

Language, Love, Alterity and Transcendence as a Model of Julia Kristeva's Dynamic Spirituality

By

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Preface

‘Spirituality is like a bird: hold it too tightly and it chokes; hold it too loosely and it flies away.’ (Rabbi Hugo Gryn, cited in *Spiritualise*, 2014: 15).

Even an atheist has a spirituality.

Spirituality is more than religious. When human beings speak, when they relate to one another; when they have the courage to be who they are; when they stare up at the night sky; when they are silent looking into face of a new baby; and, above all, when they love, there is spirituality. Spirituality is being human, whatever beliefs we hold. It is more appropriate to try to model spirituality than to try to define it. It is too fluid and non-empirical. I have chosen the writings and theories of Julia Kristeva as a source and guide from writers who can be classed as ‘poststructuralist’ or ‘postmodern’, to develop an original model of spirituality. I explain my choice by her attention to a breadth of concerns including psychological health, the marginalised, the need for love of self and the Other, as well as a place for the ineffable in language. Kristeva’s spirituality can perhaps best be modelled as Language and Love and yet with two other necessary, attendant themes of Alterity and Transcendence to link them together in an inseparable dynamic. Their dynamic helps to form a safe, ‘psychic space’ (*espace psychique*). The ‘psychic space’ terminology derives directly from Kristeva and I retain the single commas throughout to denote both this fact and that the term is ambiguous. The psyche is an indefinable activity (rather than essence) for Kristeva and can function as a useful, inclusive term of the personal, the experiential and the transcendent. I use the term ‘safe’ alongside Kristeva’s phrase to suggest her views of the need for love and openness to the Other. Kristeva (1987a: 31) relates the formation of a safe ‘psychic space’ with transference and countertransference in analysis. ‘By ensuring a loving Other to the patient...the psychic space where, possibly and subsequently, an analysis can take place.’ Kristeva (1987a: 14) has already observed that ‘this opening up to the other plays a decisive part in the evolution of species...’, and the dynamic of transference ‘*has been taken as a model of optimum psychic functioning.*’ Kristeva (1989c: 4) views language as essential to build the ‘psychic space’ as structure is introduced ‘into the

complex and imprecise zone of human activities where ideologies and religions are usually established.' Kirkby (1997: 115) states; 'It is the establishment and maintenance of psychic space that first enables the process of individuation, and subsequently, community.' Kristeva is concerned with more than inner drives.

After introducing Julia Kristeva and then analysing various models of spirituality, the themes of language and love will be explored and critiqued at length, as well as their concomitant requirement of alterity and transcendence which together form a spirituality. There can be no self without words; no relationships without love; no language without others, and no activity without the ability to go beyond the self.

Chapter 1

Introducing Julia Kristeva

Abstract

Julia Kristeva is a practising psychoanalyst, philosopher, semiologist, literary critic and novelist. Kristeva is an atheist by conviction, French by nationality and Bulgarian by birth. She is a polymath, traversing different disciplines and traditions, including an admiration of religious imagery, narrative, and ritual from a literary and psychoanalytical perspective. Kristeva works within the post-structuralist tradition and is considered as a postmodernist, though that is a term she disowns. She is a Freudian psychoanalyst, and she adapts and develops Freud into her own, original system that explores a literary dynamic of the semiotic and the Symbolic as a version of the Oedipus Complex. Language and love are key themes in her oeuvre, though these require alterity and a sense of transcendence to operate. Four interrelating themes can therefore be discerned in Kristeva's ideas. The present text has highlighted two, language and love, but never in isolation from the dynamic circle of four themes. Language is far more than logical grammar and syntax. Language can be non-discursive, poetic, imaginative and symbolic. Furthermore, it embraces the non-verbal as well as the verbal. Kristeva admits the ineffable and that there are unanswerable questions.

- Biography
- Kristeva in context
- Ideology
- Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray
- Conclusion

Keywords: language, love, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis

Introduction

'If we did not ceaselessly expose the strangeness of our internal life
– ...would there be a life of the psyche, would we be living beings?'
Kristeva (in Mitchell Gubermann (ed.) 1996: 27)

Kristeva is concerned to allow a poetics of imagination and the non-discursive as part of human wellbeing. Besides philosophical insights, Kristeva is therapeutic. Love allows the creativity and the possibility of ego formation in relationship with the Other and with the self. The possibility of transcending the individual ego, either in its ongoing process of growth, and of encountering the external world, would be impossible without the openness to trust and to give. I argue that Kristeva presents a spirituality of what I refer to as an 'interiority with reciprocity'.

Biography

Julia Kristeva is a practising psychoanalyst, philosopher, semiologist, literary critic and novelist. Kristeva is an atheist by conviction, French by nationality and Bulgarian by birth. Kristeva arrived in Paris as an émigré from communist Bulgaria in 1965, aged 25. De Gaulle was offering scholarships to eastern, francophone nationals and she enrolled in L'École Pratique des Hautes Études in 1966. She studied under Roland Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Emile Benveniste, thereby encountering semiotics, structuralism, and linguistics. Eventually, her doctoral fellowship initiated a meeting with the author and intellectual, Philippe Sollers, whom she married soon after. Sollers was a founder of the journal *Tel Quel* and Kristeva became a frequent contributor and member of the *Tel Quel* group which included Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and the Bulgarian Tzvetan Todorov. The publication of Kristeva's doctoral thesis, *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974) led to her appointment to a chair of linguistics at the University of Paris VII. In 1976 she became both a mother to her son, David, and in 1979 a practising psychoanalyst. Kristeva's style became more accessible and sometimes poetic in the 1980s, using more conventional psychoanalytical terms rather than her own academic coinage. Her studies in psychiatry took place in Psychanalytique de France which had separated from Lacan and was also influenced by relations theory such as that of Melanie Klein or D.W. Winnicott. Kristeva claims a close affinity to Freud, though using some Lacanian terminology. Her influence from relations theory is often unacknowledged but its emphasis on relations between people rather than just inner drives has helped to shape Kristeva's views. Kristeva has had many influences.

