sound puns and non sequiturs”,<sup>32</sup> but Velimir Khlebnikov was “systematic and methodical in his linguistic experimentation and his neologisms and ‘transrational language’ testify not to a preoccupation with nonsense, but to a preoccupation to sense”.<sup>33</sup>

An example of Khlebnikov’s experiments appears in his letters to his friend in theatre Alexei Kruchonykh. The two of them made “word-creations” to “call attention to the word and letter as physical objects, sensual signs that may be manipulated in various ways to carry expressive meaning”.<sup>34</sup> In these letters, Khlebnikov introduced new possible theatrical words like word-doer/wordordener (author), play-person/imagician (actor), energizer/ imager (director), eyer/contemplor/row-rats(spectator/-s), show-place/show-plays (theatre), contemplay (performance), bedram (a play out of time), dodram (a play set in the present time), didram (a play set in the past), sufferation/painplay (tragedy).<sup>35</sup> By renaming well-known elements in the theatre’s everyday life, they contributed to a new awareness of its everyday activities, the reality embodied in theatre discourse, and its motivations and hidden ideologies (double meanings). They thus prepared people to rethink, ask questions and reinforce discussions.

This process and the call for conscious awareness in language targeted affects both at a personal and political level. It was a fight for freedom and free space for “the most sacred and holiest of all rights [that] was to be able to hold a contrary opinion”.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the time and place of their actions,<sup>36</sup> they were activists in opposition to a totalitarian regime. In his visionary essay “The Trumpet of the Martians”, Khlebnikov declared his new slogan: “Let the Milky Way be split into the Milky Way of inventors/explorers and the Milky Way of investors/exploiters”.<sup>37</sup> Speaking on behalf of the inventors/explorers, he suggested that “...we can use the soap of word-creation [...] We are fated to fight with rhythm and time for our right to be free”.<sup>38</sup>

## Student exercises

Some years ago I offered an English taught master's course which elaborated on the urge to bridge the gap between theory and practice in education through the perspectives described in this article. How does our experience of meaning and different phenomenon (the signified) correspond to our language in use (the signifiers)? Is our vocabulary able to capture our professional engagements, worries and matters close to our hearts? In this exercise, I used language in order to open for a way of implementing both Kristeva's theories and the subject-in-process, transubstantiation and the political word-creation of the Futurists.

The content of this course was organized into two weeks of concentrated activities: morning sessions included practical-aesthetic activities in workshops, and afternoon sessions included theoretical lectures. The workshops offered creative engagement with fleece, greenwood, blacksmithing and clay. During workshops students were encouraged to deepen their sensory experience of the materials and to take notice of the responses in their bodies, of the interactions between materials and body/body and mind/sensations and emotions. This was an appeal for the reconnection of their bodies to a sensible world. Most of the students encountered difficulties with putting these experiences into words, rendering the borders in language visible. Could this be an encounter with a Kristeva-style foreigner?

After students faced their struggles to formulate descriptions and engaged in discussion of Kristeva's core perspectives, I invited the students to subvert and explore the "processor of meaning" via rather traditional, neutral concepts from our educational institutions. The reason for doing this was anchored in Kristeva's concepts of the subject-in-process and its generating of signifi**ance**. The concrete inspiration was Khlebnikov's letters to his friend. The students were asked to work individually, and some of the results were shared at the end of the session.

Out of the word *student*, concepts emerged such as Stewerdent; Spacetruster; Dent-of-armor; Dent-of-karma; Open-heart-surgery; Stewer-of-emotions. The word *classroom* resulted in Infantfactory; Daydreambox; Classification; Rrroom (readingandwritingroom); Rigidroleplay. *Teacher* produced Reacher; Spacecreator; Potentizer; Transparent; Stresseater. Finally, as institutions are usually administrated by a head-teacher, one student suggested we ought to supplement the leadership with a Hand-teacher and a Heart-teacher.

The task elicited a serious effort and a plenary session of spontaneous reactions, cheerfulness and relief. Reflecting on their reactions to Khlebnikov, I think the students fought with “rhythm and time” for their right to be free. Students were laughing and encouragingly commenting on each other’s contributions. Our session ended here, but the next step might include questions like ‘What kind of processes did this activity make room for?’ ‘What elements of emotions, experiences and meaning are to be traced in these new word-creations?’ ‘Did this activity welcome the semiotic disposition?’

## The need for a radical change in education (II)

What are the necessary conditions to ensure that the subjects- in-process might flourish in different ways in educational institutions? Kristeva’s engagement with the subject and this subject’s process of struggling to socially incorporate its semiotic disposition in an accepted and shareable form might offer some clues. In this period of mechanistic neoliberalism, there is an increased focus on systems of goal-oriented control and competition. Tests focus on certain skills – specifically those that are possible to measure. Human qualities that exist outside of this test focus are in danger of escaping educational attention. Educators are expected to provide the administrative and political system with results and reports that, through a system of feedback, lead to new and better ways to improve outcomes. However, one senses a spiral of dehu-

manizing tendencies as students' full capacities are neither accepted nor respected, and the educator is deprived of interactions with the whole human being. Reports are, at best, merely a partial mirror of reality; where do they provide the space needed to care for the whole human and therefore human singularity?

At all levels, all arenas and all phases of interaction in institutions (discussions, collaborations, meetings, test situations, lectures and friendly talks) language is happening. Invisible and unwritten laws exist in every context and discourse. This dynamic might become visible when new colleagues join a team. Some spaces are more open and inclusive than others, but the symbolic order might still be tight and regulated. Acting rationally and crafting logical arguments and explanations might be a central – and necessary – part of the profession, both for the pre-schoolteacher and the university professor. However, equipped with the insight of Kristeva's split speaking subject, our systems and institutions are invited to welcome this dimension of something existing outside or above all regulations, systems and structures. This dimension, which Kristeva terms the semiotic disposition, Freud called the "higher side of man".<sup>39</sup> Why should we exist without our semiotic disposition, our higher sides, in our living institutions? Are we not diminished when our higher sides are pushed to the margins?