She remained friends with Lacan, though they differed. Barzilai (1991) described them as Freud's 'children' and having a 'sibling rivalry'.

Kristeva's experience as an émigré has coloured much of her thought. She is concerned with the stranger, the dissident and the marginalised. Kristeva understands herself as a dissident within the French philosophical tradition as a polymath, and something of an outsider to her adopted nation. Even though she was awarded the légion d'honneur in 1997, she still does not consider herself French. When she travels abroad, though, she is seen nonetheless as elegantly French in her appearance, style and thought. Kristeva understands the US as another adopted country for she lectures there frequently, occupying an honorary chair at Columbia University.¹ She describes herself as 'living in exile, not belonging to a culture or to [a] native language.' (in Kurzweil, 1986: .216). She is described as a French feminist but others reject her as a feminist. She is an atheist though accused of being an advocate for Christianity and, as Jonte-Pace (in Liebman, S. & Capps, D. (eds.) 1997, p.240) states, 'Julia Kristeva's life and career are marked by paradox.'

The death of her father in Bulgaria in 1989 deeply troubled her and her second novel, *The Old Man and the Wolves* (1991d) explores themes from this episode in her life. Kristeva has written five novels² that use parts of her own life story and her ideology woven into atypical narratives that intersect genres. Kristeva is fascinated by religious symbolism, particularly that of Christianity, as well as the language and psychology of faith. Though schooled in Dialectical Materialism in a communist country, in her family life her father was a practising Orthodox layman, and her mother an atheist and a biologist. Kristeva was baptised in the Orthodox Church and, as a girl, often accompanied her father to the cathedral in Sophia where he sang in the choir. Kristeva's experience of Catholicism began with her primary education by Dominican Sisters and this has remained positive in her adoptive country where the Catholic Church is the main form of Christianity. Kristeva was invited by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011 to attend the 'Court of the Gentiles' in Assisi, a new group that holds dialogue between the Catholic Church and atheists. Kristeva has written about belief; semi-

¹ Translations of Kristeva's texts are published by the Columbia University Press.

² *Teresa, My Love* (2014b) can be understood as a sixth though most of the text is concerned with biography and psychoanalytical theories.

otics and language; the arts; love; depression and melancholy; the stranger; and more recently, about Teresa of Avila and Dostoyevsky. Kristeva is involved in campaigning for the rights of the disabled, and was a friend of Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche.

Kristeva in context

Kristeva is a poststructuralist, while adapting and introducing her own insights. She engages in the progressive critique of phenomenology as a philosophy of presence. Kristeva rejects Husserl's Transcendent Ego and the idea that pure experience can be present to the subject, who stands apart and above what is encountered and thereby experienced and interpreted. Kristeva inherits this revolt from Heidegger and latterly her friends of the Tel Quel group. Heidegger's *Dasein* (Being) criticised traditional ontology whereby history is what happens to the subject. The subject, the self, is part of 'historicity' and is the constructed understanding of history/events as time within Being or Being within time. Heidegger's *destruktion* sought to disassemble phenomenology and ontology as absolutes. He broke with Hegel arguing for the impossibility of the Absolute, and critiqued the subservient ideas mastered by synthesis in Hegel's Dialectics. The new could and should always reveal the hidden anterior, having its own interpretative value within time.³

Kristeva is indebted to Heidegger and ideas of the self as part of historicity and Being. She can use the term such as *L'Être* (Being) with assumed general acceptance among her readers. Kristeva's critique of Hegel rejects totality for infinity. The human mind can never have a *telos* to interpretation, there must always be more, a beyond. She utilises Hegel's idea of *negativité* (negativity) as the dynamic that affects synthesis between two concepts, whereby structures are rebuilt from earlier ones in a negative/positive manner. Kristeva must allow this to be an infinite differentiation, a dynamic that must always be encountered. Kristeva's background in Dialectical Materialism influenced her critique for she rejects Marxism as a form of totality, an Absolute. Kristeva follows Derrida by referencing and

³ Derrida was influenced by Heidegger and developed the idea of *destruktion* with deconstruction, whereby hidden ideas and systems are revealed within texts and structures.

rejecting logocentrism where words can describe an external reality through reason which exists prior to, and independent of language. Words (and thereby reason) are part of the human construction of language. Humanity can possess no totality of knowledge and meaning. There must always be that which is unknown and beyond, always open to the new.⁴ Kristeva has inherited the phenomenological critique, but she is also a semiologist and follows de Saussure's ideas of the randomness of the signs, and Barthes's application of randomness in writing, in society and in all human discourse. While indebted to Heidegger, Hegel, and to her friends at Tel Quel, Kristeva explores language further, with ideas of the preverbal, non-verbal and the avant-garde. *l'Être parlant* (the Speaking Being), borrowing a term from Lacan, describes communicative humanity, a 'speaking' that allows structure and therefore identity. However, Kristeva admits the inexpressible and denies an extra-linguistic, universal Reason, or a philosophy of presence. Human ideas of universals are an artifice, but a necessary one to give focus and structure and are a response to living within time and Being. Kristeva's dialogue with the Tel Quel group exposed her to *écriture limite* and the sense that writing was to be studied as more than sequences and structures of words and grammar. The experiential and expressive dimensions should be considered, and the aspect of free-floating signage. The fixed rules and forms of structuralism were therefore overturned. Kristeva's work as a psychoanalyst develops her study of language with the preverbal sounds, expressions, and gestures within the psyche of the enunciator themselves and the resulting psychodynamic, enriched by the action of transference and countertransference between analysand and analyst. Kristeva as polymath builds upon poststructuralism and as a semiologist/psychoanalyst develops a fresh trajectory from her peers and forebears. Kristeva's contribution to poststructuralism is both typical and original at one and the same time.

⁴ Derrida, for example, rejected 'Messianism' for 'Messianic', understanding the former as a completion, and the latter as an infinity of openness to that which is beyond, that which is always to come. Derrida (1996) distinguishes between *le future* and *l'avenir*, between future as predictable and that which is to come as unexpected. Similarly, Kristeva's use of the 'infinite' with regards to literary meaning, and the psyche, reflect her rejection of logocentrism.

Ideology

Kristeva's term, *le sémiotique* (the semiotic,) refers to the preverbal expressions of the psyche. Kristeva postulates a creative energy that works within and results from physical biology but transcends the purely empirical as a holistic model. Kristeva's refusal of a logocentrism and a private language links her to the movement that is described by the portmanteau term post-modernism. Kristeva's argument that the semiotic is the fount of discursive logic provides a role for imagination, creativity and emotion. Kristeva's 'semiotic' is a form of *poésie*, poetics, disrupting frameworks by rejecting any fixed nature, both within language, literature, society, and the self as language is a construction by and from it. The semiotic is a type, therefore, of revolt, a return, disturbing and reminding that language structures are contingent. Ambiguity and non-discursive creativity allow possibility when theories and ideologies are seen to be humanly conceived narratives. However, the ambiguities and possibilities allow a profound and, I would argue, spiritual appreciation.

Kristeva is not only an abstract thinker or an 'avant-garde' philosopher but is interested in the psyche and psychotherapy. Kristeva philosophises and also seeks therapeutic goals. Kristeva is in awe of the psyche and cannot reduce it to physical biology or an exclusive formation by the language of the symbolic, socially constructed order. While affirming its existence, she cannot understand the psyche as an immortal soul⁵, and the creative ambiguity allows an opening for reflective awe and mystery. The psyche is an *aporia*⁶, a limit to human reason, and is in motion, responding to relationships and always developing for Kristeva, as 'in process', or, 'under judgement' (*en procès*) and described by Kristeva (1995: 4) as 'a discourse that acts.' Though Kristeva shuns the metaphysical, logocentric language of essence, there is the inexpressible and the ineffable in the existence and role of the individual, conscious person. The subject that participates in language, a system with its rules that structures thoughts and expressions, is elusive and though it can be approached it is never grasped.

⁵ The concept of 'immortal' suggests a fixed state of being, beyond the confines of language and ongoing ego development. Kristeva rejects such ideas as 'theologizing', making external and static.

⁶ *Aporia* is used by poststructuralism/postmodernism from the Greek meaning 'no path'/no way'.

Kristeva's exploration and therapeutic use of language pays respect to religious language and symbols. She studies melancholy and depression, the darker side of the psyche, and she does not ignore this aspect with all its difficulties of being human, of belief, relationships, and intolerance. Smith (1998: rear cover text) sums up the work of Kristeva;

Julia Kristeva's most remarkable contribution to modern thought has been her revelation of how pre-verbal experience – poetic, infantile, maternal and spiritual, or simply the experience of suffering – enters language through the processes of literature, art and psychoanalysis. Speaking the Unspeakable, her work is therefore of great significance in the fields of literary study, critical theory and psychoanalysis.

Kristeva (in Mitchell Gubermann (ed.) 1996: 27) herself sums up the deep drives of her oeuvre;

If we did not ceaselessly expose the strangeness of our internal life – and transpose it ceaselessly into other signs, would there be a life of the psyche, would we be living beings?

Kristeva's writings about language and love are central to her oeuvre, presented thoroughly in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984a), and *Tales of Love* (1987a). She understands that language and love are impossible without a sense of the Other in relation. She has written about alterity in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991b). A further theme that allows language and love (and alterity) to function is that of a sense of transcendence which allows a beyond the ego to exist, formed by and helping to form language. While Kristeva has not written a title on this topic explicitly, ideas of transcendence can be traced in her oeuvre, as in the ineffable nature of the psyche, the necessary 'Other' that takes us beyond the self, and issues of belief (Kristeva, 1987b, 2009, 2020a). Kristeva's writings about language are foundational for her philosophy; language is a response to the ineffable, which allows thinking, and response to the Other. Such an interchange allows the creation of society, and therefore the possibility of love. Kristeva (2012:209) states;

Human beings' perception of their complex aptitude for representation and symbolization is at the basis of what has been imagined, since the dawn of the hominid.

For Kristeva (2009: 209) the psyche and its ability to produce language and symbols is an epistemological enigma;

Since Freud, and even more after him, the speaking being appears irreducible to his biology, but capable, starting from it and with it, of representing and symbolizing his functioning and activities with others,...

Two chapters are required to present Kristeva's views on language, both that of the semiotic and also that of intertextuality (the inter-connectivity of text and reader). In an interview with *The Guardian* (14 Mar 2006) Kristeva states:

I am very proud of the widespread use of my ideas...and at the same very much ashamed because they have become so fashionable. Everybody thinks and talks about 'abjection'. The ideas become politically correct everywhere in the world and I hate it because I think that when people repeat what you have done and said, they can no longer recognise you as yourself. You are denied. It is a kind of decay of this moment when the idea burst out of your mind. Now the idea is consumerised.