Welcoming our semiotic disposition is about hospitality – and welcoming the whole of human potential. My students liberated certain emotional aspects of their everyday experience in the short exercise presented above. I could feel the tension when their new words were voiced to the group. Tension and relaxation.

## Semiotization and the poetic in education (II)

I understand *transubstantiation* to describe the immense gap that emerges in the process of signification when the element of "generating signifi**ance**" is introduced. The generation of signifi**ance** describes the urge to let the unconscious drive that direct af-

fect – that is,- the effect of the semiotic – to be a part of one’s signifying process. As individuals, my students all possessed this idiosyncratic inscription that make every human being unique, singular. This singularity also made them, and makes us all, foreigners at an existential level. To look for this foreigner, to accept and welcome ‘it’, is another aspect of the practice of hospitality. This hospitality is a practice of the subject-in-process itself. To welcome one’s own uniqueness is a lonely and risky process. One can never fully know the foreigner inside – the unconscious. My students completed their exercise in silence, steeped in their own process of deconstruction and reconstruction of meaning, identity and self. Kristeva proposes that we arrive at a point when the meaning of “process” is double wherein the subject-in-process is a subject-on-trial: “For the subject is ‘questionable’ (in the legal sense) as to its identity, and the process it undergoes is ‘unsettling’ as to its place within the semiotic or symbolic disposition”.<sup>40</sup>

When presenting the question explored in this text, I indicated that there might be a double transgression in the signifying process to be aware of. My main concern in this article is singularity in education. Examining this singularity in the light of Julie Kristeva’s psycholinguistic theories, reveals that language, as a favoured aspect of the symbolic order, represents a system that is in need for greater hospitality. As I have shown, the symbolic order, as a social and interpersonal construct, does not welcome the subject’s semiotic disposition. The semiotic disposition never makes things easy, but this “shift in the speaking subject” is “his [/her] capacity for renewing the order in which he [/she] is inescapably caught up”.<sup>41</sup> This capacity for renewing the symbolic order is decisive. In her essay “The System and the Speaking Subject”, Kristeva sums up the request and challenge directed at every human being:

[T]he subject of the semiotic metalanguage must, however briefly, call himself [/herself] in question, must emerge from the protective shell of a transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his connection with that negat-

ivity – drive-governed, but also social, political and historical – which rends and renews the social code.<sup>42</sup>

I will again actualize the term transubstantiation, which Kristeva explained as a movement (journey) between two dissociated spheres. In this quote this ‘journey’ is exposed as the subject emerging from a protective shell to restore a decisive connection and thus rend and renew the social code/symbolic order. I have hereby identified that the double transgression as indicated from the start. Like a crayfish seeking a new shelter, the subject is requested to, “however briefly”, step *out* of its familiar position – a necessary move to gain the ability to bring in something lost, forgotten or rejected. One has to step out to look for one’s foreigner that possess the capacity to bring something new into the social code. Both stepping *out* and stepping *in* are part of the process for the split speaking subject. The semiotic disposition (the foreigner) makes the subject-in-process a pilgrim ...

... into the unknown landscape of poetic language?

The poetic in Kristeva’s context is not limited to poetry. Her conception is inspired by the Russian formalists (who had connections to the Russian Futurists), who were occupied with poetic *function*. For Kristeva, the poetic represents “the infinite possibilities of language”<sup>43</sup>. As the formalists stated, language is not restricted to communication. Furthermore as mentioned, Kristeva points out that all “language acts are merely partial realizations of the possibilities inherent in ‘poetic language’”.<sup>44</sup> Whatever one utters, or however clever and eloquent one might be, there are always infinite other possibilities in language to disclose one’s foreigner, one’s distinct approach, one’s idiosyncratic voice to share singularity. Poetic language is free to transgress grammatical rules and to play with symbols: “the symbol [...] finds itself subverted, not only in its possibilities of *Bedeutung* or denotation [...] but also as a processor of *meaning*”.<sup>45</sup>

If poetic language represents all combinations possible in language, and every speech act represents only a few of them, then language as a signifying process invites us to explore and invent. The Russian Futurists explored and invented new words. They experienced different effects and reactions both in themselves and in society. For us, their word-creation might offer a concrete way into this landscape of unknown possibilities – possibilities that might “conquer and occupy” the language of the new ideologies in education. To explore this ‘landscape of unknown possibilities’ is for each and every subject in our institutions an obligation to turn one’s foreigner into a pilgrim – on the move as a moving force.

## Words Matter (III) – Closing Comments

I have now examined and discussed Kristeva’s concepts of semiotization and transubstantiation as central to the conception of the subject’s singularity both for individuals and institutions. As the Russian Futurists explored and invented different word-creations to disclose and reconnect world and word – they experienced a touch with the centre of power of their time. They were not welcomed by the authorities, and some were expelled or imprisoned for their absurd activism.<sup>46</sup> They paid a harsh prize for their urge to take words into consideration. They might still function, for us, as a reminder: words matter.

I think a teacher as a reacher or stresseater might enter the scene of the classroom differently if this space is thought of as an infantfactory or a daydreambox. The teacher as a spacecreator potentizer or transparent might imagine what rigidroleplay do to their students as spacetrusters, stewers-of-emotions or dents-of-karma.

“We want a word maiden  
whose eyes set the snow on fire.”<sup>47</sup>





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