Kristeva is not a product; her oeuvre is not arrested but still in creative production. Her thoughts are not static but in process, as with her more recent use of 'maternal reliance' between mother and infant, whereby maternal passion in identity and society is considered. Kristeva is a person and not an abstraction. A fecundity is revealed in Kristeva as a Gallic thinker, a polymath invoking many authors, ideas, detailed theology, terminology and psychoanalytical experience.⁷ She is an eclectic thinker and writer. Her thoughts are expressed as rhetorical statements, imaginative poetry or narrative, besides discursive text. To read Kristeva is to read many others: Plato, Freud, Bakhtin, Barthes, Dostoyevsky, Holbein, Lacan, Baudelaire, Aquinas and so on. She may cross reference several authors in a single page sometimes in atypical fashion. Kristeva (2001: 1) describes her 'nomadism' in thinking and writing. The continental and personal

⁷ Payne (1993: 162) comments that other writers, particularly the poststructuralists Barthes and Derrida, influence Kristeva but hers is not 'an uncritical synthesis'. Kristeva's oeuvre is part of an 'affirmation of intellectual community' as engagement and not plagiarism. Kristeva is original in her thinking.

freshness (personal as it blends literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis so that her place in the Academy is sometimes controversial) can be frustrating for an Anglo-Saxon approach. There are always open endings, challenges, provocations and invitations. In the *Guardian* article, Kristeva states that her continental, Gallic style of doing philosophy ‘often bother the so-called Anglo-Saxon reader because they consider this French ‘stuff’ – theory – to be somehow indigestible.’ Kristeva’s difference, and sometimes ambiguity, allow creative insights and possibilities.

Studying Kristeva

Studying Kristeva involves several discourses, and discourses involve ideologies and interpretations. I seek to help to provide some foundational ideas that may facilitate further reflection. I use the term ‘foundation’ with care because a traditional study of Kristeva would be disingenuous as she is a multidisciplinary polymath. Crow (2002: 2) comments that crossing the boundaries of disciplines creates an ‘intellectual fusion’ and Hunt (199: 194) states that it involves a community of enquiry so that ‘a community of arguers is possible’. Kristeva as polymath in her thinking and writing is part of a ‘community’ of poststructuralist philosophy, literary analysis and psychotherapy. The crossing of boundaries between disciplines allows the transgressive for Kristeva. Transgression can be creative, presenting original ideas within that community. Bridges (2017: 18) comments; that the 2001 UK Research Assessment Exercise, for example, provided;

...clear evidence of creativeness (or recklessness) in combining, crossing over. Or perhaps, ‘transgressing’ traditional disciplinary structures in a context of what some have described as ‘postdisciplinarity’.

‘Postdisciplinarity’ (though the term can be used interchangeably with ‘multidisciplinarity’, ‘interdisciplinarity’ and ‘transdisciplinarity’) is suggestive of Kristeva’s work and her necessary eclecticism.

There is an irony when disciplines and many schools of thought are contrasted and disallowed dominance. Structures of power can be revealed and deconstructed. Maclure (2006: 226, 230) states that a postmodern critique allows ‘forms of theorising that embrace the ‘disappointment’ of certainty’

and 'ways of working with, and deeply within, the intricate entanglement'. Furthermore, Maclure (2006: 224) comments she understands postmodernism 'as emanating from the 'inside' of whatever is its (supposedly) modernist antagonists.' Ideas, structures, and assessments are their own internal critics when hidden and even contradictory aspects are present. Central to Kristeva's ideas is the role of the spontaneous, creative, rudderless (the semiotic) or what Bridges (2017) might describe as 'reckless'. Maclure (2006: 223) describes a necessary disturbance in postmodern research; "It argues for defamiliarization, fascination, recalcitrance, and frivolity as methodical practices for research..." Kristeva writes about breaking taboo, allowing crossroads of discovery, and the problems of being entrenched in ideas, assumptions and emotions. She seeks to confront and disturb, but also to reveal and structure. Kristeva adopts an ethical position in challenging the status quo. Kristeva does not advocate a chaotic postmodernism, though there is what Maclure refers to as 'defamiliarisation, fascination, recalcitrance and frivolity'⁸ However, the need for some organising structure (what Kristeva refers to as 'the Symbolic') is also required. Structure must not impose too many constraints, though, and thereby stifle vitality. Kristevan postdisciplinarity is proactive and Phenix (1964: 8) describes any multidisciplinarity as potentially productive of 'generative power'. Eisner (1993: 8) comments when research methods are stable then rules are clear and standardised, but with 'new games, new rules.' Kristeva's synthesis is disruptive and original while also involving rigour and systematic research (referencing, in detail, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Bakhtin, Aquinas, and Dostoyevsky, for example). Kristevan research as postdisciplinary/multidisciplinary activity should be considered as disciplined inquiry without a narrow specificity, an enquiry that creates and exposes new insights, partly through revealing 'the frailties of performance' (Maclure 2006: 224).

There is a danger of what Popkewitz (1984: 3) describes as 'particular constellations of questions, methods and procedures.' Such constellations can occur within Kristevan scholarship which run the risk of a discourse of mutual admiration and mainly an informative exegesis. Discourses as collections of ideologies need to be recognised as such when considering

⁸ Kristeva 'defamiliarises' by using different genres and some of her more poetic work is playful (seemingly frivolous) such as the joy, tenderness and pain when she gave birth. Life is more than the deductive as emotions and the unpredictable are also involved.

critics of Kristeva's oeuvre, including her own⁹. I have sought opinions that critique her work with reference to literary examples used by Kristeva (such as Ovid's story of Narcissus, or the Biblical *Song of Songs*), as well as data from philosophy and psychoanalysis. I have been careful to argue with Kristeva and see lacunae and *aporia* in her work. My referencing of her contemporaries, Cixous and Irigaray, has allowed myself to be challenged and redirected, and the main conclusion, relating to modelling spirituality, emerged as a surprise. The study of various discourses resulted in a personal discourse, and a result that is specifically dependent upon interdisciplinarity where separate categories or disciplines are seen to co-inhere inseparably to create a greater whole, a model driven, in Kristeva's case, by the power of language and of love in interaction. My 'foundation(s)' can only be considered, in my view, as a focus, or what Shulman (1999: 194) suggests as a 'field and a focus of study'. A field model is less defined, more provisional and in process. My research into Kristevan analysis results in more than a taxonomy of information, ideas, and history as it seeks models. Any model can never have closure or requires what Kristeva would refer to as 'an open text'. In this regard, McClure rejects the demand for closure and oversimplification, recognising 'forms of theorising that embrace the 'disappointment' of certainty.'. What cannot be said, what may be said, or what is not said, must be taken into consideration. In this sense, I propose a suggestive discourse.

Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray

Kristeva's ideas in her oeuvre need supplementation. Kristeva's contribution must be critiqued and is limited though fecund. To enable this critique, I will briefly compare key ideas from Kristeva's writings with her contemporaries Cixous and Irigaray (as the two other prominent French postfeminists in what is often designated the 'Holy Trinity'). Reference to Cixous and Irigaray is limited and selective by necessity in the structure of this text. I have found that Cixous and Irigaray reflect my critique of aspects of Kristeva and lacunae in her work, while Kristeva presents structure and insights lacking in their work. The creative supplementation as a triangulation with myself, helps to create a vision and a possible model of

⁹ Such as her dependence upon Freud.

spirituality. Detecting undeveloped concepts, lacunae and *aporia* in Kristeva are a form of negative space as in the construction of works of Art. The critique can often provide a series of openings.

Hélène Cixous (1937-) was born in Algeria to a mother who had fled Nazi Germany in 1933, and a father who was descended from Mediterranean Jewry. Cixous arrived in France in 1955, eventually holding the position of Professor of Literature at the Université de Paris III Vincennes. Ward (1996: 123) comments that Cixous's writing concerns 'recovering, healing and maintaining these themes'. Cixous's seminal texts are *Newly Born Woman* and *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976). Cixous argues for a new *écriture féminine* that allows women to write as women, also involving their bodily sensations as the whole person; 'with letters, with lips, with breath, to caress with the tongue, to lick with the soul, to taste the blood of the beloved body.' (Cixous, 1991: 4). Cixous has written numerous essays, books and novels for the publishing house, Des Femmes, as well as works for the theatre after her collaboration with Anna Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil. Cixous writes about love, alterity, and a discovery of the depths of the self through writing (invoking a writing of the body, a material, holistic activity). Cixous defies limits and concepts of descent/ascent, interior/exterior, evoking mystery and a journey to a conceptual edge.

Luce Irigaray (1932-) is Belgian and was raised Catholic. Irigaray's research in the 1960s involved psycho-linguistics. Irigaray had to leave her position at the École Freudienne when she published *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974). Since then, she has written widely about gender, language and ethics. Irigaray argues that Western philosophy is phallogocentric and that women need to be released from the repression of patriarchy to find their true identities. Irigaray's writing is at times playful, poetic and discordant for, as she argues, language has a patriarchal structure and so women's writing has to embrace words but finds itself 'also getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them' (Irigaray, 1977: 29). Irigaray's *parole-femme* affirms the body as part of writing and that 'text is tissue'. Elemental images are utilised such as air and water.

Despite their differences and emphases, the three writers are both contemporary and work from a poststructuralist framework.

Conclusion

Kristeva's oeuvre provides an interactional dynamic to understand language and human behaviour. Language requires the possibility of love to accept and trust the Other so that communication can result. To reach out beyond the individual ego requires a sense of transcendence. Kristeva's eclectic writings as a polymath pursue the intricacies of these themes by being attentive to other writers and ideas. I will go on to suggest that her oeuvre is fecund for the consideration of spirituality and its possible models. Though Kristeva has been influenced by Christianity and admires its stories and symbols, she is not religious, she is not a believer. The term 'spirituality' is elusive and fluid. This may be understood as concerning the interior life and existential questions, though ideas of how these should be understood varies. Spirituality can involve more than this as a study and an application of Kristeva's thought can suggest. It must depend upon the themes of language and love, with the attendant themes of alterity and transcendence to be Kristevan. The following chapter will explore what might be understood by 'spirituality' referencing aspects of modern society, some key writers and studies before any further rapport with Kristeva's themes can take place.

Chapter 2

Models of Spirituality

Abstract

While religious belief and practice has declined in the West, spirituality thrives in various ways. Details of the decline of religious belief and reasons that are suggested for these focus mainly on the inability to believe in religion because of the physical sciences. Only that which can be empirically measured can be trusted to be real. Postmodernism, though, challenges the received narrative of empiricism (especially as espoused by writers such as Richard Dawkins) as it demonstrates that their narrative is a metanarrative, a grand narrative, and as such is a human construct. Total knowledge is impossible for any system. No one point of view can be absolutely right. Postmodernism returns a place for the non-discursive after the dominance of the discursive Enlightenment. Poetry, imagination, creativity, and interiority are essential aspects of being human. Kristeva writes within this tradition, though not claiming the term for herself, and her study of language recognises this as a human construct, but one that has developed because of the nature of the psyche and the possibility of relationships with the Other, a possibility because of the value of love. Her valuing of love, alone, makes a statement against the possible limitations of a materialistic worldview. Love not only concerns human rights and self-giving (radically so with the concept of *agape*), but also the expressive and the unpredictable.

- Introduction
- The decline of faith and the rise of ‘spirituality’
- Incipient spirituality
- Metanarratives and Empiricism
- The Postmodern Condition
- Postmodernism or Critical realism?
- Models of spirituality – Sheldrake, Hay and the RSA Report ‘Spiritualise’
- Towards a Kristevan spirituality?

Keywords: models, spirituality, ‘nones’, postmodernism, metanarratives, empiricism

Introduction

‘Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable...’ (Lyotard (1979: 82)

“I’m spiritual but not religious.” Comments such as this more frequent than professions of religious belief in Western societies now. While religious belief and practice has declined in the West, spirituality thrives in various ways.

Spirituality can be modelled but never defined exactly. Terms and ideas shift continuously like a Heraclitan rejection of standing in the same river twice. Models can be understood as a type of paradigm, but not when exploring spirituality. Kuhn (1962) describes ‘paradigm shifts’ and advocates that paradigms act as ‘models of scientific practice’ or general theories based upon such practice that can change with new ideas and discoveries. Ideas are established, questioned in a crisis, and then a revolution of thought is produced. Unlike a paradigm, whereby principles are inherent in practical research with concrete, empirical, and evaluative activities within a community, a model as used in a topic such as spirituality is a self-consciously constructed suggestion, aware that empirical research is insufficient for the task. It is more intuitive and expressive. The intuitive nature does not preclude empirical observations of human behaviour and experience, of course, but it acts as an interpretation which is evaluated only in an experiential and ethical sense within any individuals or communities. A model uses metaphors whereby ideas and experiences use images and concepts that have an ‘is/is not’ quality (McFague, 1987). They do not claim to be empirical reality. Furthermore, Derman (2010) describes metaphors as ‘reductions in dimensionality’ which always refer to something else. I suggest that a model can be understood as an interactive collection of metaphors, or as what I describe as a meta-metaphor. Perhaps the model is always in search of a paradigm, a quest that is intrinsically elusive but necessary for insight, creativity, and relationality.¹⁰ Three examples of

¹⁰ A metaphor can be discerned as outdated and misleading, and therefore models face their own crises and revolutions. An example, in Christian spirituality, would be the new insights about human biology and sociology that question not only the role of gender and reproductive activity, but also patriarchal images of deity. Paradigms need models, and models require metaphors; it is impossible to draw firm boundaries within general principles.

models are explored in this chapter with the views of Philip Sheldrake, David Hay, and the RSA *Spiritualise* report. Kristeva's oeuvre segues into some of these models and their themes, though her ideas are original. Kristeva writes within what she affirms as *l'humanisme*. In its Continental context, *l'humanisme* concerns human being, or humanity in general, with the desires, rights, and values, rather than within a defined set of empirically based beliefs in Anglo Saxon humanism as a movement. Her views on love, belief (involving the possibility of forming speech, writing, and concepts rather than being narrowly religious) and the Other inform her humanism.

The decline of faith and the rise of 'spirituality'

A discussion of 'spirituality' in modern, Western society must consider the growing numbers of those who do not identify with any religion, many of whom call themselves atheists, while others are agnostic, or believers who have no (or little) connection with organised religion. The dismissal of faith and religion can depreciate ideas of spirituality for some, resulting in levels of confusion, especially when the term is applied to areas such as Healthcare or Education. What does it mean to be spiritual but not religious?

The UK census of 2001 revealed that 15% of people (14.1 million) had put "none" for their religious affiliation. 72% of responders stated that they were 'Christian'. The question was voluntary and 7.2% declined to answer. The 'nones' belonged to no organised religion. The 2011 census had 25% as 'nones' and 59% stating that they were 'Christian'. Data from the British Social Attitudes Survey (2015) and the European Social Survey (2014) analysed by Bullivant (2015) reveals that 48.6% of the UK population are classed as 'no religion, none'. 'Nones' are younger, comprising 35% among the under 35s, while all other adults are at 29%. Three-fifths of UK 'nones' were brought up in a religious tradition; yet fewer than one in ten of those brought up in a religious unaffiliated home now identify as religious. The European Social Survey shows that 75% of 'nones' never attend a religious service, and 76% never pray (however, some do so occasionally).

Having no religion can mean several things. It is wrong to assume that

all are atheists, whether strongly convinced or assuming atheists¹¹. Statistics reveal this discrepancy, such as those of Woodhead (2016) for 2013, 2014. Her research revealed that 41.5% of UK religiously unaffiliated or 'nones', are committed atheists, while 23% are either agnostic or nominally atheist.¹² The remainder may have some level of belief but rarely or never practice. Attempting to define categories should not ignore a fluidity of opinions. The boundaries can be blurred, and people can move between them at different stages in the life cycle or even in their present experience. Tomlins and Bearman (2015: 1-18) provide a list of possibilities;

...humanist, irreligious, materialist, naturalist, rationalist, sceptic, secularist, a mix of these descriptions, or something else altogether.

Cotter (2015: 171-194) found that students carried multiple labels, sometimes in conflict. Putman, and Campbell (2010) describe the phenomenon of 'switching, matching and mixing'. Woodhead (2016) describes the religiously unaffiliated as being a mixture of 'doubters and believers', often within the same individual. The fluidity and blurring of boundary positions reflects the uninformed and uncommitted attitude of many 'nones'. Voas (2009) and Storm (2009) utilise the term 'fuzzy fidelity'. Lee (2019) presents research into attitudes in 6 countries¹³ and found that the labels of 'atheist' or 'agnostic' were diverse and that there are many ways of being an unbeliever. Cheruvallil-Contractor, Purdam & Weller (2021) conclude that there is no single identity for the 'non-religious'. There are a 'multiplicity of identities' and their interface could be 'potentially creative'. Some participants seemed to be content with the term 'spirituality' so long as it was not perceived as religious, as with the example of; '...but if it means [...] feeling content with yourself and your place in the universe, then I feel quite happy with it.'

A number of reasons are suggested for the rise in the religiously unaffiliated such as disillusionment with unethical behaviours (issues of abuse) and narrow conservatism (such as attitudes to LGBTQ+). The 2017 Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) report in the US (*Searching for Spirituality*

¹¹ I use the term 'assuming atheist'; for anyone who accepts that there is no God but never really thinks this through.

¹² Based upon the Office for National Statistics.

¹³ Brazil, China, Denmark, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S.

in the U.S: A New Look at the Spiritual but Not Religious) found that the main reason was that people had ceased to believe mainly through an assumed and widespread materialism where religion is understood as unscientific. Zuckerman, Galen and Pasquale (2017) describe the prevalence of unbelief is a matter of 'an acquired incredulity syndrome' and 'a basic inability to believe'. Lee (2019) reports that those who agree with the statement 'The scientific method is the only reliable path to knowledge' scored between 66-71% in Brazil, China, Denmark, the U.K. and the U.S.

Incipient spirituality

Traces of interiority as a sense of something other than the purely rational, and the ethical importance of relationships, are still evident. An incipient spirituality can embrace a quest for a belief in a cause such as environmental issues, justice and peace concerns, or gender equality. Lee (2019) reports that the 'deep value' of nature was held by the majority of non-believers surveyed. The values most generally agreed upon were Family and Freedom, and subsequently Compassion, Truth, Nature, and Science. For some, the interior search can be for a higher power be it Divine, the Universe, the Self or even the Force, as with the unexpected development of fringe movements such as modern Jedi Knights. (The mockery that had 0.8% write 'Jedi Knight' for religious affiliation in the 2001 Census, gradually gave way to more serious and reflective associations. Wellbeing systems, mindfulness, aphorisms, rites and even a spiritual/religious quest have developed.)¹⁴

A non-confessional spirituality can be found in the New Age practises such as crystals, divination, and channelling of spirits also evoke a spirituality (though the term 'New Age' is not systematic and can include many activities, rituals and beliefs). Drane (1991, p. 203) comments that '...it certainly means that these people are spiritually open as no other generation within

¹⁴ The online US group, *The Temple of the Jedi Order*, presents Jediism as a religion and the Force is 'the underlying nature of the universe'. There is a Creed, which uses parts of the Prayer of St Francis with a refrain, 'I am a Jedi, an instrument of peace.' Lifestyle tends to be devoid of doctrine and rituals though some want to engage in the latter. They use a syncretistic approach to forms of prayer and belief (such as Muslim *salat* with Buddhist spirituality). Though a fringe movement, Jediism is an example of a post-'none' movement where there are appreciations of a religious quest and even an evaluation of ancient traditions.

living memory has been.’ The most common form of secular interiority is Mindfulness, a form of stilling the mind either for physical wellbeing, meditation, or contemplation. Mindfulness’s popularity, as a calming and awareness exercise, can be seen in many popular guides, such as the Royal Horticultural Society’s *Gardening for Mindfulness* (2017: 1), which offers a clear definition of the concept;

Through exercising the brain, we can teach ourselves to pay attention. It is not by chanting or meditation; it is not a religion, theory or belief; it is simply learning to focus, and such a beneficial practice is supported by many neuroscientists. Mindfulness is a simple concept and easy to learn... Put simply, Mindfulness is paying attention.

Mindfulness can also go further than inner calm and awareness to involve action. For example, empathy skills are used in team building and conflict resolution in business; awareness leads to clarity, and clarity to right action.¹⁵ Though the roots of this movement are Buddhist, the dogmas and rites have been excised for popular usage.¹⁶ The popularity with atheistic/agnostic practitioners is explicable, also, by its scientific basis as empirical fact.¹⁷ Harris (2015), for example, promotes Mindfulness though he is an outspoken atheist. In summary, Mindfulness involves what I describe as an ‘interiority with reciprocity’.¹⁸ Self-awareness and therapy can also involve relationship with others, and the one is essentially impossible without the other.

¹⁵ As in the Pali terms for awareness, clarity and right action (*sati, satipatthana* and *atapi*) reflecting the Buddhist roots of Mindfulness.

¹⁶ Kabat-Zinn developed basic Mindfulness techniques after attending a Zen Buddhist retreat in 1965. In *The Guardian* (23.10.17) interview he stated, ‘I bent over backwards to structure it and find ways to speak about it that avoided as much as possible the risk of it being seen as Buddhist.’

¹⁷ The scientific basis for some of the claims of Mindfulness relate to two areas of the brain, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) that is concerned with directing attention and allowing flexibility, and the hippocampus with its relation to emotion and memory. The ACC shows more activity among meditators, and the hippocampus grows in size. The empirical evidence moves the practice out into secular, doubting society.

¹⁸ ‘Interiority with reciprocity’ is my suggestion for a practical model of spirituality, involving self and the Other with inner feelings and external relationships. As such I shall reference this phrase at certain points.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists (Psych) 'Recommendations for psychiatrists on spirituality and religion' (2013) relates spirituality to human wellbeing;

Spirituality is usually understood in a more subjective, experiential and individual way, although it does have a social and traditional dimension. For example, it has been defined as: 'a distinctive, potentially creative, and universal dimension of human experience arising both within the inner subjective awareness of individuals and within communities, social groups and traditions. It may be experienced as a relationship with that which is intimately 'inner' immanent and personal, within the self and others, and/or as relationship with that which is wholly 'other', transcendent and beyond the self'. (Recommendations, 2013:4)

When relating the definition to the needs of mental health patients, for example, the RSPsych *Spirituality and Mental Health* (2015) suggests that patients need creative activity, safety, dignity, trust, forgiveness, and respect for beliefs. Gordon, Kelly, and Mitchell (2011: 57) cover reflections, activities, and concepts of spiritual care for healthcare professionals. Chapter 6 which is entitled 'Disentangling spiritual and religious care', states; 'Increasingly, service users and healthcare staff are not actively involved in faith communities.' The authors comment;

Another common misconception is that spirituality is irrelevant to those who adopt a secular, atheist or humanist perspective on life and living. All people, regardless of their life stance, have an innate spirituality.' (Gordon et al, 2011: 2).

Spirituality is more than the religious.

Metanarratives and Empiricism

The main reason for having no affiliation to a religion was given in the surveys as a lack of belief either because religious beliefs cannot be proved or are seen as primitive and pre-scientific. Dawkins (2006), Dennett (2007), Harris (2006) and Hitchens (2008), as the 'New Atheists', have a popular market for their ideas because they are excellent communicators and popularisers of the physical sciences and materialist ideas. Only Harris explores the possibility of secular spirituality, though. An analysis of the arguments

of the New Atheists shows common narratives that encourage secular, sceptical attitudes but focus these in a radical and sometimes angry atheism. Dawkins is perhaps the best example of both a clear communicator and an aggressive purveyor of their narratives. A set of ideas and themes emerge from a study of his work, complemented by Harris, Dennet and Hitchens;

God is a pre-scientific, human creation as a projection of ideals and a mythological explanation for the universe.

Religious experience is myth, misunderstanding (as in legends or 'things that go bump in the night') or the functioning of the brain (which is now better understood by neuroscience).

The mind is an epiphenomenon of the brain working and dies with the body, though the nature of consciousness is still elusive.

The universe evolved by random chance and its empirical observation through the scientific method is the only reliable 'truth'.

The prevalence of belief is both inconvenient and negative. Religious beliefs are seen as a type of mental virus that is passed on by the generations, or else a will to power that creates demagogues (a 'God complex').

The views cited above contain meta-discourses as threads of arguments about aspects of the world, humanity, science, intolerance, and attitudes to faith. Each of these tropes is driven by a desire to link many arguments and theories against religious belief. Overall, the main idea is one of materialism and empirical observation as being the only reality or means to truth. Materialism acts as a metanarrative for it is an over-arching template that seeks to define views of life and the world. It seems to be unaware of its self-creation and that it is only one interpretation of reality. Counter narratives can engage with the various metadiscourses by examining, for example, what is known and unknown about the nature of the universe; the possibility of ever knowing about 'before' the Big Bang; the evidence for the paranormal; the mystery of consciousness; debates about the mind/body relationship; and the fact that ideas of random chance are highly improbable and unprovable. McGrath (2005) is an example of a scientist and a theologian who has countered fundamental presuppositions in Dawkins and others. However, metadiscursive dialogues do not engage the metanarrative of materialism directly from a more inclusive, secular point of view, rather than that of the believer or theologian.

The Postmodern Condition

Postmodernism is a useful critique of metanarratives. Postmodernism is a general term that has come to be applied to concepts and strategies, which developed from a group of continental philosophers and writers from the latter part of the 20th century. To speak of a 'group' is an artificial designation for the authors would avoid being subsumed into a single identity as 'postmodernists'.¹⁹ Tomlinson (1996, pp. 75-76) reminds that what could be considered by some academics as an avant-garde expression by Gallic thinkers 'has flowed right out of the musty corridors of academia into the world of popular culture; it is on the pages of youth magazines, on CD boxes, and the fashion pages of *Vogue*.' Popularity does not necessarily entail accuracy and sustainability, but it demands a voice. The writers were involved in the development of post-structuralism in the 1960s as a response to structuralist theories of given norms in nature, language and society, such as binary opposition with body/spirit; light/dark; life/death and so on. The rejection of structuralism was applied to language and literature in particular. The most influential writers were, or are, all francophone. Several came to France as émigrés in their youth from Bulgaria or Algeria (including Kristeva). I propose that postmodernism can provide a metanarrative of creative negativity in so far as it challenges all metanarratives and claims to totality²⁰. There is a place for what cannot be said and

¹⁹ The term 'postmodern', in its contemporary sense, was first used by Jencks in *Language of Post Modern Architecture* (1977) as a term that was ironically self-aware of the influences and correspondences in style. All past styles were available to recreate and integrate. Modernity was not seen as self-contained but related to all that had preceded and could claim no contemporary hegemony of design. The term 'postmodern' is used as being ironically self-aware. For this reason, Jencks (2011: 15) suggests 'The Age of Lost Innocence' as one way of describing the postmodern. Postmodernism is therefore more than a new tradition or style after Modernism but a way of thinking. Bauerschmidt (in Millbank, Pickstock and Ward, 1999) suggests that Modernism entails suspicion about anything against the Enlightenment project, whereas Postmodernism changes this into irony as universal Reason is dethroned. Likewise, Bauman (1993, p.32) claims postmodernism as 'modernity without illusions.'

²⁰ The claim that there are no metanarratives is a metanarrative itself and this is a critique of postmodernism. Postmodernism must be self-critical, therefore, by its very nature. Hutcheon (1988: 56) suggests that postmodernism is its own internal critic: '... it inscribes and then undercuts...autonomy...' Ironically, a metanarrative of negativity allows constant criticism and awareness of limitations, which is central to postmodernism. Creative discourse and epistemology always need to question themselves to allow new possibilities and to avoid closed systems, or totality. The need for constant questioning, though, has Connory (1992: