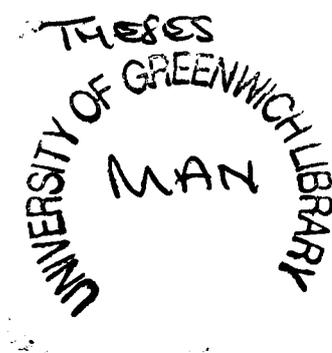


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The Notion of the Self
with special reference to Karl Rahner and Julia Kristeva



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ABSTRACT

This work considers Karl Rahner's theology of the person as hearer through a critical engagement with Julia Kristeva's post-structuralist notion of the speaking subject. This offers an experimental exploration of contemporary theological understanding of subjectivity, with specific reference to ideas of relationality, and with a particular interest in the possibility of dialogue with post-structuralist ideas.

From separate disciplines, with different tools and to different effects, Rahner and Kristeva reject the modernist cast of the human self. They demonstrate a common desire to explore subjectivity as a notion that has been problematised. In examining the person as hearer and the speaking subject together we discover a surprising number of areas of coherence as well as those of fundamental divergence. To this end we consider our theorists' pre-supposed arenas for human subjectivity, their epistemologies, and the importance each gives to language and otherness. We also examine how they relate intra- and inter-relationality. For Kristeva this involves a consideration of notions of the M/Other, the semiotic and the stranger in society. With Rahner we consider the social Trinity, the self-alienation of symbolism and the concept of neighbour-love.

We suggest here that Rahner both pre-empts aspects of current theological interest in subjectivity and provides important resources that are especially useful in relating theology to post-structuralist notions.

Abbreviations of Primary Texts:

Karl Rahner

SM	<u>Sacramentum Mundi</u> Herder and Herder, 1969.
SW	<u>Spirit in the World (1968)</u> Seabury Press, 1975.
HR	<u>Hearer of the Word (1969)</u> Seabury Press, 1975.
TI 1	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 1</u> Seabury Press, 1974a.
TI 3	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 3</u> Seabury Press, 1974.
TI 4	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 4</u> Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1966.
TI 8	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 8</u> Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1972.
TI 9	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 9</u> Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1972b.
TI 11	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 11</u> Dartman, Longman and Todd 1974.
TI 13	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 13</u> Seabury Press, 1976.
TI 18	<u>Theological Investigations Vol. 18</u> Crossroad, 1983.
FCF	<u>Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the idea of Christianity</u> Trans. W. V. Dych, Crossroad, 1978.

Julia Kristeva

- RPL Revolution in Poetic Language (1974)
Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Colombia, 1984
- PH Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection
Translated by Leon S Roudiez New York, Columbia
University Press, 1986
- IBL In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith
Trans A. Goldhammer, New York Columbia University
Press, 1987
- DIL Desire in Language: a semiotic approach to literature
and art
edited by Leon S. Roudiez Oxford : Blackwell, 1981
- TL Tales of Love
Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia
University Press, 1987
- STO Strangers to Ourselves
Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York:Colombia
University Press, 1991

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A Personal Reflection

The extent to which the interdisciplinary task has made me a “stranger” has been evident and at times painful in writing this thesis.

One question I have become accustomed to answering is why use a critical comparison of a Jesuit priest and a post-modern critical theorist in order to answer questions about the nature of human subjectivity?

Some theologians I have met seem incredulous of the amount of time I have spent in the foreign lands of Continental critical and literary theory. Is there really any possibility of a dialogue with a system that perhaps sees Christianity as among the ‘grandest of grand narratives’ to be toppled with the tools of deconstruction? Some of those comfortably ‘at home’ in the land of critical theory are equally as incredulous of my desire to bring with me on this journey both my theological framework and a good deal of Christian supposition.

During the course of my studies I have read papers in theological circles as well as English literature departments. Whilst both have been generous and encouraging to my project, both ask why I am doing it this way. I am indeed a stranger.

In attempting to engage with literary theory (and a good deal of Continental philosophy) I have been a conspicuous stranger in a foreign land, a wide-eyed traveller, somewhat overwhelmed by the alien landscape of this new domain. I have found myself in need of a host of secondary materials to serve as guides and a fair number of dictionaries to find my way about. At times I have felt completely alienated by the post-modern, post-structuralist paradigm I have encountered in Kristeva’s work.

My ‘academic passport’ would say “theologian” and more properly, “confessing Christian theologian.” My methodology has taught me that to travel beyond my home territory requires me to learn new languages: the language of post-structuralism, of psychoanalysis, of post-Marxist theory, of post-Feminism. My ability to get by, and perhaps even to be accepted, in each new domain is somewhat reliant upon my

willingness to learn these new languages and, perhaps more importantly, to listen to the inhabitants of each new territory in their native tongue. I suggest that the role of the theologian in an interdisciplinary endeavour such as mine is not to come marauding as invader or even colonialist, nor to stand back in contempt and refuse to speak in any other than my own mother-tongue, but to engage, be it falteringly, with each new academic land. This process highlights the extent of my “strangeness,” but, as all good journeys do, is a catalyst to see my own homeland through different eyes when I return to it.

This has been my experience in writing this thesis.

Introduction and Methodology

In this thesis we examine and contrast the work of the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner with that of the post-structuralist critical theorist Julia Kristeva. This is an experimental exploration of contemporary theological understanding of “subjectivity”, with specific reference to at ideas of relationality and with a particular interest in the possibility of dialogue with post-structuralist ideas.¹

When we speak of “subjectivity” as an area of common interest between Rahner and Kristeva we do so to indicate areas of concern in each thinker which we think may offer interesting and significant elements of both divergence and congruence. Whether and how far this is the case will be put to the test by this thesis. In other words, by exploring Rahner’s notion of the “person as hearer” and Kristeva’s “speaking subject” within their own disciplinary contexts we seek to demonstrate whether or not Rahner and Kristeva have concerns, themes and/or ideas in common and in particular whether and how a contemporary theology might react to and possibly learn from post modern approaches. We stress here that we do not seek to use “subjectivity” as a generic term or understanding, but rather to indicate a range of concerns which it seems each theorist may be pursuing, although perhaps in different ways. Whether or not there is scope for genuine dialogue between Rahner and Kristeva will be the crux of our thesis, to be established, or otherwise, in the main body of this work.

¹ An observation of contemporary theology’s enthusiastic adoption of relational models of the self is made by Christoph Schwöbel in his essay “The Human Being as Relational Being” in Persons Divine and Human (ed. Colin Gunton and Christoph Schwobel, T&T Clark, 1991). Although it would not be possible to list all of the key theological anthropologies adopting relational models, renowned examples of this trend include the personal dialogism of Martin Buber, (I and Thou translated Ronald Gregor Smith, T&T Clark 1st edition 1937). See also John Zizioulas’ re-examination of Cappadocian doctrines of the Trinity to establish a notion of “Being as Communion” (Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church Contemporary Greek Theologians 4, St Vladimir’s Press 1985). The social personalism of feminist writers such as Anne Carr in Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women’s Experience, (Harper and Row, 1988) and the dialogical/dialectical approach of Alistair McFadyen’s The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships, (Cambridge University Press, 1990), where he posits a Christian notion of the self as a process of organisation and the structuring of social experience and communication, are further examples of theological relational anthropology. Theological attempts to relate directly to “French feminists”, such as Kristeva, include Rebecca S. Chopp’s The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God, (New York: Crossroads, 1989) and Pamela Sue Anderson’s A Feminist Philosophy of Religion (Blackwell, 1998). A further specific approach is taken by the “Sea of Faith” theologians who adopt the non-realist paradigmatic claims of postmodernism, E.g.: Mark Taylor Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology, (Chicago University Press, 1984); Don Cupitt Sea of Faith (SCM Press, 1984) and David A. Hart, Faith in Doubt: Non-Realism and Christian Belief (Mowbray, 1993).

From separate disciplines, with different tools and to different effects, Rahner and Kristeva reject the modernist cast of the human self. Together they demonstrate a desire to explore subjectivity as a notion that has been problematised. Within the broad stream of reflection upon issues around subjectivity Rahner will propose the notion of the “person as hearer”, whilst Kristeva constructs her theory of the “speaking subject”. These apparently antonymic depictions of subjectivity will be explored to reveal a surprising number of common themes: an emphasis on relationality and dialogue; considerations of otherness; a study of the nature of language and symbols and the relationship between intra- and inter-subjectivity. These provide us with the main foci for our project.

Given the difficulties in constructing a dialogue between such divergent thinkers it might be worthwhile briefly reflecting on the possible value of this enterprise. Theology has long had to grapple through the minefield of inter-disciplinary engagement. One stream of theology, perhaps best represented by Barth, determines that this type of endeavour is not possible, or perhaps not even necessary, to the theological task. However, our chosen theorist, Rahner, expressly desires an “open” theological method that takes seriously the need to engage with the best thought from other interested fields. Rahner’s anthropological theology is an example of this. He seeks to construct a theology that is informed by, as well as engages with, other disciplines. In the present-day setting, there is widespread interest within contemporary theology to engage with post-modern writers and their ideas. This thesis offers a very focussed and specific exercise in attempting to construct a dialogue between a theologian and a post-structuralist critical theorist. The exertion required to properly “hear” and understand the other has been apparent for the duration of this project and is exemplified in the methodological difficulties we shall now outline.

An immediate difficulty relates to terminology. In our study of Rahner and Kristeva’s writing on subjectivity we encounter terms such as “person”, “man”, “human nature”, “human being”, “subject”, “ego”, “self” and “the I”. As we encounter these terms we shall examine the particular ways in which they are used by each of our theorists. The very question as to whether there can be a dialogue or comparison between our

thinkers is apparent from the sheer range of terms, the differences between their disciplines' terminology (and often between writers from the same discipline): a range and difference which indicates the contested nature of these notions. In other words, we find that difference in terminology which, of itself, must shape our method in seeking to bring these two diverse theorists into a dialogue. Given the differences in their terminology we must firstly examine their thought within its own particular context, looking closely at how they use the terms they choose. Within their explorations of subjectivity, Rahner and Kristeva explore and employ different terms: the "subject", "ego" and "the I" in Kristeva's writing, and "person", "man" "subject" and "human nature" in Rahner's. It is also apparent that the meaning of each term has become increasingly precise and discipline-specific. How can we seek to critically compare the "hearer" and "speaker" when each is couched in a different language and comes from divergent traditions? We seek to address this significant difficulty by allowing each writer to speak in their own terms, making it apparent when they are addressing different facets of subjectivity. Comparisons will be drawn after they have explained themselves in their own words and no synthetic term is sought to combine both sets of notions. We are not interested here to *combine* the thinking of Rahner and Kristeva, but rather to see what light is shed on theological thinking about "subjectivity" by means of an interface between them.

In considering terminology, we note that increasingly a "hermeneutics of suspicion" is required. We suggest that any attempt at a generalist definition reveal the vagueness there is around many of the terms. Even a very cursory study of dictionary entries from various disciplines reveals that there is vagueness around many of the terms. Often collections of terms appear interconnected, as in this early dictionary entry,

"Self: Ego, subject, I, me, as opposed to the object or to the totality of objects"²

Such generalist definitions obscure important differences of meaning. Increasingly the meaning of many of these terms is discipline-specific. For example, in philosophy, the term "self" remains a notion connoting the bearer of a set of attributes such as

² Noah Webster, Webster's dictionary of synonyms : a dictionary of discriminated synonyms with antonyms and analogous and contrasted words, 1918 and 1942

thoughts, beliefs, emotions, intentions and sensations.³ It is frequently adopted, philosophically, to delineate personal from social identity;

“A “person” is associated with the body and public or social roles, while the “self” is more related to the inner part or aspect of a person”⁴

Without generic terms between disciplines, we further note that each term has developed increasingly precise and considered connotations within disciplines. For example, within psychology, the term “self” has a precise meaning, referring to the mediating function of the ego within Freud’s tripartite mind.

“The ego, the subject of intentional actions and decisions, is the mediator between the id and superego, and is the real “I” or genuine self.”⁵

The contested nature of the terms and concepts *within* specific disciplines also disallow discipline-based generalisations being made. In respect of this study, we note that not all post-modernists or post-structuralist writers would agree with Kristeva’s understanding and use of terms. We shall therefore be unable to make incontestable conclusions about an interface between the *disciplines* of theology and post-structuralism here, and offer instead a very specifically focused exploration of the interface between two particular theorists. Even given this, the vagueness around non-specific disciplinary uses of the terms poses a problem for our project. Each term appears inadequate when attempting to transpose it into another discipline; its meaning fragments. It is necessary therefore to carefully look at how terms are used by a particular person and to avoid implying a false cohesion between writers, even where they use the same terms.

Considering terminology, Kristeva favours the terms “I” or “subject”. The use of the personal pronoun to speak of the subject *per se*, is favoured in much post-structuralist writing, and does not appear in Rahner’s work in this precise way. The terms “I” or “subject” used in this context express, with Freud, a fictive unity which the developing child encounters and adopts as its own symbolic representation.⁶ In this sense, the use of the jarring personal pronoun more clearly points to the notion of a constructed subjectivity than any other current term such as “self”. The use of the

³ As per Bunnin and Yu’s definition in The Backwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy, Blackwell, 2004.

⁴ Ibid p.627

⁵ Ibid p.119

⁶ This ideas will be fully examined in Ch 3 of this thesis.

term “I” or “subject” in Kristeva’s discussions of subjectivity points to the influence of psychoanalysis. In this context it implies that the “I” is the result of a false but necessary self-identification; the subject is a construct. For Kristeva, the term “self” has become a convention to hide the extent to which a subject is in process, multiplicitous, socially and linguistically constructed. She rejects the term “self” because she rejects the notion of subjectivity it implies. For Kristeva, the term “self” implies a measure of self-awareness and intentionality, a self-possession which makes the subject a subject-to-no-one.”⁷ Kristeva views the Enlightenment self not only as false but as a dangerous notion of subjectivity used to silence the experience of many non-white, non-male subjects. For her, any understanding of subjectivity that views the self as first and foremost alone and free, denies the experience of dependency that is central to human existence. As we consider her notion of the M/Other we see that, for Kristeva, the foremost experience of human dependency relates to the feminine.⁸ To take independence and individuality as the starting point for subjectivity ignores the centrality of the feminine in the construction of human subjectivity. The self, for Kristeva, is always marked by its experience of the M/Other, and in this by experiences of “strangeness” and “otherness”. In writing of her notion of the “speaker” she therefore adopts the term “I” or “subject” to better denote the inclusion of psychoanalytic notions. There is one further advantage influencing Kristeva’s choice of terminology. The terms “I” and “subject” have a provenance and tradition within the disciplines of linguistics and literary theory. In using the terms “the I” and “subject” Kristeva overtly offers a view of subjectivity that highlights the fractured, changing and constructed nature of self-identity. We shall see from our study of Kristeva, that the very concept of the “self” has become,

“The elusive “I” that has an alarming tendency to disappear when we try to introspect it.”⁹

However, given this, we shall consider that Kristeva makes allowance for pragmatic notions of persistence within the fractured subject, even if this is seen as nothing more than a necessary illusion adopted to enable a person to function in day to day life.¹⁰

⁷ Noelle McAfee Julia Kristeva, Routledge Critical Thinkers, 2004, p.1-2

⁸ See Ch.6 of this thesis.

⁹ Simon Blackburn, Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy Oxford University Press, 2005 p.332

¹⁰ See Ch. 3.2 on the notion of the Chora.

Rahner predates Kristeva and does not have the benefit of contemporary fastidious considerations of the terminology around subjectivity. In his consideration of subjectivity he most frequently uses the term “person”. This term has a long theological tradition and is rooted in the Latin term “persona” meaning mask or actor, and its Greek equivalent of “hypostatis”. It has a long history in Christian anthropology. In the first Christian century it became usual to use the term “person” to mean simply an individual human being, however the term was strongly rooted in Trinitarian discussions.¹¹ Two separate streams developed from early Christian use of the term. The first interprets the term in the light of classical Trinitarian ideas of “persona” as the unique subject of consciousness and self-consciousness, as Augustine does. This gives rise to Boethius’ definition that “a person is an individual substance of a rational nature.”¹² However, other theologians, and we shall see that this is Rahner’s position, see that a number of problems have arisen from modern usage of the word “person”. Like Barth, Rahner argues that the proper theological use of the word “person” points back to ideas of substance rather than notions around modes of being. We discuss this in detail when we examine Rahner’s review of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹³ It gives rise to a plural and dialogical understanding of divine personhood that elicits the relational human person. This may chime with the heterogeneity of Kristeva’s “speaking subject”.

We also note Rahner’s use of the term “man” to speak of the state of being a person. For example, when addressing human history he refers to the “history of man.”¹⁴ When speaking of what constitutes personal being Rahner again speaks in masculine gendered terms,

“Being situated in this way between the finite and the infinite is what constitutes man, and is shown by the fact that it is in his infinite transcendence and in his freedom that man experiences himself as dependent and historically conditioned.”¹⁵

Even when addressing relationality Rahner speaks of “man”,

¹¹ Alan Richardson and John Bowden (ed.s) *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, SCM, 1983, p.442-3

¹² See “Person” in Bunnin and Yu, *The Backwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, Blackwell, 2004, p.511-2. Also Gillett and Peacocke (ed.) *Persons and Personality: a contemporary enquiry* Blackwell, 1987.

¹³ See Ch.7 of this thesis.

¹⁴ Rahner, TI 9, p.32

¹⁵ FCF, p.42

“Man only comes to himself in the encounter with the other man, who is presented historically to one’s experience in knowledge and love, who is not a thing but a man.”¹⁶

Given this usage we can comment that Rahner clearly intends "man" as inclusive, and generally intends "anthropos" by the word. In today’s climate this may not be defensible. However, it is important to see his work in context. He is writing before the sexist nature of this term was widely acknowledged and before careful use of gendered terms became prevalent. Before we castigate his thinking as sexist and outdated (as his language clearly is) it is worth considering the extent to which his notions of personhood were ahead of their time and influenced contemporary theology to re-envision personhood in a post-Enlightenment manner.¹⁷ We have not commented further on the use of “man” to denote subjectivity, but allowed Rahner to speak in his own words.

Our thesis suggests that a novel dialogue between Rahner, a theologian, and Kristeva, a post-structuralist critical theorist, can highlight issues about subjectivity within contemporary theology, shedding light onto the possibility of debate with postmodernism by means of an interface between these two divergent thinkers. The extent to which we find shared themes in the “hearer” and “speaker” is surprising since our theorists come from such divergent fields. However, we suggest that the movement to re-examine the nature of personhood in contemporary theology correlates somewhat with the post-modern turn to the subject, with both stressing the place of relationality, dialogue, otherness and imaginative symbolisation. However, this dialogue should not be taken to imply that the disciplines of theology and post-structuralism are coherent. Our concern is to consider how Rahner’s theology might engage with Kristeva’s philosophy, despite some of the fundamental differences between these two theorists’ paradigms.

As we consider the foci elicited from shared themes we shall be mindful that in considering the “hearer” and “speaker” we are also confronted with differences which fundamentally underlie those of terminology. As their respective terms imply they situate the experience of subjectivity very differently. Rahner’s “hearer” implies that the experience of personhood is reliant upon the actions of an other to “speak”. The

¹⁶ TI 13, p.127

¹⁷ We consider this in following chapters which deal specifically with Rahner’s theories

“hearer” has a secondary and responsive role in a dialogical reality within which it is situated. Its ontology¹⁸ is contingent upon an other. For Rahner, personhood exhibits a necessary “transcendental existential”; the hearer’s being is dependent upon a transcendent Speaker. In contrast, Kristeva’s “speaking subject” possesses a primary function; it speaks itself into being. This function initially appears less reliant upon the act of a partner in dialogue.¹⁹ As we compare and contrast the “hearer” and “speaker” we discover very different ways of viewing the experience of human subjectivity.

Although our project is shaped by the anticipation of areas of common interest between the “hearer” and “speaker” we bear in mind that at times our thinkers do not address the same questions and we should resist making them appear to do so. Our belief is that we should recognise disjuncture rather than to attempt to force a dialogue at such points. As our theorists address similar themes the lack of symmetry we encounter is, of itself, interesting. It is possibly indicative of the questions that arise, and those that are perhaps disallowed, by each of our thinker’s paradigmatic framework. Allowing for this lack of symmetry we remain convinced that there is scope enough to allow for a dialogue at later points. Within each chapter we will signpost and briefly comment on areas of interest to our thesis. We will then draw these areas together in chapter ten where we explore what is to be learnt from this interface between Rahner’s “person as hearer” and Kristeva’s “speaking subject”.

We also need to explain our pragmatic choice of writing as “we”, rather than in the more common impersonal style or single personal pronoun. However archaic the use of a plural personal pronoun may be, in our consideration, it has two advantages over the alternatives. Primarily, in writing as “we” the use of the term “I” is avoided. This not only avoids textual confusion but is also fundamentally important if we are really to “hear” Kristeva. For post-structuralists the very notion of the pre-existence of the “I” is rejected. The use of the currently unpopular plural pronoun may be jarring; however it offers less difficulty than writing about the non-existence of the “I” in the first person singular. Furthermore, the use of “we” might be said to infer a multiplicity of authors. The deconstruction of the myth of the singular author and the contention

¹⁸ We explore later that an ontology for subjectivity is precisely what Kristeva rejects.

¹⁹ With exception of the M/Other, an subject-less, agent-less entity relating to the pre-Oedipal infant.

that knowledge is deeply connected to a web of discourse will be examined in this thesis. Both of these facets of knowledge and writing are perhaps anticipated in the plural personal pronoun? The main disadvantage of our choice is that “we” could be taken to infer that the reader agrees with the author(s). This is clumsy and might even be seen as totalitarian, which is rather unfortunate in that this thesis concerns a critique of just such modernist tendencies. However, given the greater drawbacks of the alternatives, we have chosen this option.

Having attempted to explain some of the methodological choices we have made we shall now outline the shape of our study. Our first question, addressed in chapters one and two, concerns where human subjectivity is created and exists for our two thinkers. We begin with Rahner’s view of the arena of human history. We seek to situate Rahner within contemporary Christian theology and, to this end, briefly examine the Thomist approach he adopts. Whilst we do not seek to define Rahner’s exact relation to Thomism, a task fraught with difficulty²⁰ and not necessary to our project, our appraisal finds him entirely orthodox within Catholic thought whilst being characteristically philosophically rigorous. Our focus in examining Rahner’s work will be upon the centrality he gives to notions of relationality and openness. We shall suggest that, in this, he is one example among a broader stream of contemporary theological anthropology. Schwöbel describes such relational understandings of the human person as “form(ing) a common element in contemporary anthropological reflection.”²¹

In chapter two we shall examine the arena of subjectivity presupposed by Kristeva. We examine the arena of discourse and how it elicits a phantom of subjectivity that has no ontological or metaphysical validity. In the place of metaphysics we observe a turn to linguistics, literary theory and psychoanalysis. It might be said that here we see

²⁰ The situation is further complicated by an ongoing discussion as to Thomas Aquinas’ relation to Thomism! The debate over Rahner’s particular relation to Thomism remains unresolved. A summary of this debate is found in Fergus Kerr’s *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*, Oxford Blackwell, 2002.

²¹ Schwöbel “The Human Being as Relational Being” in *Persons Divine and Human*, p.141. See further consideration of this in ch. 7 pp.161-177 of this thesis. We note with James Jones in “The Relational Self: Contemporary Psychoanalysis Reconsiders Religion” *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 1991, Vol. 59, pp.119-135, that secular psychoanalysis has similarly enjoyed a renewed interest in relational models of selfhood. In contrast to the “relatively self contained system of instinctive drives or archetypes [of Freud or Jung] more recent theoreticians propose an interpersonal and interactional model of personality” to the extent that, in Jones’ opinion, “Virtually all major psychoanalytic studies of religion published in the last decade draw upon relational models of the self.” (p.119)

the “constructivism” of postmodernism apparently at immediate odds with the “objectivist” paradigm imagined by theology.²² This is an example of post-modern re-framing of the question of human subjectivity. As Gary Madison says,

“The post-modern condition entails the rejection of the modernist framing of the question regarding the human subject as a metaphysical query about the human essence”²³

We find Kristeva’s work to be both complex and controversial. She is a Professor of linguistics, a practising psychoanalyst, and a renowned critical theorist. We observe two interrelated interests throughout Kristeva’s work: the scientific study of language and the psychology of the unconscious and human sexuality. She sees these two fields, semiotics and psychoanalysis, as together providing insight into the nature of human subjectivity and they form the foundation for her emergent notion of the speaking subject. Kristeva stresses the ex-centric and relational nature of the subject and rejects modernist notions of a transcendental or essential core. In seeking to situate Kristeva’s work, this chapter will also include a brief examination of the genesis of her philosophy from its beginnings in Continental literary theory. This decision, as opposed to tracing post-modern philosophy from the thought of Western philosophy, of perhaps Nietzsche, is partly due to the extensive and thorough consideration already available on this approach.²⁴ Our chosen approach is also due to a desire to be true to Kristeva’s own project, which began in earnest with her doctoral thesis on the nature of semiotics. This early Kristevan work is overtly directed towards taking forward the work of post-structuralist literary theorists and Continental psychoanalytic theory rather than presenting us with a post-modern philosophy *per se*. Our project will therefore seek to contextualise Kristeva’s work within its literary and psychoanalytic heritage rather than beginning with an examination of the origins of

²² Cf.: Stanley J. Grenz, A Primer on Postmodernism, Eerdmans, 199, p.40. “In a sense, postmoderns have no worldview. A denial of the reality of a unified world as the object of our perception is at the heart of postmodernism. Postmoderns reject the possibility of constructing a single correct worldview and are content simply to speak of many views and, by extension, many worlds...that is to say, we have moved from an *objectivist* to a *constructionist* outlook.” Grenz cites Walter Truett Anderson Reality Isn’t What It Used To Be, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990, pp. x-xi, in contrasting modern and postmodern paradigms in this way.

²³ Gary Madison, The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes, Indiana University Press, 1988, p.155 cited in The Social God and The Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei, Stanley J. Grenz, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

²⁴ Recent examples of which include Nietzsche and the question of interpretation: between hermeneutics and deconstruction by Alan D. Schrift, Routledge, 1990, Infectious Nietzsche by David Farrell Krell, Indiana University Press, 1996 and Hegel, Nietzsche and the criticism of metaphysics by Stephen Houlgate, Cambridge University Press, 1986.

post-modern philosophy within Nietzsche's writing, as appears to be the more usual approach.

In addressing the arena of the "person as hearer" for Rahner and that of the "speaking subject" for Kristeva, we are immediately faced with the differing epistemologies of our thinkers. We shall explore Rahner's use of the transcendental method of enquiry, which is a useful example of an "objectivist" theory of knowledge.²⁵ By this we mean that Rahner is committed to an epistemology whereby what is revealed reliably correlates with what is. His is a realist paradigm is at odds with the constructionist outlook of Kristeva who disallows any one construction of reality to preclude any number of alternative interpretations.²⁶ In many ways Rahner's notion of reality is just such a master-narrative as that jettisoned by Kristeva. However, we shall observe that Rahner's confidence in the correspondence of revelation to reality does not rest (as per Modernity) in the rational faculties of the human, but rather in the special position of the human being as a created hearer of God – a facet of spirit and relationality rather than rationality which indicates his similar rejection of Modern rationalism.²⁷ Whilst each of our thinkers would be unwilling to adopt the wider framework of the other their critiques of the modernist self bear great resemblance as well as some points of interesting divergence. It is from considering this that we suggest a better understanding of the nature of subjectivity can be drawn; one which will be informed by the interface of Rahner and Kristeva's thought such as their similar emphasis on religious imagination and art as opposed to relationality and unitive oneness.

Having situated Kristeva's work in chapter two, we continue in chapter three to a closer examination of her thesis on the "speaking subject". We consider how she views the creation of the "I" in her resourcement of Lacanian psychoanalysis, her application of post-structuralist linguistics and her study of the borderline patient.

In chapter four we focus upon Rahner's thesis that human subjectivity is a special example of self-expressive being. This is important because whilst Rahner's person is primarily a "hearer" this does not preclude the ability to "speak". The person is, in

²⁵ See ch. 1 pp.13-29 of this thesis outlining Rahner's Thomist belief in this respect and cf. note 22 above.

²⁶ Cf.: Hilary Lawson and Lisa Appignanesi (ed.s) Dismantling Truth: Reality in the Post-Modern World (St. Martins Press, 1989 p1-4).

²⁷ We shall consider this in ch. 5 pp.161-181 of this thesis.

fact, in a reciprocal dialogue to the transcendental “speaker” and it is in this that the human self achieves its personhood; both speaking and hearing are part of this process of self-actualisation. The main consideration of this chapter will be Rahner’s philosophy of language and how this underpins and informs his notion of subjectivity. He views reality as essentially self-expressive and dialogical. Chapters three and four establish significant shared areas of interest between our thinkers. This is mostly with respect to the role of language as creative of selfhood and also in presenting human subjectivity as a dynamic process. We see in both the privileging of poetic language and an interest in religious language and art.

In chapter five we shall pull together what we have learnt from our investigation of Rahner’s writings and examine further the nature of the hearing person which he proposes.

In chapters six and seven we narrow our focus to the understanding of otherness in both Kristeva and Rahner’s writings. We anticipate that this is a key theme for this engagement. This is where we suggest theology can be informed by the post-structuralist emphasis of relating intra- to inter-subjectivity in an exploration which emphasises the role of otherness in the creation of the subject.

In chapter six we begin by returning to Kristeva. In doing so, we find two inter-related notions of the other: the semiotic M/Other and the stranger. We shall explore how the former is used in the exploration of intra-subjectivity, whilst the latter provides Kristeva with a basis for inter-subjective ethics. This chapter will be followed by a study of Rahner’s similarly twofold use of the notion of an ‘other’. He adopts the doctrine of the Trinity as a model of inner-plurality and the notion of neighbour-love, the loving response to the ‘other’, in the construction of ethics. In this, we shall see that the Kristevan notion that to recognise ‘strangeness within’ is necessary in order not to do violence to the strangers in society is a useful way to understand Rahner’s notion of neighbour-love, successfully relating inter-subjectivity to intra-subjectivity in a way which can inform the notion of the person as hearer.

In chapter seven, focussing on Rahner’s use of models for otherness, we introduce Rahner’s consideration of the doctrine of the Trinity. Rahner is certainly not alone in

revisiting notions of personhood by way of reconsidering this theological doctrine. Grenz (2001) suggests that when questions regarding human selfhood came to the fore in the twentieth century, theologians began a thoroughgoing re-examination of divine personhood. Christian theologians revisited ideas about the *imago dei* and the Trinity²⁸. Such a focus is exemplified in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics" (1936-1969)²⁹. Grenz (2001) points out that Barth's influence has achieved far more than returning the doctrine of the Trinity to theological centre-stage.³⁰ It is the particular Trinitarian model that Barth adopts, one of "social analogy", which impacted so decidedly upon contemporary theology. In fostering a social notion of the Trinity and emphasising the notion of the *imago dei*, following Barth, there has been a call to revisit Christian anthropology in the light of Trinitarian doctrines. If God's personhood is primarily to be seen as "social", then the human person, created in this image, is also primarily social and relational. This is a rejection of the Enlightenment rational ego on theological terms. In Grenz's words the result of the social analogy of the Trinity

“(H)as been the coalescing of theology with the widely accepted philosophical conclusion that “person” has more to do with relationality than with substantiality and that the term stands closer to the idea of communion or community than to the conception of the individual in isolation or abstracted from communal embeddedness.”³¹

In Rahner's use of the Trinity as a model for Otherness we witness the theme of relationality emerging from a relational notion of the Trinity. It also provides him with an ethic of respect for the other, which is outworked in his concept of neighbour love. Furthermore, with his desire to see the doctrine of the Trinity as central to the theological task and his emphasis on notions of relationality, this focus will show that Rahner is representative of a major shift in twentieth century theology.

In chapters eight and nine we seek to emphasise two points where our comparison has been most striking. Here we consider the very different notions of freedom and the

²⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, The Social God and The Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei, John Knox Press, 2001.

²⁹ For Barth the doctrine of the Trinity is to be addressed prior to all other doctrinal considerations. This is a direct and overt inversion of Schleiermacher's ordering, emphasising Barth's insistence that the Trinity is an "explanatory confirmation" of *all* revelation of who God is. Barth's bold stance purports that a proper understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity is needed as a prolegomenon of all theology. Such a view was greatly influential for twentieth century theology, as pointed out by John Gresham in "The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics" Scottish Journal of Theology, 46/3 (1993) p.327.

³⁰ Stanley Grenz, The Social God and the Relational Self, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

³¹ Grenz, *op.cit.*, p.4.

possibility of a telos for human selfhood. For Rahner, this will involve a consideration of Christ as the norm and telos of the human self. For Kristeva, we consider the notion of “jouissance”.

In our final chapter we seek to draw together our thesis and make some conclusions as to the extent to which the hearing person might be a useful tool for theology to interface with a post-structuralist notion of a speaking subject. This will include a consideration of the areas where theology can be advantageously informed by post-structuralism and attempt to make provisional conclusions as to the usefulness and significance of this inter-disciplinary theological project.

1. Where is Subjectivity Created for Rahner? The Hearer as Created within a Graced History.

We begin here with an examination of the location of the “person as hearer”. We anticipate that the setting for subjectivity determines its shape. Questions about reality may configure and circumscribe the shape of the human subjectivity for both writers. We begin with an examination of the presupposed arena for Rahner’s hearer.

The paradigm presupposed by Karl Rahner is, unsurprisingly, thoroughly theistic. For Rahner, the human person exists within a created order that can be described fundamentally as the arena where divine revelation takes place. In other words, it is God as primordial speaker, and the created world as the place of divine revelation, which determine that the human be seen as primarily a hearer. In considering Rahner’s understanding of reality we adopt three of his important themes. Taken together the themes of historicity, relationality and revelation provide us with a full understanding of the arena of the hearing person that Rahner posits.

1.1 Human history as a historic reality

We note that, when addressing the arena of personhood, Rahner does not speak of the doctrine of creation *per se*, but turns to an examination of human history in particular.

“We have said that the only thing we can say about the place of a possible revelation is that man himself is to be this place...Thus the place of a possible revelation is always and necessarily also the history of man.”³²

In describing the person as a hearer Rahner is not concerned to examine the whole of the natural world so much as to present human history as the place into which God speaks. He says,

“Revelation is possible...the place where such revelation may occur is our history. The historical appearance in the world may, in the human world, make known the free word of the God of revelation.”³³

³² Rahner, TI 9, p.32

³³ Rahner, HW, p.136

In other words, Rahner elevates human history to be the place where divine revelation takes place in a way that would not be possible if the presence of human beings were removed from the natural world.³⁴ This position may appear surprising.

Commentaries on Rahner more generally focus upon the emphasis he gives to God's immanence in the natural world, his refusal to separate God from creation. Given this emphasis on the immanence of God, it cannot be assumed that Rahner sees God's revelation as in any way reduced in the natural, non-human realm. For Rahner,³⁵ God speaks to humans in and through the material order of creation as a whole but from within human history in particular. Importantly, the human as hearer of God is placed within an arena that is both historical and temporal. This is important to keep in mind, especially since it might be said that the most readily recollectable facet of Rahner's anthropology is his emphasis on the human as transcendent being. However, given his emphasis on the temporal and historic nature of the arena of selfhood, the hearer's transcendence is from an original historical and temporal grounding and full self-transcendence is never completely achieved in life. This emphasis on history and temporality will provide us with an important contrast with the speaking subject, which we shall pursue later in this thesis.

This examination of the nature of reality requires us briefly to investigate Rahner's theory of matter. What kind of material world does the human person exist within?

In Hearers of the Word (1969) Rahner's description of the nature of matter finds him at his most philosophical and demonstrably influenced by Thomas Aquinas³⁶.

“We saw matter is the in itself undetermined possibility of real determinations.”³⁷

Rahner broadly adopts the theory of matter associated with Aquinas which views material objects as “forms” of being. For example, the body is the form of the soul. Whilst such material things are necessarily spatial and temporal they also point towards a fuller and increasingly actualised state of being,

³⁴ Rahner, TI 9

³⁵ Rahner, TI 9

³⁶ The relation of Rahner to Thomas Aquinas is not relevant to our project; however we note that it is not possible to use the terms Thomist or neo-Thomist in a non-contentious way. This is discussed in Fergus Kerr's After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism, Blackwell, 2002.

³⁷ HW, p.110

“Hence the material being is one which always points towards the totality of the realisation of its possibilities as the future of its inner movement and keeps striving towards it.”³⁸

In viewing material entities this way Rahner follows the Thomist axiom that "existence precedes essence." Stated simply this metaphysical a priori purports that knowledge of any particular thing is preceded by a pre-thematic awareness of existence. In other words, one has to know that something exists before it can be apprehended for what it is. Following Aquinas, Rahner sees the existence of reality as entirely apparent but not logically necessary; being exists, but it need not exist. Therefore being is inherently contingent and, given this, its contingency makes it finite³⁹. This is the basis of the Thomist cosmological argument for the existence of God. Given that reality is contingent, then it must have, by necessity, been caused to exist. Logically it could not have caused itself to exist; therefore there must be an external cause of being. Thomists see that this cause must ultimately be an original “uncaused cause” of all being, which is God.

Rahner’s Thomist insistence on being before essence gives rise to his anthropological axiom that the human person as hearer should not be seen as a collection of various “modalities.” Given this, one might say that Rahner avoids both a Platonic mind-body dualism and a reductive materialism. By this we mean that, following Thomist principles, the hearer’s body is the form of the soul and cannot be thought of as a separate “essence” in and of itself. The human is seen as a unity, composed of soul and body in mutual dependence.

Furthermore, by working within a Thomist schema, the historical, material and temporal aspects of a human being are not to be seen as additions to human nature but as constitutive of the hearer.

“Man is not put into a spatio-temporal world after first being made into man. He is not simply put on a spatio-temporal stage to act out his life. Spatio-temporality is his inner make-up that belongs properly to him as man. Because matter is one of his essential components, it is by himself that he constructs space and time as inner moments of his existence.”⁴⁰

³⁸ HW, p.110

³⁹ The finite nature of the human being is explored in SW and will be a theme we return to throughout this thesis, and particularly in chapter 5.

⁴⁰ HW, p.111

Rahner states that whilst the human being is spiritual, he or she is not only spiritual, but experience him or herself as both historical and dependent. Rahner says,

“Man as personal being of transcendence and freedom is also and at the same time a being in the world, in time and in history.”⁴¹

In this, Rahner’s view concurs with the human experience of being deeply affected and, to an extent, personally constituted by the particular historical and social situation into which one finds oneself.

Thus, according to Rahner, the human person cannot be sectioned up into different modes of being; rather the human is a unity of body and soul, of immanence and transcendence.⁴² In drawing upon Thomist notions of existence Rahner suggests that human experience is one of both finitude and self-transcendence. We suggest that, for Rahner, the human experience of being profoundly conditioned by the world is as important as the awareness of self-transcendence. For Rahner these two experiences are coherent and interdependent. It is the awareness of our fixed and finite historicity that mediates the possibility of our self-transcendence and freedom. Again this is fundamentally divergent from post-structuralist subjectivity which, we shall see, offers no place for transcendence out of (textual) reality, but only within it. In contradistinction Rahner says,

“In so far as he experiences his historical conditioning he is already beyond it in a certain sense, but nevertheless he cannot really leave it behind. Being situated in this way between the finite and the infinite is what constitutes man, and is shown by the fact that it is in his infinite transcendence and in his freedom that man experiences himself as dependent and historically conditioned.”⁴³

From our examination so far we find that primary emphasis is given to presenting the hearer as originally placed within a temporal and historic realm in and through which God is present in self-revelation.

⁴¹ FCF, p.40

⁴² HW, p.111

⁴³ FCF, p.42

1.2 Human history as a social reality – Rahner’s consideration of human relationality.

We turn now to consider the second major theme Rahner considers in speaking of the wider arena of the hearer. Here he speaks of history as social; that all material things must be necessarily more than any individual event, but one among many. He says in respect to the human being, “Man is real only in a humanity.”⁴⁴ It is to this important theme that we now turn our attention. We keep in mind that these two tenets of the human person, as material and relational, will provide a basis for comparing this with the very different notion of the self as speaking subject.

We find that Rahner presents the world as an essentially relational reality. Both the horizontal axis of human relationships and the vertical axis of human-divine relationship are necessarily present. For Rahner, the very core of reality is relationship. As such, both human and divine persons construct history through their interrelation. He says of this,

“The free act of God is again and again kindled by the activity of man. History is not merely a play that God himself performs and in which the creatures are simply what is performed. Rather, the creature is a genuine co-performer in this divine-human drama of history.”⁴⁵

History, and in this sense Rahner means the totality of human reality, is thus portrayed as a “performance”, or dialogue between persons human and divine. As Mark Lloyd-Taylor (1986) says, history is “a genuine personal dialogue between God and the world that is established by divine self-communication.”⁴⁶

For Rahner, it is unsurprising that human history is essentially relational because he views the original act of creation as an inter-relational event.⁴⁷ From such a foundation, human history proceeds as a continuation of the divine dialogue, with human beings as partners. We note that this emphasis on creation and history as relational is evident in much contemporary Christian anthropology. Rahner can be seen to pre-empt this contemporary focus, which makes his theology especially of

⁴⁴ HW, p.111

⁴⁵ TI 1, p.111

⁴⁶ Mark Lloyd-Taylor *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner*, Scholars Press American Academy of Religion, 1986, p.155-6.

⁴⁷ FCF, p.76. Rahner purports that we are not “creatures” simply because God has “caused” us. Creatureliness is not a one-time experience. It is the experience of being in a relationship with mystery.

interest since he is influential for a great many later writers. For example, Alistair McFadyen shares this relational and dialogical view of history, outlined in The Call to Personhood,

“The Biblical theme of creation is not ultimately concerned with cosmogony or cosmology but with the relationship between God and God’s creatures.”⁴⁸

“In the provision of space for free human response to the divine address, the divine-human relationship is structured from God’s side as a dialogue. For human being is intended in this communication to be God’s dialogue-partner....Because God’s communication takes dialogical form, it should be conceived in terms of grace. Dialogue here means that, on God’s side at least, there is respect for freedom and independence and an absence of overdetermination. In the mystery of God’s grace human beings are addressed as God’s dialogue partners.”⁴⁹

Rahner can be seen to pre-empt such readings of the relational and dialogical nature of both creation and human history in *Theological Investigations I 1*,

“God’s activity in the course of salvation history is not simply a monologue that God undertakes for himself alone. It is rather a long dramatic dialogue between God and his creature in which God grants to man the possibility of genuinely responding to his word. Thus, in fact, God make his own further word dependent upon the outcome of man’s free response.”⁵⁰

We note the particular nature of relationality Rahner outlines: it is one whereby reality is social and these social relationships exist between *persons*. It is also one where both partners are engaged in a reciprocal dialogue of speaking and listening. It is God who speaks first, as the primordial Word, however God’s continuing dialogue is “genuinely responsive” to the reply of the human self. In this the human self exists as fundamentally a hearer, a dialogue partner, of God. Furthermore in this, the human self is never an isolated entity, or a sole voice, but rather the nature of the self as hearer is only actualised in community.

⁴⁸ Alistair McFadyen, The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the individual in Social Relationships Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.18. In a later chapter, pp.161-181, on Rahner’s use of the doctrine of the Trinity we shall return to consider McFadyen’s thesis that the tri-unity of God provides both an ontological and ethical model, an “is” and an “ought”, for human personhood.

⁴⁹ McFadyen, op.cit., p.18.

⁵⁰ TI 11, p.225

“It follows that a single human person can never exhaustively, and at one time, actualize all that belongs to it by way of possibilities as a material being. That is why referring to other beings of one’s own kind, which everyone does as this particular individual, is not something unimportant...We are actually human only in a humanity. To be human is to be one among many.”⁵¹

Rahner’s is an inter-personal ⁵²view of the nature of reality, which will give rise to a relational view of human subjectivity. In his study of Rahner, Mark Lloyd-Taylor concludes that,

“It cannot be stressed strongly enough that, for Rahner, this inter-subjectivity or relatedness to others is essential to human being.”⁵³

We anticipate that this may be seen as fundamentally at odds with post-structuralist subjectivity, if that subjectivity privileges intra-subjective relationality between facets of discourse over the relation between persons.

However, in portraying Rahner giving great importance to the facet of interpersonal relationality we note, with Lloyd-Taylor, that this reading does not enjoy universal consensus among scholars. He cites the work of Eberhard Simons and Alexander Gerken⁵⁴ as examples of critics who question the adequacy of Rahner’s treatment of the theme of interpersonal relations. Lloyd-Taylor himself admits, “There is no doubt that the interpersonal nature of human being is hardly considered at all in *“Geist in Welt.”*⁵⁵ Were these criticisms valid, our suggestion of Rahner’s hearer as a possible means to critique the individualism of post-structuralism’s speaking subject would be diminished. We therefore briefly consider this critique of Rahner.

During his lifetime, his student Johann Baptist Metz publicly criticised Rahner for not developing the theme of relationality further and applying it to a discussion of political theology (such that Metz favoured).⁵⁶ In response, we should note that

⁵¹ HW ch.11 “The Human Person as a Historical Spirit”, p.111.

⁵² A fuller study of Rahner’s use and intention in the term “person” will be undertaken in ch.5 pp.112-131 where we bring together the major characteristics of Rahner’s hearer.

⁵³ Lloyd-Taylor, op.cit., p.67.

⁵⁴ Cited in Mark Lloyd-Taylor op.cit.: Simons, Eberhard *Philosophie der Offenbarung: Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Rahner* Stuttgart: w, Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966 and Gerken, Alexander. *Offenbarung und Transzendenzerfahrung*: Dusseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1969.

⁵⁵ Lloyd-Taylor, op.cit., p.65-66.

⁵⁶ For an example of Metz’s argument for a more political use of the theme of relationality see The Emergent Church : the future of Christianity in a postbourgeois world, Johann Baptist Metz , translated by Peter Mann from the German, SCM, 1981.

Rahner addresses these issues in later writings including “Theology of Poverty” in Theological Investigations 8 pp.168-214 and “The Unreadiness of the Church’s members to Accept Poverty” in Theological Investigations 14 pp.314-330.

However, could it be that relationality is an after-thought of Rahner’s anthropology, rather than, as Lloyd-Taylor suggests, an integral part of it? In response to this we suggest that consideration should be given to several aspects of the way in which Rahner worked. Rahner did not usually pursue a systematic programme but wrote to address issues raised when the Catholic Church considered disputes both internally and by contact with other disciplines. He often wrote apologetically, pastorally, or by responding to interviewers’ questions and letters.⁵⁷ His theology is as much to be drawn from his many sermons, prayers and devotional works as from his better-known theological tomes. It could be said that his is largely a responsive and reactive corpus, which was later compiled and published thematically, such as the many volumes of Theological Investigations. Writing in this responsive way, it might be expected that as the theme of relationality increased in appeal more generally, so his engagement with this theme developed. Instead of forming conclusions based upon Rahner’s earliest work we suggest that the entire body of writing merits consideration. This is especially the case since Rahner did not set out to explicitly address the theme of human inter-relatedness in isolation, but rather as an emerging anthropological theme within the wider theme of his view of human history and as part of his project of truly “anthropological” theology.

However, if we accept that relationality is an important theme for Rahner, we would expect it to at least appear infrequently in his earlier work. In a review of the entire corpus of Rahner’s work, Mark Lloyd-Taylor finds that this is just the case. He finds that the theme is addressed more frequently as the broader academic climate shows increasing interest in a relational way of exploring what it is to be human.⁵⁸ However, Lloyd-Taylor cites one early and unequivocal statement of Rahner’s view of inter-personality from an interview as early as 1954. Here Rahner says,

⁵⁷ For an example of Rahner’s collected pastoral writings see Meditations on Hope and Love, translated by V. Green, Burns and Oats, 1976.

⁵⁸ We return to this argument in ch.5 of this thesis “Rahner’s Hearer”.

“Personal spirit is spirit that is directed toward the other. Absolutely solitary spirit is a contradiction in itself and is –insofar as there can be such – hell. If [man is to be conceived as spirit] then this means the embodied spirit that man is, exists necessarily in relation to a Thou...Whoever posits man, posits necessarily, not only factually, human community, that is bodily, personal and spatial-temporal human community.”⁵⁹

Lloyd-Taylor’s thesis maintains that the theme of relationality is a continuous but developing theme for Rahner. We conclude here that the theme of relationality may have been of increased importance in his later work, but cannot be said to be entirely absent from his earlier work. It is an emerging theme. We agree with Lloyd-Taylor that a full philosophy of human inter-subjectivity is never fully realised in Rahner’s work and that it is only in Rahner’s later work that a more thoroughly interpersonal account of human being is found.⁶⁰ However, in considering the whole of Rahner’s writings it is certainly evident that, for Rahner, the human being as hearer realises itself relation to the “other”, in community.⁶¹ As Lloyd-Taylor summarises, for Rahner,

“The Thou is there with the I necessarily.”⁶²

Rahner himself writes,

“Man only comes to himself in the encounter with the other man, who is presented historically to one’s experience in knowledge and love, who is not a thing but a man.”⁶³

Rahner’s insistence here is that the other person is encountered, to use Martin Buber’s now famous terminology, as a “Thou.”⁶⁴ As such the person encountered in this social reality is not a projection of the I and cannot be considered as merely a means to self-actualisation. As Lloyd-Taylor says, “The Thou stands over against the I in her or his own reality.”⁶⁵ The relationality which brings about self-actualisation must therefore be viewed as truly inter-personal and reciprocal.

⁵⁹ Appearing in *Theologisches zum Monogenismus*, 1954, cited in Mark Lloyd Taylor op. cit. pp. 60

⁶⁰ Lloyd Taylor op.cit. p.66

⁶¹ A theme we shall focus upon in ch.7 of this thesis, where we consider Rahner’s theme of neighbour-love.

⁶² Lloyd-Taylor, op.cit., p.67.

⁶³ TI 13, p.127

⁶⁴ Martin Buber *I and Thou* translated Ronald Gregor Smith, T&T Clark, 1st edition 1937.

⁶⁵ Lloyd-Taylor, op.cit, p.67

It can be claimed that Rahner's early and emerging theme of human relationality has come to the fore in contemporary theological anthropology. Alistair McFadyen's thesis on personhood as relationally constituted is an example of such contemporary focus. McFadyen extends the metaphor of divine-human dialogue to the "horizontal axis" of interpersonal relations.

"The I is constituted by the form of its response in which others are intended either as co-subjects of dialogue (other Is or Thous) or as manipulable objects (Its)."⁶⁶

This is precisely what Rahner intends in describing self-actualisation as the encounter with "the other man," as "not a thing but a man". Lloyd-Taylor's thesis demonstrates that this "other" is "precisely another human subject" and, in this way, Rahner is fully consonant with the theme of relationality that has become a characteristic of contemporary theology. We anticipate that this theme of relationality will be key in relating to the view of the self within post-modern thought as we consider our example of Julia Kristeva's speaking subject. Could it be that the emphasis Rahner gives to the inter-personal aspects of relatedness highlight an aspect possibly absent in Kristeva's schema where subjectivity is arguably an illusion within text, and self-creative relationality does not take place between personal entities?⁶⁷

We find that Lloyd-Taylor's thesis helpfully redresses overly epistemological readings of Rahner. These emphasise the way in which the self is created and shaped by its questions and relation to a world of objects (rather than other co-existing subjects). Whilst the quest for knowledge is a key way by which the self travels towards its horizon, it should not be forgotten that the arena of self-creation is inhabited by other selves, and that these are encountered, not as objects, but as "Thou" to the self's "I". Such inter-personality is a no less formative to the creation of the self than each individual's epistemological search for answers to its own existence. Rahner suggests our greatest self-actualisation involves encounters not with *objects* of enquiry, but with other *subjects*, other "Thou's" sharing the arena of self-creation.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Alistair McFadyen, *op.cit.*, p.122.

⁶⁷ We explore the different concepts of relationality in ch.5 and ch.8. We shall connote these as Rahner's "exo-centric" person compared to Kristeva's "ex-centric" subject in ch.10.

⁶⁸ We return to this in ch. 7 and ch. 8 of this thesis, where we consider Rahner's treatment of "neighbour love".

Such an insistence upon relationality has, in our opinion, provided a necessary corrective to previous modernist assumptions of individual autonomy which appear in both former theology and secular philosophical fields. In this, Rahner's emphasis upon the notion of the self as relational hearer co-relates to some extent with the rejection of the modern autonomous self in Kristeva's writing.⁶⁹ It is one example of where Rahner and Kristeva broadly agree.⁷⁰

We wish to make a further identification of the precise nature of relationality in Rahner's anthropology. It is our contention that Rahner's notion of creative self-agency avoids defining the self exclusively by its relations to others.⁷¹ He offers a place for the self to exist as de-centred but nonetheless ontologically real and present. For Rahner the self exists; it is far from substantive in the sense of a static reality, yet it is also more than the sum of its immediate and temporal relations, since it is a created being. It is, in Hegel's terms, a 'being-present-for-itself' as well as a 'being-in-relation'. Marit Trelstad makes the important point⁷² that feminist writers have warned of the inherent danger done to women when they are defined in such a solely relational way,

"Patriarchal constructions of women's selfhood have always defined women's values in terms of their relations to others and this is a pitfall to avoid in constructing a more adequate sense of human agency in theology....it is obvious that creative self-agency (of women) is necessary as a caveat to these former models that described women as only instrumentally [by their relations] valuable."⁷³

We believe that Rahner safeguards against the danger of the hearer being understood as purely a web of relations. He balances a notion of relationality with one of individuality.⁷⁴ There is a genuine connectedness in Rahner's understanding of the person as hearer, but it is the connectedness between persons, which we might expect to identify as fundamentally different to the play of discourse which we will be

⁶⁹ We briefly deal with the difficulty of distinguishing these terms in ch.2 of this thesis.

⁷⁰ We return to discuss this question later.

⁷¹ See chapter 7 and ch.10 of this thesis for a further examination of Rahner's notion of the subject and the subject-in-relation.

⁷² Trelstad, "Relationality Plus Individuality: The Value of Creative Self Agency"⁷²From *Dialog* vol. 38, number 3, summer 1999, pp.193-198.

⁷³ Trelstad, *op.cit.*, p.193

⁷⁴ The clearest example of this being in his careful examination of the two-fold nature of Christ's subjectivity, which we examine in ch.9 of this thesis.

examining in Kristeva. The hearer is a person-in-relation and these are inseparable for Rahner. For Rahner, for there to be relationality, the presence of the “I” must be maintained as well as the presence of a “Thou”. In other words, the agency and creative power of the other cannot be allowed to completely overshadow the agency and self-creative power of the self. Trelstad writes,

“While understanding all humans as part of a relational matrix, we can reclaim a positive, healthy understanding of “separate self” that does not work to undermine relationality, but rather enhances it...The challenge is to describe all humans as both influenced and influencing, adding their own novel experience to the process of all experience.”⁷⁵

Rahner’s understanding of the hearer has both these facets. On the one hand the selfhood of the hearer is separate. It experiences its “thrownness of being” and grapples with the question of its own existence by a process of questioning and unrest. However, it is not in this situation alone. Within the arena of self-creation it experiences other objects but also other subjects; other beings and its own unthematic knowledge of Ultimate Being. The hearer is therefore, by necessity, a relational being. It can no more ignore the “Thou’s” sharing its arena of self-creation than the objective world around it. For, Rahner, as we shall see in chapter eight of this thesis, true self-actualisation is entered into only as a person realises its freedom in acts of neighbour-love, and fulfils the potential of influencing other selves positively. In this way self-creation is relational and the hearer is necessarily both separate and inherently interrelated.

1. 3 Human history as a place where divine revelation exists

We turn now to our third and final theme that is apparent in Rahner’s consideration of the wider arena of selfhood, the theme of revelation. The most important aspect of this theme is the emphasis Rahner gives to God’s presence in revelation. Where does God stand in the arena of the person as hearer?

For Rahner the world is a created reality which owes its very existence to the decision of God to reveal God-self in an act of creative expression. Rahner does not see the

⁷⁵ Trelstad, op.cit. Trelstad is writing about the usefulness of Alfred North Whitehead’s notion of the self. However, we believe that the same balance between separate and relational self can be found in Rahner’s thought, see ch.7 and ch.10 of this thesis. We share her belief that purely relational notions of the self are dangerous to women in particular and damaging to the notion of the self generally.

world as merely a stage into which God may decide to act; rather it is intrinsically graced by the immanent presence of God. As a material reality it points to the form beyond it. In this way the world is a symbol for God. It is distinct from God, yet wholly dependent on God and exists to express God's being. It is what Rahner calls a "vicarious sign, of that which is not given in itself."⁷⁶

As we have seen, Rahner constructs a view of creation that emphasises revelation and dialogue and rejects the duality potentially implied in the relationship of a creator and creation. Rahner presents us with the view that "the dependence of the world upon God and the world's autonomy are directly and not inversely, proportional."⁷⁷ In this, Rahner believes that seeing the God-world relationship as a loving dialogue corrects the error of dualism. God is seen as present within the world and not apart from it.⁷⁸ The world is God's primary means of self-revelation and the external expression of God's being. In rejecting dualism, we find that Rahner also dismisses pantheistic understandings of the relationship between God and the world. He believes that God cannot be wholly identified with the world and is radically different from the world. In this Rahner upholds the orthodox Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

"Creation ex nihilo means, in essence, creation totally from God, precisely such that in creation the world is radically dependent on God, while God is not dependent on the world, but remains the self-sufficient one who is free over against the world."⁷⁹

In rejecting pantheism, Rahner is careful not to inadvertently suggest dualism. If pantheism is to be rejected it should be, according to Rahner, on the grounds that it does not *distinguish* God from the world. However, God should not be *separated* from the world in a dualistic fashion. The distinction should be made, but with caution, as Rahner says the distinction between God and the world is not that of "two categorical realities" since this presupposes that God can be set against a different background and judged as distinct from the world. This is not possible for Rahner; God is the ultimate background of all reality. The difference between God and the

⁷⁶ HW, p. 46. A full consideration of Rahner's theory of symbols shall be offered in ch.4 of this thesis.

⁷⁷ Mark Lloyd Taylor, 1986, p153.

⁷⁸ This view of reality will be seen to provide scope for theology critiquing some of the pre-suppositions made by post-modernists. See ch.10 of this thesis.

⁷⁹ FCF, p.78. A helpful consideration of the debate surrounding the relationship between God and the world in contemporary theology is found in John Macquarrie's Thinking About God, see especially the chapter "God and the World: Two realities or one?" SCM Press, 1975. Also William Hill, The Three-Personed God The Catholic University of America Press, 1982.

world must therefore be an internal difference within the being of God.⁸⁰ Rahner argues that our experience of distinction within the world cannot be accurately used to describe the distinction between God and the world, since God is not one object among many but the very ground of being of all objects. God's distinction is important yet difficult to define, yet it must be made in order to view the world as a real place of dialogue rather than monologue. The primary function of the world is to be the place into which God speaks. Yet God is not to be seen as talking to Godself.

“We have already said that creation can and should be conceived as a moment within, a presupposition of, the self-communication of God in which he does not create and set over against himself that which is other than himself, but rather communicates his own reality to the other ...this indwelling is no longer to be thought of as a particular occurrence given here and there within the world. Instead, it is a fundamental relationship of God to the world in general.”⁸¹

We anticipate that Rahner's dialogical view of the person hearer may offer a useful contrast to Kristeva. As many postmodernists, Kristeva purports that the presence of a transcendent voice (of God) implies a 'master' voice or 'phallogocentrism', precluding the real presence of other voices.⁸² In Rahner's understanding of the nature of reality there are always multiple voices, speaking to each other, shaping each other and shaping themselves.⁸³ God is present in the arena of human subjectivity, but has graciously determined to address human persons as partners in a creative dialogue.

We find that Rahner's dialogical view of reality can be seen as part of a long theological tradition that seeks to emphasise relationality. The development of modern Catholic thought such as Rahner's has some surprising progenitors. Grenz⁸⁴ suggests that this tradition of relational selfhood can be traced back to the desire of the Protestant Reformers to offer a relational rather than structural understanding of the *imago dei*. In Grenz's words “The relational understanding of the *imago dei* moves the focus from noun to verb.”⁸⁵ In tracing this tradition, Grenz suggests that Aquinas represents “the high-water mark” of the development of structural understanding of

⁸⁰ FCF, p.62-5.

⁸¹ TI 11, p.225.

⁸² We consider this in ch.s 8 and 10 of this thesis.

⁸³ We shall comment further on this in ch.8 It has been noticed here since the primary source is so suggestive of this important point.

⁸⁴ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

⁸⁵ Grenz, op.cit pp.162-177.

the *imago dei*, emphasising the inherent power to know and love God as the definitive human characteristic. Luther and Calvin's shared emphasis was to propose that the *imago dei* could be completely lost through sin and must be restored in the relationship of faith. According to Grenz, this dynamic dimension of the image of God set the scene for a fully relational view of what it meant to be human. Emil Brunner developed this emphasis in stressing that the relational aspect of the human was found in relationship to the Word of God.⁸⁶ In Brunner we see the most apparent progenitor for Rahner's hearer. For Brunner, the human self experiences God's Word as both a 'call' and a 'capacity to respond'. In other words, for Brunner, the 'structure' of the hearer of God *is* its relation. This enables Thomist notions of structure to be correlated with relational notions of self. For Rahner, within the *imago dei*, the same relationship exists between structure and relationality. This is a position whereby the human person is best characterised by his or her relation to the Word of God: to recall Brunner's terms they are a "being-in-the-Word".⁸⁷ Grenz calls this a "word-and-response" relational anthropology. Interestingly, the centrality given to the theme of love found in Rahner's anthropology is also present in that of Brunner.⁸⁸

Clearly, there is a history of theological attempts to explore the relationality of the human person, which can be seen to inform Rahner's notion of the hearer. Our choice of Rahner to represent theological anthropology is somewhat determined by the place he occupies in this tradition. We believe that his notion of the hearer pre-empts themes that have come to the fore in more recent contemporary theological discussions. These would include, for example, the notions of reciprocal relationality found in the 'History of God' theologians Moltmann and Pannenberg, and those of 'being as communion', found in John Zizioulas. We shall refer to these writers throughout this thesis and believe that Rahner's notion of the self as hearer can be said to be greatly influential on current theological anthropology.

In summary then, Rahner's is an optimistic and positive understanding of the world. It is one whereby the transcendent presence of the divine saturates human history. The task of the person as hearer is to search out history, finding either the revealing word

⁸⁶ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, translated Olive Wyon, Lutterworth, 1939.

⁸⁷ Brunner, p.58.

⁸⁸ See ch. 7 and 8 of this thesis, where the concept of neighbour-love as inter-subjective relationality is examined and explored.

of God or the revealing word of God's silence. Rahner's depiction of human history allows for a considerable focus on the world as a mysterious place in which each person as hearer, and human history in its totality, is orientated towards transcendence. In this, it is also a thoroughly holistic reality with no ultimate separation between the immanent and transcendent. This allows for "multiple voices" and not the over-powering "master-voice" that disallows dialogue. This graced and dialogical environment will shape the person that inhabits it.

In summary we have found that this notion of reality prescribes that the "person as hearer" has both facets of separation and relationality. This is not a pure relationality, rather, with Trelstad, within the notion of the "person as hearer" a healthy notion of separation here enhances interrelation.

Having examined Rahner's view of the nature of reality, we turn to a very different paradigm presupposed as encompassing human subjectivity, that of Julia Kristeva's discursive reality; the place where her speaking subject is formed.

2. Where Does Subjectivity Exist for Kristeva?

The Arena of the Subject as Speaker

We turn now to an examination of the nature of reality presupposed by Kristeva as she constructs her notion of the speaking subject. This will involve a consideration of the nature of structuralist and post-structuralist thought. In seeking to explore the nature of reality pre-supposed by Kristeva we anticipate that, just as for Rahner, the arena of selfhood will determine the shape of the self. Fundamentally, Kristeva purports that reality is discursive. In other words, what we can know about reality is only accessible through discourse, with no direct reference to a “real” reality beneath the constructs of language. The arena of the “I” is impersonal and a-historical. This sets the parameters for the speaking subject, both in terms of where it exists and what it consists of. This provides us with a striking contrast to Rahner’s theological arena of the hearer.

Broadly speaking, Kristeva adopts the paradigm of Continental post-structuralism. The context of her writing on the speaking subject falls with a particular French intellectual movement which had its height in the 1960’s and 70’s. Arriving in Paris on a scholarship from Bulgaria, Kristeva began to move in the intellectual circle of a new generation theorists including Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Emile Benveniste, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault.⁸⁹ This circle has become known as “structuralist” in that they sought to locate and analyze structures in all fields relating to subjectivity: sociology; linguistics and psychology. Structuralism was to be a foundational influence on Kristeva’s view of reality, the arena of the speaking subject.

At the heart of structuralism is the belief that things cannot be known in isolation, the greater “structures” around them need to be recognized and accounted for. The individual therefore can only be understood in relation to the larger structure to which it belongs.⁹⁰ These structures are not, of themselves, objective realities, but larger abstract constructs that come to be from the particular culturally constructed way we view the world. The structures are the discourses and disciplines that impact upon any

⁸⁹ Kristeva writes on her experience of being an exiled academic in Paris in *Intimate Revolt* trans. Jeanine Herman, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002 (first published in French in 1997)

⁹⁰ A good summary of structuralism is found in Peter Barry’s *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Critical Theory*, Manchester University Press, 1995.

individual entity, including the subject. In this paradigm, meaning is therefore always attributed to things, rather than being inscribed or inherent within them.

Many of the guiding principles of the structuralist paradigm come from the thinking of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Saussure emphasised the arbitrary, constitutive and relational nature of words. Importantly, for Saussure, language constitutes reality rather than merely explaining or labelling it. Meaning is attributed to a thing by the human mind; of themselves they have no inherent meaning. Saussure's work was important to the later structuralist theorists, who Kristeva was to encounter in Paris, because it gave them a system for seeing reality as discursive; where systems were constructed through arbitrary relationships between signs. These systems could be recognized and evaluated in order to deconstruct the meanings previously assumed as inherent and given. In this, the structuralists of the 1950's and 60's believed that Saussure's findings in regard to language could be extrapolated to explain how all signifying systems work. The structuralist task was to deconstruct all assumed knowledge by reference to its context; to the greater systems of thought that constituted it. In effect this took the focus away from the thing itself and outwards to consider the nature of the discursive reality wherein it is found. This provided a view of reality which was entirely discursive and non-realist.⁹¹ Within this new paradigm, many new directions opened up for structuralist thinkers. Roland Barthes applied the method to modern culture and literature, Claude Lévi-Strauss focussed on the contexts of myth and Lacan revisited the psychoanalysis of Freud. All of these critical theorists can be seen to influence the paradigm Kristeva adopts in her consideration of the speaking subject.⁹²

As we consider Kristeva's arena of the speaking subject we can see that she takes the findings of structuralism and develops them to their fullest conclusions whereby reality becomes entirely "de-centred", that is all reference points for meaning are deconstructed and a universe of radical uncertainty is revealed. This is one meaningful

⁹¹ We consider the influence of non-realism on theology in chapter ten of this thesis. Here we introduce this paradigmatic approach to reality as a striking contrast to the objective reality pre-supposed by Karl Rahner.

⁹² More of this in the following chapter.

way to define “post-structuralism”; it possesses the courage of the convictions of structuralism, and more readily celebrates paradigmatic non-realism.⁹³ As Barry says,

“Post-structuralism inherits the habit of scepticism, and intensifies it.”⁹⁴

Most important for our task is to identify post-structuralism’s confidence in viewing reality itself as textual. Here, with meaning found only in the play between words, the choice of words, each with its greater structure identified, becomes highly important. Words are chosen as much to deconstruct ideas as to express them. They often achieve both tasks at the same time. In this, post-structuralist writers, such as Kristeva, exhibit what Barry calls “linguistic anxiety”⁹⁵. Kristeva employs a number of words which are heavy with former associations and disrupted by a clash of possible meanings. We shall consider her use of the term “jouissance” and note that this is a good example of “linguistic anxiety”.⁹⁶ The playful or ironic use of words to dislocate and play with meaning is to be expected in a discursive in which the only certainty is the lack of all certainty (an irony that is celebrated rather than worrisome to post-structuralists). Meaning is always and everywhere unstable and knowable reality is purely a matrix of intersecting discourses, with no possible objective “centre” or fixed point of reference.

“We cannot know where we are, since all the concepts which previously defined the centre, and hence also the margins, have been ‘deconstructed’, or undermined.”⁹⁷

To this end, Kristeva was greatly influenced by the structuralist and post-structuralists project to eradicate the *I*. This was approached by a consideration of how meaning is elicited from a text. The novel approach of the new French theorists of Kristeva’s day was to begin with an insistence that in the production of meaning, the text, and not the author, is the active, meaning-producing force.⁹⁸

⁹³ Barry further suggests characteristic differences in origin, tone, style, attitude to language and project between structuralism and post-structuralism. Op.cit, p.63-65.

⁹⁴ Barry, op.cit. p.63

⁹⁵ Barry op.cit p.65

⁹⁶ See chapter 9 of this thesis.

⁹⁷ Barry, op.cit. p.62.

⁹⁸ We shall see that Barthes, Derrida and Kristeva stop short of completely eradicating the self. They maintain a partial place for a tenuous self, *le sujet*, which is a construct of the text but has itself a measure of activity. This is described as a bi-active approach. However, since the *I* is a construct of the text, the text remains the active agent, even in these compromise positions.

We can see this approach most clearly in the writing of Roland Barthes. In the quote following, Barthes insists upon the view that the text is active and the self is the construct of the text.

“I read the text. This statement, consonant with the “genius” of the language (subject, verb, compliment) is not always true...I do not make (the text) undergo a predicative operation called reading, consequent upon its being and ‘I’ is not an innocent subject, anterior to the text, which will deal subsequently with the text as it would an object to dismantle or a site to occupy. *This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts, of infinite codes, or more precisely, codes whose origins is lost.*”⁹⁹

The text is active in these systems firstly to negate the need for an “external” author as the originator of meaning, which is seen as internal to the text itself, and furthermore to replace the role of interpreter, since this task is also resituated to within the text.

The text not only inscribes meaning (it takes over the “author” role) but it also “reads” itself; it is self-interpreting,

“Within the reader-subject resides a multiplicity of texts and codes, and this “resource” effectively rules out any conception of the reader-text transaction as a simple relation of subjectivity to objectivity. The invasions of intertextuality into the self of the reader disintegrate that enclosed self. The borders collapse, producing a disorienting complicity. The *reader* like the text, is unstable...Essentially, deconstruction regards the subject as an effect of language. The “ego,” a rational formulation, emerges out of a play of signifiers.”¹⁰⁰

Here it is the texts and codes within the reader which are active rather than the “self” of the reader. Codes interpret codes. This is described in the passage as an “invasion” resulting in “collapsing borders.” Such language successfully conveys the power of the active text for post-structuralists and the supposed vulnerability of the “enclosed self.” There is the interesting use of images of war or, borrowing phraseology from the Kristeva, of a “revolution” in this reversal of the active role from author to text. However, it is worth noting here that there are no prisoners in this war. There is no room for the “enclosed self” to become merely complicated, internally plural, or otherwise affected as a result of the operation of the text. It appears that in text-active systems it is the text *or* the self. The text is not considered as a tool of the self (as we

⁹⁹ Barthes, *S/Z* 1957 (English translation 1972, p132) See also chapter 6, Barthes, “The Cambridge History of Literary Theory: From Formalism to Poststructuralism” Vol 8, ed. Raman Selden 1995 Cambridge University Press.

¹⁰⁰ Vincent B. Leitch, “Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction” New York, Columbia University Press, 1983, p.111

might have expected) rather the self is a casualty of the active text. It is either/or. The signifiers have total power and operate to create, disrupt and eradicate the “ego”.¹⁰¹

Derrida further investigated the new arena heralded by structuralist claims. He examined the nature of meaning present in words. He formulated an understanding of meaning as a process of deferral and referral by emphasising the ability for signifiers to “slip”.¹⁰² For Derrida the ability for words to signify a variety of concepts and the way in which these very concepts are by necessity couched in other words (signifieds becoming signifiers) deconstructed a sense of “core meaning” within the text. If the signifying processes occur within the text then meaning is a property of the text, and not inscribed by an external human subject. This led to the disruption of the notion of meaning itself and a rejection of the author as the originator of meaning. The deconstruction of all essence, existence, substance, subject, transcendence, consciousness, God and “Man” was to follow by the same means. If the process to construct any “meaning” to these terms is a textual process, then they all exist only within a textual realm and not a metaphysical external reality. Upon this foundation everything could be seen as a facet of text. The foundation for Derrida’s eradication of the external subject (and much else) is based upon the activity within the text. The active text, for Derrida, essentially negates the active subject.

The tenets of structuralism as being developed by Barthes, Derrida, and others, gave Kristeva a new textual, non-realist arena for human subjectivity.¹⁰³ This was the heady intellectual, philosophical and political movement that Kristeva encountered in Paris. She took an active role in this circle, joining the “Tel Quel” (meaning “such as it is”) group, among others. Working from the linguistic base of structuralism, Kristeva worked to undermine the “already saids” and forged a new understanding of

¹⁰¹ Reader-response theorists make a critique of the either/or thinking behind the philosophy of post-structuralists. An example of this is Norman Holland’s “The Critical I” see p. 217 “One reason this literary formalism persists is the general pattern of either/or thinking common among literary critics. *Either* the text controls response *or* the reader does. ..*Either* there is an objective text *or* subjectivity rules.”

¹⁰² Derrida, Jacques. 1967 “Of Grammatology” (1976 English Trans: Spivak)

¹⁰³ Criticisms of the purely textual reality proposed by post-structuralists can be found in many camps, from Raymond Tallis’s critique of Saussurean linguistics, Not Saussure: a Critique of Post-Saussurean Literary Theory, MacMillan, 1998, and John Ellis’s Against Deconstruction, Princetown University Press, 1989. Criticisms of the post-structuralist paradigm are also directed from some feminist writers such as Susan Bordo “(Re)Writing the Body: the Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism” pp7-29 of The Female Body in Western Culture ed. S. Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986 pp.7-29. We shall consider these criticisms in later chapters.

the self that would go beyond (or post) structuralism and formulate a new understanding of human subjectivity.

With the new de-centred universe Kristeva could readily reject the notion of the self as autonomous, free and unified. In its place, using linguistics, psychoanalysis and literary theory she constructed a notion of the speaking subject, one at the mercy of external forces, and internal, unconscious experiences, which we examine in detail in the following chapter. The arena to trace the subject was to be found within texts, and especially those of avant-garde writers and poets. He she proposed to identify the true nature of the subject; a dynamic, shifting and multiplicitous stance within a discursive reality.

However, unlike many of her structuralist progenitors, the structures of language and literature did not provide Kristeva with a full enough account of the human subject. She sought new ways of seeing the subject that would take account of the signifying practices of human beings. In an interview with Diana Kuprel, Kristeva says,

“My position was that mere structure was not sufficient to understand the world of meaning in literature and other human behaviours.”¹⁰⁴

Kristeva became increasingly interested in the role of psychoanalysis to explore the nature of the subject.¹⁰⁵

“The psychoanalytic experience struck me as the only one in which the wildness of the speaking being, and of language, can be heard.”¹⁰⁶

It is very important for Kristeva that the subject is viewed as part of an “open system”.¹⁰⁷ Psychoanalysis argues for a view of the subject that is able to shift and remodel itself in the transfer of energy between people in relationships, especially love relationships. For Kristeva, the relationship between the analyst and analysand

¹⁰⁴ Diana Kuprel, In Defence of Human Singularity: Diana Kuprel Speaks with Julia Kristeva Canadian Review 28 (8/9) Jan 21-26, 2000

¹⁰⁵ Noelle McAfee Julia Kristeva, Routledge Critical Thinkers, 2004. See introduction “Why Kristeva?” for a discussion of Kristeva’s influences. McAfee argues that Kristeva’s increased focus upon psychoanalysis coincided and was caused by her increasing disillusionment with Communist politics.

¹⁰⁶ Kristeva, *Ibid.* p.19.

¹⁰⁷ RPL p.14

offers particular insight into the inter-relational and fluctuating aspects of subjectivity.

“It can be said that with Freud, for the first time, the love relationship (imaginary as it might be) as reciprocal identification and detachment (transference and countertransference) has been taken as a model of optimum psychic functioning.”¹⁰⁸

The practise of psychoanalysis, therefore, sheds new light on the inter-dependence of the subject. Rather than being autonomous and rational the subject is held and shaped by relationships where the flow of energy between people shapes them both. Kristeva suggests that this can be a dangerous experience within a love-relationship and that the analyst offers a safer place for the speaking subject to begin to explore and redefine themselves.¹⁰⁹ The findings of psychoanalysis became, therefore, another axis defining the arena of the subject.

In reviewing Kristeva’s corpus then, we can trace the various disciplines she pursued to provide a place to speak of post-structuralist subjectivity.¹¹⁰ In the mid 1960’s and 1970’s Kristeva focused on semiotics and language, she was also keenly interested in left-wing political notions of the subject. This gave her a place to begin to define the post-structuralist subject. This gives way in the 1980’s to more overtly psychoanalytical writing, where a revision of Lacan added a further axis to her frame for the speaking subject. The 1990’s saw Kristeva taking two new directions, a return to political writing, where she sees the speaking subject as informing the macro-political problem of oppression of foreigners,¹¹¹ and her first fictional works.¹¹² Increasingly, of late, we see Kristeva exploring subjectivity through her own fictional writing and by a consideration of the autobiographies of women. Her most recent work has included autobiographical studies of the theorists Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein and the French writer, Collette. This has provided yet another dimension to the arena of the speaking subject. Currently Kristeva is a professor in the University of

¹⁰⁸ RPL p.14

¹⁰⁹ RPL p.14

¹¹⁰ See Kuprel, *ibid.* p.9

¹¹¹ STO

¹¹² Kristeva’s fictional works in the 1990’s are The Samuri (1992) The old Man and the Wolves (1994) and Possessions (1996)

Pairs, a regular visiting professor at Colombia and Toronto Universities, and a practising psychoanalyst.

It is perhaps worth briefly considering possible causes why Kristeva, and many of her contemporaries, sought new arenas within which human subjectivity might be defined. Commentators have offered suggestions as to why the project to deconstruct subjectivity holds so much attraction for Kristeva's generation of literary theorists and offer an explanation as to why this might be. Many, such as Norman Holland, suggest that it is a predominantly *Continental* phenomenon.¹¹³ Holland suggests that the twentieth century history of Europe sheds some light in this respect. He purports that the general political cast to avoid individual responsibility for the atrocities of the Second World War gave rise in the early sixties (the time of the "Tel Quel" movement in Kristeva's biography) to a left-wing politically motivated desire to be disingenuous of the individual. In order to further distance the intellectual body of the time the atrocities of war and holocaust were laid at the feet of a failed Enlightenment *project*, rather than at the collective feet of Europeans. Clearly theory (the Enlightenment) and practice (the escalating atrocity of war in Modern European history) are linked. With the benefit of critical hindsight, it might be said that the Enlightenment desire to elevate Man to a position of transcendental rational objectivity lies beneath many of the abhorrent oppressive regimes in modern European history, not least the horrendous ramifications of the National Socialist movement and its agenda of progress. According to Holland, blaming a failed Enlightenment *ideology* reduced the pain of individual responsibility in a society unable to come to terms with national and localised atrocities.

This movement was further encouraged by the growing demand to be "heard" made by formally "silenced" and marginalized groups in the sixties, such as feminists. The claim was that all sorts of oppression and marginalisation (of gender, ethnicity, class etc.) resulted from Enlightenment humanism and the belief in a transcendental Self. The charge against humanism was that it elevated only one sort of self: male, white and gentrified. Such was seen as political and intellectual tyranny and the means to silent other 'deviant' voices within society. According to Holland, the growing voices of marginalized people within European society during the Sixties met with the co-

¹¹³ Norman Holland, *The Critical I*, Yale University Press, 1999.

incidence of a continent unable to accept the atrocities of war and holocaust. By deconstructing the “I” Continental Europe might have perhaps been attempting to lay a lot of ghosts to rest. Of course, looking for the reasons behind an intellectual movement is always a process of conjecture. However such explanations such as Holland’s are compelling in that they might offer an insight into the importance of historical context. They are a reminder to keep in mind the particular political aspirations of the deconstructionist project since its inception.

We recall that, in common with all poststructuralist writers, Kristeva indeed believed that the model of the transcendent ego, the Enlightenment or Humanist Self, was fundamentally false and a tool of oppression. Kristeva was confident that a critique of the humanist self would emerge from a post-structuralist deconstruction of language,

“The semiological approach identifies itself, from Hjelmslev on, as an anti-humanism which outmodes those debates - still going on even now - between philosophers, where one side argues for a transcendence with an immanent ‘human’ causality while the other argues for an ‘ideology’ whose cause is external and therefore transcendent; but where neither shows any awareness of the linguistic and, at a more general level, semiotic logic of the sociality in which the (speaking, historical) subject is embedded.”¹¹⁴

Kristeva suggests here that it is only within the study of language that the subject can be freed from humanist, transcendentalist notions, and proposes to undertake just such a venture. Kristeva felt strongly that previous attempts to identify subjectivity and examine language in other disciplines were at best ineffective, and at worst knowingly oppressive,

“Our philosophies of language, embodiments of the Idea, are nothing more than the thoughts of archivists, archaeologists and necrophiliacs.”¹¹⁵

To this end she set about constructing her own study of linguistics. She undertook this in her doctoral work in 1974, which was published in English in 1984 as Revolution in Poetic Language. For Kristeva, only post-structuralism provides a way to view the subject as able to generate meaning and experience within a dynamic process of discourse. For Kristeva, post-structuralism provides for an understanding of the

¹¹⁴ Kristeva in the essay “The System and the Speaking Subject” which first appeared in the Times Literary Supplement (12 October 1973, pp 1249-52) and was re-printed in Thomas A Sebeok (ed.) The Tell-Tale Sign. A Survey of Semiotics, Lisse, The Peter de Ridder Press, 1975. This essay is also reprinted in The Kristeva Reader ed. Toril Moi, Basil Blackwell, 1986 p. 25-26.

¹¹⁵ RPL p.13

powerful and transformative practices possible through language, whereby language is seen as a place for a potentially explosive discharge of a subject's energy.¹¹⁶

As a rejection of the transcendent ego, the new subjectivity Kristeva seeks is one where a 'grand-master' ideology is replaced with a plethora of other subject-positions. At the centre of the post-structuralist concern is to undermine the notion of *logocentrism*: the idea of one pervasive "Truth", a position which limits the influence of the particular standpoint of the subject. Post-structuralism argues for the voices of the many subject positions to be heard, and that none should be privileged. Perhaps the appeal of post-structuralism to feminist writers is in some way explained in this. Post-structuralism offers a voice to the marginalised and insists that their positions are as valid as any that might suppose themselves to be the centre of discourse; those assuming one Truth. Post-structuralist writers view themselves as the vanguard of a new age of ideological pluralism, where repressed and marginalised voices will rise up to challenge the hegemony of modernism.¹¹⁷ It is essentially (if we can use such a word!) an argument for philosophical pluralism. For Kristeva, as we shall see in following chapters, this movement is a literary endeavour led by the avant-garde poets and writers who decentre the subject within a text. Their tools are the dispersal of meaning and the disruption of syntax.¹¹⁸ In this way the post-structuralist cause is for a 'Revolution in Poetic Language'; a revolution which transforms poetry itself, then the notion of the subject, and finally all stable subject-object distinctions until the very notion of objective truth is dismantled.

We note here that Lorraine sees the post-structuralist position, such as Kristeva's, as distinct from that of postmodernism generally. Post-modernism also adopts the tools of deconstruction, the dispersal of meaning and a philosophical pluralism. However, as Lorraine says, the consequence of this programme in the hands of postmodernism is to replace ideology by *the end of ideology*. Perhaps we might characterise this in saying that postmodernism replaces the single voice of modernism with the many voices of post-structuralism but *continues* to conclude that there is *no* real subject position, rather than merely *many*. It is this anti-foundational stance which defines

¹¹⁶ RPL p.16

¹¹⁷ Cf Kristeva's essay "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident" which was originally published as an editorial in *Tel Quel* no.74, Winter 1977, pp.3-8, and reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toiril Moi, 1984, pp.292-300. We shall examine this essay fully in chapter 10 pp.237-253 of this thesis.

¹¹⁸ Kristeva's use of deconstruction is examined in chapters 3 pp.52-80 of this thesis.

postmodernism and leaves it with the stance of parody, pastiche and irony. This is perhaps all that postmodernism can say in terms of cultural commentary.¹¹⁹ It is the ‘ultra-relativism’ of postmodernism that tends it towards nihilism¹²⁰ and which post-structuralist authors, such as Kristeva, are keen to avoid.

According to Jorge Larraine the distinction between post-modernism and post-structuralism is useful but far from clear.

“The dividing line between poststructuralism and postmodernism is far from clear. They certainly share a good number of premises and principles - for instance, the centrality of discourse for modern life, the relativist distrust of truth, the discursive constitution of the subject, and so on...While for poststructuralism ideology critique is replaced by the articulating discourse which creates ideologically active subject positions, for postmodernism ideology critique is replaced by the end of ideology.”¹²¹

A similar interest in the discourse of Otherness is the key characteristic of both groups.¹²² Both emphasise particularity and the split, contradictory subject. However post-structuralism is keener to explore the interrelationship of discourse, power and subjectivity (as per Foucault) and maintains the importance of historicity as contingent to the subject’s position.¹²³ Postmodernism seems more interested in challenging modernism on the grounds of an anti-foundational perspective of knowledge.

Douglas Kellner argues that postmodernism needs to be rescued from ultra-relativism. He sees the ‘problem with post-modernism’, as its tendency towards nihilism, as based upon Lyotard’s inability to differentiate between *types* of narrative.¹²⁴ Kellner

¹¹⁹ See Ursula Kelly, Schooling Desire: literacy, cultural politics and pedagogy, Routledge, 1997. Kelly delineates postmodernism from structuralism in terms of their different emphases. She ascribes Kristeva to a clear post-structuralist camp, alongside Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Cherryholmes, Weedon and Davies, whilst fixing Lyotard, Jameson, Baudrillard, Rorty and Haraway as “postmodern”. We have some issue with adopting rigid categories which we shall explore using Kristeva as a case in hand in this chapter. However, her underlying principle agrees with that of Larraine, that post-structuralism more keenly retains a sense of the self, albeit in a problematised and pluralist sense, whereas postmodernism seeks to undermine the sense of the subject *per se*.

¹²⁰ See Linda J Nicholson’s (ed.) introduction to Feminism/Postmodernism, Routledge 1990 and Nicholson and Steven’s Social postmodernism: beyond identity politics, Cambridge University Press 1995.

¹²¹ Jorge Larrain, Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence Cambridge Polity Press, 1994, p.90-91.

¹²² See Kelly op.cit and ch. 6 pp.132-160 of this thesis for a discussion of Kristeva’s use of notions of otherness.

¹²³ See Kelly and Larraine op.cit.

¹²⁴ Douglas Kellner and Steven Best, Postmodern theory : critical interrogations, Macmillan 1991

suggests that a distinction needs to be made between “master narratives” that attempt to subsume every view under one total theory and “grand narratives” which have a greater understanding of their situational dimension and seek to chart the history and development of a particular notion.

What conclusions can we draw, then, as to the arena of Kristeva’s subject, in relation to post-structuralism and post-modernism? From our study of her arena of subjectivity we suggest that Kristeva begins from a post-structuralist standpoint. She is keen to retain a “space” for the subject, although this is tenuous space.¹²⁵ In common with the wider post-structuralist movement her discourse on otherness, which we examine in chapter six of this thesis, she uncovers the power play of gendered signifiers. With post-structuralism, she maintains the arbitrary relationship of signs and stresses the importance of the unconscious and the contingency of identity. In this she constructs what might be seen as a classically post-structuralist notion of the self.

However, we suggest that there are also apparent postmodernist tendencies in Kristeva’s writing which reveal a desire to go beyond the philosophical pluralism of post-structuralism to the ultra-relativism of post-modernism. This is most apparent in her denial of universal categories (we anticipate her denial of the category of ‘woman’).¹²⁶ Furthermore, her negation of the materiality of the feminine in subjectivity results in a sense of the *position-less* subject, which is characteristic of post-modern anti-realism.

Peter Brooker describes Kristeva as post-modern. He says that she has a,

“Thorough-going scepticism towards monolithic systems and categories, and her deconstructive, psycho-semiotic theory of language and identity. It is these that she brings to postmodernism.”¹²⁷

Kristeva is tellingly described in this passage as “bringing” theories to postmodernism. This aptly describes her relationship to this movement. Linguistics and psychoanalysis, the findings of which lead her to a more confident anti-realist postmodernism, drive her early writing. We can conclude from this discussion that Kristeva stands at the juncture of postmodernism and post-structuralism.

¹²⁵ For Kristeva’s tenuous notion of a space for selfhood see chapters 3.2 p56-60 of this thesis.

¹²⁶ See ch.8.1 and 8.2 pp181-191 of this thesis where we consider Kristeva’s notion of freedom from the “marked body” which is the basis for her denial of universal categories such as woman.

¹²⁷ Peter Brooker (ed) *Modernism/Postmodernism* Longman 1992, p.198

In terms of the arena of subjectivity, we can say that, for Kristeva, this question is framed by a post-structuralist understanding of language and symbols. To this she adds the axis of psychoanalysis and the subject in fictional literature. The subject has no ontological validity of itself but is rather a position, and a tenuous one, within a matrix of linguistic relationships and discourse. The subject is best examined by a consideration of linguistics, especially avant-garde poetry and psychoanalysis, and best expressed through artistic and literary representation.

We turn now to consider more closely how the speaking subject comes to be and evolves within this particular arena. We anticipate that the given the arena of linguistic and textual process, the subjectivity Kristeva constructs emphasises the subject's ability to *speak* into its arena; a subject that not only uses language but is constituted through its use of language.

“Signification is like a transfusion of the living body into language.”¹²⁸

It is in speaking, or other acts of signifying its presence, that the subject comes into being. Having examined the subject as “speaker”, we shall then critically compare this to Rahner’s “hearer” and consider how they can be said to inform each other. For both, the arena of subjectivity is fundamentally discursive and dialogical (although in very different ways), hence the language of speaking and hearing. Constructing a dialogue between Rahner and Kristeva can be seen to provide a valuable dialogue that might be valuable to the theological task of engaging with post-structuralist notions of subjectivity.

¹²⁸ Kelly Oliver, “Introduction” in The Portable Kristeva, Columbia University Press, 1997, p.xx

3. The Creation of the Speaking Subject – Kristeva

In our previous chapter, we explored the nature of Kristeva's discursive reality within which the speaking subject is said to emerge. We now begin a closer examination of its creation and shape. In this, we narrow our focus to adopt three of Kristeva's main foci. The first concerns the way in which Kristeva's thesis has an overt "psychological orientation."¹²⁹ Here we consider Kristeva's reworking of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Kristeva's willingness to engage with the work of Freud and Lacan is shared by other "New French Feminists", and has often been used to classify this approach.¹³⁰ We shall briefly comment on her relationship to this school of thought and outline some criticisms of the adoption of Lacan, which is so evident in Kristeva's writing.

Our second focus will be Kristeva's emphasis on the speaking subject as a process. Kristeva describes this as "le sujet en proces."¹³¹ The French term both denotes the subject in process and has legal connotations: the subject on trial. We shall consider how the speaking subject evolves through a process of disruption and deconstruction. By way of examining the multiplicitous nature of the subject, Kristeva posits the notion of the dissolution of dualistic sexual distinction. She seeks to thoroughly disrupt notions of sex and gender and posit the notion of a complex subject, one able to achieve "mystical metamorphosis"¹³² as the speaking subject is created and recreated by the revolution of language. We consider the dissolution of sexual categories here.

¹²⁹ The description is taken from Margaret Whitford's Preface to *Mapping Women* ed. Kath Jones, CPL, 1994.

¹³⁰ Commentaries often group Kristeva's work with that of Luce Irigaray and Helene Cixous. As we shall suggest, this is not entirely helpful or satisfactory on a number of fronts, offering a false homogenization of their very different contributions. "The term French feminism quickly became associated with three names in particular: Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva" See Bowlby *Still Crazy After All These Years*, Routledge, 1992 pp.117-130, especially ch. 7 "The Judgement of Paris."

¹³¹ Kristeva introduces her notion of subject-in-process in her early texts including *Revolution in Poetic Language* (RPL), as a chapter entitled "Le Sujet en Proces" in *Polylogue* and in *Desire in Language*. She develops this notion of the subject as process in later writings that we shall also refer to in this chapter. See also "Subject/Object" by Susan Hekman, chapter 3 of her work *Gender and Knowledge*, Polity Press, 1990, for a discussion as to why Kristeva adopts this notion of the subject and draws back from the dissolution of the subject.

¹³² In her interview with Vassiliki Kolocotroni, *Textual Practice* vol. 5, No. 2, Summer 1991. She describes this process as the "alchemy of the word" which "so irradiates the resources of the alphabet" to bring about such "mystical metamorphosis."

Our third focus is of significant interest to our wider project in that Kristeva's work reveals a preoccupation with religion and poetry. Kristeva sees the semiotic disrupting symbolic unity in "madness, holiness and poetry". She privileges religion along with art and poetry as a context where the semiotic breaks through. We then draw some provisional conclusions about Kristeva's analysis of the speaking subject and identify themes that we shall return to in a critical comparison with Rahner's notion of the person as hearer.

3.1 Kristeva and Lacan

Kristeva introduces her doctoral thesis on the notion of the speaking subject by saying,

"We will be attempting to formulate the distinction between semiotic and symbolic within this perspective, which was introduced by Lacanian analysis, but also within the constraints of a practice – the text – which is only of secondary interest to psychoanalysis."¹³³

In this Kristeva introduces her synthesis of Lacanian psychoanalysis and textual theory. It is the coincidence of psychoanalysis and textual criticism that allows Kristeva's writings to be seen as a form of psychoanalysis of the written word.¹³⁴ She offers a thesis on how the subject is formed and split by the process of two discursive forces, the semiotic and symbolic. She views these forces as emerging in discourse and shaping the psyche during infant development.

A common feature of 'French Feminism,' of which Kristeva is often described as being a part, is the adoption of Lacan's reworking of Freud. In fact, one way to distinguish what has become known, as 'French' from 'Anglo-American' feminism is the extent to which it affords a place for the influence of psychoanalysis. Before Lacan, Freud's theories received a fairly hostile reception by feminists, who objected to the 'phallogocentric' nature of Freud's schema (a term first used by Ernest Jones).¹³⁵ Initially Freud's theories were understood on a basic biological level and this made them less attractive to feminist theorists keen to break free from universalism. By emphasising the 'phallus' as a 'symbolic concept' rather than a biological actuality

¹³³ RPL p.98. The original French version of Kristeva's doctoral thesis was published in 1974. Key passages from this work are also available in *The Kristeva Reader* Toril Moi (ed.) Blackwell, 1986

¹³⁴ Toril Moi's introduction to *The Kristeva Reader* Blackwell, 1986

¹³⁵ A good summary of these positions is found in Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*, Manchester University Press, 1995.

Lacan provided a way to avoid biological essentialism, making psychoanalysis more readily adaptable to feminist theory. Lacan agrees with Freud that key to understanding the subject is by a study of the unconscious.¹³⁶ He agrees with Freud that the fundamental events that shape the unconscious occur in infancy. However, he begins his re-working of psychoanalysis by rejecting the biologism inherent in Freud.¹³⁷ For Lacan, the “phallus” is a symbol of ultimate power rather than a biological reality, as it was for Freud. Furthermore, it threatens both sexes with ‘the castration complex’. For Lacan therefore the concept of loss is central to the formation of identity in both male and female infants. Lacan relates the phallus to ‘the Name-of-the-Father’ and it is juxtaposed against the feminine “imaginary”. Lacan situates language development alongside the process of individuation, and it is this aspect of Lacan’s psychoanalysis that is so fundamental to Kristeva’s notion of the emergence of the speaking subject.

Briefly, Lacan sees the acquisition of symbolic language as beginning at the same time as, and as a corollary of, the experience of loss when the infant differentiates itself from its mother and, later, other objects and its own reflection.¹³⁸ This experience gives rise to the ability to adopt signifiers for such external objects. However, in this, the infant loses access to the realm of the feminine “imaginary” enjoyed in its pre-Oedipal phase. Lacan sees the process of individuation and differentiation as the suppression of the imaginary by the “Law of the Father”.

French feminists have enthusiastically taken up the project to adopt Lacanian psychoanalysis as a resource for contemporary identity theory. This is perhaps unsurprising since one might say that Freud has always enjoyed greater currency in France than in America or England. French feminism has, to a great extent, re-introduced psychoanalysis to discussions about identity creation. This is clear in

¹³⁶ Freud makes the claim that the self is fundamentally unconscious in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900)

¹³⁷ See Philippe Julien Jacques Lacan’s Return to Freud: the real, the symbolic and the imaginary, New York University Press, 1994 and Madan Sarup, Jacques Lacan, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

¹³⁸ The experience of Woman’s loss relating to the phallus is explored in Lacan’s “God and the Jouissance of The Woman. A Love Letter” in Feminine Sexuality ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, New York: Norton, 1982, p.114. Here Lacan says, Woman “does not exist and ... signifies nothing.” Woman is the binary opposition of the phallus and therefore of signification according to Lacan. op.cit p.145 Kristeva adopts the same gendered terminology when speaking of the feminine semiotic and relate this to that which defies signification.

Kristeva's work where Lacanian psychoanalysis is seen as offering the opportunity to express and symbolise aspects of the unconscious self. John Lechte says,

“Kristeva's work can be seen, in fact, as a prolonged meditation on the effect of the unconscious in human life, an effect psychoanalytic discourse is charged with rendering thinkable, symbolizable, and perhaps explicable.”¹³⁹

French feminists, such as Kristeva, have appreciated a privileging of female 'openness' in Lacan's schema. Kristeva's work often polarises 'closed' rational systems, and the 'irrational' 'female' 'open', disruptive system. She confidently adopts many Lacanian principles with a few changes that will be outlined later in this chapter in her notion of the speaking subject.

Kristeva's understanding of the development of the self in infancy can be divided into four stages, which we shall briefly summarise.

The first stage in an individual's development occurs roughly between 0-6 months of age. Kristeva refers to this stage as centring on the “chora.”¹⁴⁰ This is the semiotic stage of experience. In the earliest stage of development a chaotic mix of perceptions, feelings and needs dominate the individual, Kristeva often terms these “pulsations”. At this stage the infant does not distinguish itself from its mother¹⁴¹ or from the world around. At this stage, according to Kristeva, the infant is dominated by “drives”. This is the stage at which the infant is closest to the pure materiality where everything is experienced as pleasurable without any acknowledgement of existence, which Lacan terms “the Real”.¹⁴²

The second stage of infant development occurs roughly between the ages of 4-8 months. During this time in an individual's development a separation between the self and the maternal begins to occur thus creating boundaries between self and other. Following Lacan, for Kristeva, these boundaries must be in place before the acquisition of language is possible. Also with Lacan, symbolic language will be

¹³⁹ Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* Routledge, 1990, p.33.

¹⁴⁰ We shall examine what Kristeva means by this term later in this chapter.

¹⁴¹ A full examination of Kristeva's understanding of the role of the maternal follows in chapter 6 of this thesis where we consider the maternal as M/Other.

¹⁴² *Écrits : a selection* (by) Jacques Lacan, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan, Tavistock Publications, 1977. See also Philippe Julien, *Jacques Lacan's return to Freud : the real, the symbolic and the imaginary*, New York University Press, 1994 and Madan Sarup's, *Jacques Lacan*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992.

connoted in masculine terms. These boundaries, and the development of male symbolic language that will follow them, mark the emergence of a notion of the “I”.

One key difference Kristeva makes in her adoption of broadly Lacanian theories of infant development is the insertion of an intermediate stage between the first stage of the “chora” and the third stage, which relates to Lacan’s “mirror stage.” This intermediate stage is a pre-linguistic stage that Kristeva associates with the “abject”. At this point, as individuation is in its earliest state of development, the threat of falling back into the pre-linguistic stage of the “chora” strikes the subject with fear and horror. To fall back into the undifferentiated “chora” means giving up all the developing linguistic structures by which the social world is ordered and gains meaning. This intermediate phase is unique to Kristeva. For Kristeva the feeling of threat, and the fear of the “abject”, is key to heralding the third stage of development. At the third stage the infant will begin to understand and use symbols, partially in response to the threat of the “abject”. As we shall see later in this chapter, the role of the “abject” continues to exist and threatens the notion of the stable self after it has been formalised.

For Kristeva, this intermediate stage gives way at around 6-18 months of age to what Lacan terms the “mirror stage.” Both Kristeva and Lacan see this as a defining moment in the creation of selfhood. The “mirror stage” is present as the young child identifies with his own image; an identity Lacan terms the “Ideal-I” or “Ideal ego”.¹⁴³ This recognition of the self’s image precedes the entrance into language, after which the subject can understand the place of the image of the self within a larger social order. This “Ideal-I” is important precisely because it represents to the subject a simplified, bounded form of the self, as opposed to the turbulent chaotic perceptions, feelings and needs felt in the previous stages. Importantly, this “Ideal-I” is a construction rather than a given of identity. According to Lacan and Kristeva this creation of an ideal version of the self gives pre-verbal impetus to the creation of phantasies in the fully developed subject. It establishes what Lacan terms the “imaginary order” and this order continues to assert its influence on the subject even after the subject enters the next stage of development.

¹⁴³ Lacan, op. cit.

The final stage of development occurs at approximately 18 months to 4 years of age. The most important occurrence in relation to the emergence of selfhood occurs at this stage. The acquisition of language here further separates the developing “self” from its former connection to “the Real”. Language acquisition at this stage rests upon the ability to differentiate. Once the differential system of language is entered upon, it forever determines the self’s perception of the world. For both Lacan and Kristeva, this explains why the intrusion of materiality (termed “the Real” for Lacan and the “semiotic” for Kristeva) becomes a traumatic event after this stage. Kristeva adds that language is ultimately a “fetish,” an effort to resolve the trauma we inherently experience in our relation to death and materiality,

"It is perhaps unavoidable that, when a subject confronts the factitiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish?"¹⁴⁴

Having briefly outlined the four main stages of an individual’s subjective development, we turn now to a closer examination of the role of the semiotic in Kristeva’s schema. In this we seek to extrapolate exactly how she sees the subject as being created.¹⁴⁵

3.2 The Chora and the Semiotic

As we have seen, in Revolution in Poetic Language Kristeva adopts Lacan’s fundamental distinction between the imaginary and symbolic. Lacan’s imaginary becomes her semiotic. In this she makes a number of adaptations, of which perhaps the most important is that the semiotic is self-disruptive, and has a more ambiguous and less historical role in subject formation than Lacan’s ‘imaginary’. Kristeva’s semiotic persists as an ‘other’ to the subject and will be a continuing presence in the process by which it is de-centred.

¹⁴⁴ Kristeva RPL, p.37

¹⁴⁵ Whilst the parameters of our thesis will not allow for a discussion here, we note that Lacan’s theories of the development of selfhood are contentious. A summary of the positions critiquing Lacan is made in Criticism and Lacan: On Language, Structure and the Unconscious, ed. Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit. See especially “I-ing Lacan” pp.96-108 by Norman Holland for a reader-response critique of Lacan’s theory of language acquisition and the development of selfhood and “Signifying the Father’s Desire: Lacan in a Feminist’s Gaze” pp.111-119 from Jane Flax’s Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West, Oxford, Berkley 1990 for a feminist critique of Lacan.

Kristeva suggests that before the creation of language and the notion of a separate “I”, the child’s experience is of the ‘semiotic.’ These initial ‘signifiers’ are the raw material of later-acquired language, which will come to overlay the semiotic foundation, as the individual identity of the child emerges. However, for Kristeva, the semiotic is never fully replaced, but is merely superseded by the learnt symbolic ordering.¹⁴⁶ It continues to exist, much in the way of an “other”¹⁴⁷, and disrupts and challenges the apparent coherence of the symbolic order.

“To summarize briefly, the two trends designate two modalities of what is, for us, the same signifying process. We shall call the first ‘the semiotic’ and the second, ‘the symbolic’. These two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metanarrative, theory, poetry, etc.) involved.”¹⁴⁸

The semiotic and symbolic are never experienced in isolation. It is the dynamic relationship between them that will shape both the nature of discourse and the emerging subject.

We shall now examine the notion of the semiotic more closely so as to assess its role in the creation of the speaking subject. This will initially involve a consideration of Kristeva’s notion of the chora, the space where the semiotic is first experienced.

The notion of the “chora”, the Greek word for ‘womb’ or ‘enclosed space’, is unique to Kristeva and one of the most important contributions she makes in her re-working of Lacan’s psychoanalysis. This term is appropriated from Plato’s *Timaeus*, where the chora is described as an amorphous receptacle or space from which form emerges.

Plato links this space to ideas of the maternal,

“Wherefore the mother and receptacle of all created and visible and in any way sensible things is...an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible and is most incomprehensible.”¹⁴⁹

Plato describes a process whereby a deity impregnates this amorphous space, so producing ordered forms. Kristeva appropriates this term linking it to the first stage of infant development. She sees the male symbolic order of language, Lacan’s “Law of

¹⁴⁶ Kristeva RPL, DL.

¹⁴⁷ A notion we shall return to in chapter 6 of this thesis.

¹⁴⁸ Kristeva RPL, p.96

¹⁴⁹ Plato *Timaeus*(51a)

the Father”, as analogous to the deity impregnating the chora and producing the symbolically constructed self and the sense of order which language provides. Kristeva is keen to continue Plato’s notion that the chora is linked to the maternal. For Kristeva, the chora is the undifferentiated space shared by the body of the mother and child. It is,

“Receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father and consequently maternally connoted... An essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases.”¹⁵⁰

In her essay “Women’s Time” Kristeva sees the chora as,

“Matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics.”¹⁵¹

For Kristeva, the chora is not to be directly associated with the body of the mother. The chora is neither a ‘sign’ nor a ‘signifier’, but is rather “generated in order to attain this signifying position.”¹⁵²

Elizabeth Wright describes the Kristevan chora as:

“The unnameable, unspeakable corporeality of the inextricably tangled mother/child dyad which makes the semiotic possible.”¹⁵³

The semiotic chora is split in the later “thetic” phase as the subject begins to attribute difference: between subject and object, self and other. Once the acquisition of the overlay of symbolic language is fully achieved, the chora is felt only as a disruption upon thetic language or, as in the case of poetic language, a disruption from within language itself.¹⁵⁴ Kristeva emphasises that the chora is not the seat of semiotics, but the process by which the semiotic pulses were first gathered. In this way she avoids falling back into any essentialist notion of the self, which she has rejected from the outset. In other words, the chora is not an actuality to be possessed, but rather it is itself a process. In the notion of the chora Kristeva offers an important revision of

¹⁵⁰ Kristeva, RPL, p.133.

¹⁵¹ Kristeva, “Women’s Time” first published in *Signs* 7:1 (1981) pp.13-35, this quote p.13.

¹⁵² Kristeva RPL p.94. We address the issue of what the maternal body signifies in chapter 6 of this thesis.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychology: A Critical Dictionary* Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, p.195.

¹⁵⁴ A point we return to in chapter 6, where semiotic-rich poetic language is seen as an ‘other’ to the stable self.

Lacan. Lacan rejects the possibility of the female speaking subject (the symbolic order is male) and insists that the desire for the mother must be repressed in order to form an illusion of stable selfhood. Kristeva reminds us that without the maternally positioned chora there would be no space from which the subject emerges. She goes on to insist that while the desire for the mother is repressed it continues to exist, as the “semiotic”, and can subvert the male order by its multiple meanings and sounds which recall the choratic experience. She contradicts Lacan and insists that the Law of the Father is not all that persists in subjectivity and so makes a place for the maternal and feminine.

There are other noticeable and important contrasts between Kristeva and Lacan. According to Lacan, the unconscious is structured like a language being susceptible to articulation, while remaining equivocal. For Lacan the unconscious is fundamentally symbolic. Subjecthood is constituted as the pain of a child’s separation from the primary and simple identification with the mother and is symbolised as ‘lack’ (“castration”). On the contrary, for Kristeva, the unconscious is that which disrupts the symbolic.

Clearly, for Kristeva, the element termed ‘the chora’ is the means by which the encounter with the semiotic is made possible and becomes incorporated into self-identity. The chora is therefore the presupposition of the encounter. Kristeva’s thesis hinges upon the persistence of the chora and the semiotic, as existent beneath the apparent unity of the symbolic.

The persistence of the chora is perhaps indicative of Kristeva’s unwillingness to deconstruct identity further. The chora is not any seat of essential selfhood, being in itself a process, and extremely provisionally articulated. In an extensive footnote to Revolution in Poetic Language she says,

“How far can one think an articulation of what is not yet singular but is nevertheless necessary? All we may say then, to make it intelligible, is that it is amorphous but that it ‘is of such and such a quality’ not even an index or something in particular (‘this or that’).”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ RPL, p.126.

Kristeva appears to take great pains not to give the chora substance. It is not a place, but a “space”. It is “amorphous” but has given qualities. At the same time this “space” persists, it has a function; it is universal. It might appear that in her treatment of the notion of the chora Kristeva is caught between deconstructing the subject through literary criticism and retaining some element of identity through psychoanalysis. Toril Moi suggests that Kristeva has a professionally invested predisposition to preserve some place for human subjectivity, rather than continue the deconstruction of identity further.

“It is Kristeva’s psychoanalytic practice that makes her put the case with such force for an unstable and always threatened, yet nevertheless real and necessary, form of subjectivity. The analyst is after all engaged in the task of healing her patient, and has therefore to provide them with some kind of ‘identity’, which will enable them to live in the world, that is to say, within the symbolic order dominated by the law.”¹⁵⁶

Leaving aside the ambiguity surrounding the reasons for Kristeva’s assurance that the chora persists, we can see, from her writings, that the chora and the semiotic share in the function of disrupting male symbolic structure and language. It is this disruptive function that is key for the speaking subject to be a process rather than an entity. The function of the semiotic is to bring about a dynamic disruption that will ultimately defy symbolic order.

3.3 The Speaking Subject as Process

In our thesis so far we have seen that in Revolution in Poetic Language Kristeva theorises how language is constituted and meaning created and then how the female semiotic breaks this in a continual process of re-presentation. It is the action of the semiotic that gives rise to the unstable and ever-changing speaking subject, which Kristeva has described as,

“[An] eternally premature baby, prematurely separated from the world of the mother and the world of things, (which) remedies the situation by using an invincible weapon: linguistic symbolization...by constructing a network where drives, signifiers and meanings join together and split asunder in a dynamic and enigmatic process.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Toril Moi’s Introduction to The Kristeva Reader, 1986, p.14.

¹⁵⁷ Julia Kristeva in an interview with Françoise van Rossum-Guyon reprinted as “Talking About Polylogue” in French Feminist Thought: A Reader ed. Toril Moi, Blackwell, 1987.

The speaking subject is, therefore, the defensive illusion created as the individual finds itself in the midst of a process of semiotic disruption of the symbolic. The “premature baby” that is the speaking subject, constructs symbolic order through language to defend its own tenuous position within the network of discursive reality.

“Identifying the semiotic disposition means in fact identifying the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity for renewing the order in which he is inescapably caught up; and that capacity is, for the subject, the capacity for enjoyment.”¹⁵⁸

It is clear, thus far, that Kristeva’s thesis utterly rejects the notion of the centred or substantive self. In its place, as we have examined, Kristeva offers a reworking of Lacanian psychoanalysis where the self is created through the continual disruption of semiotics upon the symbolic order. The result of this is not a finished or static self, but rather a dynamic process; a decentred speaking subject. We refer to this process as if it were an entity. For Kristeva, even this tenuous identification of selfhood, of the subject, must ultimately call itself into question,

“The subject of the semiotic metalanguage must, however briefly, call himself in question, must emerge from the protective shell of a transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his connection with that negativity – drive-governed, but also social, political and historical – which rends and renews the social code.”¹⁵⁹

If one were to seek a definition of the type of process that Kristeva characterises as the subject, it would be a process of continual disruption. The themes of displacement and disruption have been used to describe the overarching characteristic of Kristeva’s writing as a whole. In his now famous description Roland Barthes says,

“Julia Kristeva changes the order of things: she always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud; what she displaces is the already-said, that is to say, the insistence of the signified; what she subverts is the authority of the monologic science and of filiations.”¹⁶⁰

This process of dispersal and disintegration has popularly been termed “the death of the self.” For Kristeva, this ‘death’ has its roots in a process acted upon by both

¹⁵⁸ Kristeva, “The System and the Speaking Subject” in Toril Moi, op.cit. p.29. We shall comment on the notion of enjoyment – *jouissance*- in ch.9 of this thesis. We use this quote here to explain how Kristeva sees the self as “shifting” in a process of re-defining itself and its arena of discourse.

¹⁵⁹ Kristeva, “The System and the Speaking Subject” op. cit., p. 33.

¹⁶⁰ This quote is taken from Roland Barthes reviewing *Semiotike* in “La Quinzaine Litteraire.”

external and internal stimuli. Externally, it is the semiotics within art and poetic language and the persistence of the abject and the chora prompting ‘rupture’ of the tenuous self; leaving only the possibility for a range of unstable subject positions. However, internally, the subject is also fundamentally divided. Kristeva agrees with Lacan here; the subject contains both the semiotic (‘Imaginary’) and the symbolic. Disruption is an inner state. Therefore she says,

“The ‘I’, subject of a conceptual quest, is also a subject of differentiation – of sexual contradictions.”¹⁶¹

In describing the subject as a disruptive process, Kristeva focuses on the theme of sexual multiplicity within each individual. Given her emphasis, our own examination of her notion of the subject as process shall necessarily include a thorough consideration of her understanding of multiplicitous and contradictory sexuality.

Kristeva describes the notion of internal disruption and the linking of this to sexual multiplicity:

“All speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning [male] as well as that which multiplies pulverizes and then finally revives it [female].”¹⁶²

This is an instance where the importance of the arena of the speaking subject is important. We recall that, for Kristeva, reality is discursive. In this she is decidedly opposed to realism. Here, as in the case of the semiotic “feminine”, Kristeva is not connoting the experience of men or women, but rather the theoretical and discursive realities of sexuality alone. Although Kristeva (tentatively?) uses the word “bisexuality” in the above quote, the multiple identity opportunities infer more than two sexual identities, indeed an infinite variety available to each individual. With no external meaning behind signification an endless possibility for change and multiplicitous identity creation becomes possible. It marks the end of the pre-modern and modern preoccupation with a core identity and accepts the understanding that,

“Both ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are woven of multiple, asymmetrical strands of difference, charged with multifaceted, dramatic narratives of domination and struggle.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Kristeva DIL_p.167.

¹⁶² Kristeva RPL, p.165.

¹⁶³ Haraway cited by Elaine Storkey Created or Constructed: the great gender debate 2000, p.42.

If, with Kristeva, the dualism of sexual difference is rejected, the multiplicitous subject can enjoy any number of sexual and gender identifications.

“As a result, a strange body comes into being, one that is neither man nor woman, young nor old. It made Freud dream of sublimation, and the Christians of angels, and it continues to put to modern rationality the embarrassing question of an identity that is sexual (among other things), and which is constantly remade and reborn through the impetus provided by a play of signs.”¹⁶⁴

For Kristeva the post-modern defeat of the powers of constructions such as ‘gender’ or ‘sex’, she imagines, will free each individual to re-position their ‘self’ within a matrix of experience and identity, to bring “a strange body” into being. Such a revolution must begin with an acceptance that subjectivity is created by language: the belief in ‘the speaking subject’.

“In my view, a critique of this ‘semiology of systems’ and of its phenomenological foundations is possible only if it starts from a theory of meaning which must necessarily be a theory of the speaking subject.”¹⁶⁵

In summary then, Kristeva identifies subjectivity as a facet of language, and language disruption as a characteristic of female semiotic otherness. This disruption in language and meaning leads to a further fundamental challenge to the subject’s sense of static identity, and opens the way for a radical dispersal of identity. The myth of the unified, transcendent ‘self’ is de-bunked as the unconscious is prioritised (as per Freud and Lacan). The speaking subject is therefore merely apparent in language, having no necessary form, no given sex or gender.

For the purposes of our project, we may meaningfully describe this as the pitching of semiology against metaphysics (ontology). Kristeva shares in the anti-humanist project to ‘dethrone’ or debunk the myth of the transcendent, unified self. This former notion is, as we have seen, largely attributed to Cartesian epistemology, where priority is given to the self-consciousness and rationality. This notion of the self has been described as the “myth of the number one” by the feminist theorist Susan

¹⁶⁴ Julia Kristeva in an interview with Françoise van Rossum-Guyon reprinted as “Talking About Polylogue” pp.110-117 *French Feminist Thought: An Anthology* ed. Toril Moi, Blackwell, 1987, p.111.

¹⁶⁵ Kristeva, RPL p.29

Bordo.”¹⁶⁶ This privileging was challenged and reversed by Freud and Lacan in their insistence upon the influence of the unconscious, and further emphasised by the post-structuralist understanding of subjectivity as a facet of language, both notions being found within Kristeva’s work.

3.4 Some Feminist Critiques of Adopting Lacanian Psychoanalysis

Until now this chapter has outlined Kristeva’s adoption and adaptation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Despite the revisions to Lacan’s schema, many contemporary feminists do not share Kristeva’s keenness to adopt Lacanian psychoanalysis.

The feminist critique of Kristeva begins at her adoption of Lacan’s “mirror stage”, where the infant begins to recognise difference and separation such as its own self-recognition. At the mirror stage the thetic infant begins to encounter what Lacan and Kristeva term “elementary signifiers.” As we have seen this process begins the sense of separation of the subject from their experience of external stimuli and will be completed in the Oedipus complex where the child uses representations to designate its experiences. Contentiously for feminist critics, Kristeva agrees with Lacan that this process of subject-creation occurs through the child’s relation to ‘the Phallus’ as master signifier.

“...The phallus totalizes the effects of signifieds as having been produced by the signifier: the phallus is itself a signifier. In other words, the phallus is not given in the utterance but instead refers outside itself to a precondition that makes enunciation possible.”¹⁶⁷

Many feminists do not see in Lacan a satisfactorily extensive revision of the sexism and biologism inherent in Freud’s work.¹⁶⁸ These critics assert that Freud’s distinction between the biological penis and the “Phallus,” a fantasised emblem of power and sexuality has been somewhat collapsible (and here Lacan and Kristeva would also agree). Lacan has attempted to vindicate psychoanalysis against charges of biologism

¹⁶⁶ Susan Bordo “(Re)Writing the Body: the politics and poetics of female eroticism” 1986 pp.7-29 of The Female Body in Western Culture ed. S Suleiman, Harvard University Press, 1986.

¹⁶⁷ Kristeva, RPL, p47-48.

¹⁶⁸ See Judith Butler’s “Gender trouble, Feminist Theory and Psychoanalytic Discourse” Ch.13 of Feminism/Postmodernism, Linda Nicholson ed., Routledge, 1990 and also Jane Flax’s Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Post-Modernism in the Contemporary West University of California Press, 1990.

by stressing that the “phallus” is a “signifier” rather than a biological organ. He keenly distinguishes between the “symbolic” of the phallus in his schema, rather than the real function (of possession or lack) in Freud’s system.

In support of Lacan, Elizabeth Wright says,

“The distinction between penis and phallus enables Lacan to problematize Freud’s biologism and to replace it with a more social, linguistic and historical account.”¹⁶⁹

However, Lacan’s attempt to see both sexes as equally ‘lacking’ in the possession of the phallus has elicited feminist derision. Many feminist theorists claim, in disagreement with Kristeva, that the phallus unjustifiably remains the ‘master signifier’ around which other signifiers revolve.¹⁷⁰ They also contend, as Wright points out, that:

“The phallus cannot be a neutral signifier; the relationship between the penis and the phallus is not arbitrary but is clearly socially and politically motivated.”¹⁷¹

At this fundamental level, Kristeva’s theories begin to be at odds with many other contemporary feminist theories. Her confident adoption of Lacanian psychoanalysis can be seen as the fundamental point from which her uneasy relationship to feminism originates.

There are further internal tensions apparent in Kristeva’s thesis. An obvious inherent dilemma is how to speak of the semiotic in thetic (symbolic) terms. For Kristeva, there is no way back to the pre-Oedipal ‘babble’ of pure semiotics. From this we can infer that Kristeva is suggesting that the desire to return to a pure semiotic realm, which one might say characterises Helen Cixous’ work,¹⁷² is not admissible since the semiotic is carried within the symbolic once the process of individuation is underway.

With no return to pure semiotics permissible, Kristeva’s own theory is under the constant, and we believe unresolved, tension of putting the “unsayable” semiotic into

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Wright (ed.), *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: a critical dictionary*, Blackwell, 1992, p.322.

¹⁷⁰ See “Signifying the Father’s Desire: Lacan in a Feminist’s Gaze” pp.111-119 from Jane Flax’s *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West*, Oxford, Berkley 1990.

¹⁷¹ Wright, op. cit. p.322.

¹⁷² See Helene Cixous, *The Body and the Text*, Harvester, 1990.

the written, symbolic words of her doctoral thesis. This tension is perhaps apparent in the complex and disrupted syntax and writing style Kristeva adopts. The complexity of Kristeva's writing has received a mixed reception. Perhaps less generous or suspicious critics may charge Kristeva with a level of obscurity that renders her theories absurd. However, in defence of Kristeva on this point, it would be expected that in seeking to put semiotic notions into symbolic language, the language itself should necessarily become disjointed and disrupted. It is an example found in much post-modernist writing where the means of expressing theories of disruption and deconstruction elicit a complex and obscure writing style.¹⁷³ The medium is very much linked to the message in Kristeva's work. However, one might say that the difficulty in reading Kristeva has contributed to the somewhat cautious response to her work among non-French audiences.

Whilst the parameters of this paper prohibit a full discussion here, we believe that it is important to attempt to briefly delineate differences between the "French Feminists" Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva.¹⁷⁴ In attempting this we will reject previous scholarship that has falsely homogenised their work, and express some of the advantages we believe Kristeva's work offers our project.

We have already hinted at the distinction Kristeva makes herself in distancing herself from the "écriture féminine" project of Cixous. As Rachel Bowlby rather lightly puts it,

"Cixous is knocked out for subscribing to a notion of écriture féminine which finally sweeps away all analytical power in a vague celebration of anarchic fluidity and endless writing."¹⁷⁵

Kristeva distances herself from such a project that will ascribe the anarchic, fluid writing style to one particular essentialist sex: that of women. There is the danger of

¹⁷³ Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" provides a good example of this, whereby, not only the syntax of the writing is complex, but also the text itself is interrupted by a series of poems that cut into the layout and confuse the usual reading pattern. The physical disruption of the text becomes a visual and textual representation of her theory that the semiotic breaks through its symbolic overlay in the experience of maternity. "Stabat Mater", *In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith* Trans A. Goldhammer, New York Columbia University Press. This essay is reprinted *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi, Basil Blackwell, 1986 pp. 160-185.

¹⁷⁴ In this, among other secondary sources we shall refer to Elizabeth Wright (ed.) *Feminism and Psychology: A Critical Dictionary*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, Rachel Bowlby *Still Crazy After All These Years* Routledge, 1999 and Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.) *New French Feminisms*, Harvester Press, 1981.

¹⁷⁵ Rachel Bowlby op.cit. p.121

biologism in Cixous' emphasis on 'writing the body'. Kristeva's work keenly avoids all such notions of the 'marked' body preferring a more wholehearted adoption of post-modern notions of biology as a discourse vulnerable to deconstruction.¹⁷⁶

The relationship between Irigaray and Kristeva is somewhat more difficult to delineate. Irigaray's work offers a thesis whereby feminine counter-mythology is seen as a way to subvert the 'phallogocentrism' of male logical coherence.¹⁷⁷ By this we mean that Irigaray seeks to re-introduce the feminine to a place of powerful prominence by identifying it with the irrational, bodily and erratic, an inverse of the male rational, social and coherent order. At first glance this seems more akin to Kristeva's approach. However, Irigaray is perhaps equally vulnerable to an unhelpful slide into essentialism as Cixous, in that she views women as privileged in the new counter-mythology, having special access to the feminine, and she emphasises the female body as a site of *jouissance*.¹⁷⁸ In this Irigaray might be said to reinstate biological essentialism, the very notion Kristeva will go on to deconstruct. While, for Irigaray, sex may be a pragmatic category, she emphatically claims that it must be used in order that the voices of women have some place to be heard. One reading of Irigaray (perhaps Kristeva's?) might connote her as an essentialist, yet her essentialism may also be understood as a necessary construct which, once established, can be dismantled at a future date when the hegemony of the male *specula* culture is countered.¹⁷⁹ As we have seen, Kristeva is unwilling to venture down this same path. She insists upon the complete deconstruction of notions of sexual difference.

In attempting to situate herself within the difficult grouping of "French Feminism," Kristeva considers her relationship to feminism *per se*. Kristeva's essay "Women's Time" (1981) proposes that feminism be seen as having been through two not entirely separable generations, or "times". The first generation of feminists appeared unconcerned with sexual differentiation and argued for access to social power within existing structures, from which women are excluded. The second generation rejects this very structure as masculinist and proposes a feminine alternative: a feminine

¹⁷⁶ We shall return to this theme and the problematic effects in regards to corporeality in ch.6 where we consider critiques of Kristeva's use of the maternal body as subject-less.

¹⁷⁷ Marks & de Courtivron, *op.cit.*

¹⁷⁸ We shall return to consider Kristeva's use of this term, which is perhaps a possible *telos* for the subject in French feminism, in chapter 9 of this thesis.

¹⁷⁹ Rachel Bowlby, *op. cit.* agrees with this reading of Irigaray, refusing to classify her as an "essentialist".

vision of social relations. Following this historic summary Kristeva imagines what a third generation of feminism would look like and views her own work as part of such a new generation. She sees such a project as having the primary aim of ending binary sexual identification all together. Instead, she argues, human subjectivity should be seen as intrinsically plural and multifaceted. There will be no place for essentialism or biologism in such a third generation. In this essay, Kristeva might be said to infer that the other “French Feminists” continue to be too closely allied to the second generation project of creating a feminine alternative culture to properly enter the third generation of sexual dissolution. From this we can tentatively conclude that Kristeva is the most post-modern and deconstructionalist of the three “French Feminists”. She appears the most willing to be post-feminist, in that she disallows the category of “women” in any realist sense, or even as a pragmatic category on the way to such dissolution, as Irigaray does. She perhaps exceeds both Cixous and Irigaray in the extent to which she is wary of essentialism and biologism. For the purposes of our project then, Kristeva might be said to offer the most decidedly post-modern notion of the self from among the “French Feminists”. She might appear, therefore, to be the most useful partner in seeking a theological response to post-modernism’s radical notions on selfhood.

However, we note that the programme for a third generation feminism is not without its critics. In (Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism Susan Bordo (1986) identifies that, in contradistinction to the discourses of race, class and ethnicity, it is within feminist analysis alone that there has been the speedy uptake of the notion of deconstructing the very categories which these voices formerly insisted were recognised. In the case of feminism this has been the deconstruction of the categories of gender and now sex. We certainly have yet to witness a proletariat call for the dissolution of class difference or the deconstruction of the idea of blackness from African-American theorists! For Bordo, Kristeva’s project represents a worrying turn of events which, she suggests, could play into the hands of the masculinist status quo, and it is one that should warrant caution in the use of post-modern deconstruction for feminists. It could be argued, with Bordo, that the fear of universalisation has affected contemporary feminists to a greater degree than other social and cultural analysts. As we have suggested, this is perhaps most evident in

Kristeva's work where the adoption of a post-modern understanding of identity can be seen as just such a response to the fear of universalisation.¹⁸⁰ This could be an explanation of Kristeva's continuing deconstruction of the notions of gender and sexual difference within her examination of the self as a process.

Kristeva's speaking subject can therefore be summarised as a dynamic process within a discursive reality. Within such a process even the "already-saids" of sexual difference are to be rejected in favour of a notion of subjectivity in which the individual is free to choose from a spectrum of sexual identities which have nothing to do with supposed biological type, but everything to do with discursive reality.

In our assessment of Kristeva's notion of the subject as boundless process, exemplified by the self as sexually unmarked, we bear in mind Susan Bordo's challenge to post-modern feminists (or post-feminists) that post-modern notions of identity have exchanged the Cartesian "myth of a view from nowhere" for the co-related myth of "a view from everywhere." Bordo sees in postmodernist schemas such as Kristeva's the exchange of the Cartesian metaphors of spectatorship for post-modern metaphors of dance, the dance of the disembodied "shape-shifter."¹⁸¹ The essence (for want of a better word) of our debate concerns the extent to which deconstruction, of the type carried out by Kristeva, fosters a notion of the subject which is equally 'mythically' transcendent as that of the Enlightenment self. Given these critiques, has Kristeva unwittingly upheld the modern myth of transcendence? Under the Cartesian understanding of the transcendent self, postmodernists argue that there is the notion of self-dislocation by virtue of the privileging of rationality to allow, as it were, a view from above reality. Are we witnessing here a replacement of such a modernist myth with a dislocation in terms of the subject's ability to metamorphosise through reality in postmodernism?

¹⁸⁰ See chapter 2 of this thesis where we consider possible motives for the post-modern rejection of universals. For Bordo (op.cit.) feminism is in less danger of the "totalization" tendency of feminists than of an increasingly paralyzing anxiety over falling into ethnocentricity or "essentialism".

¹⁸¹ Bordo, "(Re)Writing the Body; the politics and poetics of Female Eroticism" pp.7-29 of The Female Body in Western Culture S. Suleiman (ed.) Harvard University Press, 1986.

Have Kristeva and the ‘total social-construction’¹⁸² theorists of identity underplayed and disregarded the extent to which we are, in Susan Bordo’s words “centric”. Do we really enjoy the extensive ability explored in Kristeva’s theory to adopt and reject an endless variety of sexual and personal identities? Or are we fundamentally defined by the particularity of our bodies, and so forth? We shall return to Kristeva’s treatment of maternity as a process without an agent in discussing this, and consider these themes in a dialogue with Rahner’s theory of the person as hearer that arguably offers greater credence to the facet of particularity.¹⁸³

Before turning to such an engagement, we turn to the third and final foci of our examination of the creation of subjectivity, which is Kristeva’s privileging of poetry and religion and her exploration of the borderline patient.

3.5 Poetry and Religion

For Kristeva, art in its many forms produces the subject, rather than the more commonly held assumption that the subject produces art,

“The work of art, the production, the practice in which (the artist) is engaged extends beyond, and reshapes subjectivity.”¹⁸⁴

In the interview which we have quoted from above, Kristeva advocates “aesthetic practices” in the construction of subjectivity, in that they explore the possibility of multiplicitous identifications: a subject with a myriad of possible identities, including an array of gender identifications.

According to Kristeva in art, music and literature semiotic processes are liberated from the unconscious. This is particularly so in avant-garde poetry. In the final chapters of Revolution in Poetic Language, and using the poetry of Mallarme and Lautreamont as examples, Kristeva describes how the primary processes of rhythm and sounds are liberated from the unconscious. She relates the use of sound in poetic language to primary sexual impulses. For instance, the sounds ‘Mama’ and ‘Papa’ set the nasal ‘m’ against the plosive ‘p’. The ‘m’ denotes maternal ‘orality’ while the ‘p’

¹⁸² We use the term “total social construction” to distinguish Kristeva’s thoroughly post-modern and post-structuralist approach from feminism more broadly which has always sought to highlight the extent to which gender is socially constructed.

¹⁸³ We shall consider this theme in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

¹⁸⁴ Perry Meisel, “Interview with Julia Kristeva” in Partisan Review Vol. LI no.1 1984, p131.

relates to male ‘anality’. The final chapters of her thesis work through examples of how in avant-garde poetry, with its use of primary sound and rhythm, the semiotic re-surfaces to disrupt the symbolic order. She suggests that poetic language revisits, through the function of sound, the pre-Oedipal semiotic rupturing the symbolic order. In this way poetry is seen to resist ‘the Law-of-the-Father’ and bring about a semiotic revolution.

According to Kristeva, poetry is the most potent key to unlock semiotic power in that the semiotic sounds surfaces within the symbolic word structures of the poem.

The thetic, or symbolic, meaning arrives carrying within it the semiotic rhythm and irrational suggestion of poetry. It is a middle ground, or meeting place for both forms of language and meaning. In agreement with other French Feminists Kristeva sees poetic language as offering a challenge to the dominant rational ‘Male’ symbolic discourse.¹⁸⁵ Poetry is described as having a transgressive value,

“From its roots in ritual, poetry retains the expenditure of the thetic, its opening onto semiotic vehemence and its capacity for letting *jouissance* come through...Poetry – more precisely, poetic language – reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it. The theory of the unconscious seeks the very thing that poetic language practices within and against the social order: the ultimate means of its transformation or subversion, the precondition for its survival and revolution.”¹⁸⁶

In writing on poetic language Anna Smith describes the shift in perception and disruption of the coherent order as a theme of both philosophy and literature,

“In different ways philosophy and literature have sought procedures that would estrange the object of perception in order to render it paradoxically more beautiful, more knowable, or both.”¹⁸⁷

For Kristeva, the power of poetry, and most especially avant-garde poetry, is to allow the semiotic level of language to break through the symbolic (thetic) overlay of later-learned signification. It has a disruptive force to “rupture” meaning, and ultimately fragment the subject.

¹⁸⁵ Although the parameters of this thesis disallow this, a worthwhile comparison might be offered of the increasingly poetic and discordant writing style of a number of feminist theologians, such as Mary Daly. Here too, the poetic use of language and the disruption of syntax and vocabulary are used to express the feminine challenge to patriarchal discourse. See Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, Beacon Press, 1978. She addresses this point specifically in the “Original Pre-Introduction” to *Beyond God the Father*, 1986 edition.

¹⁸⁶ Kristeva RPL p.80-81

¹⁸⁷ Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: readings of exile and estrangement*, Macmillan Press, 1996, p.3.

“We view the subject in language as decentering the transcendental ego, cutting through it and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminary moment of the process, which is itself always acted upon by the relation to the other dominated by the death drive and its productive reiteration of the ‘signifier’.”¹⁸⁸

For Kristeva, the nature of encounter with the semiotic poetic language is one whereby what was ‘taken as read’, and incontrovertible, becomes alienated and strange, dislocated from familiarity. This is the purpose and character of poetry and as such it is instrumental in the process of continual disruption and de-centring of the illusory centred self. Art and poetry are seen as the catalysts to undertake this journey towards the de-centred subjectivity. Such a journey may seem initially threatening, since it involves the rejection of our notion of having a stable and static sense of identity.

On this John Lechte says,

“To be challenged by art is to be confronted by the void of non-meaning and the prospect of our own hell, our own suffering caused by a loss of identity inducing our melancholies and the truly tragic aspect of being. Once to ‘travel hell’ was possible: for God was love (agape); now, God is dead and we are alone and afraid of the challenge of the void.”¹⁸⁹

Acknowledging the enormity of the task, in Desire in Language Kristeva asks, “What discourse, if not that of religion would be able to support this adventure?”¹⁹⁰

What are we to make of this question? Is Kristeva being ironic here?

Joy Greybeal asks,

“Is she saying, “It surely must not be a religion?” Or is she saying, “Whatever it is, it will in some sense be a religion?” What could take the place of the sheltering function of religion without simply replicating it?”¹⁹¹

Could Kristeva be suggesting that the way beyond the religious (and other) projections of the stable self and its legacy of dualistic difference would inevitably be in some sense a “religious” act?

¹⁸⁸ Kristeva RPL p.98

¹⁸⁹ John Lechte, Julia Kristeva, Routledge, 1990 p.219.

¹⁹⁰ DIL p.210

¹⁹¹ Joy Greybeal’s essay “Joying in the Truth of Self-Division” appears in Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: religion, woman and psychoanalysis ed. David Crownfield, State University of New York Press, 1992, p.133-134.

Graybeal suggests that Kristeva does indeed speak of art in an “apocalyptic, if not religious way”, suggesting that Kristeva sees aesthetic practices as an alternative to religious projection. Can we infer that Kristeva is seeing art as a new religion?

Certainly in Powers of Horror she says,

“The artistic experience...appears as the essential component of religiosity” and that “it is destined to survive the collapse of historical forms of religion.”¹⁹²

What does Kristeva make of Christianity in this respect? Is the Christian religion a place for semiotics to break through the male symbolic order? Why should Kristeva argue that it should, or will, be superseded by “artistic experience”?

In answering this question we are struck by the extent to which Kristeva engages with Christianity in her various writings. She writes extensively on the Cult of the Virgin Mary and offers a thorough exploration of Christian mysticism.¹⁹³

In her early writings Kristeva sees religion, and Christianity especially, as a central pillar supporting the masculine symbolic order, as a tool of feminine repression. This is the standard psychoanalytic critique of religion. She says,

“We maintain therefore that science and theological dogma are doxic. By repressing the production of doxy, they make the thetic belief from which the quest for truth departs; but the path thus programmed is circular and merely returns to its point of departure.”¹⁹⁴

In other words religion is fixated with justifying its beliefs as dogmas. In this they never question the psychological drives which might explain how these beliefs might be said to arise. In this, she argues religion supports a male symbolic order where truth is dogmatic rather than explore the greater mysteries and disruptive forces of the semiotic.

¹⁹² PH p.17, quoted by Graybeal op.cit. p.134.

¹⁹³ Of special interest here are “Stabat Mater” appearing in The Kristeva Reader ed. Toril Moi, Basil Blackwell 1986 pp. 160-185, In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith trans A. Goldhammer, New York Columbia University Press, 1987 (abbreviated hereafter to IBL) and Kristeva, Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection Translated by Leon S Roudiez New York, Columbia University Press, 1986 abbreviated hereafter to PH.

¹⁹⁴ Kristeva RPL, p.59.

However, Kristeva does see the semiotic as a force apparent in the poetic language and imagery of religious art and liturgy. She sees artistic and poetic religious expression as having a “capacity for letting jouissance come through.”¹⁹⁵ In this Kristeva offers a more complex evaluation of religion by suggesting that the former broad feminist understanding of Christianity as a male construct, reflecting a male reality that excludes women, is a mere façade covering a more complex relationship with the feminine. In essence, Kristeva argues that Christianity is entirely reliant upon the feminine semiotic, which is instrumental in its formation. Christianity is seen as the most grand attempt to escape its origin, or perhaps more properly, its “mother”.¹⁹⁶ She concludes that in Christianity “Jouissance is thus not so much forbidden as regulated.”¹⁹⁷

“We thus find sacrifice and art, face to face, representing the two aspects of the thetic function: the prohibition of jouissance by language and the introduction of jouissance into and through language. Religion seizes this first aspect, necessary to the institution of the symbolic order.”¹⁹⁸

Among the earliest of Kristeva’s considerations of the relationship between Christianity and the semiotic is that found in “Women’s Time” where she credits the dualistic separation of the sexes as being at the root of monotheistic belief.

“Monotheistic unity is sustained by a radical separation of the sexes: indeed, this separation is its prerequisite. For without this gap between the sexes, without this localization of the polymorphic, orgasmic body, laughing and desiring the other sex, it would have been impossible, in the symbolic sphere, to isolate the principle of One Law – One, Purifying, Transcendent, Guarantor of the ideal interest of the community.”¹⁹⁹

Kristeva argues here that the symbolic order itself, and with it the notion of monotheism and its “Law of the (ultimate) Father”, is built upon a sustained rejection, or type of enforced forgetting, of the earlier maternal semiotic realm. For Kristeva, the

¹⁹⁵ Kristeva RPL, p.80. We shall consider the notion of jouissance in ch. 9 of this thesis. Here we can briefly say that it is an ecstatic experience when the semiotic disrupts the symbolic order and the true state of polymorphous meaning is displayed.

¹⁹⁶ A chapter considering Kristeva’s notion of the M/Other, will follow in this thesis. Here we concentrate on Kristeva’s thesis that Christianity is an attempt to escape the feminine semiotic, but is entirely reliant upon it for its own existence.

¹⁹⁷ Kristeva, RPL, p.78.

¹⁹⁸ Kristeva, RPL, p.80.

¹⁹⁹ Kristeva, DIL, p.33.

key theme in Christianity, and all monotheistic paradigms, is to escape and repress the feminine.

For Kristeva a grand outworking of Christianity's attempt to subsume the feminine is found ironically in the cult of the Virgin Mary. It is in the cult of the Virgin that Kristeva sees the fundamental representation of the feminine within Christianity as being one of the idealised women: a virgin and a mother²⁰⁰. Kristeva in "Stabat Mater" considers the power of Mariology²⁰¹. She examines the nature of the powerful attraction of the Cult of the Virgin, especially to male Christians. She says that an interest in Mariology has survived the onset of modernism, and could be said to have reached its peak in the years following the Second World War. At this time several important dogmas were formally recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, including the Assumption, and the title of Mary as "Queen of Heaven" (1950, 1945). Kristeva questions the nature of the appeal that such doctrines offer.

"What is there in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, virginal, one, that reduces social anguish and gratifies a male being?"²⁰²

In "Stabat Mater" Kristeva concludes that the post-war world needed and the caring and giving qualities of Mother-love, personified in Mary, and thus there was a revised interest in Mariology. According to Kristeva, this instinct is driven by the remembrance of the care and protection of the womb and the Mother-love experienced by the newborn, semiotic infant.

"This love, of which the divine love is merely a not always convincing derivation, psychologically is perhaps a recall, on the near side of early identifications, of the primal shelter that ensured the survival of the newborn."²⁰³

²⁰⁰ The parameters of this thesis will not allow for a consideration of the Christian portrayal of woman as temptress or helpmeet, which many feminist theologians argue have an equally powerful hold over the understanding of what constitutes femininity. For such a discussion see Daphne Hampson's *After Christianity* ch.5, "Woman as Other", SCM Press, 1996. Here, our decision to restrict this examination to the idealisation of the feminine in Christian thought follows Kristeva's primary interest in the cult of the Virgin Mary.

²⁰¹ This essay first appeared in *Tel Quel*, and was reprinted in *Tales of Love* (1983)

²⁰² Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", p. 170 appearing in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi, Basil Blackwell 1986 pp. 160-185

²⁰³ Kristeva, "Stabat Mater", reprinted 1986, p. 176.

with an Other that is no longer substantial and maternal but symbolic and paternal.”²⁰⁵

In her study of Christian mystics²⁰⁶, Kristeva unpacks this further. She discusses Saint Augustine’s use of the metaphor of Christian unity with God as being that of a child feeding from its mother’s breast. She says of this,

“What we have here is fusion with a breast that is, to be sure, succouring, nourishing, loving, and protective, but transposed from the mother’s body to an invisible agency located in another world. This is quite a wrench from the dependency of early childhood, and it must be said that it is a compromise solution, since the benefits of the new relationship of dependency are entirely of an imaginary order, in the realm of signs.”²⁰⁷

Kristeva’s analysis of the cult of Mary and Christian mysticism suggests that the very formulation of ideas about divine care and comfort, whether projected onto the person of Mary or onto God the Father, are complex reactions to the remembrance of the original feminine semiotic M/Other. In such religious expressions of a desire for comfort, Kristeva sees the semiotic resurfacing through its symbolic overlay. However, in religion, Kristeva sees that this desire is repressed as it is symbolised and therefore denied. Kristeva’s critique of religious art sees such as an example of the attempt to maintain the symbolic order of the “Law of the Father”, and as such a place of shelter for the illusory unitary and gendered subject. In fact for Kristeva, all attempts by Christian feminists to instigate a sense of the feminine, or *jouissance*, into religion inevitably serve only to strengthen the dominance of the male symbolic order. In application this means that contemporary Christian feminist concern to develop inclusive liturgies, or find ways of exploring God as Mother, are ultimately subsumed in the “Law of the Father” and patriarchal discourse. They are simply serving as a means of letting some of the repressed feminine through whilst remaining within the symbolic order themselves. In some ways Kristeva suggests that the ‘pressure valve’ of religious representations of the feminine only serve to maintain the persistence of the male symbolic order by allowing some of the pressure off the male order. In other words, if the semiotic experience of *jouissance* is what a self really desires then the occasional surfacing of this through religion maintains the place and value of religion and so the strength of the symbolic order persists.

²⁰⁵ Kristeva, IBL., p.24.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

However, importantly, in Christianity this does not lead to the formulation of feminine images of divinity, but rather to an idealised woman, virgin and mother, whose status and identity is entirely dependent upon her relation to a male child.

Furthermore, Kristeva sees projections of the desire to return to a state of comfort at the site of a pre-Oedipal Mother projected into the most overtly male identification of God, as Father. Here, she sees Christian Creedal expressions uncovering the projection of feminine attributes within the male Father God. According to her analysis, in a patriarchal culture God must, by necessity, be male and Father. However, so strong is the desire for mother-love and a return to the repressed semiotic relationship of comfort, that “motherly” attributes are projected even onto a male Father God. She sees this as apparent in several early Christian writers in her study of Christian mysticism. She quotes Clement of Alexandria,

“God is love, and we seek him precisely because of that love. In his ineffable majesty he is Father; but in his love he has opened himself up to us and become our Mother. Yes, in his love our Father has become woman, and the greatest proof of this is his Son born of her.”²⁰⁴

Here the male God has assumed feminine characteristics, subsuming any possible feminine expression of divinity and attempting to obscure the fundamental need for the M/Other.

Interestingly, according to Kristeva in “Stabat Mater” (1983), this process of original reliance upon the feminine and its later repression and subjugation is not restricted to religion. Kristeva sees a similar secular account of this process within Freud, where the Father possesses both gender characteristics. Her re-working of Lacan can be said to be an attempt to uncover the original feminine as source of identity creation.

Returning to a discussion on Christianity, Kristeva argues that the fundamental desire to re-encounter the semiotic Mother is represented and repressed at the same time.

“Overcoming the notion of irremediable separation, Western man, using ‘semiotic’ rather than ‘symbolic’ means, re-establishes a continuity of fusion

²⁰⁴ Quoted from Leonardo Boff’s The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions, Collins, 1989, p.85. Boff offers a full exploration of the emergence of feminine characteristics for the Father from Patristic writers and throughout the Middle Ages. See also Marina Warner’s Alone of All Her Sex. The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, Vintage Books, 1983.

However, we note here that in her discussions regarding the “abject” in Powers of Horror,²⁰⁸ Kristeva expounds her theory of the undeniable attraction of the maternal by saying that the relationship to the maternal body is not purely one of attraction but also involves the feeling of revulsion. Her explanation of such phenomena includes a discussion about the way in which a child learns to distinguish itself from external elements such as its own excrement. Arguing that a fear of defilement is also related to the maternal body, Kristeva says,

“Devotees of the abject, she as well as he, do not cease looking, within what flows from the other’s ‘innermost being’ for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body.”²⁰⁹

The relation of both male and female adults to the maternal body is therefore ambivalent. As Greybeal says,

“On the one hand we have separated from the maternal plenum and want at some level to go back there, and on the other hand, we have each both made some kind of peace with the societal structure of meaning and law and yet experience alienation within it.”²¹⁰

What then of Kristeva’s analysis of religion as a place of semiotic renewal? At first she appears to draw negative conclusions about Christianity in this respect. At the heart of her critique is that the Kristevan subject is a disunited and decentred subject. It appears to have dealt with this within the Christian tradition by a varying array of denials and repressions as it attempts to cling to the normatives and absolutes of hierarchical structures and Christian doctrines which represent the self as a static unity. Christian art and doctrine are seen as particularly to blame in this respect. In these, according to Kristeva, inner self-division is denied and repressed in the construction of a meta-narrative where God the Father reigns. In this the religious subject projects its inner plurality onto the idealisation of the feminine, such as witnessed in the cult of the Virgin, and subsumes it into stable symbolic and patriarchal identities, such as God the Father. In all this Kristeva sees an unhealthy tendency to escape from “jouissance” or “joying in self division”²¹¹. In her works

²⁰⁸ Kristeva, PH.

²⁰⁹ Kristeva, PH., p.54.

²¹⁰ Greybeal, op. cit, p.131.

²¹¹ This notion is seen as the *telos* of the speaking subject, and will be covered at length in ch. 9 pp.215-237 of this thesis.

“Powers of Horror” and “Tales of Love” Kristeva warns of the consequences and perversion of our true sense of multiplicitous selfhood if we follow such tendencies. She sees Western history as witness to such dangers, with its social intolerance and violent persecution of the “stranger.”²¹² Religion is seen as instrumental and fundamental to this denial of difference. To free us from this power we must undertake a revision in our own notion of identity, and know the “jouissance” of self-division in both a personal and political sense.

However, as we said in our opening question on Kristeva’s relationship with religion, Kristeva herself asks what possible system could replace the sheltering power of religion other than something in some sense religious? Art and poetry provide for Kristeva, “the modern reply to the eternal question of morality”²¹³ in the absence of religion itself. Kristeva suggests that poetry and art offer the subject a way to explore the plurality of being and meaning and such ventures are “destined to survive the collapse of historical forms of religion”²¹⁴. She suggests that the work of artists and poets are experiments in just such a rejection of religious and symbolic certainty and offer artistic experience, and her description of such is certainly as apocalyptic, if not as religious in itself.

However, we might consider how reductionist a view of religion, and Christianity in particular, Kristeva adopts in her assessment. Joy Greybeal’s essay questions whether Kristeva denies the “side of religion that does allow for and even demands jouissance?”²¹⁵ Greybeal sees an internal contradiction within Kristeva’s writings in that she uses discussions from Christian mysticism as “a counter-example” to her own generalizations about religion.”²¹⁶ Kristeva herself cites religious texts where the mystical experience of otherness, or plurality of being, ruptures the implied unitary religious self.

²¹² The ethical outworking of Kristeva’s notion of the creation of selfhood will be appraised in ch. 6 of this thesis.

²¹³ Kristeva, *DIL.*, p.35.

²¹⁴ Kristeva, *PH.*, p.17.

²¹⁵ Greybeal, *op.cit.*, p.134.

²¹⁶ Greybeal, *op.cit.* p.135.

We should also note that Grace Jantzen points out that the maintenance and preservation of the male symbolic order, through religion or otherwise, could be ultimately read in a positive way within Kristeva's schema. Jantzen says,

“Taking the position to its logical conclusion, however, means that unless the symbolic were in a place of mastery, chaos would ensue: in terms of an individual we would speak of psychosis; in terms of society, self-destructive anarchy...The result, given Kristeva's conceptual linkages, is not only that the phallus is in fact dominant but that it is necessary for the health and balance of individuals and societies that it remains so. Although it appeared that the semiotic/maternal would subvert the hegemony of the patriarchal/symbolic, this could at best only be a modification of its rigidity, not a system of equality.”²¹⁷

In Jantzen's assessment Kristeva's critique of religion is laid upon a suspect foundation which assumes the primacy of the phallus, as per Lacan. She argues that this foundation leads to the conclusion that only the symbolic order allows for the “health and balance” of individuals. As we have seen from Kristeva's notion of the repression of the chora and abject, Kristeva agrees that the semiotic can only exist as a repressed but disturbing force through language once the infant has developed a sense of selfhood. She would therefore agree with Jantzen's reading, although not the normative values implied.

However, what if the primacy of phallus were discounted for a paradigm which saw the basis of reality founded upon a model of reciprocal relationality rather than repression and dominance? We will suggest that the very central doctrine of the Trinity and imago dei could be seen as quite the opposite understanding of the basis of reality; one which also disrupts the notion to the unitary and static self, and contradicts Kristeva's pre-supposed reductionist view of religion. We shall explore this more fully in a future dialogue using the work of Karl Rahner.²¹⁸ In seeking a system of thought that allows for an understanding of the subjectivity whereby “you do not take place as such, but as a stance essential to a practice”,²¹⁹ is Kristeva overlooking the most powerful themes of inner plurality that arise from within the Christian doctrine of the Trinity?

²¹⁷ Grace M. Jantzen Becoming Divine: towards a feminist philosophy of religion Manchester University Press, 1998, p.199.

²¹⁸ See chapters 7 and 10 of this thesis for our consideration of Rahner's use of the Trinity as a model of intra-subjectivity.

²¹⁹ Kristeva, “Novel as Polylogue” DIL, p. 165.

3.6 Subjectivity Explored Through the Borderline Patient

We recall that Kristeva is a practising psychoanalyst. She has a special interest in melancholia and depression as states where the nature of human subjectivity can be explored. In Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia²²⁰ Kristeva explores case-studies of patients who have lost the power of speech or show no interest in it. This is a particular and extreme form of melancholia, sometimes termed narcissistic depression. Kristeva explores this borderline state with reference to case studies from her own practice as well as artists and writers from a variety of times: the artist Holbein the Younger; the poet Nerva; the authors Dostoevsky and Margaret Duras. For Kristeva, the depressed patient portrays an extreme version of the battle for subjectivity that is common to all. The depressed narcissist feels “wounded, incomplete, empty.”²²¹ This emptiness prompts the patient to lose interest in speaking, or even to lose this ability altogether. It is this facet which makes the depressed patient a borderline subject. Without the ability to express their being symbolically, the person risks complete loss of the sense of their own subjectivity. In exploring this state, Kristeva argues that it is due to an underlying loss suffered at the developmental stage of abjection which leaves the child unable to break between subject and object. She has lost the “Thing”. Kristeva uses this term to express an enigmatic, indeterminate something that is missing in the process of entry into the symbolic realm.

“Let me posit the Thing as the real that does not lend itself to signification, the centre of attraction and repulsion, seat of sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated.”²²²

The depressed narcissist is left in a state of severance from the symbolic realm. They have “the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, of something unrepresentable”.²²³ They lack the desire for objects, and in this, words seem pointless. In McAfee’s words, they are “like an orphan in the symbolic realm”.²²⁴ In losing touch with the symbolic realm the depressed narcissist risks losing their ability to form a fictive sense of being a “self”. The borderline here is between having some sense of subjectivity and falling back into the undifferentiated semiotic

²²⁰ Kristeva Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia, English Transl. 1989, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press.

²²¹ BS p.12

²²² BS p.13

²²³ BS p.13

²²⁴ Noelle McAfee Julia Kristeva, Routledge Critical Thinkers. 2004, p.63.

realm. To avoid this, the depressed person shields their subjectivity with sadness. Such sadness acts as a cohesive force to the disintegrating subjectivity.²²⁵

The struggle to retain a sense of selfhood for the borderline patient is explored in detail in Black Sun through an interpretation of the poetry of Gerard de Nerval. Kristeva interprets Nerval's poems as the expression of the depressed narcissist attempting to claw back from self-disintegration and regain access to the realm of signs. Kristeva views his writings as providing a temporary salvation from his depression and threatened total loss of the sense of being as subject. He constructs a new symbolic family for himself in his poetry, "this construction becomes a substitute for the lost ideal in the same way as it transforms the woeful darkness into a lyrical song that assimilates 'the sighs of the saint and the screams of the fay'".²²⁶ In her exploration of Nerval's writing, Kristeva suggests that the borderline patient experiences in extreme what is universal. They must deal with the realm of symbols in order to achieve subjectivity. We anticipate a striking resonance here between Kristeva's theory and that of Karl Rahner, who will also view subjectivity as necessarily involving symbolisation.²²⁷ For Kristeva, artistic and literary creation offers a means for the subject to proceed. For the depressed melancholic or borderline patient this will be the means to turn sadness into a symbolic object and so express themselves within the realm of signs without which they face total dissolution of subjectivity.²²⁸

3.7 Provisional Conclusions

While it is far too early in our work to reach any evaluative conclusions it may be worthwhile here to summarise the findings of this appraisal so far.

By revising Lacan's psychoanalysis Kristeva has retained a place for the feminine in the origins of identity creation and as a repressive force at work in identity destruction and repositioning. In this she may be seen as redressing the balance of psychoanalysis somewhat, although we note that she seems to disqualify the feminine speaking subject in her agreement with Lacan that the phallus is the prime signifier.

²²⁵ BS p. 19-22

²²⁶ BS p. 162

²²⁷ See ch's 4 and 9 of this thesis.

²²⁸ Kristeva relates her theory of the borderline patient to Freud's Death Drive and Melanie Klein's writing on melancholia. BS p.19

Kristeva's major concern is to forward a notion of the divided subject; de-centred and multiplicitous, created by the exercise of the co-existent forces of symbolic order and semiotic disruption. In this we have seen her privileging language in meaning and identity creation. The loss of access to the symbolic order renders a subject dangerously at the borders of total loss of meaning and any sense of being a subject. It is only through literary or artistic creation that such a threat can be avoided. In the creation and maintenance of subjectivity Kristeva radically privileges poetry, art and even religious language. We anticipate an area of shared concern with theological systems, specifically that of Rahner, which similarly considers the relationship between symbolisation and self-actualisation and gives art and poetry a significant role in the creation of subjectivity.²²⁹

Most importantly for our project we have raised questions as to her understanding of religion as prohibitive of the acceptance of internal self-division and otherness. We suggest that this is one area where theology can meaningfully respond to Kristeva's theories and we seek to do this by examining Rahner's use of the doctrine of the Trinity. We anticipate, in Rahner's thought, a model and origin of plural intra-subjectivity in the Trinity.²³⁰

We have noted Kristeva's concern to explore the way in which interconnected relationships constitute subjectivity. These have been described in terms of dynamic and conflicting forces between the semiotic and symbolic order. Kristeva believes that neither force can exist independently, the symbolic providing the semiotic with its only possible form of expression, the semiotic with the raw material to drive and disrupt the process. This has been seen to set her against those, such as Irigaray and Cixous, who seek a feminine discourse, and been a cause of feminist critiques of her work.

Most importantly to our thesis we note that the semiotic and symbolic are impersonal forces, and offer the possibility for impersonal relatedness rather than inter-personal

²²⁹ See ch.4 of this thesis for our consideration of Rahner's philosophy of language.

²³⁰ See ch.7 of this thesis and ch 10 where we reflect on the possibility of Rahner's account of the person as hearer meeting some of the concerns raised by Kristeva and some of her vision of the potential of religion, without falling into the traps she views as inevitable in religion.

relationship in constructing a sense of selfhood. We anticipate that this understanding of relationality in the creation of selfhood may foster individualism. Relationality is present but in a form which privileges the operation of texts over pre-existing subjectivity. The speaking subject has no “centre” to give it the power of agency in affecting its own creation or that of others; it is the text, and its internal forces which are active.²³¹ In this Kristeva’s subject has the power to “speak”, to say “I”, but cannot be fully in control of what it says because discourse is unstable and meaning fluctuates. We seek to compare and contrast the speaking subject in these regards to the notion of the person as hearer, to which we now return.

²³¹ We return to consider the individualism inherent in the notion of the speaking subject in ch.8, 9 and 10 of this thesis.

4. Rahner: the Creation of the Hearer

- A Philosophy of Language and Symbols

Here we examine Karl Rahner's theory of language, paying particular attention to his theory of symbolisation, since this is key to the notion of the person as hearer. As we proceed we keep in mind that the apparent emphasis on theories of language and symbolism has provided Rahner with a notion of subjectivity that takes the role of language seriously. We anticipate that this area of common interest will provide scope for an engagement between our two theorists. Our question therefore, as we turn to Rahner's theory of language, is to what extent is the hearer shaped by language and in what ways is this similar and different to the role of language in the creation of the speaking subject?

4.1 Rahner's Transcendental Argument

As a prerequisite to our exploration of Rahner's ideas about language and personhood, we should first become acquainted with his use of the transcendental method of argument. This method begins with an understanding of how something is experienced and argues back to what must therefore be. It is a regressive argument and characteristic of Rahner's methodology. Charles Taylor defines this approach as,

“A regressive argument from an unquestionable feature of experience to a stronger thesis as the condition of its possibility.”²³²

Michael Buckley sees Catholic theology in general favouring the transcendental method. For example, in Catholic thought the existence of God is established from the experience of God.

“In the history of Western thought, there have been two general ways of affirming the existence of God. One argues from the notion of God, that He must be; the other argues from the analysis of experience, that He must be. ...The Catholic tradition has favoured the second.”²³³

²³² Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p.21.

²³³ Michael J. Buckley, “Within the Holy Mystery,” the essay appearing in *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* ed. Leo J O'Donovan, The Seabury Press, 1980, p.34.

It could be suggested that the Catholic tradition might be at an advantage when seeking a dialogue with many contemporary disciplines, including postmodernism generally and Kristeva in particular, given the increasing importance of non-rational, experiential knowledge in contemporary discourse. It might be said that its *a posteriori* methodology relates well to other discourses that have been similarly influenced by existential philosophy. This is an encouragement to our project. Certainly, at the heart of Rahner's epistemology is the Heideggerian existentialist definition of the human person as infinitely questioning.²³⁴ For Rahner, continual questioning is a universal trait; the human person will always grapple to know more of the great mystery of his or her being,

"It belongs to man's basic make-up not only that he can inquire about being, but also that he must do so."²³⁵

Rahner's epistemology gives rise to an existentialist anthropology. In other words, the question of what being human means can only be addressed by giving primary reference to the human experience of being. In this Rahner rejects the rationalist notions of the human person as essentially a thinking subject. This is an important fundamental similarity between the notion of the self as hearer and that of the speaking subject. For Rahner, human personhood is dynamic, relational and existentially formulated.²³⁶ These are all themes which Kristeva similarly favours in a rejection of the rationalism of modernity.

Turning to Rahner we find that the experience of questioning acts as a focal point for Rahner's theological anthropology. For Rahner, in the universal human act of questioning, and especially in the act of acquiring self-knowledge, the person is already experiencing the presence of God. This transcendental experience is, for Rahner, "the basic and original way of knowing God."²³⁷ As Michael Buckley puts it,

²³⁴ See ch. 1 pp.13-29 of this thesis and Robert Masson, "Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing and God" in *The Thomist* 37 (1973), pp.455-488.

²³⁵ Rahner, HW p.13.

²³⁶ Cf. Leo J O'Donovan (ed.) *A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology* Ed., The Seabury Press, New York, 1980.

²³⁷ FCF, p.57.

“The human mind goes spontaneously to the context to answer questions about any object. It does so because human experience is that this object can be understood; that it makes sense – but not finally in terms of itself. Its intelligibility is ultimately derived from its context... This is what Rahner means by asserting that the drive of the mind is toward the infinite.”²³⁸

For Rahner, the search for understanding is a spiritual and ‘Spirit-present’ act. In the characteristically human trait of the urge to question, the human person demonstrates the possession of both a measure of the known and the unknown²³⁹ because one can not inquire after the utterly unknown.

“This implies further that every being, as possible object of knowledge, has of itself and on account of its being, hence essentially, an inner ordination to possible knowledge and so to a possible knower.”²⁴⁰

In this, Rahner draws on the epistemology of Aquinas and Kant, where sensible experience is the foundation for all human knowledge. For Rahner the orientation towards mystery and the transcendent must necessarily require a measure of pre-reflective, original knowledge; he sometimes terms this “pre-thematic knowledge”.

David Ford describes Rahner’s approach to knowledge as the replacement of a Kantian cognitional a priori with a metaphysical a priori.²⁴¹ Where Kant argued that the transcendent structures of reason make it possible for the sense perceptions to be construed as knowledge, Rahner begins with ordinary knowledge drawn from experience and pre-supposes a prior readiness to affirm the nature of their subjective existence. Rahner describes this metaphysical, transcendent reality as a “backdrop of being” (*Vorgriff auf esse*), which is reached by a reflexive analysis of knowledge itself. Rahner’s method places God at the centre of human existence, as the metaphysical a priori to all human knowledge. In other words, and using the concept of revelation as an example, Rahner argues that given the actuality that Christians

²³⁸ Michael Buckley, op. cit. p.36-37.

²³⁹ Rahner first explores this concept in his philosophical works *Spirit in the World* first published in 1968 and in *Hearers of the Word* 1969 both published New York, Seabury Press 1975. Abbreviated throughout as *SW* and *HW*

²⁴⁰ Rahner *HW* p.7.

²⁴¹ David Ford *The Modern Theologians: an introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century* Blackwell, 1997.

confess revelation has occurred, we know something of what must be true about the structures of human knowledge for such revelation to be recognised and received.

In this, we contend that Rahner has introduced a level of complexity to the contemporary desire to “know thyself”²⁴². The ‘turn to the subject’ so evident not only in contemporary academic disciplines but in their ‘high street’ versions of pop-psychology and what might be seen as ‘the cult of self help’, have viewed self-knowledge as achievable by a process of introspection. We shall see that, for Rahner, the quest for any type of knowledge inherently includes an encounter with God: the background to all being and knowledge. We might connote this as a process of “exo-spection” in contrast to cultural postmodernism’s introspection.²⁴³ For Rahner, to “know thyself” is also, in some fundamental sense, to ‘know’ or rather ‘experience’ God.²⁴⁴

We move now to consider how Rahner’s transcendental method shapes his exploration of the nature of language and how it relates to the creation of human personhood.

4.2 Rahner’s Theology of Language

On one level Rahner shares Kristeva’s belief that language is formative of human subjectivity. Language and enunciation lie at the heart of how we experience ourselves and how we relate to others. Rahner offers a thorough-going philosophy of language and an exploration of the nature and work of symbols. Whilst we anticipate many differences, the shared valuing of language as self-creative is an encouragement to our task. The remainder of this chapter will focus upon Rahner’s theory of language in respect to the creation of personhood. Our thesis is that Rahner’s system shares

²⁴² This inscription is supposed to have been taken by Socrates to be his personal maxim and was written across the walls of the temple to Apollo at Delphi; so much for the notion that the turn to the subject is a modern phenomenon!

²⁴³ Our term here relates Rahner’s process of acquiring self knowledge and directly to Pannenberg’s anthropology, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 1985. Here, for Pannenberg, authentic human personhood is achieved by “turning outwards” from the ego; “exocentricity” as opposed to the sinful process of “egocentricity”. We refer to the similarities between Pannenberg and Rahner’s anthropology in ch. 8.10 of this thesis.

²⁴⁴ We shall see that Rahner’s placement of the self within the arena of graced history and his Christological notion of Jesus as the norm and *telos* of the human person will also lead him away from the contemporary view that *introspection* is the route to self-knowledge. For Rahner, the truths about the self lie in an exploration of the person of Christ. See ch.9 of this thesis. Furthermore, for Rahner, the whole process of searching for such answers is itself viewed as a process utterly dependent, epistemologically, upon the presence of God.

many of the advantages of post-structuralist approaches. We contend that in his philosophy of symbolisation Rahner succeeds in de-centring the self as a dynamic and relational process.

As we turn to a close examination of Rahner's philosophy of language our project is immediately impeded by the fact that Rahner does not set out to provide an explicit theory in this respect. In seeking this we are required to trace the theme of linguistics and symbolisation through Rahner's works, from a number of sources within his major writings as well as from numerous articles. We discover in this search that a theory of language and symbolisation is developed as Rahner reflects upon varied theological and religious interests. In essence, throughout his consideration of many theological topics, Rahner keenly asks, 'What is language? What is its role in the creation of the human person?' Recent theological scholarship has centred upon a number of his works. Most notable here are Rahner's essays on "The Theology of the Symbol" and "The Hermeneutics of Eschatological Statements"²⁴⁵ as well as "Poetry and the Christian" and "Priest and Poet"²⁴⁶. In seeking to examine Rahner's understanding of the nature and role of poetry, scholars have also concentrated upon his writings on the cult of the Sacred Heart.²⁴⁷ It is an encouragement to the task at hand that scholars such as Robert Masson²⁴⁸ assure us that a coherent theory of language can indeed be drawn together from Rahner's disparate works.

One focus for this chapter will be an in-depth examination of Rahner's Transcendental Thomist notion whereby it is considered more profitable to confront a fundamental examination of language itself than to concentrate upon the concepts that language might produce about God. Rahner's contention is that language is only possible because of the existence of God. In short, everything we know, all objects that we conceive of in terms of language are revealed against an infinite horizon, or backdrop of Being, which is God. For Rahner,

²⁴⁵ T I 4, pp.221-252 & pp323-46.

²⁴⁶ T I 3, pp.294-320.

²⁴⁷ T I 8. Michael Walsh is particularly helpful here. Walsh expounds Rahner's notion that words contain the potential to evoke Absolute Being in his consideration of the word "heart", a theme we shall return to under the heading of "Surplus of Meaning" pp.93-100 of this thesis. Michael J Walsh, The Heart of Christ in the Writings of Karl Rahner Gregorian University Press, 1977.

²⁴⁸ Robert Masson, "Rahner and Heidegger: Being, Hearing and God" in The Thomist 37 (1973) pp.455-488.

Central to Masson's thesis is the extent to which Heidegger's aesthetics has informed Rahner's view of language as symbol.

“Everything which we say here about the knowledge of God is indeed said in words, but it refers to a more original experience.”²⁴⁹

In other words, what Rahner terms “unthematic knowledge” and the experience of God precedes language and is the prerequisite for it. This theological theory of language is obviously fully convergent with Rahner’s theological metaphysics of knowledge, whereby knowledge itself requires the presence of God; as such we shall often be required to deal with the two together.

4.3 Rahner and Symbolisation: Symbolic Realism

Rahner’s seminal essay on symbols, “The Theology of the Symbol,”²⁵⁰ can be understood to be an expansion of the notions he set forward in Spirit in the World. From this later essay it is apparent that Rahner’s theory contains two basic principles, which he relates to all expressions of being, whether sentient or otherwise. The first is a development of the Thomist understanding of being as essentially self-expressive.

“Our first statement, which we put forward as the basic principle of an ontology of symbolism, is as follows: all beings are by their very nature symbolic, because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.”²⁵¹

For Rahner, all beings must express themselves to an external reality in order to achieve self-actualisation. Furthermore, the ability to create or emanate symbols is reliant upon the inherent inner-plurality of being itself. Following Thomist principles, beings are composed of both matter and form; it is this intrinsic, plural nature which gives them their ability to create symbols.²⁵²

Rahner’s second principle in the theory of symbolisation involves a distinction between signs and symbols. According to Rahner, signs are separate from the being they signify. They are expressions of this reality in time and space but are not intrinsically linked to the original being. Conversely, symbols render another reality present. They are the expressions of being as it makes itself known to an “other”.

²⁴⁹ Rahner, FCF., p. 56

²⁵⁰ Appearing in TI 4, pp.221-252.

²⁵¹ Rahner, TI 4, p.224.

²⁵² Stephen Fields, Being as Symbol; on the origins and development of Karl Rahner’s metaphysics Georgetown University Press, 2000.

“The symbol strictly speaking is the self-realisation of a being in the other which is constitutive of its essence.”²⁵³

In other words, for Rahner, a symbol expresses the form of being and is the necessary manifestation of this form to external reality.

Importantly, in this theory of symbolisation Rahner states that the nature of being is neither given nor static but a process. A being can only come to experience itself fully, and so perfect its nature, by expressing itself. According to Rahner, this self-expression has two parts, “emanation” and “return.”²⁵⁴ In the process of symbolisation a being emanates from itself into its own “other” by creating a mediating sign, a “realsymbol”. The process of recognising or “returning” to this “other” is the means by which being constitutes itself as a reality. Symbolisation is therefore a dynamic process and the means by which all beings achieve expression and ultimately self-fulfilment. Rahner’s understanding is thoroughly Thomist in this respect. It is important here to note that within such a Thomist paradigm, Rahner is able to speak of the “ontology of symbolisation”. In his understanding, symbols are far from mere human conceptions. In fact, symbols share to some extent in the essential nature of a particular expression of being; they are ontologically linked to the being that they express. They are essential in the self-expression of any given being and are the means by which all beings come to express and fulfil their nature. There is therefore a unity between the nature of a being and the symbol it produces to express itself.

Relating this understanding of symbols to language, for Rahner, words are the vehicles of symbolic meaning. They contain as well as carry symbolic meaning, and in this, they are somewhat linked to essential being. Rahner will go so far as to say that some words have greater symbolic qualities than others do. He calls these words “primordial words”. Even non-primordial words convey, albeit in a lesser and mediated way, a symbolic thought, which is itself related to the being or form it expresses. Such a belief puts Rahner at immediate odds with post-modernist theories. For Rahner, within signs, the relationship between “signified” and “signifier” is far more than an arbitrary matter of convention with no connection to a reality behind

²⁵³ Rahner, TI 4, p.234.

²⁵⁴ Rahner TI 4, p.229.

discourse.²⁵⁵ The signifier carries and shares, to some extent, the same reality of being as the signified. This is not to say that the relationship between signifier and signified is static or automatic for Rahner. There are many different ways to express this essential reality of being, thus there are many possible translations of each signifier. However, for Rahner, a symbol must share to some extent in the very nature of the thing it symbolises. A key notion here is found in Rahner's statement that a symbol is both "derivative and congruous"²⁵⁶ with the being it symbolises. Rahner states that the symbol contains and does not merely represent the essence of the being it carries.

It is at this point that Rahner's transcendental epistemology truly breaks through into the theory of language. In Spirit in the World Rahner hypothesises that the nature of "knowing" gained from external data is only the understanding of a universal. In order to progress from knowing a universal to knowing a particular object the intellect must make a judgement. Rahner will argue that this process requires the pre-apprehension of the horizon of absolute being.²⁵⁷ In some way this pre-apprehension provides a backdrop by which to fix the particular entity, and so understand it. To put this simply, an object becomes distinct against a background. Human beings can make any object a background in order to recognise a particular thing. However, a further removed and subsequent background makes this act of identification possible. This ultimate background can never be truly seen; else it would become an object. For Rahner this ultimate background of being is God, the "holy mystery".

The insight given in a particular seeing of an object against the background happens, according to Rahner, when the intellect actively produces a "phantasm," an image of the external object. Here Rahner adopts the theological understanding of "image" as a way to understand the symbol, which contains "ontological representation" rather than mere similarity.²⁵⁸

Rahner describes the creation of this "phantasm" as an act of "conversion." The ability to judge and create a "phantasm" of the external object is reliant upon the human spirit's "pre-apprehension" or "foregrasp" of the Absolute. Judgements about

²⁵⁵ A post-modern concept of language we examined in ch.2 of this thesis.

²⁵⁶ Rahner: TI 4, p.231.

²⁵⁷ Rahner's Transcendental Method was outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

²⁵⁸ See Rahner SW, pp387-93.

particular realities can be conveyed through language because of what Rahner terms the “dialectical relationship” between the act of conversion and the pre-apprehended “horizon of the Absolute”.²⁵⁹

In simplistic terms, we can say that particular things are only knowable through the tension inherent in knowing something by what it is part of (the universal, the Absolute) and through the understanding that it is only a small part of it. Particular things are seen and known by appreciating them in relation to the Absolute. Without the pre-apprehension of the Absolute the human “hearer” could not create this “phantasm” and could not actually know anything. The intellect’s “foregrasp” of infinite being presents it with the contrast necessary for its grasp of finite data. This contrast causes the individual datum to be determined precisely as a particular entity.²⁶⁰ For Rahner, this “foregrasp” of the Absolute is universal in human beings and is definitive of their nature. This component of human nature drives the human being to question and seek answers from outside their spatial and temporal setting.

“The world raises questions for human being which it does not answer, but to evoke a question is to suggest and anticipate an answer. On the other hand, the drive of the mind is the anticipatory experience of God, because the drive of the mind is for a coherence that “makes sense” out of everything. And the drive towards coherence is embodied in every question we ask.”²⁶¹

For Rahner, this “foregrasp” of a horizon of Absolute Being is the self-disclosure of God, which is graciously revealed as a transcendental existential of the human person.

We believe that a key term in Rahner’s analysis of the process of knowledge gained from language reception is “contrast”. The act of intellectual judgement can only take place while the ability to contrast particulars and the universal is possible and, as we have seen, this is ultimately guaranteed by the presence of God. In such a way Rahner’s is truly a *theology* of the symbol.

Since we anticipate that Rahner’s theory of language might be meaningfully brought into a dialogue with that of Julia Kristeva, it is worthwhile giving greater consideration to the terminology he adopts. One danger in constructing an inter-

²⁵⁹ Rahner, SW, p.389.

²⁶⁰ Rahner, SW, pp395-400.

²⁶¹ Michael J Buckley, “Within the Holy Mystery” from *A World of Grace: An introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology.* ed. Leo J O’Donovan, Seabury Press, 1980.

disciplinary dialogue is that the terms found in each system become terribly confused. This is especially relevant when we consider the differentiation between signs and symbols.

As we have seen, in “Theology of Symbols” Rahner sees symbols as having ontological attachment to the form they represent. This is only true to a much lesser extent for mere signs. However, even signs such as words or images may contain a symbolic dimension, and indeed some - which Rahner calls “primordial words” - do so more than others.

The distinction between signs and symbols is fully considered in Paul Avis’s God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology.²⁶² Chapter ten of Avis’s work offers a clear description of the differences between signs and symbols as used within theological settings. He says,

“All symbols are signs but not all signs are symbols.”

Rahner’s understanding of the ontological facet of symbols places him in the category that Avis describes as “Symbolic Realism”.²⁶³ In symbolic realism one key difference between signs and symbols is that the symbol has the inferred ability to transcend the sign, and as such has a dynamic and living quality. Signs do not exhibit the same lively quality; they are much more straightforward and static. Whilst symbols rely on recourse to the imagination, signs point to something on the same level of reality and rely on a conditioned or automatic reflex.

In Philosophy in a New Key Susanne Langer expresses the difference between signs and symbols saying,²⁶⁴

“The sign is something to act upon, or a means to command action; the symbol is an instrument of thought.”²⁶⁵

²⁶² Paul Avis, God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology, Routledge, 1999.

²⁶³ See Avis op.cit. chapter 13, pp.152-185.

²⁶⁴ Susanne Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Oxford University Press, 1967, pp.60-61.

²⁶⁵ Langer, op. cit., p. 63.

According to Avis, signs are conventional and arbitrary; for example red lights give the sign to “stop!” There is no deeper connection between the sign of a red light and the command to stop. However, on this point, Avis muses that the connection between red and stop may have its origins in the colour of blood, in which case they would exhibit a measure of “symbolic” quality present. Avis contrasts this with the idea that symbols “effect a connection between the moment and eternity.”²⁶⁶ Most interestingly, in light of our consideration of Rahner’s theory of symbols, Avis states that symbols have a “translucent” quality. By this he means that they reveal something about the being they represent yet do so in an ambiguous way that makes the being or object they represent at one and the same time clearer and yet more obscure and problematic. They do this by encouraging implicit references to a level of being beyond the present level of reality they inhabit.

“The mediation of symbols between the known and the unknown gives them their orientation to transcendence.”²⁶⁷

Rahner would wholeheartedly agree with Avis’s understanding of the symbol as “translucent” and “orientated to transcendence.” These are key definitions in his theory of language and symbolisation. For Rahner, the “sign” of the word, carries the “symbol” of thought which is “derivative and congruous” with the being or essence it communicates.

Avis suggests that Coleridge’s view of the symbolic power of metaphorical language is the best example of this understanding of “translucent” symbols and emphasises the “transcendent” quality of symbols.

“(A symbol) always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.”²⁶⁸

In Coleridge’s view symbols are “the visible tips of an ontological iceberg.”²⁶⁹

According to Avis, Coleridge represents the re-emergence of the incremental view of the symbol in the Romantic Movement. This approach emphasises a link between symbols and an ontological reality beyond themselves, which is clearly Rahner’s

²⁶⁶ Paul Avis, *op.cit.* p106.

²⁶⁷ Avis, *op.cit.*, p.107.

²⁶⁸ Avis, *op. cit.* p.108 citing Coleridge, 1972, p.30.

²⁶⁹ Avis *op. cit.* p.108 citing from Swiatecka, 1980, p.59.

view. Avis is clear that the “other reality” mediated by symbols need not be the “sphere of divinity” but may be the “spirit of a nation, a tradition, a cultural legacy, a political ideal; it always carries a value greater than the individual.”²⁷⁰ However, for Rahner, it is indeed an aspect of ‘the holy mystery,’ as a backdrop of being, which is encountered in and through the symbol.

Avis continues his exploration into the theological and religious use of symbols with an examination of Paul Ricoeur’s notion of “tensive symbols.”²⁷¹ We find that there is a resonance between the theories of Rahner and Ricoeur.

Ricoeur sees symbols as “tensive” in that they are constantly held in the tension between revealing and obscuring. They work both to veil and unveil meaning. They are “translucent;” at one and the same time clear and obscuring. Contrary to Derridan denial of “presence” Ricoeur sees that the symbol “testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life. It is born where force and form coincide.”²⁷² Rahner and Ricoeur insist upon continuity between the symbol and the thing it symbolises. They share in an ‘incremental’ rather than ‘ornamental’ view of symbols²⁷³ because they do not only add something to convey meaning but are “vehicles of tensive truth.” Language used symbolically, such as in religion or poetry, becomes “like an army fighting on a moving battlefield: fighting to conquer the not yet expressed on behalf of the expressed.”²⁷⁴

As we have seen, for Rahner, language as self-communication is a necessary and implicit part of the nature of being. We now turn our attention to address the question of what Rahner says of the words that we use to express such communication.

²⁷⁰ Avis, op. cit., p107.

²⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, Texas Christian University Press, 1976 and The Rule of Metaphor, Routledge 1978.

²⁷² Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory, Texas University Press, 1976, p.59.

²⁷³ Avis, op. cit., p.93.

²⁷⁴ Ricoeur, “Response to Karl Rahner’s Lecture: On the Incomprehensibility of God” Journal of Religion 58 (1978) pp.126-131.

4.4 Surplus of Meaning and Primordial Words.

In Rahner, words are described as the “matter” of meaning.²⁷⁵ Meaning is grasped because the medium of the word incarnates and expresses it. Therefore, in Rahner’s philosophy of language, words have recourse to objective signification. This is clearly a point of conflict with post-modernist theories whereby the symbol can hold no claim to congruence or derivation from the essence of a being.

Rahner might be seen as offering a warning to the deconstructionist project when he says,

“All definitions have constant recourse to new words, and this process must come to a stop with the ultimate words, whether these are absolutely the last possible words or merely those which constitute in fact the final point of a man’s reflexive self-interpretation.”²⁷⁶

To dissect words continually for their meaning is to kill them. For Rahner the strength and nature of words is in their ability to represent the being they symbolise, as matter to form. In this they are multi-layered,

“We are not speaking here of worn-out words which are preserved, impaled like dead butterflies, in the showcases of dictionaries.”²⁷⁷

With language coupled to the realm of transcendent pre-apprehension and requiring the presence of Absolute Being, we should not be surprised that for Rahner all words have a “surplus of meaning.”²⁷⁸ It is this notion that we shall now focus upon.

According to Rahner, every word has the potential to evoke some knowledge of the Absolute, no matter how dimly. Every word is produced as a sound or symbolic representation of the intellect’s process of imagination, abstraction and judgement all set against the pre-apprehended horizon of the Absolute.²⁷⁹ Because of the complexity of this process, and the necessity of the transcendent as a background upon which to see individual meaning, words have what Rahner calls a “surplus of meaning.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁵ Rahner, TI 4, p.232.

²⁷⁶ Rahner, “Priest and Poet” p.297. The essay appears in TI 3, pp294-320.

²⁷⁷ Rahner, TI 3 p.296.

²⁷⁸ Rahner “The Theological Meaning of the Sacred Heart” TI 8, pp. 217-228.

²⁷⁹ Rahner; “Poetry and the Christian” p.359.

²⁸⁰ See Michael Walsh, The Heart of Christ in the Writings of Karl Rahner Gregorian University Press, 1977, where he also considers a further passage from TI 1, “Considerations on the Development of Doctrine”.

Rahner says that words “embody” meaning. This expression suggests that knowledge of a word’s definition does not exhaust the meaning or thought that the word “embodies”. Rahner says that the word’s incarnated thought ranges from its minimum content to its maximum intelligibility. Rahner calls the former a word’s “formal statement.” This content attempts to delineate one proposition or idea from another. However, a word’s definition alone fails to fully express its “surplus,” which Rahner calls language’s “formal communication.” This is more difficult to specify, it is equivocal and remains “translucent” to those who express and receive it.²⁸¹ As a result, words require sustained interpretation.

At this point that Rahner introduces the category of “primordial words.”²⁸² These are words that do not distinguish one thought from another but harmonise a multiplicity of meanings. He says they “evoke the blinding mystery of things.”²⁸³ For Rahner, these words stimulate a conscious awareness of the origin of knowledge, the absolute Being.

“Every genuine and living word has roots which penetrate endlessly into the depths.”²⁸⁴

Rahner suggests that the words “water” and “heart” as examples of primordial or “genuine” words. They are examples of where the mere sign of a word becomes a symbol. For instance, the meaning of “water” cannot be reduced to a chemical formula. Neither can the meanings of “heart” be contained by biological definitions. On the contrary, these words contain a “surplus” which overshadows their respective definitions. They are “archetypes”— words that in some way capture unconscious yet universal human experiences. For example, “water” evokes “life” and “spirit”, and “heart” evokes “love” and “inner being.” Using the example of the word “heart” Rahner suggests that the word is primordial in that it carries with it an awareness of the truth of the human being as an embodied spirit who is open to absolute being.²⁸⁵ Primordial words resist exhaustive definitions and, for Rahner, they offer insight into

²⁸¹ Walsh, Ibid.

²⁸² Rahner, “Priest and Poet” TI 3 p.296.

²⁸³ Ibid. pp. 296-97

²⁸⁴ Rahner, “Priest and Poet” TI 3, p.367.

²⁸⁵ Walsh, Ibid.

the pre-apprehension within the human spirit of the infinite horizon. Rahner says that such words are “redemptive”²⁸⁶ in that they point to humanity’s ontological destiny.

Secondly Rahner contends that primordial words are powerful; they have the power to transform us. For Rahner, it is in poetry that human sensibility finds its fullest expression. It is in using and appreciating poetic language that we experience creative transformation. One way in which this is apparent is that we are at some level aware of the different ways in which poetry can touch us depending upon our situation. The poet uses words which affect us even though we are distanced from the poet’s own situation. Doud makes the point that poetry viewed this way can be said to “transcend the particular”.²⁸⁷ As the power of poetic language affects us in different situations Doud says, “Creative transformations between variant structures occur.” He says,

“The great value of poetry lies in the fact that its primordial words can touch the hearts of persons enjoying different visions and structures from those of the poet. But, what the reader comes to appreciate is the poet’s vision and structure, not merely being confirmed in his or her own tradition.”²⁸⁸

Primordial words may be small but they are deceptively powerful.

“Like sea shells in which can be heard the sound of the ocean of infinity, no matter how small they are in themselves.”²⁸⁹

Rahner suggests that all words require careful interpretation, since all carry, to a greater or lesser degree, a surplus of meaning. For this reason Rahner calls his theory of interpretation a “hermeneutics of retrieval.” For Rahner, the meaning in primordial words can never be fully exhausted.²⁹⁰

However, there is a third, final and more powerful way in which Rahner sees poetic words as transformative. Rahner insists upon a link between poetry and the Christian Gospel. He asks,

“Is there a preparation which he must undergo to be or to become a Christian, which turns out to be a receptive capacity for the poetic word?”²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Rahner, “Priest and Poet” TI 3, p.300.

²⁸⁷ Robert E Doud, “Poetry and Sensibility in the Vision of Karl Rahner” *Thought* vol. 58 no.231 (December 1983) pp.439-452, this quote p.446.

²⁸⁸ Doud op. cit. p.446.

²⁸⁹ Rahner, “Priest and Poet” TI 3, p. 296.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p.298.

²⁹¹ Rahner, “Poetry and the Christian” TI 3, p.357

Rahner insists that in poetry the “happy danger of meeting God”²⁹² is apparent, it is a real possibility. Like preparing soil for seeds, Rahner views human aesthetic culture and poetry as making the hearer “open for the word through which the silent mystery is present.”²⁹³ Rahner says that the person who appreciates poetry prepares their heart to hear the Gospel, and similarly, the person who responds to the Gospel comes to appreciate the beauty in other poetry.²⁹⁴

According to Robert²⁹⁵ the link Rahner makes between the Gospel and poetry sees Rahner’s Thomist roots resurfacing again. Rahner views human sensibility, the ability to be moved by art and poetry, as being caused by the effect of spirit moving through matter. With sensibility as a created trait in all human “hearers”, poetry is the closest to the most original movement of spirit through matter.

“Poetry is spirit’s appetite for being made flesh in words or made passionate in the need for primordial words.”²⁹⁶

Therefore the ultimate transforming power of poetry is, for Rahner, the possibility of an encounter with God. In essence this argument states that the same abilities necessary to respond to poetry are required to respond to the Christian Gospel. Furthermore, according to Rahner, divine grace and revelation can be experienced outside of the “sacred” as “anonymous Christianity.”

Importantly, this discussion reveals that Rahner does not see the Gospel message as restricted solely to the ‘religious’ sphere. Rahner sees poetry and art as places where divine grace is already operative, and where divine communication is possible. We recognise a similar notion in Kristeva’s idea of the semiotic as resurfacing through poetic language. Rahner states that even though artists and poets may never refer to grace or Christianity their work is both the product and vehicle of the word of God. Rahner says,

“There is an anonymous humanism inspired by grace, which thinks that it is no more than human. We Christians understand it, better than it does itself.”²⁹⁷

²⁹² Ibid. p. 365

²⁹³ Ibid. p. 358

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 364

²⁹⁵ Robert Doud, “Poetry and Sensibility in the Vision of Karl Rahner” *Thought* Vol. 58 no. 231 (December 1983) pp.439-452.

²⁹⁶ Doud, op. cit p.450.

²⁹⁷ Rahner, “Poetry and the Christian” TI 3, p.366.

Art and poetry are “a gift of the grace of God and a tribute to redemption, even though as yet it knows nothing of this.”²⁹⁸ Artistic works and words are shot through with “anonymous Christianity” in a way that is similar to Kristeva’s view that they carry with them a semiotic power. Rahner encourages those desiring an encounter with the divine to develop a habit for appreciating poetic language. He says that we must learn how to be receptive to the poetic word.

“This capacity and readiness must be developed by practice, so that the primary words do not glance off the shell of preoccupations, and are not choked in the indifference and cynical nihilism of man, are not drowned in chatter, but like a lance piercing mortally a crucified man and opening up the sources of the spirit, may strike the inmost depths of man, killing and bringing to life, transforming, judging and graciously favouring.”²⁹⁹

We have seen a similar call for aesthetic practice and awareness in Kristeva and this is a point of similarity between our two thinkers. For both Rahner and Kristeva language itself has the power to transport and transform our very being and opens the way for further revelatory encounter. For Rahner this is nothing less than an encounter with the divine as “holy mystery”. Whilst religious sacraments and Scriptures are special examples of the transformation power of the symbol, for Rahner, poetry and art enable the creative transformation to take place where Christianity is both present and anonymous. Of this, Doud says that for Rahner,

“The religious brings the aesthetic to its highest actualization, and the aesthetic gives the religious its very possibility of being expressed.”³⁰⁰

Before we move on, and by way of contextualising Rahner’s theory of language, it can be noted that his particular understanding of symbolisation has its roots in Augustinian semiotics. According to Todorov³⁰¹ this appreciation of the symbol came to dominate the medieval tradition and can be traced through Aquinas to Rahner. This system maintains that symbolisation is in effect a circuit; beginning with the divine, transmitted to human by means of an immanent knowledge of the divine (Rahner’s pre-apprehension) and objects of knowledge within the soul (Rahner’s awareness of the horizon). This “knowledge” is expressed as an “inner word,” a pre-linguistic word within the mind or a symbol; it is then received as an “outer word,” as thought, and finally produced as a spoken word, a sign. Whilst there are successive mediations in

²⁹⁸ Ibid. p.367.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p.360.

³⁰⁰ Doud, op. cit., p.440.

³⁰¹ See Tzvetan Todorov’s *Theories of the Symbol*, Basil Blackwell, 1977.

this procession there is an unbreakable link between the spoken word and the thing in itself. Such a link is guaranteed in that the sign has its origin in and reference to an extra-linguistic realm, that of transcendent deity. In this the symbolic word becomes a “realsymbol”: it evokes a reality transcendent to itself.

Stephen Fields provides an excellent examination of the Thomist roots of Rahner’s concept of “realsymbol”. Fields suggests that the concept, whilst being an achievement within Neo-Thomism has a long history within Western metaphysics.³⁰² For Fields the notion of “realsymbol” has its roots in the very beginnings of Western philosophy with Heraclites and the Stoics. Here the central maxim is that the visible world of flux and change is ultimately reconciled in an underlying invisible harmony. Fields suggests that in these earliest Western philosophical traditions visible reality was understood as “symbolic.” It required an external and absolute reality to make sense of and resolve the tensions inherent in the ever-shifting flux experienced on the ‘surface’, these actions becoming symbolic of the invisible reality ‘beneath’.

Furthermore, according to Fields, the concept of “realsymbol” can be seen to relate directly to Aristotle’s theme that “something of the divine” is to be found within humanity, who express but never fully manifest it. In *Summa Contra Gentiles* (3:50) Aquinas develops Aristotelian thought to become a Christian concept which contends that the actions of humans are driven by an inherent desire for God.³⁰³ These actions become the implicit symbols of the divine.

Whilst the roots of Rahner’s concept of the “realsymbol” can be found in such early traditions, Fields points out that it was the late nineteenth century ecclesiastical programme of *Aeterni Patris* (to bring the old to completion by the new), in conjunction with a renewed interest in Thomism under Pope Leo XIII, that first brought Thomism into dialogue with secular thought.³⁰⁴ Leo’s project was to inject divine truths into the temporal and secular orders by revisiting Thomist concepts and relating them to the emerging secular epistemologies and metaphysics. This project was interrupted when the succeeding Pope, Pius X (1903-14), perceived these

³⁰² Stephen Fields, Being as Symbol; on the origins and development of Karl Rahner’s metaphysics Georgetown University Press, 2000, p. 21.

³⁰³ Stephen Fields, Being as Symbol; on the origins and development of Karl Rahner’s metaphysics Georgetown University Press, 2000, p. 21.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p.22.

emerging philosophies, loosely termed “modernism,” as a threat to the analogy of being. This threat was deemed sufficient to cease the inter-disciplinary project. Clearly, as Fields, points out, “modernism” could indeed be seen as leading to the denial of claims of universal truth.³⁰⁵ The analogy of being, a key Thomist notion, holds that the act of human knowing is to unite a changeless universal concept (of being) to a datum of sensation. This guarantees the link between the external reality and human understanding and establishes a basis for the truth claims of religious dogmas and the ethics of natural laws. The ontologies of “becoming” could be seen to undermine the faculty of human judgement, but also, and rather more importantly to Pius X, the religious claims to universal truth.

Field argues that from the impasse between religious defence of the analogy of being and the developing ontologies of becoming, a new synthesis of symbol and analogy would eventually be born.³⁰⁶ A key component in this synthesis is the development made by Joseph Marechal to bring Kant into dialogue with Aquinas. Marechal introduced the evidence for the Absolute’s existence in what has become known as “Transcendental Deduction.”³⁰⁷ Here Marechal asserts that existence of intellectual yearning establishes an existential or empirical ground for the possibility of the Absolute’s existence. Simply put, this argument states that the concept of the Absolute is self-justifying. The Absolute’s objective existence is a necessary condition for the possibility of every affirmation, even, paradoxically, for the assertion that the absolute does not exist! Rahner will follow this lead and ground the analogy of being within that of human intellectual judgement.³⁰⁸ Finite objects can be meaningfully conceived because they are appreciated against the causally immanent Absolute.

Rahner’s Thomist understanding can therefore be seen as a progression of earlier theological and philosophical movements. His contribution is a unique development in that he relates the symbolism within the analogy of being to both finite and infinite beings and says that the nature of the human person affirms this structure of reality.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. pp.22-24.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. pp23-34.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p.35.

³⁰⁸ See Karl Rahner: Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning ed. Geoffrey B Kelly, T&T Clark, 1993, p.39.

4.5 From a Theory of Language to a Theory of Personhood: The Person's Purpose of Self-Expression and Communion

We now more closely examine the effect of Rahner's philosophy of symbols upon his notion of the person as hearer. In this we shall see that, for Rahner, human beings hold a privileged position in that they are able to transcend the world which also conditions them. A primary aspect of the ability to transcend the world is found in the ability to express and interpret language. Whilst language is limited and constrained, for Rahner, it is the prime tool of the "open human person" striving after the unlimited "Absolute horizon of Being." We emphasise here that perfection of knowledge for Rahner is not the grasping of certainty, but rather of mystery. For Rahner, the fulfilment of the human condition is the apprehension of ultimate mystery rather than some climax of rational thought.³⁰⁹ Rahner, therefore, views the particular nature of human thought and language as a facet of human self-transcendence. With the ability to transcend the self, the human can reasonably undertake theology, the talk of God. It is upon such ground that Rahner establishes anthropology as fully concurrent with theology.

We recall that, within Rahner's schema, the state of being is a process of self-alienation, recognition and retrieval. Rahner argues for a dynamic and plural inner reality to every being. Rahner, like Kristeva, recognises the "stranger within," and the possibility of self-actualisation through a system of self-alienation and embracing this "other." The process of self-expression is ongoing. It is implicit to all beings and as such intrinsic to all beings. The process requires an inner-plurality in which both the "form" and the "matter" of the being is actualised and benefits from the presence of its complementary "other."³¹⁰ It is due to such a process that all beings can be said to consist of three aspects: "original unity," a medium or "other" and a "perfected unity."³¹¹ Rahner uses these descriptions of being to discuss the relationship of form to matter. For Rahner, form and matter are inseparable. Form and matter must be understood as constituting a unity within their difference, that they are "unity-in-difference." To use Rahner's phraseology, form "emanates" in matter, "giving itself

³⁰⁹ We shall examine the notion of mystery as it appears in Rahner in chapter 5.4 of this thesis.

³¹⁰ We return to the theme of the "other" in both Rahner and Kristeva's writing in ch.s 6 & 7 of this thesis. Here we address Rahner's understanding that "otherness" is intrinsic to language, and indeed to all beings.

³¹¹ Rahner, "Theology of the Symbol" TI 4, p. 229.

away” to matter, in which process matter gains meaning and intelligibility.³¹² Here we signpost significant shared ground between Rahner and Kristeva. Both emphasise inner-plurality and specify language as key to the process of becoming.

Expression in language is understood as involving a complex process by which the human being can receive knowledge from another or from an inanimate object. In this examination we shall appreciate that Rahner elevates the function and potential of language beyond mere human contrivance. Language is the chief means by which human beings achieve their purpose. Language, being the means to communicate essence, therefore can be said to be the vehicle to bring beings to their perfection. It is implicitly involved in the “being” of all beings and brings them towards a fuller self-expression. Key to this understanding is that words and language are “human” in origin but are made sense of in the intellect, which is a facet of the spirit, the human soul. Using Rahner’s terms, whilst words emanate from the material realm they are received and retrieved by the human as transcendent soul.

In “Theology of the Symbol” Rahner applies his linguistic notion of “realsymbol” to a discussion of the human being as body and soul. We will recall that the concept “realsymbol” was originally used by Rahner to express the relationship between word and meaning. In this anthropological context, Rahner asserts that the human soul should not be imagined as pre-existing the body, as some kind of alien to the body. Instead he says that body and soul are congenitally joined as a unity-in-difference. The body contributes matter, allowing for the person to be seen as individual. Through this expression of individuality the soul achieves its perfection as a person.³¹³

“(A) being realizes itself in its own intrinsic “otherness,” retentive of its intrinsic plurality, as its derivative and hence congruous expression, it makes itself known. This derivative and congruous expression, constitutive of each being, is the symbol which comes in addition from the object of knowledge to the knower – in addition only, because already initially present in the depths of the grounds of each one’s being. The being is known in this symbol, without which it cannot be known at all: thus it is symbol in the original (transcendental) sense of the word.”³¹⁴

³¹² Ibid. p.231.

³¹³ Ibid. p.246-7.

³¹⁴ Ibid. p230-231.

As a “realsymbol” the person is able to think, imagine and feel. This is only possible because the soul is mediated to itself in and through the body.³¹⁵ In summary therefore, Rahner describes human self-consciousness as a special case of the operation of a symbol. The human person, as all symbolic beings, achieves self-fulfilment by self-alienation and re-appropriation.

Clearly, Rahner’s concepts of “*Bei-sich-sein*” and ‘realsymbol’ are central to our discussion. These complex and inter-related concepts are vital themes in Rahner’s exploration of the exo-centric self. We can agree with William Hill in his work The Three-Personed God that for Rahner,

“Everything, to the extent that it is, seeks to come to full realization of itself by bringing its own being to expression in “another” that it posits over and against itself. . . . This is constitutive of the very essence of being in coming to its fulfilment. Thus, the mystery of being is such that it is one, but only one in its plurality, i.e., it maintains itself precisely by resolving and disclosing itself into a plurality.”³¹⁶

In other words, the very essence of reality is of unified inner plurality rather than primordial oneness.³¹⁷ The self cannot exist in Rahner’s thinking as a static and uncomplicated singularity. The human self is a prime example of the fundamental essential truth about the very nature of being itself. For Rahner, “being” is plural, relational and procedural.

“A being is, of itself, independently of any comparison with anything else, plurality in its unity.”³¹⁸

This resonates with Kristeva’s thesis on the inner-plurality of subjecthood. In both Kristeva and Rahner there is the emphatic denial of a unified, singular core to personhood.

A central maxim for Rahner’s thought is that all beings remain in a dynamic process of becoming through self-realisation. For Rahner, every being expresses itself because

³¹⁵ Ibid. p.232.

³¹⁶ William Hill, The Three-Personed God The Catholic University of America Press, 1982, p.137.

³¹⁷ This point highlights the need for a discussion on Rahner’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. This will follow in ch.7 of this thesis. We mention the Trinity here as an anticipation of this fuller examination.

³¹⁸ Rahner, “Theology of the Symbol” TI 4, p.227.

every being desires to be known; every being seeks communion. Reality itself is therefore symbolic in as much as it expresses itself in order to realise itself. This is the fundamental message of “The Theology of the Symbol.”

4.6 An Initial Brief Comparison between Rahner’s Theory of Language and that of Kristeva.

We appreciate from both our theorists that an understanding of subjectivity needs to pay careful attention to the importance and role of language. We have identified that both Rahner and Kristeva use an understanding of the nature of language to suggest the inner plurality of being. Both emphasise the role of language to bring about the process of becoming in the continual recreation of the self, and both privilege poetic and religious language in this. Language is seen as transgressive in both schemas. Such a wealth of common ground is an encouragement to our task to consider a theory of the self from an inter-face between Rahner and Kristeva.

However, our initial enthusiasm at the shared ground in this respect needs to be tempered with a consideration of the direction in which each takes this theory of language in the creation of an understanding of subjectivity. Rahner’s theory of language informs the creation of the person, however, it does not wholly prescribe the shape of subjectivity. The person as hearer will also be shaped with reference to a realm outside of text and ultimately relate to a transcendent reality which is accessible to a hearer. This is not the case for Kristeva who, following post-structuralist anti-realism, sees discourse as entirely circumscribing reality and the possibilities of subjectivity. We shall now consider the aspects of the speaking subject and Kristeva’s theory of language that do not sit so comfortably alongside theological theories such as we have encountered in Rahner.

We recall that, for post-structuralist thinkers such as Kristeva, the signifier does not directly express the signified. They attach and separate from each other. Contrary to Rahner’s understanding of symbolisation, meaning is not immediately present in a sign, neither can it be said to be present in a mediated way, by referring to a symbol,

as per Rahner.³¹⁹ Following Derrida, for Kristeva, there is no way that the content and means of expression can be unified. The sign must always be studied “under erasure.”

Kristeva’s understanding of meaning in signs stands in stark contrast to Rahner’s idea that the symbol is “derivative and congruous” with the being it mediates and that the sign may be a vehicle of symbolic meaning. For Rahner, meaning lies within language, it is incarnate in words. As Paul Avis says Rahner favours “Symbolic Realism”, an understanding of symbols that avoids both literalism and anti-realism. Avis summarises Rahner’s approach for us saying,

“There is no symbolic meaning without an actual symbolic fact to serve as its vehicle.”³²⁰

Furthermore, one of the distinctive features of post-structuralist theories such as Kristeva’s is the direct application made between theories of language and theories of subjectivity. We have witnessed that the “turn to the subject” so evident in contemporary thought is achieved by means of a “turn to language.” The deconstruction begun in textual analysis is extended to destabilise personhood to the extent that the notion of a unified or substantial self is completely rejected by postmodernist theories. There is the inference within such systems that the unified self is necessarily a means of oppression and its demise something to be celebrated. In Kristeva’s system, post-structuralist philosophies of language have been the means to achieve such a coup. For Kristeva the theory of the unfixed nature of meaning within language can be immediately and directly applied to the deconstruction of the notion of the unified self. For instance, if nothing is ever fully present in signs, and the components of language are to no extent as fixed as previously imagined, then meaning itself is a precarious notion. Meaning will change from context to context. In such a deconstructuralist paradigm the human self is to be regarded as constructed solely through language,³²¹ and so the idea that personhood is stable or unified must also be abandoned. In the place of unified self we find merely the “play” of a multiplicity of selves, each one unstable and disintegrating.³²²

³¹⁹ Peggy Kamuf (ed.) *A Derrida reader : between the blinds*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991 & Julian Wolfreys *Deconstruction : Derrida*, Macmillan, 1998.

³²⁰ Avis, op. cit., p.156.

³²¹ A concept we explored in depth in the previous chapter on Kristeva’s notion of the creation of the self of this thesis.

³²² Such a belief in the dissolution of a unified, coherent self is exemplified in Kristeva’s work as we have seen in ch.s 2 and 3 of this thesis.

To a lesser extent, but with arguably significant similarities, the application of linguistic theory to anthropology is apparent in Rahner's writing: a turn to the subject via an inquiry into the symbol. Whilst Rahner's notion of personhood retains the elements of process, reciprocity and evolution it does so without the dissolution of meaning. Rahner's notion of the person is one of inner plurality yet anchored, or perhaps tethered, as it journeys to an external referent, the transcendent reality of God. For Rahner, human personhood reflects the ultimate Being from which it originates and to which it travels. Here, language and symbols inform theories of subjectivity, but not in isolation. There is an arena outside of the text and a pre-symbolic facet to meaning that shapes personhood.

Even given this fundamental difference, there are a number of similarities apparent when Rahner's theories are brought into comparison with Kristeva's. Kristeva holds the tentative position of allowing a space for the self to shelter from deconstruction, in, as we suggested earlier, the persistence of the illusive 'chora'. The subject remains as a process of balancing between the semiotic and symbolic linguistic forces. This offers the possibility for a number of positive comparisons between Kristeva and Rahner's theories.

Firstly, there is an apparent and striking similarity in their notion of poetry. Both see poetic words as being powerfully loaded and disruptive. Poetry disrupts the illusion of a static self, and more broadly deconstructs the simplistic unity of being itself. Both Rahner and Kristeva dismiss the notion of primordial oneness. For Rahner this is expressed in the "surplus meaning" within all words, where the poetic or primordial which are especially potent. They may even become "archetypes", expressing the transcendent realm beyond, and fracturing the sense of uncomplicated meaning and object identification. They are rightfully described as translucent. They obscure and reveal meaning at one and the same time. He describes them as full of "the soft music of infinity".³²³ Kristeva too denotes the power of poetic words as having a musical quality. For her they contain an opportunity for the repressed remembrance of the

³²³ TI 3 and TI 4, as examined earlier in this chapter.

sounds of the semiotic M/Other to disrupt the apparent order and unity of the Law of the Father in symbolic language³²⁴.

Rahner does not emphatically privilege a certain type of poetry, as Kristeva does in her favouring of avant-garde poets. Rather, he stresses that all words have a surplus of meaning to some extent or another. However, both agree that the operation of poetic words is fundamentally redemptive. For Rahner, they bring about an encounter with the transcendent reality and ultimate meanings for which they are the vehicles. They also point to the constitution of all being as inherently plural. For Kristeva, poetic words are the reappearance of the semiotic as it breaks through the symbolic overlay of thetic language. In both writers, the purpose of poetic language is to bring about redemption from the imagined notion of the fixed and static self. They bring the “soft music of eternity” to bear upon such notions and can transform the self as they are used and received as expressions of the other, of plural being. In both schemas the enemy is the rationalistic, unified cogito; in both schemas the aim is for a plural, procedural self. Both dismiss primordial oneness for relational dynamism. For Rahner, this process is driven by divine grace, for Kristeva it is the activity of the semiotic. In both there is remembrance and process, an original state of plurality and the threat of the static state of illusionary oneness.

In this comparison, where so much is revealed in regards to shared interests, careful attention should be given to the very precise and different use of the term “symbolic”. For Kristeva this denotes the later, acquired, thetic overlay of language which will separate the developing individual from its semiotic origins experienced at the M/Other. Whilst Kristeva is keen not to give a qualitative judgement to the symbolic, her references to the musicality and freedom of the semiotic somewhat entails the symbolic to be seen as rigid and confining, an aspect of the Law of the Father. Whilst her paradigm will not allow for value judgements to be made, her writing suggests a privileging for the feminine semiotic. It is in the recognition of the semiotic, its inner divisions and fracturing presence, that the self experiences *jouissance*.³²⁵ However, if the semiotic is privileged, Kristeva does not see a way back to the semiotic realm, and

³²⁴ This is examined in ch.6 pp.132-153 of this thesis.

³²⁵ This is Kristeva’s chosen term denoting the “joying” in inner plurality. It is offered as a *telos* for the self, a concept we shall return to in ch.9, pp.215-237 of this thesis.

the symbolic is not to be viewed in a negative sense.³²⁶ Kristeva views the symbolic as entirely necessary for the development of separate identity. It is also the vehicle by which the semiotic is carried into the psyche of the individual. In such a way judgements about the value of each process are avoided; neither is “better” than the other is.

As we have seen in this chapter, for Rahner, the symbolic is entirely necessary for a being to express itself, which is its ultimate purpose. Symbols are the visible or audible tip of the ontological iceberg that is being. They are the means by which a being both expresses and actualises its being. The symbolic is therefore spoken of in unashamedly value-laden terms. It is part of the divine graced gift to the human being and is essential in human becoming.

In these areas of shared interest and approach there appears to be ground for engagement between the two theorists. It appears possible to use Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic alongside that of Rahner’s notion of symbolic language to argue for a notion of subjectivity whereby poetic language is seen as instrumental. However, we anticipate significant difficulties in relating Rahner’s thought to other disciplines outside of theology, since both his methodology and the theories arising from this are fundamentally and intrinsically theological. His has been most fittingly titled a “theology” of language in our appraisal. We might expect disciplines such as post-modern literary theory to view Rahner’s use of theological notions within theories of symbolisation as an anathema. Does Rahner’s reliance upon the transcendent realm prohibit any opportunity for a dialogue with Kristeva’s?

It is worth considering that popular misreadings of theological theories may assume the theologian is arguing from a top-down rationale, i.e.: this is how God is revealed (in our religious understanding) and therefore it follows that this is how human reality must be. Our reading of Rahner offers encouragement in this respect. Rahner does not seek to construct his theology or anthropology in this “from above” way. Rather, he begins with an investigation of human cognitive faculties, after Kant, and discovers evidence there for the existence of a divine background of being. This is an *a*

³²⁶ Cf. Ch. 3 pp.52-60 of this thesis.

posteriori methodology. His use of transcendence comes after, and not before, a study of human faculties.

"Christology is the end and beginning of anthropology. And this anthropology, when most thoroughly realized in Christology, is eternally theology."³²⁷

Rahner's pre-suppositions come after reflection upon human experience. As Michael Buckley says,

"The world intimates God, and does so because human beings find it finally insufficient to answer their questions.... the drive towards coherence is embodied in every question we ask."³²⁸

Such a methodology may sit at odds with Kristeva's yet, we believe, it cannot be said to be negated by it. After all, the problematic exercise of relating post-modern theories to lived experiences perhaps suggests that postmodernism's methodology might more fittingly be described as "top-down" or *a priori* themselves. Here, the text takes the place of the divine "top" or 'meta-notion'. Theories about the 'active-only' text are extrapolated down to notions of the subject.

If it is permissible to argue from a critique of language towards a theory of the nature of reality (a far grander exercise, and one undertaken by post-structuralists) might it not also be permissible to argue, as Rahner does, in a regressive manner, from things as they appear, towards conclusions as to the nature of how things must be? Both systems seem to entail certain ideological allowances. Both relate one system of being and experience to another of a different scale. In the same way in which Rahner's theory can be said to be reliant upon the actual existence of the transcendent realm, so too post-modernism's notion about the nature of being (as ultimately anti-realist) rests upon its critique of structuralist notions of language. Both suffer if these foundations are disallowed or rejected. Our point here is that systems other than theology require a certain amount of "faith" in their pre-suppositions. Both only work if these pre-suppositions hold firm. In regards to Rahner's pre-supposition (divine nature as the ultimate affirmation of a distinct nature of reality), the long history of theology points to the impossibility of proving the existence, or indeed non-existence, of God on the basis of rational argument alone. Theology has taken the view that religious

³²⁷ Rahner, "On the Theology of the Incarnation," TI IV, p. 117.

³²⁸ Michael Buckley, op. cit., p.34.

knowledge involves the operation of a system of “knowing” or believing which operates beyond rationalism. Fittingly for our project, this “knowing” of the transcendent insists upon the relevance of ways of knowing which involve the operation of symbols and creative imagination, as well as the response of faith to religious experience.

5: Rahner: The Person as Hearer

We have considered Rahner's arena for personhood and his philosophy of language. We now draw together our examination of Rahner's notion of subjectivity by outlining the aspects of the human person as a hearer which we believe are significant to contemporary theology and will be of interest in a critical comparison with the speaking subject. We Here we allow Rahner to speak in his own terms. We shall follow the themes of Rahner's major work Foundations of Christian Faith: an Introduction to the idea of Christianity³²⁹ and a number of other devotional essays.

Rahner begins his first chapter of Foundations by asking,

“What kind of hearer does Christianity anticipate so that its real and ultimate message can be heard?”³³⁰

This is an example of the transcendental method of enquiry that we have come to expect from Rahner, since it presupposes the Christian message and argues back to what must therefore be true. In this case, Rahner asks, “What must be true of the human hearer of the divine Word given the nature and content of the Christian message?”³³¹ Alongside this use of the transcendental method comes the corresponding appeal to experience. Rahner invites his reader to compare their experience of what it is to be a human person with that which can be pre-supposed given the nature of the Christian message.

“Everyone then is asked whether he can recognize himself as that person who is here trying to express his self-understanding, or whether in responsibility to himself and to his existence he can affirm as the conviction which is to be the truth for him that he is not such a person as Christianity tells him he is.”³³²

For Rahner, the philosophical transcendental method of enquiry is accessible from the point of human self-experience. He suggests that a person is “fundamentally and by its very nature pure openness for absolutely everything.”³³³ Essentially, for Rahner, in knowing his or her own limits and finitude the human subject imagines and longs to

³²⁹ Rahner, Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the idea of Christianity Trans William V Dych, New York, Crossroad, 1978.

³³⁰ Rahner, FCF p.24

³³¹ We note a similar turn to the experience of revelation, and precisely of revelation as encounter in Emil Brunner's anthropology. See Brunner's Man in Revolt: a Christian anthropology, trans. Olive Wyon, Lutterworth Press, 1939. “The Word of God, as revealed to us through the Holy Scriptures, is thus not merely the ground of knowledge, but it is also the ground of man's being.” p.72.

³³² Rahner, FCF p.25.

³³³ FCF p. 19

move beyond its own reach. This is the first glimpse we have of the person as a hearer of transcendence in Foundations. For Rahner, all knowledge is also self-knowledge since everything we know is known against the horizon of all that we do not know, yet strain towards. This, Rahner says, is a universal and obvious human experience; “it is clear that one must speak of it because it is always there.”³³⁴ This experience drives the person to metaphysical explanations of their being. It is the openness of the human person to ideas of being that confirms Rahner’s claims that all humans are necessarily metaphysicians,

“[The human person] wants to know what everything is, particularly in its unity, in which everything always already encounters him. He asks after the final backgrounds; he asks after the one ground of all things; and, in so far as he knows every thing as existent, he asks after the being of all that is.”³³⁵

“This kind of knowledge is present in every man or woman as belonging essentially to the very roots of cognition in him or her, and as constituting the starting point and prior condition for all reflexive knowledge...an experience so inescapable, in other words, that in its ultimate structures its reality is implicitly asserted in the very act of denying it or calling it in question.”³³⁶

In this, Rahner purports that a human person has universal qualities which, by their very nature, point to metaphysical explanations. Interestingly, even the denial of this original experience of selfhood is in fact proof of its existence. This is so because the ability to argue against a particular anthropology is an example of cognition which in itself implies unthematic knowledge of the experience of the self. Viewing metaphysics an intrinsic part of what it means to be human offers a striking contrast between the person as hearer and that of Kristeva’s notion of the speaking subject. Kristeva rejects all metaphysical notions. In its place we have observed a turn to the meta-structures of discourse as the arena of subjectivity. However, we note that the subject’s ability to take up a variety of subject positions within a text offers a qualified measure of transcendence, the transcendence from a static subject position.³³⁷

Returning to Rahner, with the focus of experience utilised, he begins with the statement that personhood is a “presupposition of the Christian message.”³³⁸ In other

³³⁴ FCF p.26

³³⁵ HW p.44

³³⁶ Rahner “Experience of Self and Experience of God” TI 13 pp122-32, p.125

³³⁷ We shall examine the notion of freedom for the speaking subject in ch.8 of this thesis.

³³⁸ FCF p.26

words, subjectivity is personal. Furthermore, personhood is intimately related to relationship, in this case to a dialogical relationship with God.³³⁹

“A personal relationship to God, a genuinely dialogical history of salvation between God and man, the acceptance of one’s own, unique, eternal salvation, the notion of the responsibility before God and his judgement, all these assertions of Christianity, however they are to be explained more precisely, imply that man is what we want to say here; person and subject.”³⁴⁰

The broad characteristic aspects of the person as hearer outlined in Foundations are of the human subject as possessing universal characteristics, an in-built tendency to metaphysics and to be a truly personal and relational being.

5.1 The Hearer as Original Experience

In a further anticipated contrast to Kristeva’s speaking subject, Rahner’s anthropology addresses the person in its totality. Other accounts of subjectivity offer what Rahner terms “regional anthropologies.” These include the human sciences that address certain aspects of the person such as biology or sociology. For Rahner, such partial answers may be valid, however the human person stands back from them to judge their validity against an unthematic original experience of selfhood.

In his insistence that credence be given to an original experience of subjectivity Rahner’s notion of the person as hearer is clearly at odds with postmodernism/post-structuralist approaches which fracture the notion of the subject by deconstructive methods. In contrast, Rahner begins with the subject as whole because he says that people experience their subjectivity in this way, as an “original experience.” He uses this term to denote an experience both profound yet obvious to all; one that cannot be ignored. We experience ourselves as being selves. This cannot be fully expressed in words since it is “unthematic knowledge”.

“The product of reflection and objectification is never adequate to the original reality or vision.”³⁴¹

For Rahner, the human person confronts itself as a whole because the conclusions reached as we examine any part of the whole (such as gender, biology, or psychology)

³³⁹ We shall examine this further in the following chapter of this thesis. It is mentioned here to complete the three characteristics of subjectivity in Foundations: universal qualities, a tendency to metaphysics and personal relationality.

³⁴⁰ FCF p. 26

³⁴¹ Geoffrey Kelly’s reading of Rahner’s notion of the original experience of the self from Karl Rahner: theologian of the graced search for meaning ed. Geoffrey Kelly, T & T Clark, p.37.

will always lead us to stand back and, as a whole person, examine each conclusion. In other words we possess a wider framework to assess the claims of regional anthropologies, and in this broader frame the self experiences itself to be a greater whole. Rahner purports that all attempts to understand what we are require that we stand apart from any reductionist answer and confront our “original experience.” In this way Rahner’s anthropology is decidedly opposed to reductionism. He insists that the person as hearer is more than the sum of its parts.

“In the fact that man raises analytical questions about himself and opens himself to the unlimited horizons of such questioning, he has already transcended himself and every conceivable element of such an analysis or of an empirical reconstruction of himself. In doing this he is affirming himself as more than the sum of such analysable components of his reality...A finite system cannot confront itself in its totality...It does not ask questions about itself. It is not a subject. The experience of radical questioning and man’s ability to place himself in question are things which a finite system cannot accomplish.”³⁴²

The crux of Rahner’s argument here is that our very recognition of our finitude indicates that we transcend it. It is this questioning that is the means by which we experience ourselves as “transcendent being, as spirit.”³⁴³

As we continue to explore this “original experience” we find our personhood is not straightforward or uncomplicated, but rather, it is one of immense and radical questioning. We experience ourselves as selves but also fundamentally as questions. For Rahner, our radical questioning of who we are, by many and varied human sciences, is not so much what we do but what we are. We might say that Rahner would not be surprised by the contemporary turn to the subject in fields such as post-structuralism. We might surmise that he would not be shaken by Kristeva’s notion of the speaking subject. In fact, for him, such theories are evidence of the broader need for self-examination and questioning which characterises the person as hearer. However, he warns against reductionism and posits a notion of subjectivity which challenges us to pitch the claims of various anthropologies against our own “original experience”. We shall bear this in mind as we turn to a direct comparison between the person as hearer and the speaking subject in this thesis.³⁴⁴

³⁴² FCF p. 29-30

³⁴³ FCF p.33

³⁴⁴ See ch.10 of this thesis.

Having set the broad tone of his exploration of subjectivity, Rahner continues to explore the nature of the self as possessing a number of “existentials.” In Foundations Rahner lists them as being directed towards transcendence, being responsible and free, placed in history, orientated to holy mystery, capable of sin and social in nature.³⁴⁵ Here we briefly examine each of these attributes of the hearer.

5.2 The Hearer as Directed towards Transcendence

In respect to transcendence we recall that, following Aquinas, Rahner views the human person as possessing both sensory knowledge and intellect.³⁴⁶ Intellect, in this Thomist sense, is the ability to know things intuitively, beyond knowledge gained through sensory experience.³⁴⁷ Intellect is a facet of the soul, and as such, the human intellect contains transcendental experience. In epistemological terms this is the hearer’s pre-apprehension of the infinite ground of being. Knowing is therefore intimately bound to experiencing transcendence.³⁴⁸ For Rahner, always and everywhere, in every act of knowing, humanity experiences transcendence. This experience is fundamental to what it is to be human. It cannot be avoided, although as we shall see, it can be ignored or rejected. For Rahner, all those who embrace an openness to encounter transcendence are mystics, whether this is a knowing search for divine revelation or not. We are all mystics. As Harvey Egan says,

“Strictly speaking, therefore, everyone is at least a sleeping, distracted, or repressed mystic. To deny this experience with one’s entire being – not simply with words- is to deny one’s deepest self”³⁴⁹

Rahner believes that every person is a spiritual being, a mystic and a theologian in the sense that all are compelled to ‘hear’ the revelation that emanates throughout the created world and at the very core of their being.

³⁴⁵ FCF p. 26

³⁴⁶ A useful guide to Thomist thought in this respect is An Introduction to St Thomas Aquinas ed. Anton Pegis, Random House, 1948. His chapter on human intellect is found pp. 22-27.

³⁴⁷ We saw this in Rahner’s understanding of the means by which a person uses symbols. See ch.4 of this thesis. Aquinas saw intellect as the means by which angelic beings gain knowledge since they have no bodily senses. Animals have only sensory knowledge. The human being stands between these two categories, having both sense and intellect. See Pegis, *Ibid*.

³⁴⁸ See the ch. 4 of this thesis for a detailed account of Rahner’s epistemology.

³⁴⁹ Egan, Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life, Crossroad, 1989, p.57.

Rahner adds that the person who exercises their openness to holy mystery will not only come to experience God as the distant horizon but also as an intimate home.

“Persons who open themselves to their transcendental experience of the holy mystery at all have the experience that this mystery is not only an infinitely distant horizon...which frightens them away and back into the narrow confines of their everyday world. They experience rather that this holy mystery is also a hidden closeness, a forgiving intimacy, their real home, that is a love which shares itself, something familiar which they can approach and turn to from the estrangement of their own perilous and empty lives.”³⁵⁰

This facet of Rahner’s theology of transcendence opens his notion of holy mystery to aspects of religious experience in which the faith encounter is of God as a familiar and intimate place of security. It is an important counter-balance to the experience of God as horizon and one that embraces a magnitude of faith experiences.

5.3 The Hearer as Responsible and Free

Rahner moves on to discuss the responsibility and freedom³⁵¹ of the human hearer. He says that the Christian message presupposes a hearer who can listen and respond. In this the hearer has both responsibility and freedom.

“Like subjectivity and personhood, so too responsibility and freedom are realities of transcendental experience.”³⁵²

Rahner understands a person’s freedom to go beyond the capacity to choose from a variety of options within everyday experience. Freedom is more fundamentally the ability to decide about ourselves and actualise our being.³⁵³ It is a facet of our whole being, rather than a part that can be separated off. It is an experience of our subjective reality.

Anne E. Carr, reading Rahner, says

“Freedom is not something which one has, like a motor in a car, a tool which one can use for good or ill according to circumstances. It is, rather, who one is as one creates oneself in time and relationships, the person one has already become, and the person one proposes to be in the future.”³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ FCF p.131

³⁵¹ A more thorough study of human freedom will appear later in ch.8. We are dealing with the topic briefly here as a characteristic of the hearer.

³⁵² FCF p.37

³⁵³ FCF p.36-40

³⁵⁴ Anne E. Carr, “Starting with the Human” from A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology Ed. Leo J O’Donovan, The Seabury Press, New York, 1980, p.24.

“Cynicism or hope, despair or courage, indifference or love in the face of concrete circumstances shape our lives, indeed our very selves. We are in our own hands, and this kind of freedom cannot be escaped.”³⁵⁵

This freedom relates to the totality of being rather than just one instance of choice. In this way human beings are “coming to freedom.”³⁵⁶ According to Rahner, we exercise individual freedom in the extent to which we commit to or distract ourselves from our transcendental orientation. Human actualisation is therefore measured by the extent to which the human being is a hearer. Rahner says that the question of our existence begins a process by which we exercise our freedom. The extent to which we cooperate with this process is ultimately our responsibility since the question of our existence is ever present. Considering human freedom and openness, Rahner says that the “regional anthropologies” seeking to explain human behaviour can be the catalyst to drive us towards freedom, or become a place to abdicate responsibility. As Brian O. McDermott says,

“I can choose to recognize these explanations as the stuff of my freedom, as the account of what I am empirically but not of who I am called to be...In other words, all the motivational and quantitative explanations of what I am can become the field in which I live out my life in gratitude, or the hiding place where I avoid my responsibilities.”³⁵⁷

We have no excuse that we were not able to understand our responsibility in this because our nature as questioning will always presuppose the ability to stand and hear a response, even if this response is ultimate mystery.

Rahner is far from alone in his emphasis here. Wolfhart Pannenberg can be seen to share in focussing upon the theme of human “openness” and the notion that human being is a process to be fulfilled.³⁵⁸ Pannenberg similarly replaces the notion of the human being as possessing a substantive soul with one of a relational structure. The human is a “becoming” in the extent to which he or she is “open” to the future, to relationships and the divine, and this will determine the extent to which he or she actualises their own being. Furthermore, Christoph Schwöbel describes such relational

³⁵⁵ Ibid. p.26

³⁵⁶ FCF p. 96

³⁵⁷ Brian O. McDermott, “The Bonds of Freedom,” A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner’s Theology, Ed. Leo J O’Donovan, The Seabury Press, 1980 p52.

³⁵⁸ Wolfhart Pannenberg, Anthropology in Theological Perspective trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, T&T Clark, 1985

understandings of the human person as, “Form(ing) a common element in contemporary anthropological reflection.”³⁵⁹

Rahner’s emphasis upon human freedom and openness is synchronous with that found in Pannenberg, Moltmann, Jungel and others. For the purposes of this project, Rahner’s notion of the hearer provides us with an approach that is in keeping with a strong trend within contemporary Christian anthropology.³⁶⁰ According to Schwöbel contemporary Christian anthropology can be defined by a similar desire to re-situate what is characteristic about the human being away from the notion of a substantive soul and rationality, and towards relationality and eschatological process.

5.4 The Hearer as Historical

The human person as hearer experiences the extent to which they are deeply conditioned and influenced by their historical position.³⁶¹ This is not seen to be at odds with human transcendence, in fact Rahner says, “transcendentality and freedom are realized in history.”³⁶² He continues,

“In so far as he experiences his historical conditioning, he is already beyond it in a certain sense, but nevertheless he cannot really leave it behind. Being situated in this way between the finite and the infinite is what constitutes man, and is shown by the fact that it is his infinite transcendence and in his freedom that man experiences himself as dependent and historically constituted.”³⁶³

In other words, the fact that we do experience ourselves as products of our time and circumstance is due to an underlying transcendence we have from these inescapable conditioning influences. We are dependent upon our circumstances and relationships to others in that we do not experience ourselves as subjects in complete control of our lives, but as Rahner says, we are “disquieted by the appearance of being” and “open to something ineffable.”³⁶⁴ Furthermore we do not experience ourselves as the creators of our selves, or our situation, but find ourselves as having received limits and contingencies from a foundation of being beyond ourselves. Of this, Carr says,

³⁵⁹ Christoph Schwöbel, “The Human Being as Relational Being” Persons Human and Divine, p.141.

³⁶⁰ We deal with this in ch.8.11 of this thesis.

³⁶¹ We first encountered this theme in our appraisal of the arena of selfhood pre-supposed by Rahner. Here we focus on the attributes that emerge in the self from just such an arena.

³⁶² FCF p.40

³⁶³ FCF p. 42

³⁶⁴ FCF, p.34

“We experience...our greatness as transcendent spirit and our smallness as finite, limited, receptive beings. The paradoxical union of both elements is the meaning of human personhood.”³⁶⁵

Rahner says that we experience dependence in relation to our historical conditions. However, in our awareness of these origins, we are able to transcend them. The human person is therefore deeply dependent upon the interpersonal relationships of which they are a part. This resonates, somewhat, with the emphasis upon the influence of cultural setting within much post-modern thought that might be seen to inform Kristeva’s notion of the speaking subject. The main difference here is that, as we have seen, Rahner insists that the self as hearer is able to transcend these origins to an extent and is driven to do so by an awareness of them.

5.5 The Hearer of Mystery

The hearer’s orientation to mystery is further suggestive of the place between transcendence and finitude that they occupy in history. For Rahner, even when it is not overtly apparent, the hearer’s orientation to mystery is an orientation to God. Rahner exactly relates the terms mystery and God here by stating that the only way we can really know what the term “God” means is due to our orientation to mystery.

“A person explicitly understands what is meant by “God” only insofar as he allows his transcendence beyond everything objectively identifiable to enter into his consciousness, accepts it, and objectifies in reflection what is already present in his transcendentality.”³⁶⁶

In a prolonged discussion about the term “God” Rahner suggests that it means “the silent one”. “God” refers to “silent mystery” and is “the final word before we become silent.”³⁶⁷ It is important to Rahner that the meaning of the word “God” is outside our finite understanding and therefore cannot really be objectified by a word, but in silence. For Rahner silence here is not the lack of communication but the place where words completely fail and fall silent. It is being “helplessly silent” in response to “God” that makes us human hearers and not clever animals.³⁶⁸ Once Rahner has explained the restrictions of the term “God” (it can mistakenly suggest an object), he replaces it with other terms such as “holy mystery” or “horizon of being”.

³⁶⁵ Carr op. cit. p.22

³⁶⁶ FCF p. 44

³⁶⁷ FCF p.46-47

³⁶⁸ FCF p.48

In elevating everyday experiences to possible mystical encounters Rahner by no means reduces the content of revelation to the mundane. In fact, he suggests that were we to constantly strain to hear God “with every moment of life” we would be undertaking an unfulfillable, yet never futile task. In all of our hearing we hear mystery. Rahner states that we only truly know and hear God when we grasp God’s incomprehensibility. He says,

“When I approach God to the extent I understand him, I only reach him when I perceive him as the absolute mystery that surpasses me. And when I do not perceive him as the absolute mystery, then I have to say: Stop! You’re on the wrong track, this path certainly does not lead to the true God of Christianity, the God of eternal life...For me, God is precisely that mystery of the incomprehensible, the inexpressible, toward which at every moment of my life I am always tending.”³⁶⁹

For Rahner, what we know of God is known ‘after the fact’; it is always *a posteriori* knowledge.³⁷⁰ We can ultimately say with Rahner that the reality of God is not a concept we can fully grasp. It is rather that which grasps us.³⁷¹

The purpose of our hearing God is not, therefore, to lead us to the point where we understand the divine with any clarity or certainty; it is rather an experience we grasp which is beyond our full understanding. So Rahner proposes that we call the divine source of our original experience of transcendence the “holy mystery.”³⁷² For Rahner, this mystery is inescapable. It is not unknowable: it is inexhaustible,

“Mystery is not what I do not know. I do know it. I know it as Mystery, as the final context of my life...in this sense, Mystery is incomprehensible – I can never enclose it in definition. For Mystery is the endlessly intelligible. It is its own explanation and the explanation of everything whose reality raises a question.”³⁷³

What is more, for Rahner, this mystery speaks through silence.

“I recall an interview by Dan Rather with Mother Teresa of Calcutta. “What do you say to God when you pray?” he asks, mother Teresa quietly replied, “I listen.” Slightly flustered, Rather tried again, “Well, then, what does God say?” Mother Teresa smiles, “He listens.”³⁷⁴

³⁶⁹ Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (ed.s) Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982, Harvey Egan, trans. (ed). Crossroad, 1997, p.216-217.

³⁷⁰ FCF p.52-53

³⁷¹ FCF p.54

³⁷² FCF p.60

³⁷³ Michael J Buckley, “Within Holy Mystery” from A World of Grace: An introduction to the themes and foundations of Karl Rahner’s theology. Leo J O’Donovan (ed.), Seabury Press, 1980, p.40.

³⁷⁴ Taken from Philip Yancey, Finding God in Unexpected Places, Hodder and Stoughton, 2002.

The experience of Mother Teresa's prayer beautifully illustrates what Rahner is speaking about.

5.6 Can we choose not to hear?

In this chapter we have examined the idea that openness to transcendence is a universal and inescapable human trait.³⁷⁵ However, in the same passage in Foundations, Rahner says that it is the very everyday nature of this awareness which can mean that it is overlooked; that we can become so used to the possibility of "hearing" that we forget what we are doing and overlook it.

"If it is clear that one must speak of it because it is always there, but for this reason it can also be constantly overlooked; if it is clear that by its very nature it can never have the novel attraction of an object that is unexpectedly encountered, if all of this is clear then one understands the difficulty of the task we are undertaking."³⁷⁶

In other words our ability to hear God, to tune in to the transcendent, is something we know how to do without having any reason to reflect upon this ability. For Rahner, it is only with spiritual discipline and awareness of the "mysticism of everyday life" that we can come to this knowledge reflexively. However, can we choose not to hear?

Rahner says that by suppressing our questions and immersing ourselves in concrete concerns alone we can avoid acknowledging the transcendent and spiritual dimension of our being. This is possible because human transcendence is in the "background."

Rahner says,

"It is present only as a secret ingredient."³⁷⁷

The person who distracts themselves from all thoughts of transcendence is ultimately denying their own being. However, all such attempts will never be able to remove a person from the arena in which God's self-communication is received, since this is not found within some religious enclosure, but rather permeates the whole created order and is constitutive of our very nature.

³⁷⁵ FCF p. 21

³⁷⁶ FCF p. 21

³⁷⁷ FCF p. 35

5.7 The Hearer as Social and Interpersonal

The final attribute of the person as hearer from Foundations is to be social and interpersonal. He will develop this theme later in a discussion about how the love of neighbour is united to love of God.³⁷⁸ The person who is open to the otherness of those in society is precisely the person who is and can be open to the otherness of God.

As we saw in chapter one of this thesis there has been a degree of disagreement among Rahner's commentators as to whether his treatment of the human person as interpersonal is adequate.³⁷⁹ We identified with Mark Lloyd Taylor (1986) that the contemporary desire to emphasise this aspect of human personhood is unmet in Rahner's Spirit in the World. However, building upon his portrayal of human transcendence, Hearer of the Word does include important material on how the human person exists in interpersonal relation to other persons in history. Despite this inclusion Lloyd Taylor concludes,

“Nevertheless, the discussions of *Geist in Welt* and *Horer des Wortes* remain orientated toward the human knowledge of material objects.”³⁸⁰

Taylor cites a late passage from an essay entitled “*Theologisches zum Monogenismus*” as clarifying Rahner's position,

“Personal spirit is spirit that is directed toward the other, Absolutely solitary spirit is a contradiction in itself and is – insofar as there can be such – hell. If [a person is conceived as spirit] then this means that the embodied spirit that man is, exists necessarily in relation to a Thou...Whoever posits man, posits necessarily, not only factually, human community, that is bodily, personal and spatio-temporal human community.”³⁸¹

The notion of human relationality has become a major theme across many contemporary theological works. Rahner's view of relationality fits with what Christoph Schwöbel terms “multi-dimensional views of human relatedness.”³⁸² Here

³⁷⁸ We shall examine the notion of neighbour-love in ch. 7 and 8 of this thesis.

³⁷⁹ This is the view of Johann Baptist Metz, who was keen to emphasise inter-subjectivity in his liberation theology. Mark Lloyd Taylor God is Love: a study in the theology of Karl Rahner, Scholars Press American Academy of Religion, 1986, gives a brief outline of the disagreement among German scholars. Also see ch.1 of this thesis on this point.

³⁸⁰ Taylor op. cit. p. 66

³⁸¹ The translation from the German text of this essay appears in Mark Lloyd Taylor, op.cit., p.66

³⁸² Schwöbel, “Human Being as Relational Being: Twelve thesis for a Christian anthropology” appearing in Persons Human and Divine ed. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E Gunton, T & T Clark, p. 142

the human being is self-reflective, relating to society through a web of symbolic systems of communication and to the divine, which is encountered as the absolute horizon of its being. This is a non-reductionist view of human relatedness, in which an adequate view of what it means to be human cannot be found from one set of human relations alone. Neither self-reflection nor the empirical findings of “regional anthropologies” account for the whole truth of what it means to be a person. As John Zizioulas says, they answer some of the “what” questions about a human person, but none of the “who” questions.³⁸³ In arguing for a non-reductionist view of human relatedness Rahner sees the human person as multi-dimensional and more than the sum of the parts of human sociological, biological or other empirical measures. We anticipate that this will provide one focus for our thesis that Rahner’s notion of the person as hearer offers the possibility to engage with Kristeva’s speaking subject.³⁸⁴

5.8 The Hearer as a Process

Having examined the fundamental existentials that Rahner outlines for the human person as hearer, it remains to say that, for Rahner, personhood remains radically “on the way”.³⁸⁵ For Rahner, the restless and striving nature of the human person bears witness to their unfinished state. The constant questioning and dissatisfaction with goals accomplished, that are “always already relativized as something provisional at every stage,”³⁸⁶ further suggests that the human being is in process.

For Rahner, human freedom and human knowledge reveal that the human person is in part transcendent. This means that there is no set way by which the being is determined to fulfil its nature. The human person is a “radically open, unfinished, entity.”³⁸⁷ Their finished state has not been determined from the outset. The human being is a ‘becoming’. We recall from earlier in this chapter that each human being remains responsible for the process of becoming, of self-actualisation.

“Freedom is not the ability to choose an object nor the ability to choose a particular way of relating oneself to this or that, but it is the freedom of self-understanding, the possibility of decision for or against oneself.”³⁸⁸

³⁸³ John D. Zizioulas “On Being a Person: Towards an Ontology of Personhood” pp.33-46 in Schwöbel and Gunton_op.cit.

³⁸⁴ The conclusions drawn from this comparison are drawn together in ch.10 of this thesis.

³⁸⁵ Rahner, FCF p.32

³⁸⁶ Rahner, FCF p.32

³⁸⁷ Rahner TI 9 p.213

³⁸⁸ Rahner TI 6, p.185. A full consideration of freedom as a characteristic of the human person is examined in ch.8 of this thesis.

This chapter will continue by examining the means by which Rahner suggests we might become better hearers and the role of theology in this.

5.9 How We Become Better Hearers: Rahner's Theory of Revelation

By way of introduction to this section it would seem worth briefly outlining Rahner's theory of revelation. In order to be brief, we shall focus upon this doctrine as outlined in Foundations.³⁸⁹

For Rahner, revelation is inseparable from grace. Grace and revelation share a single history.³⁹⁰ Revelation is simply what always "takes place."³⁹¹ The human person is a revelatory event, before revelation is received or interpreted. This is powerfully expressed in Rahner's formulation that the human person is "the cipher of God".³⁹² He says,

"[The human person] is that which comes to be when God's self-expression, his Word, is uttered into the emptiness of the Godless void in love."³⁹³

Rahner suggests that the human person is "the utterance within which God could empty himself."³⁹⁴

"When God wants to be what is not God [the human person] comes to be."³⁹⁵

The very existence of the human person, as the creation of God in God's image, expresses the self-revelation of God. The human hearer is the other to God, but, in this, the precise place where God expresses God's image.

When Rahner says that God's self-revelation is "in" the world, he stresses that the things in which we experience God as being present do not "contain" God. Rather, particular things, set as they are against an infinite horizon, point to the presence of

³⁸⁹ See especially FCF "The History of Salvation and Revelation" pp.153-175. Useful supplementary material is found in a number of Rahner's other essays including TI 3 pp.277-93 "Spirit and Life" and TI 9 pp.127-44 "Observations on the Doctrine of God in Catholic Dogmatics".

³⁹⁰ FCF p.141

³⁹¹ FCF p.138

³⁹² FCF p.224

³⁹³ FCF_p.224

³⁹⁴ FCF_p.224

³⁹⁵ FCF_p.225

God everywhere and in all things. They are icons, or sacraments of God's presence.³⁹⁶ In such a way God's presence is open to the human hearer at all times and in all things. Revelation is not merely "from beyond" or outside the human person, but the person is inherently constituted by and for God's self-revelation.

Rahner's emphasis upon a relational view of revelation in defining personhood demonstrates a key area of agreement between Rahner's idea of the hearer and that of Emil Brunner.³⁹⁷ Brunner brings an understanding of revelation as encounter; basing his ideas upon the dialogical personalism of Martin Buber, which stresses the difference between "I-It" and "I-Thou" relationships.³⁹⁸ Buber, Brunner and Rahner agree that there is a strongly relational element to all revelation in that the human person encounters the presence of God. The "hearer" of God is not therefore the passive recipient of communication but the 'I-Thou' partner in encounter with God.

For Brunner, the means by which revelation is received is a universal and inherent characteristic present within the human person. This led to the famously heated exchange that has become known as the "Barth-Brunner" debate.³⁹⁹ Brunner's insistence that the human person contains a "point of contact" for divine revelation was disputed by Barth who saw this as an attack on the Holy Spirit's ability to impart divine revelation without the co-operation of the human receptor. For Barth, the "point of contact" for revelation was evoked by the Word of God and is itself the result of divine revelation. Where might Rahner be placed in this debate? Whilst he shares with both Brunner and Barth the notion that revelation is divine encounter, his transcendental method of enquiry pre-supposes that the human person is inherently able to receive revelation in the natural, through its "graced" state. For Barth, God's grace comes with the impartation of revelation and so enables a point of contact. However for Rahner, the graced state is universal and the nature of the human is to be just such a graced person who can inherently receive divine revelation; which is a position more similar to that of Brunner.

³⁹⁶ FCF p.151

³⁹⁷ Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian anthropology* London, Lutterworth Press, 1939.

"The Word of God, as revealed to us through the Holy Scriptures, is thus not merely the ground of knowledge, but it is also the ground of man's being", p.72.

³⁹⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou* trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, T&TClark 1st edition 1937.

³⁹⁹ See *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and grace' by Emil Brunner and the reply 'No!' by Karl Barth* London: Bles, 1946.

For Rahner, God shares in our history. Every event therefore is a possible experience of revelation. This has given Rahner the title of “everyday mystic.” Religious meditation is not by any means the only avenue to hear God. He says,

“The mediation of this experience of transcendence does not necessarily have to be an explicitly religious mediation.”⁴⁰⁰

Elucidating on Rahner’s “mysticism of everyday life”⁴⁰¹ Harvey Egan charts five types of experience that hone our encounter with divine mystery and so enable the human person to become better “hearers” of God.⁴⁰² It is worth remembering that, for Rahner, no experience is outside of the possibility of hearing God’s self-revelation,

“...There is for Christianity no separate and sacral realm where alone God is to be found...everything then can be regarded as a special providence, as an intervention of God, presupposing that I accept the concrete constellation of my life and of the world in such a way that it becomes positive, salvific concretization of my transcendental relationship to God in freedom.”⁴⁰³

Firstly Egan highlights the Rahnerian theme of “immense longing.” This theme is foundational to Rahner’s anthropology. For Rahner, the experience both indicates our true nature as in some ways transcendent and is the result of just such a nature. The human as hearer desires transcendent experiences because he or she already possesses them in some measure. The constant craving of humans for more from life, Rahner argues, is due to our foundational experience of God. As a hearer of God the human person has tasted infinity within its pre-apprehension of the horizon of being and finite things alone will not satisfy the human thirst. In fact, Rahner suggests, the more things a person acquires, the more unsatisfied he or she feels. Even the most abundant temporal life, when it attempts to block out the divine, has only more and more of what they increasingly know will not satisfy them. This is a desperate state. Egan writes,

“The God-experience is the cause of our dissatisfaction with life, for nothing measures up to that which rests at our deepest centre.”⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ FCF p.144

⁴⁰¹ This phrase has become a popular way of denoting Rahner’s approach to Christian mysticism. It appears in his essay “Experiencing the Spirit” from *The Practice of Faith* eds. Karl Lehmann, Albert Raffelt, New York: Crossroad, 1985, p.84

⁴⁰² Harvey Egan, “ ‘The Devout Christian of the Future will...Be a Mystic’: Mysticism and Karl Rahner’s Theology” in William J Kelly, (ed.) *Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honour of Karl Rahner* Marquette University Press, 1980, pp139-158.

⁴⁰³ FCF p.89

⁴⁰⁴ Egan op. cit p. 60

There are distinct echoes of Augustine's autobiographical Confessions in Rahner's understanding of immense longing.⁴⁰⁵ The recurring theme of Augustine's reflection is upon the incomplete nature of human existence, which manifests itself in hope and longing. For Augustine, human longing is based upon the created nature of the human who, created in the image of God, desires to relate to God. However, according to Augustine, the universality of sin means that no human, apart from an act of divine grace, can ever fulfil this longing for a relationship with his or her Creator.

Augustine's maxim *desiderium sinus codris* ("longing makes the heart deep") is directly compatible with Rahner's notion of the human transcendental existential. For both, human experience, of longing and hope, points to a dimension of the human person which is not purely temporal and cannot be satisfied within the realm in which the human exists. The created human being has an inherent longing for its Creator, which it cannot satisfy for itself. According to Rahner, recognising this "immense longing" will both give the hearer insight into his or her own nature, and help them to understand that they cannot satisfy their longing with finite things.⁴⁰⁶ For Rahner, we cannot elevate a finite good into an ultimate value.

The second way in which "sleeping mystics" can wake up is by reflecting upon experiences of happiness and meaning. Whilst Rahner takes seriously the suffering and emptiness that are part of the human condition, he argues that moments of joy, laughter, goodness and beauty are the basis of a possible argument for the existence of God; a kind of anti-theodicy that takes joy seriously. Rahner believes that since, as hearers, we experience God in the very depths of our being everyday life can be full of God's gracious communication. The "mystical joy" that Rahner speaks of is not the preserve of religious encounter, but open to all people who are surprised by the joy

⁴⁰⁵ The Confessions of St. Augustine, Sheed and Ward, 1943. See Christoph Schwöbel's introduction to Persons Human and Divine. Schwöbel cites J.R. Illingworth's thesis that "the real foundations of our subsequent thought upon the point (personhood) were undoubtedly laid in the first Christian centuries, and chiefly by Christian hands." Illingworth, Personality: Human and Divine London, MacMillan, 1894. Illingworth views the main Western conceptions in personhood as arising from Augustine, Luther and Kant. In Augustine, Illingworth sees the first time that there is an emphasis, not on reason, but on a tripartite nature of human consciousness. See also Brian L Horne, in "Person as Confession: Augustine of Hippo" in Persons Human and Divine. Horne states that Augustine's is the first Christian attempt to see the person as a "confessional" being, with "a linking of personhood to memory." He agrees with Illingworth that it is not possible to overestimate the influence of Augustine upon contemporary Christian discussions about the nature of the person.

⁴⁰⁶ A theme Egan sees as founded upon Jesus' response during his temptations, Matthew 4:4 "People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Harvey Egan, "The Devout Christian of the Future will...Be a Mystic": Mysticism and Karl Rahner's Theology" in William J Kelly, (ed.) Theology and Discovery: Essays in Honour of Karl Rahner Marquette University Press, 1980, pp139-158.

and beauty in everyday life.⁴⁰⁷ For Rahner, this feature of the human experience is deeply reassuring; our “pre-apprehension” of the infinite horizon is not an experience of nothingness. The silent mystery we face is not absurd or empty. Rahner says that whilst we do experience the absurd we also know moments of contrasting and powerful hope and joy. For Rahner, the positive elements of life are present even in moments of despair.

The third experience that Rahner suggests awakens latent mysticism is that of emptiness and loss. Rahner suggests that when we do not distract ourselves from such experiences, even those born from a crisis of faith, we can find holy mystery. Rahner wrote that even within a spiritual “wintry season” faith might be found and even flourish.⁴⁰⁸ For Rahner distraction is the main obstacle to this process, rather than unbelief or doubt. In fact he urges people to grow into and through their doubt, even their atheism. Writing as Ignatius he says,

“God himself: I know God himself...if you were to let your scepticism about such an assertion, sharpened as it is by an underlying atheism, go to the very limit, not only in cleverly expressed theory but in bitter practice of life too, then you might have the same experience.”⁴⁰⁹

What Rahner suggests here is that the person who has been forced to face their doubts and loss is in just the right place to encounter Holy Mystery. If we are complacent and believe that we understand everything in our lives we will perhaps never grapple with the very loss that stretches us to look beyond ourselves. Even atheism, in this regard, is a better starting place than spiritual complacency.

Egan says,

“The most telling moment, says Rahner, is when everything that props up our life fails. Then we are forced to ask if the inescapable darkness engulfing us is absolute absurdity or a blessed, holy night.”⁴¹⁰

The next category Egan constructs from Rahner’s teaching on becoming better hearers of God is the experience of love. For Rahner, offering love to our neighbour is an experience that reveals the absolute worth of another person.⁴¹¹ He suggests that this is both the presupposition and a consequence of the love of God. Indeed, both love of

⁴⁰⁷ Egan op.cit. adds a light note relating Rahner’s reported love of ice cream as an example of such joy-giving everyday experiences.

⁴⁰⁸ Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (eds.) Faith in a Wintry Season: Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the last years of his life Trans. Harvey Egan, Crossroad, 1990, pp. 103-105

⁴⁰⁹ Rahner, writing as Ignatius, in Faith in a Wintry Season p.105

⁴¹⁰ Egan, op.cit p. 62-3

⁴¹¹ We consider Rahner’s notion of neighbour-love fully in ch.7.8 and 8.10 of this thesis.

God and love of the neighbour are seen as a unity. They are both experiences which are radically open to the mysterious other.

For Rahner, love is a mystical experience because it involves “abandonment”. In other words, real love for the other, be it God or the other person, should avoid trying to fit that being into one’s own framework, as if to imagine that the other could be completely comprehended. The love of God and neighbour involves an acknowledgement of otherness, and does not attempt to subsume this into our own frame of reference.

Rahner describes the love between human beings as a mystical experience of the presence of God. This is due to the way in which each act of love, of God or another person, is in fact a unity, and also because God is to be found within every person. Human friendship and love differ only in degree, rather than in kind, from more profound religious mystical experiences, they are an everyday means of hearing God.

We continue with this exploration of the means by which Rahner suggests the human person better actualises itself as a hearer with a consideration of the role of theology in this respect. Rahner adopts the word “mystagogy” to express the task of theology in making its students better ‘hearers’ of God. The term comes from two sources and means both “to teach a doctrine” and “to initiate into the mysteries”. Harvey Egan says that both Rahner’s more scholarly writings and his pastoral works contain “mystagogia”, the expressed desire to lead people into an experience of God’s grace.

“He attempts to evoke, to awaken, to deepen, and to strengthen the basic experience of God’s Self-communication which haunts the core of every person, at least as an offer. Because of his mystagogical concentration, his theology begins and ends in a mystical moment: the experience of the lived, root unity of self-possessing knowledge and love penetrated by God’s self-communication.”⁴¹²

The task of theology is not therefore to enforce external doctrines upon a person, but to awaken the personal experience of grace and to challenge, interpret and clarify this experience within the person. This is nothing less than to assist a person to encounter God. Rahner says,

⁴¹² Egan op. cit p. 142

“If God is truly the incomprehensible God, whose incomprehensibility perdures for all eternity, even there where we see God “face to face”, as Christians are wont to say, then it is completely obvious that a theology that wishes to answer all questions clearly and thoroughly is guaranteed to miss its proper “object”.”⁴¹³

The belief in “mystagogy” can be seen as an example of the important influence Martin Heidegger had on shaping Rahner’s view of the theological task. Rahner described himself as a “disciple” of Heidegger, and there is clearly the influence of Heidegger’s pedagogy in not teaching particular doctrines but in learning a style of thinking and investigating.⁴¹⁴

In summary, Rahner says that a life lived with an awareness of joy, despair, beauty and care, one that does not seek distractions from these experiences but fully enters into them, is a life that is open to God. It differs only in degree, but not in kind, from the lives of the great Christian Mystics such as Ignatius. For Rahner, God meets us in this life. He draws us onwards to see transcendent hope in our circumstances and to express our love in an awareness of the otherness within those with whom we share our lives. In this way our lives are in constant and mystical union with God. Our part is to be open to this process, to truly be hearers of God.

5.10 Why denote Rahner’s human person as “Hearer” and not “Knower”?

Much of the weight of academic interest in Rahner’s anthropology has focussed upon the role of his transcendental epistemology in defining the human person. In this respect, we might expect the subject to be denoted a “knowing” subject. However, given our examination of the existentials of the human being in this chapter we agree with Mark Lloyd Taylor⁴¹⁵ that this reading of Rahner’s theory of subjectivity is too heavily focussed upon epistemology and does not truly reflect Rahner’s intention. Over-emphasizing and isolating human transcendence as epistemological can also unwittingly lead to a misapprehension of the human subject as ‘learning’ by rational exercise in order to move along a transcendent existential. This does not appear to be

⁴¹³ Rahner, Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982 trans. Harvey D Egan Crossroads, 1986, p.216.

⁴¹⁴ Rahner makes this point himself in Karl Rahner in Dialogue, Crossroad, 1997, p.14, see also Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge Charles B Guignon, Hackett, 1981 for a full examination of Heidegger’s epistemology and pedagogy.

⁴¹⁵ Lloyd-Taylor M., God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner Scholars Press American Academy of Religion, 1986.

an accurate or fair reading of Rahner, in our opinion. As we have seen, there is a privileged place within Rahner's anthropology for rational questioning. However, in Rahner's understanding of revelation the process is more readily likened to a process of "tuning in" to God's self-revelation, an act of encounter, which is available in all acts of knowledge. Rahner goes further to say that this "knowing" is magnified in experiences of love, happiness and joy, as well as despair, emptiness and longing. In these experiences we become aware of the transcendent holy mystery breaking through our understanding and transforming us. Our experiences of "knowing" involved in these experiences is not arrived at by rational thought alone, but involves our total being, which Rahner sees in terms of both intellect and sense, and which is available at all times whether we are conscious of it or not. In this sense we believe that "hearing" is a better term than "knowing". The human can hear closely by attending, or on the contrary be inattentive and barely recognize the revelatory act of God in everything, much in the way of hearing background noise. In either case the noise is continuous and a level of hearing persists; a level of noise is always present to the human person, even if it is only the noise of our own being. In just such a way human transcendence and divine immanence is within and around us constantly. It speaks to us: we are hearers.

"We may therefore summarize our whole anthropology by saying as it were by way of definition: we are the beings of receptive spirituality, who stand in freedom before the free God of a possible revelation, which, if it comes, happens in our history through the word. We are the ones who, in our history, listen for the word of the free God. Only in this are we what we should be."⁴¹⁶

As we have appreciated from our cursory study of Rahner's Foundations, he takes great care to avoid objectifying divinity. There is a great emphasis on mystery and this can be read as a counter-balance to the more epistemological aspects of the person. Read in this way the hearer's questioning comes from a non-rational feeling of immense longing and not from the kind of rational enquiry that might be supposed. This strengthens Lloyd-Talyor's thesis regarding a less rationalistic reading of Rahner and encourages our connotation of the person as a "hearer" rather than a "knower".

We turn now to focus upon a further area of shared concern between Kristeva and Rahner, that of the important role of the "other" in constituting subjectivity. We shall focus upon Rahner's use of the Trinity as a model of inner-plurality, and his notion of

⁴¹⁶ Rahner, HW p. 142

the “Neighbour love” as offering an ethic of inter-subjectivity. We turn first to Kristeva and her use of otherness in the formation of speaking subject. We begin with her theory of the M/Other as the original ‘other’ of intra-subjectivity and then turn to her writings on the “stranger” as offering an ethic of inter-subjectivity.

6. The Role of the Other - Kristeva's Semiotic M/Other and the Stranger in Society.

We now turn to examine the importance Kristeva gives to concepts of otherness in the creation of the speaking subject. We anticipate that this area will offer a positive contribution in the interface between Rahner and Kristeva.

The theme of otherness is central to Kristeva's more recent work.⁴¹⁷ It is a highly evolved theme that unites her theories of intra- and inter-subjectivity. We recognise that this is an aspect of Kristeva's work that has attracted a great deal of academic attention, especially from feminist academics, and as such we anticipate encountering a number of complex areas of debate. We do not seek to bypass these areas but to examine them as fully as the remit of our thesis will allow. We aim to resist forcing a false symmetry between Kristeva's writing on otherness and that of Rahner. To this end we will again allow Kristeva to speak on her own terms, identifying areas of connection and difference with Rahner's hearer at the end of this chapter; areas that will be explored and developed in chapter ten of this thesis. We seek to establish what Kristeva's treatment of otherness has to offer theological anthropologies in respect to defining the relationship between intra- and inter-subjectivity; the speaking subject here informing and resourcing the person as hearer.

Our previous examination of Kristeva's thesis drew mainly upon her doctoral work, which was published as Revolution in Poetic Language.⁴¹⁸ Our focus now turns to later Kristevan works that focus upon the place of the other in the formation of the self. Here, we shall concentrate on the works Tales of Love;⁴¹⁹ Desire in Language,⁴²⁰ In the Beginning was Love,⁴²¹ the essay "Stabat Mater"⁴²² and Strangers to

⁴¹⁷ See PH, ITB and STO

⁴¹⁸ Julia Kristeva Revolution in Poetic Language (1974) Trans. Margaret Waller. New York :Columbia University Press, 1984 [RPL]

⁴¹⁹ Julia Kristeva Tales of Love Trans. Leon S. Roudiez New York :Columbia University Press, 1987 [TL]

⁴²⁰ Julia Kristeva Desire in Language: a semiotic approach to literature and art edited by Leon S. Roudiez Oxford : Blackwell, 1980 [DIL]

⁴²¹ Julia Kristeva In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith trans. A Goldhammer, New York Columbia University Press, 1987 [ITB]

⁴²² Julia Kristeva "Stabat Mater" appearing in Tales of Love trans. Leon S, Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1987.

Ourselves⁴²³ as well as a number of secondary articles and interviews. In doing so, we find two inter-related notions of the other: the semiotic M/Other and the stranger. We shall explore how the former is used in the exploration of intra-subjectivity, whilst the latter provides Kristeva with a basis for inter-subjective ethics. We shall consider the role of each in the creation of the speaking subject.

This chapter will be followed by a study of Rahner's similarly twofold use of otherness in explorations of subjectivity. He adopts the doctrine of the Trinity as a model of inner-plurality and the notion of "neighbour-love", the loving response to the other, in the construction of ethics. We suggest that the Kristevan argument that recognising 'strangeness within' is necessary in order not to do violence to the 'strangers in society', is a useful way to understand and expand upon Rahner's notion of "neighbour-love."

6.1 The Role of the Other for Kristeva

In essence, the purpose of the other in Kristeva's thesis is to deconstruct the notion of a whole and unified self. As we have seen in previous chapters, her notion of subjectivity stresses the fragmented and unstable nature of selfhood.⁴²⁴ The other continually disrupts the unification of the self, which means that the speaking subject is a process which is both ongoing and unfulfilled and remains fundamentally "split".⁴²⁵

Kristeva's first use of a notion of the other is related to the "semiotic" force. This force is the threat of non-meaning that exists within and beneath the apparent, coherent symbolic order.⁴²⁶ Here we consider how Kristeva relates otherness to the body of the Mother and to the feminine generally. We note that Kristeva is keen to distance her theory from biologism,⁴²⁷ and uses gendered terms in a purely theoretical way. Kristeva defines all biological categories as discursive terms, with no direct

⁴²³ Julia Kristeva Strangers to Ourselves Trans. Leon S Roudiez. Columbia University Press, 1991 [STO]

⁴²⁴ See ch. 3 of this thesis.

⁴²⁵ This notion was covered fully in ch.3 of this thesis.

⁴²⁶ Kristeva, RPL.

⁴²⁷ "Biologism" refers to theories which relate aspects of selfhood to biological entities; a criticism often made of Freud, particularly his notion of the "phallus". This critique drove Lacan's revision of Freud, where the "phallus" is not related to any biological organ, but to the theoretical notion of power. As we saw in ch.2 of this thesis Kristeva adopts an anti-realist schema that would prohibit the "marked" human body of a set biology.

reference to a reality behind or beneath them. In this, Kristeva separates the term Mother from mothers, and Feminine from females. This is a difficult and precarious distinction to make; the wisdom and validity of this methodology has divided opinion among commentators.⁴²⁸ For clarity, and in order to denote the separation of the theory of the Mother from the lived experiences of mothers, the term to connote Kristevan otherness in this thesis will be termed M/Other.⁴²⁹

Before we commence our examination of Kristevan otherness, we note that commentators disagree as to the extent to which she relates “the semiotic” to the “feminine,” even in this theoretical sense. This is relevant in defining notions of the Other in Kristeva. Many, with Elizabeth Grosz, see an explicit linkage,

“The semiotic and the chora are explicitly maternal and feminine in Kristeva’s account, while the symbolic is paternal, bound up with concepts of the symbolic father and the castrated mother.”⁴³⁰

Others, like John Lechte, would like to limit the scope of this identification,

“The unnameable, heterogeneous element is called “feminine” in Kristeva’s writing in the mid-seventies”⁴³¹

Susan Rowland agrees with the identification of the “maternal” with the semiotic M/Other in Kristeva’s work, but is less ready to use the terms “the feminine” or “female” as interchangeable with “the maternal” as Grosz appears to do. Rowland points out,

“The semiotic is structurally linked to the mother’s body. It is pre-Oedipal maternal so it must contain the potential for both genders as it is before symbolic definitions and the understanding of gender as an exclusive binary. Therefore the semiotic is not ‘the feminine’.”⁴³²

⁴²⁸ A point we shall return to when considering feminist critiques of Kristeva later in this chapter.

⁴²⁹ This term is first used in ch.3 of this thesis to express the feminine maternal that is experienced at the site of the pre-Oedipal child with its mother. The notion is of the maternal as Other. The term is not entirely our own, being first used as “(m)other” by Beth Jensen, 1985, in *The (m)other tongue: essays in feminist psychoanalytical interpretation* Cornell University Press, 1985. Jensen adapted this term in her later work *Leaving the M/other: Whitman, Kristeva, and Leaves of grass*, New York Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. This is where we first encountered the term. We have chosen to adapt Jensen’s term giving the Other its capital letter to connote that the phrase relates to the primary source of otherness.

⁴³⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, Allen and Unwin, 1989, p.49.

⁴³¹ John Lechte “Julia Kristeva” Routledge 1990, p.201.

⁴³² Susan Rowland, “Jungian Feminisms in Deconstruction with Post-Freudian Feminisms” ch.5 of *Jung: A Feminist ReVision* (awaiting publication).

Given this, we conclude that it is permissible to relate the semiotic directly to the M/Other, but require more caution in relating this to the term “feminine”. In any respect, the semiotic feminine and the M/Other are used as expressions of otherness within Kristeva’s thought, even if, as Rowland argues, they cannot be directly related to each other.

Whilst we shall return to the debate over Kristeva’s use of gendered terms for “semiotic”, we should first clarify that this does not concern the place of women within Kristeva’s paradigm. The speaking subject is not a gendered subject. Neither does Kristeva seek to suggest an overt privileging of women’s experience, perhaps by virtue of their monopoly of the semiotic. “Woman” or “feminine” belong to a purely pragmatic category having no ontological significance. Kristeva rejects modernist ideas of essential female nature; her use of gendered terms for the semiotic is not an attempt to formulate a universal female experience. As Bordo comments,

“Gender has become [for Kristeva and post-modernists] a discursive formation, inherently unstable and continually self-deconstructing...the meaning of gender is constantly deferred, endlessly multiple.”⁴³³

Kristeva herself says,

“We must use “we are women” as an advertisement or slogan for our demands. On a deeper level, however, a woman cannot be; it is something which does not belong in the order of being...In “woman” I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies.”⁴³⁴

Kristeva’s point is that, as a socio-political construct rather than an ontological term, “woman” cannot and should not be defined. In this, she could be termed a “total social constructionist” in that she views sex as well as gender to be social constructs. This belief is largely an extension of the work begun by Michel Foucault in that it relies upon the deconstruction of scientific language and discourse. According to Foucault, discourse, including that found with biology, can never be seen as neutral.⁴³⁵ Rather it is based upon the desire to legitimise present social structures by suggesting that they are “natural” and incontrovertible. According to Foucault, this process usually

⁴³³ Susan Bordo, “Feminism. Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism” appears as ch.6 of Feminism/Postmodernism ed. Linda Nicholson, Routledge 1990, p.134.

⁴³⁴ From an interview with Kristeva “La femme, ce n’est jamais ça” (Woman can never be defined) appearing in Tel Quel, Autumn, 1974.

⁴³⁵ Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality trans. Robert Hurley. Pelican Books 1981

involves setting up hierarchies and dualisms that support the Enlightenment philosophy of the rational self. They act to mask the violence or “will to power” that underlies them. Foucault’s analysis suggests that scientific knowledge is far from being incontrovertible and is just as subjective as other discourses, and, as such, is vulnerable to deconstruction.

For Kristeva the dualistic construction of biological discourse unduly limits human sexuality to one of two given sexes and, as such, is an act of power and control. She argues for a deconstruction of such biological terms. She suggests that from a deconstruction of dualistic sexuality many other equally legitimate and multiplicitous ways of speaking of human sexuality will evolve. This will involve the rejection of set biological categories such as male and female. In this way, for Kristeva, gender, identity and language are irretrievably intertwined and are therefore examined together in this thesis.⁴³⁶

Taking into consideration the debate as to the extent to which Kristeva relates the ‘feminine’ to the semiotic, it appears clear to us that Kristeva is mainly concerned to express the semiotic as other. In order to do this she resorts to feminine terms in her notion of the theoretical M/Other.⁴³⁷ This achieves her desire to place semiotics outside of the paternal domain of symbolic relations and absolute distinction. For Kristeva, the M/Other, or semiotic realm, precedes such categorisations. The semiotic exists as other to the symbolic order and constantly disturbs and disrupts the system of language. Kristeva chooses to somewhat anthropomorphise this process of semiotic disruption by relating it to the infant’s experience of the pre-Oedipal Mother. The re-positioning of identity creation to experiences of the maternal body allows Kristeva to undermine the phallogentric focus of psychoanalysis.

We shall now turn to a close examination of the role and nature of the M/Other in Kristeva’s writings, and how this theoretical figure acts as the other to the speaking subject in the process of continual re-creation.

⁴³⁶ The use of gendered terms in an anti-realist paradigm will provide a focus for a critique of Kristeva’s work by contemporary feminists later in this chapter.

⁴³⁷ A notion we explored in chapter 3 pp. 52-60 of this thesis.

6.2 The M/Other: space and force.

According to Elizabeth Grosz,

“Maternity is probably the most central and sustained object of Kristeva’s investigations.”⁴³⁸

In this examination we consider Kristeva’s use of the term “maternity” and how she relates this to the mother’s body. We shall see that she views the M/Other as the central site where both identity creation and language acquisition takes place. In short, the maternal is the place that exists before identity. Motherhood and birth are seen as fundamental moments of the splitting of selfhood (and all symbolisation). In this, she argues for the M/Other to be recognised as the original other and the site for the emergence of the split subject.

Kristeva describes the maternal as a motherland existing outside of and anterior to language.⁴³⁹ In Grosz’s summary,

“‘She’ remains the necessarily unspoken underside of social and psychic order.”⁴⁴⁰

For Kristeva, a proper understanding of the semiotic and symbolic facets of language reveals maternal origins to both the development of language and the notion of selfhood. The promotion of the feminine as Other will be of great importance to both Kristeva’s semiotics and her philosophical notions of personhood and this will provide for a useful comparison with Rahner’s use of otherness in the person as hearer.

In examining Kristeva’s use of maternity as a critical tool our first focus is the extent to which she describes the M/Other as a space; a place for processes to flow across. We shall then consider how Kristeva presents the M/Other as a disruptive force. Our twin foci are borrowed from Grosz’s reading of Kristeva⁴⁴¹. She says,

⁴³⁸ Grosz, op. cit. p.78

⁴³⁹ See Kristeva PH and TL

⁴⁴⁰ Grosz, op. cit. p.78

⁴⁴¹ Grosz, Ibid.

“The maternal, for Kristeva, designates both a space and a series of functions and processes.”⁴⁴²

6.3 The M/Other as Space

Kristeva views the human self, from its very beginning, as insubstantial; that is, it is a space across which physical and psychic impulses rhythmically flow. According to Kristeva, at the earliest developmental stage of the human infant⁴⁴³ these impulses centre on the mother.

“Drives involve pre-Oedipal semiotic functions and energy discharges that connect and orientate the body to the mother. We must emphasise that “drives” are always already ambiguous, simultaneously assimilating and destructive...The oral and anal drives, both of which are orientated and structured around the mother’s body, dominate this sensorimotor organisation.”⁴⁴⁴

Kristeva first makes the association between semiotics and the body of the mother in Revolution in Poetic Language. She refers to her womb and breasts in particular, since the early pre-Oedipal drives are experienced here. This notion is expounded in a poetic interruption to the text of her later essay “Stabat Mater” where Kristeva describes early childhood experience of pre-Oedipal mother’s body,

“No time at all. Fragrance of honey, roundness of forms, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks. Mummy. Almost no sight – a shadow that darkens, soaks me up or vanishes amid flashes. Almost no voice in her placid presence.”⁴⁴⁵

It is clear from Kristeva’s writings that the pre-Oedipal semiotic stage is left behind in the child’s further development. Prior to this separation the self is not yet distinct, and the infant experiences itself as part of the mother, as symbiotically joined. We recall from our previous chapter that this symbiosis will be broken as the infant enters the phase of distinguishing between objects and itself (Lacan’s “mirror stage”).⁴⁴⁶ Therefore, we can say that Kristeva posits that our first experience of otherness is the loss of semiotic unity with the M/Other. As this process is entered into, language is learned. Kristeva says,

⁴⁴² Grosz op. cit. p. 79

⁴⁴³ We refer to ch.3 of this thesis which outlines Kristeva’s four stages of infant development.

⁴⁴⁴ Kristeva, RPL p. 27

⁴⁴⁵ “Stabat Mater” first appeared in *Tel Quel* (Winter) p.30-49. This essay is reprinted in Tales of Love trans. Leon Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1987, pp. 234-263, this quote p 256.

⁴⁴⁶ See ch.3 of this thesis

“Language learning can therefore be thought of as an acute and dramatic confrontation between positing-separating-identifying and the motility of the semiotic chora. *Separation from the mother’s body*, the fort-da game, anality and orality, all act as a permanent negativity that destroys the image and the isolated object even as it facilitates the articulation of the semiotic network, which will afterwards be necessary in the system of language where it will be more or less integrated as a signifier.”⁴⁴⁷

The semiotic M/Other is described in Kristeva’s later work, Tales of Love,

“(T)hat ideal is nevertheless a blinding, non-representable power – a sun or a ghost.”⁴⁴⁸

In this way the M/Other is an insubstantial space. The prize of separation from the M/Other is language acquisition and entrance to the symbolic order (relating to Lacan’s “Law of the Father”).⁴⁴⁹ The characteristic of this order is the subject’s ability to make distinctions and construct hierarchies. This order comes to overshadow the semiotic order, forcing it beneath itself as its persistent other.

“The symbolic is erected only on the basis of repression of the maternal...civilisation, the symbolic order, the coherent text, then are possible only at the cost of the silencing, the phallicisation, of the maternal chora.”⁴⁵⁰

The first human experience of the other is therefore posited by Kristeva to be an experience of original symbiosis and then dramatic loss. This loss permits the subject to be created. However having been rejected, the semiotic persists as the unrepresentable aspect to language, which defies distinction and representation. The maternal semiotic threatens the unity of the subject, and forever forces the emerging “I” to be in process or to use Kristeva’s term, to be an “exile” from the M/Other.

At this point we might add that in designating the maternal body as a “space” Kristeva posits a very controversial notion of pregnancy and maternity. For Kristeva, pregnancy does not involve the mother as an agent; maternity has no subject. This is apparent in the following passage from Desire in Language,

“Cells fuse, split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other. And no-one is present, within that simultaneously dual and alien space, to signify what is going on. ‘It happens

⁴⁴⁷ RPL p.47 – our emphasis.

⁴⁴⁸ TL p.41-42

⁴⁴⁹ See ch.3 of this thesis

⁴⁵⁰ RPL p.49

but I'm not there.' 'I cannot realize it, but it goes on.' Motherhood's impossible syllogism."⁴⁵¹

Maternity, viewed this way, is a subject-less process. It happens without the will or action of the pregnant woman.

"The maternal body is the place of splitting. Through a body destined to ensure reproduction of the species, the woman-subject...(is) more of a filter than anyone else – a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture'. To imagine that there is someone in that filter – such is the source of religious mystifications."⁴⁵²

Kristeva has a particular point to make in this. For her, the presence of the woman, the real-life mother, as a subject in maternity would allow the phallic fantasy of the "master", the omnipotent mother, to be present. This, for Kristeva, would threaten the emerging subjecthood of the developing child,

"If we suppose her to be master of a process that is prior to the socio-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group, then we acknowledge the risk of losing identity at the same time as we ward it off."⁴⁵³

We view this to be an example of Kristeva's inherent individualism. Subjecthood is viewed here as a process undertaken in isolation from other person-subjects, therefore the maternal other is a "space" rather than a person. We shall return to critique this notion when considering Rahnerian subjecthood as contrasting with Kristeva in this respect.⁴⁵⁴

6.4 The Abject

It is also worth briefly examining Kristeva's use of the notion of the "abject" to connote the disruptive force linked to the experience of the otherness of the M/Other. This term, unlike the "semiotic", is not an unmitigated memory of the M/Other but rather a feeling of disgust and rejection which comes about because of separation from the M/Other.

"Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵¹ DIL p.237

⁴⁵² WT reprinted p.238 in The Kristeva Reader

⁴⁵³ DIL p.238

⁴⁵⁴ Conclusions we draw together in ch.10 of this thesis.

⁴⁵⁵ PH p.2

As we saw in chapter three of this thesis, the stage where the developing infant experiences the abject is immediately after the semiotic union with the M/Other and prior to the full “mirror stage” where it differentiates itself from her.⁴⁵⁶ Abjection therefore refers to “an extreme state of subjectivity – a crisis in which the borders of the self and other radically break down.”⁴⁵⁷

Abjection works on a number of levels. Originally it is experienced on the level of individual psychosexual development. The abject here marks the moment when we separated from the mother, when we began to recognise a boundary between our “self” and the M/Other. In Powers of Horror Kristeva states that our first experience of the abject haunts and destabilises the relationship between mother and child. She describes how the emerging subjectivity of the child experiences a primitive terror of maternal engulfment that threatens the boundaries of the self almost before they come into being.⁴⁵⁸ In this Kristeva describes how the emerging subjectivity of the child knows itself through the experience of being thrown out or repulsed from the M/Other. This difficult experience of the maternal involves the feeling of abjection, “a fluid haze, an elusive clamminess,” “ghostly glimmer” and a “violent nausea”.⁴⁵⁹ For Cleo McNelly Kearns the resultant subjective condition arising from the experience of abjection around the site of the M/Other is one of “discomfort, unease and dizziness”.⁴⁶⁰ This foundational experience of otherness forms the basis for subject-object relations.

There is a second level at which we experience abjection, one that is experienced as a persistent threat to the formed speaking subject. “Abjects” are neither subjects nor objects, but are rather all bodily experiences that threaten our sense of being a distinct and “proper” self.⁴⁶¹ These could be “unclean food”, bodily fluids, wounds, all forms of decay, and even criminality. In fact, for Kristeva, anything that represents “the in-

⁴⁵⁶ As we saw, in ch. 3 this stage is a unique Kristevan addition to Lacan’s three stages of infant development. In it, Kristeva highlights the sense of threat that the abject causes in the development of the “proper self”.

⁴⁵⁷ Magan Becker-Leckrone, Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.151.

⁴⁵⁸ PH p.6. See also Cleo McNelly Kearns essay “Kristeva and Feminist Theology” pp.49-80 in Transfigurations: Theology and French Feminists ed. C.W. Maggie Kin, Susan M. St Ville and Susan M. Simonaitis, Wipf and Stock, 1993.

⁴⁵⁹ PH p.6

⁴⁶⁰ Cleo McNelly Kearns op. cit. p.58

⁴⁶¹ PH p.6-7

between, the ambiguous, the composite” elicits feelings of abjection in the self because they remind the self of its initial feeling of horror as it experienced splitting from the M/Other. Such processes disturb our sense of having secure borders. In other words, our experience of feelings of “abjection” reminds us of the initial splitting stage. Kristeva says the abject draws the self towards the place where meaning collapses. These disturbing experiences might be known in moments of crisis; they threaten the feeling of having secure boundaries to the self and, as such, abjects operate as other to the self. Kristeva sees “borderline patients” as particularly aware of abjection.⁴⁶²

If abjection is known in moments of crisis and madness then it seems telling that, for Kristeva, abjection is the key means to interpret and explain religious motifs such as defilement, purification and atonement and, in fact, much religious expression and experience.⁴⁶³

“Abjection accompanies all religious structurings and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse.”⁴⁶⁴

In other words, the evolution of religious motifs is directly linked to the experience of primary abjection from the M/Other. In fact, religion is a temporary home for feelings of abjection which will outlast religious belief to be “worked out” in other artistic expressions. It is none other than the longing for the maternal that drives religious sentiment, for Kristeva. The abject is present in religion where the threat of meaning breaking down is represented.

“The various means of purifying the abject – the various catharsis- make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and nearside of religion.”⁴⁶⁵

Furthermore, Kristeva sees art, which is grounded in the experience of abjection, as “destined to survive the collapse of the historical forms of religions.”⁴⁶⁶

Kristeva’s interpretation denies any transcendental cause for the experience of ‘immense longing’. In other words, the characteristic of longing that we appreciated

⁴⁶² PH p.7

⁴⁶³ See Kristeva ch.4 “Semiotics of Biblical Abomination” pp.90-112 RPL. Kristeva most usually relates the uncanny to religious motifs of purity and defilement.

⁴⁶⁴ PH p.17

⁴⁶⁵ PH p.17

⁴⁶⁶ PH p.17

in Rahner's notion of the hearer is, for Kristeva, none other than the recollection of the experience of abjection in the emerging subject and a longing for the undifferentiated semiotic harmony with the M/Other. In this religion is, like madness, an expression of abjection surfacing in the split subject.

Perhaps this reading of the experience of longing is an inevitable pre-supposition for Kristeva since she has already discounted the possibility for an external reality in her adoption of an anti-realist discursive arena for selfhood. Christian theologians would, of course, be likely to reject this explanation and look beyond discursive reality for the source of human longing.⁴⁶⁷ However, it is perhaps worth considering, with Kristeva, that the pivotal experience of separation from the maternal body has a lasting legacy both in terms of the individual's psyche and in society more generally. Could the trauma of abjection in this pre-subjective experience foster the mixed emotions of desire and hatred that are, according to much feminist analysis, directed towards women's bodies in every culture?⁴⁶⁸ Kristeva implies this in Tales of Love⁴⁶⁹ where she states that where women have been reduced to a maternal function in patriarchal societies which leads to a "misplaced abjection" of women within these societies. This is, for Kristeva, the root cause of female oppression and degradation.

6.5 M/Other as a Powerful Force

So far we have considered how Kristeva views maternity as a subject-less space. However the lack of agency should not imply a lack of power. The second focus for this examination is Kristeva's notion that the M/Other is a powerful, disruptive force. Here too abjection is seen as the key means by which the M/Other's power is exercised. In her essay "Stabat Mater" Kristeva says maternity is,

⁴⁶⁷ Although we consider the adoption of non-realism by the Sea of Faith a/theologies in chapter 10 of this thesis.

⁴⁶⁸ This argument is fully considered in an as yet unpublished thesis by Christine E Jamieson "The significance of the Body in Ethical Discourse: Julia Kristeva's Contribution to Moral Theology". The outline of Jamieson's thesis is found on www.longergan.on.ca/cvjamieson.htm. Jamieson uses Kristeva's notion of the abject to inform a reading of Christian body theology giving special emphasis to Rosemary Ruether Radford. Whilst we agree with Jamieson's reading of the privileging of the maternal body in Kristeva's notion of subjectivity we do not share her expectation that this will properly give precedence to the body *per se*. We believe that Kristeva's denial of agency for a woman in the maternal body undermines the possibility of her work being viewed as positive to corporeality in any real sense. Whilst the body of the mother is present in the process of producing subjectivity for Kristeva, the agency of a real woman is denied.

⁴⁶⁹ TL p. 374

“An identity catastrophe that causes the Name to topple over into the unnameable that one imagines as femininity, nonlanguage, or body.”⁴⁷⁰

This notion of feminine power involves Kristeva relating otherness to the feminine semiotic that emerges within certain types of writing. It is as otherness within poetry and art that the semiotic powerfully disrupts the systems of language of whole communities. The link between the disruption of the individual and that of social groups is first made in Revolution in Poetic Language. Here, Kristeva interestingly traces the power of the semiotic M/Other throughout the development of poetry in the twentieth century.

According to Kristeva, by the end of the century, poetic language had developed to a stage where its function within literature was nothing less than an attempt to disrupt logical order itself. This was not done from a stance which Kristeva terms “delirium,” the construction of a purely semiotic discourse, which Kristeva believes to be impossible. Rather, Kristeva sees in the work of Joyce or Bataille, for example, that poetic language moves beyond madness on one hand and realism on the other, maintaining both “delirium” and “logic”.⁴⁷¹ For Kristeva, this revolution in poetic language entailed the recovery of the primary importance of the M/Other. This was achieved by an awareness of the phonic facets of poetic language, which recall the experience of the M/Other. In this, poetry comes to mediate otherness to the speaking subject. Considering avant-garde poetry, Kristeva sees the power of maternal semiotics surging up through phonetic, syntactic and logical orders to disrupt them and, with them, all ideologies that are erected to ignore or repress the semiotic. According to Kristeva, this revolution was truly begun by twentieth century avant-garde poets.⁴⁷² The new language of twentieth century poetry is seen as beginning a social revolution,

“Since the end of the nineteenth century “poetry” has deliberately maintained the balance between sociality and madness, and we view this as the sign of a new era...Consequently poetry ceased to be “art” and claimed other functions: showing the heterogeneity that works on all practice and furnishing every disappearance of meaning with a signifying device and practical scope.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷⁰ “Stabat Mater” TL p.235

⁴⁷¹ RPL p.82

⁴⁷² RPL p.83

⁴⁷³ RPL p.212, 216

In terms of society the abject has to do with "what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."⁴⁷⁴

According to Kristeva, the best modern literature explores the place of the abject, the place where boundaries, and especially those of subject/object, break down.

“On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.”⁴⁷⁵

In this way both maternal semiotics and the abject, which is itself the result of splitting away from the M/Other, persist as disruptive forces in both an individual and societal setting.

We find that artistic representations of the corpse are especially relevant to Kristeva's concept of the power of the maternal other in art.⁴⁷⁶ The corpse graphically portrays the breakdown of the distinction between subject and object. It is an abject. A corpse confronts us with our own eventual death, made palpably real. In an essay entitled “Holbein’s Dead Christ”⁴⁷⁷ Kristeva explores the feeling of abjection arising from a particular religious painting, that of Holbein the Younger, “The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb”, (1522).⁴⁷⁸ In this essay Kristeva reflects on how this painting of Christ in the tomb made a remarkable impression upon the writer Dostoyevsky. On seeing the painting, one of his characters in The Idiot, remarks,

“That picture...that picture! Why some people may lose their faith by looking at that picture?”⁴⁷⁹

The quality of abjection in this painting, according to Kristeva, is the way in which Christ is utterly dead. He has lost his subjecthood.

“Rigor mortis had not yet set in, so there is still a look of suffering on the face of the dead man, as though he were still feeling it (that has been well caught by the artist); on the other hand, the face has not been spared in the least; it is

⁴⁷⁴ PH, p.4

⁴⁷⁵ PH p.207

⁴⁷⁶ PH p.3

⁴⁷⁷ This essay was originally published in “Soleil noir: Depression et melancholie”, 1987. It has been reproduced in Fragments for a History of the Human Body Part One, ed. Michel Feher, The MIT Press, 1989.

⁴⁷⁸ Musee des Beaux Arts, Bale.

⁴⁷⁹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky The Idiot trans. David Magarshack, Viking Penguin, 1955.

nature itself, and, indeed, any man's face would look like that after such suffering."⁴⁸⁰

Here the general feeling aroused by the abject is heightened in that it is Christ's corpse being portrayed. Kristeva says,

"The unadorned representation of human death, the death or well-nigh anatomical stripping of the corpse conveys to viewers an unbearable anguish before the death of God, which is here mingled with our own death because there isn't the slightest suggestion of transcendence... this corpse will never rise again."⁴⁸¹

The portrayal of Christ as utterly dead disturbs not only our sense of immortality but also our sense of transcendence in totality. God is viewed as dead here. Furthermore in Holbein's depiction, for Kristeva, there is no suggestion of resurrection. This would be a cause for the viewer to "lose faith". However, interestingly, in her essay, Kristeva adds that the depiction of Christ as utterly dead would have been experienced firsthand by the original disciples. She wonders what possibly could have happened to them to convince them that this corpse had been raised. Could Kristeva be inferring here that only a true experience of resurrection could explain early Christian faith?

Returning to consider how the corpse is an abject, Kristeva says

"Consequently, death reveals itself as such to the imaginative ability of the self in the isolation of signs or their banalization up to the point of disappearing: such is Holbein's minimalism."⁴⁸²

In this way, Kristeva links the power of the abject to disrupt ideas of the self and the stability of symbols. As Kristeva puts it, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject."⁴⁸³

Before we proceed further, it may be worthwhile considering the novelty of Kristeva's approach. She introduces a psychoanalytical discourse on maternity within that of language acquisition and the formation of selfhood. In this her work is situated between the fields of contemporary feminism and post-modernism. Here we shall observe that Kristeva has been criticised by both camps, and that her work defies each category. This is entirely fitting perhaps, given Kristeva's belief that symbolic

⁴⁸⁰ Reprinted in Feher, op. cit. p. 240

⁴⁸¹ Ibid. p.241-242

⁴⁸² Ibid. p. 265

⁴⁸³ PH p.4

distinctions require disruption. Her work can be seen to disrupt the categories of feminism and post-modernism, and challenge both. Whilst other postmodernist theorists employ a discussion about language and psychoanalysis in order to explain the creation of the illusion of the self, Kristeva is remarkable in the place she gives maternity in this process. Her insistence upon a central and significant place for female otherness situates her within the broader feminist project to recover the female position as a place of power and influence.

In emphasising the role of Mother as Other, Kristeva might be said to extend the work of early feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir. In de Beauvoir's monumental work, The Second Sex⁴⁸⁴ women in a patriarchal society are consistently "other" to all that is masculine, and the norm. According to de Beauvoir, 'Woman' has always been necessary to man. She is the means by which males, and male culture, formulate their own identity and fulfil their own destiny. In this, 'woman' is never "a thing in itself" but always and only what is not male. Kristeva extends this notion of the "otherness" of the feminine one stage further than de Beauvoir and turns the marginalisation of the feminine into a positive, rather than a patriarchal, concept. With neither "male" nor "female" having any ontological reality nonetheless the primary experience of the semiotic centres on the M/Other, and given its persistence after separation, the feminine semiotic is a powerful and disruptive force, which pre-exists the male discourse of symbolic order.

However, in common with Beauvoir's notion of the "secondary" nature of femaleness, the female discourse of semiotics can have no independent existence.

John Lechte says,

"To avoid psychosis, the feminine element (in men and women) needs to be inscribed within the symbolic order. According to Kristeva, the feminine semiotic may be potentially disruptive of an overly rigid form of the symbolic but it cannot humanly exist independently of it...To put it simply: the social sphere signified by the Name-of-the-Father is itself complicit with a patriarchy that makes the independent existence of the feminine impossible."⁴⁸⁵

Rather than accept this exclusion by patriarchy, Kristeva and the 'second generation' of French feminists celebrate the marginalised position of "woman". Cixious and

⁴⁸⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. H. M. Parshley, Pan Books, 1988 (first published 1949).

⁴⁸⁵ Lechte, Julia Kristeva London, Routledge, 1990, p201-202.

Irigaray share the desire to question dominant systems of meaning by using non-traditional narrative structures emphasising linguistic ambiguity and gaps in the patriarchal discourse. Of this Catherine Belsey says,

“Whatever the male tradition ignored – intuition, imagination, lyricism – and whatever it condemned – wild festivity, witchcraft – French feminism promoted.”⁴⁸⁶

It is Kristeva’s gendered description of this polarity within language that groups her work with that of Cixious and Irigaray. However, she does not ascribe either sex as having ownership of either facet of language. She disallows for the relationship Cixious makes between the ‘marked’ body and language. For Kristeva the body is largely unmarked and indeterminate; thus avoiding the biological essentialism or reductionism that she sees as threatening the dissolution of gender difference in the work of Cixious and Irigaray. Kristeva can be said to be the keenest among those known as “French feminists” to stress the anti-realism of binary sexual difference. Her refusal to “celebrate the feminine” has led to ambivalence concerning her relationship with feminism itself. This does not appear to overly concern Kristeva. Her criticisms of feminism are addressed in the essay “Woman’s Time”. Here she charges feminism, or more properly modernist feminism,⁴⁸⁷ with adopting a limiting remit of seeking equality within the existing system. She calls for a fundamental revolution of that order and for a move beyond the duality of sex.

“In this third attitude, which I strongly advocate – which I imagine? – the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to metaphysics. What can ‘identity’, even ‘sexual identity’, mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged? I am not simply suggesting a very hypothetical bisexuality which, even if it existed, would only, in fact be the aspiration towards the totality of one of the sexes and thus an effacing of difference. What I mean is, first of all, the demassification of the problematic of difference.”⁴⁸⁸

If Kristeva is somewhat at odds with contemporary feminists, in that she appears more strongly in favour of post-modern anti-realistic notions of the body, she also has a

⁴⁸⁶ Catherine Belsey (ed.) The Feminist Reader : essays in gender and the politics of literary criticism Macmillan, 1997, p.240

⁴⁸⁷ We use Elaine Storkey’s typography from Created or Constructed: The Great Gender Debate Paternoster Press 2000. Modernist feminists question the staticity of gender yet hold claim to the notion of sexual difference, beyond its basis in the discourse of language.

⁴⁸⁸ From “Woman’s Time” this essay was translated in Signs, 7, no.1 (Autumn 1981) pp.13-35. This essay is reprinted in The Kristeva Reader ed. Toril Moi, Blackwell 1986, pp.187-213, this citation appearing p.209.

difficult relationship with other post-modernist theorists. Her “turn to maternity” is viewed by some post-modernists as allowing essentialism to return ‘via the back door’ and as a return to the idealisation of the mother. However, given Kristeva’s anti-realism, this is certainly not her intention. Her starting point is that, just as “woman” cannot be defined, nor should “motherhood” be seen in any essentialist category.

This creates a paradox for Kristeva, a gender-sceptic, which surfaces most readily in her essay “Stabat Mater” where the bodily experience of childbirth and motherhood are explored in the creation of ethics. She begins her introduction to “Stabat Mater” asking,

“If it is not possible to say of a *woman* what she *is* (without running the risk of abolishing her difference), would it be perhaps different concerning the mother, since that is the only function of “the other sex” to which we can definitely attribute existence?”⁴⁸⁹

In “Stabat Mater” Kristeva explores the influence of the cult of the Virgin Mother on the understanding of motherhood and femininity. In this the analysis of gender, literature, linguistics and religion come together. Offering an insight into maternity, this essay was written during Kristeva’s own experience of pregnancy and birth, descriptions of which interrupt the body of the text as a series of poems and observations. She suggests that the experience of motherhood is primarily one of separation. In this there is the inference of a special privileging of female experience provided by giving birth. Kristeva suggests that the understanding of maternity as one encompassing separation, ambiguous self-identity and loss could pave the way for a new “herethics” of reproduction and death.⁴⁹⁰ We recall that in this the feminine experience in question is only theoretical the M/other here is a “space” without an agent. A woman’s experience of giving birth, possibly the most poignant “I-Thou” encounter available to humans, may have once been seen as a female experience that could inform a feminine ethic, however, no such reciprocity is allowed in Kristeva’s schema.

As Grosz says,

“Maternity is thus not the function of a woman...it is an organic, a social, pre-signifying space-time: it is disembodied, a function and not a mode of the corporeal specific to women. It cannot be attributed to woman, for woman is precisely that which does not exist.... She is content to attribute an irreducibly

⁴⁸⁹ From “Stabat Mater” TL p 234

⁴⁹⁰ From “Stabat Mater” TL p263

biological basis to pregnancy while refusing an identity or agency to the pregnant woman.”⁴⁹¹

It would appear that Kristeva’s use of the maternal body places her at the intersection of different and often opposing theories. She faces criticism from both feminist and post-modernist camps. Others, and perhaps this is our position, feel disappointed by the repositioning of a corporeal experience such as the body and maternity to the dislocated arena of sexuality.

Feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz have met such theories with scorn,

“Sexual differences, like those of class and race, are bodily differences...the body must be reconceived, not in opposition to culture, but as its pre-eminent object.”⁴⁹²

While much is said of the role of the body of the mother to the construction of discourse, and this being in the formally “female” territory of birth and early motherhood, Kristeva dislocates this process from women themselves. Grosz concludes,

“It is ironic that (Kristeva) problematizes the concepts of ‘man’, ‘woman’ and ‘identity’, seeing them as forms of a metaphysics of presence, when, at the same time and unlike many other feminists, she concedes the relevance of biological, physiological, genetic and chromosomal structures in her discussion of maternity. She is content to attribute an irreducibly biological basis to pregnancy while refusing an identity or agency to the pregnant woman.... In refusing to accord a sex to the maternal body, Kristeva seems to accept an essentialist notion of maternity as a process without a subject.”⁴⁹³

In this way, the influence of corporeality is greatly reduced in Kristeva’s wider notion of selfhood, in our opinion. The actual mother here has no agency in the gestation or birth of her baby. In the early experiences of the child it is ‘M/Other’ at work, rather than a woman. An unbridgeable gap has opened up between the experiences of women, as mothers or otherwise, and the power of the pre-Oedipal Mother. Embodiment here is side-lined, to a great extent, for a notion of corporeality that is only theoretically “feminine”, and this as an experience that remains defined by what it is not (being ex-centric, and other to a male norm). While corporeality is emphasised in the development of the pre-Oedipal child, the importance of this aspect

⁴⁹¹ Elizabeth Grosz *Space, time and perversion : essays on the politics of bodies* Routledge, 1995 p.97

⁴⁹² Ibid. p.32

⁴⁹³ Ibid. p.132

to the mother is to a large extent denied; 'she' is not really present, having no agency in a process of maternity that is dislocated from women. This is surely therefore a one-sided encounter with Otherness? The dismissal of agency in the M/Other leads to the suppression of any notion of reciprocal, personal relationality in the formation of selfhood. Instead there is an a-corporeality and individualism that we ultimately find wanting.⁴⁹⁴

On a more positive note, in Body/Text in Julia Kristeva Marilyn Edelstein credits Kristeva with offering a reversal of the general trend within psychoanalysis to focus on the mother as object for the child.

“Kristeva attempts to create more a discourse of maternity-for-the-mother, than maternity-for-the-other.”⁴⁹⁵

This, however, should not be taken as returning maternal agency to the woman. Edelstein suggests that Kristeva's use of 'the maternal' is as “metaphor for metaphor, and perhaps even for the split subject itself.”⁴⁹⁶

Edelstein's reading of this text rightly, we believe, places the maternal body within the discourse of textuality (and perhaps this is entirely the problem for feminists hoping to find a place for the woman's body within Kristeva's work). However Kristeva's writing once again involves the problematic use of female terminology as post-structuralist metaphor. Edelstein herself asks, “Can a biological metaphor ever be completely severed from biology? Where does the 'mother' stand in *Stabat Mater*?”

The most positive use of the maternal body Edelstein appreciates is the linkage between maternal and metaphor. She points out that both terms have the same Greek root meaning “to bear” or “give birth”, and are etymologically related to the term “to transgress”.

Within Kristeva's “*Stabat Mater*” the maternal, whilst being linked to the actual experiences of mothers, is available to others too. Edelstein suggests that Kristeva's

⁴⁹⁴ We consider this conclusion fully in ch.10 of this thesis.

⁴⁹⁵ Marilyn Edelstein Body/Text in Julia Kristeva, State University of New York Press, 1992, p.28.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid. p.29

use of the term places the maternal body as a metaphor for division, for splitting, for the divided self.

In our reading of Kristeva so far we have found that her first use of the notion of otherness is related to early pre-Oedipal experience of the M/Other. In order to build the imaginary ego the self has to reject the mother and begin to embrace the realm of distinction and symbolisation, which is expressed in gendered terms as the Law of the Father. However, such an experience marks the self in process, as an exile or stranger, which is already internally divided or split, having been through the experience of loss. The semiotic realm persists beneath the realm of symbolic language and disrupts the emergence of a stable ego. In this way the self is an “exile”. It is this notion that leads us to Kristeva’s second notion of how the self encounters the other, of the foreigner or stranger that she explores in her work “Strangers to Ourselves.” To explore the role of the other further, Kristeva brings the notions of inner division and the experience of social division together and attempts to relate theories of intra-subjective difference to inter-subjective relationships.

6.6 The Other as Stranger

Kristeva adopts notions of the maternal, or the M/Other, to posit a notion of intra-subjectivity. As we have seen, she sees the semiotic experience of the M/Other as a disruptive force. It is the catalyst for the original formation of the split subject and present in the continuing process of disruption of the static self or “I”. Having established a model of intra-subjectivity, Kristeva extends her notion to inter-subjectivity, in a consideration of the role of the foreigner, to which we now turn.

In Strangers to Ourselves Kristeva focuses upon the role of the foreigner in post-Christian societies as representing otherness to the speaking subject. Here she views the post-Enlightenment dissolution of religious ties as being instrumental in the rise of the nation-state.⁴⁹⁷

In this, Kristeva suggests that the arrival of the nation-state has changed the view of identity and brought about the concept of the other as the foreigner within a nation-

⁴⁹⁷ STO p. 170

state. The foreigner is often seen as less than ‘a man’ and used to embody notions of otherness.

“This process means that one can be more or less a man to the extent at one is more or less a citizen, that he who is not a citizen is not fully a man. Between the man and the citizen there is a scar: the foreigner. Is he fully a man if he is not a citizen?”⁴⁹⁸

In considering the role of the foreigner in society, Kristeva considers, with Proust, the character of the Jew in the context of Western culture in her recent works Proust and the Sense of Time and Time and Sense.⁴⁹⁹ Here, she sees,

“The character of the writer, the artist, and the homosexual are identical with that of ‘the Jew’ [in Proust]: they are all marginal. This is a position of witnessing. To what do the writer, the artist, the homosexual and ‘the Jew’ bear witness: to the impossibility of identity itself...In society there is a kind of constitution of sado-masochistic bonds where the marginal, the individual, the impassioned become a scapegoat in relation to which the others tie the bonds of fascination and hatred.”⁵⁰⁰

Kristeva re-introduces her notion of abjection in this discussion, linking the notion of abjection to the feelings aroused by a stranger in society. In Powers of Horror Kristeva adopts notions from Mary Douglas’ Purity and Danger⁵⁰¹ to examine the sociological dynamics of abjection. In summary, group identity is constructed by excluding others, which are seen as threatening the group’s borders, in the same way that abjection framed the experience of being rejected from the stable, symbiotic unity of the pre-Oedipal infant to the M/Other. In this Kristeva adopts the Freudian notion of the “uncanny.” For Kristeva, the foreigner becomes the “uncanny”: the presence of the other among the familiar. She says,

“In that sense, the foreigner is a “symptom”...he signifies the difficulty we have of living as an *other* and with others.”⁵⁰²

In effect, Kristeva is arguing that the rejection of the foreigner in society is an extrapolation of the profound experience of the displacement of the self in its primary rejection of the M/Other. In order to end the violent response to otherness, Kristeva

⁴⁹⁸ STO p. 97-98

⁴⁹⁹ Kristeva, Proust and the Sense of Time Faber and Faber, 1995 and Time and Sense, Columbia University Press, 1996.

⁵⁰⁰ From Kristeva’s response to a question by Prof. Jonathan Freedberg, reprinted in Parallax: Julia Kristeva 1966-96 Aesthetics, Politics, Ethics 1998, vol. 4 no.3pp.5-16 “Dialogue with Julia Kristeva”, this quote p.12.

⁵⁰¹ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, Routledge, 1969.

⁵⁰² STO p.103

suggests the “death of the proper self.” She views this process as begun by Freud, saying,

“(The self) no longer exists ever since Freud and shows itself to be a strange land of borders and otherness ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed.”⁵⁰³

Kristeva considers Freud’s notion of the uncanny (*Unheimliche*) at the end of Strangers to Ourselves. For Kristeva, this is the place where an appreciation of intra-subjectivity can effect social and ethical action. Kristeva argues that since the uncanny exists internally, within the unconscious, it challenges the rational ego posited by the Enlightenment, and ultimately suggests inner plurality and division. Kristeva suggests that with the notion of the uncanny,

“Delicately and analytically, Freud does not speak of foreigners; he teaches us how to detect foreignness in ourselves. That is perhaps the only way not to hound it outside of ourselves.”⁵⁰⁴

Kristeva suggests a number of things. Firstly, that the use of Freud’s notion of the uncanny is a relevant way to explore the role of the foreigner in a nation-state. The foreigner is the stranger or “other” that disrupts the false notion of a homogenous and uncomplicated whole nation-state. Secondly, that the awareness of the uncanny within our very self is perhaps the only way to prevent the violent rejection of the other outside of ourselves.

“We cannot suppress the symptom that the foreigner provokes; but we must simply come back to it, clear it up, give it the resources our own essential depersonalizations provide and thus only soothe it.”⁵⁰⁵

In this Kristeva relates intra-subjectivity to inter-subjectivity, by suggesting that an acceptance of internal plurality will facilitate a socio-political tolerance of external plurality. In essence she sees a kind of enlightened secularism, which is aware of the psychoanalytical structures of semiotics and abjection and their relationship to the experience of the maternal, as leading to social equanimity.

“Freud brings us the courage to call ourselves disintegrated in order not to integrate foreigners and even less to hunt them down, but rather to welcome them to that uncanny strangeness, which is as much theirs as it is ours.”⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ STO p.191

⁵⁰⁴ STO p.192

⁵⁰⁵ STO p.190

⁵⁰⁶ STO p.192

We note that in Strangers to Ourselves Kristeva argues from the tenuous notion of Freud's uncanny to the external notion of the stranger, which is something Freud himself did not attempt. In defending her decisions to do so Kristeva asks,

“Are we nevertheless so sure that the ‘political’ feelings of xenophobia do not include, often unconsciously, that agony of frightened joyfulness that has been called *Unheimlich*?”⁵⁰⁷

In this, Kristeva suggests that a revolution within the self, undertaken by the power of poetry and art, will spark a revolution in society generally; that respect for the otherness within the self will lead to the acceptance of the other in society.

“By recognising our uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside. The foreigner is within me; hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners.”⁵⁰⁸

In some ways this is a similar notion to that found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas.⁵⁰⁹ Levinas seeks to return to the questions of difference and diversity posed in the “infancy of philosophy” and address what he calls the “allergic reaction” to “the other that remains other.”⁵¹⁰ Levinas argues for the acceptance of otherness, which is absent in notions and actions which attempt to assimilate the other. In this, Levinas' idea of the other differs somewhat from Freudian notions of the uncanny. For Levinas, the other disrupts the idea of hegemony and unity but does not cause anxiety in the way that Freud suggests is characteristic of the uncanny. For Levinas, the encounter with otherness leads to an ethical response from the subject. As we have demonstrated, Kristeva shares this view, and her work can be read as an attempt to move from the anxiety reaction of Freud's uncanny to one of respect and openness to Levinas' other. She sees the “immanence of the strangeness within the familiar”⁵¹¹ as the catalyst to end the violent reaction to the other in society. Furthermore, in Strangers to Ourselves, Kristeva states that the immanence of the stranger preserves the transcendence of the other. In other words, she agrees with Levinas that the other is not to be subsumed, but rather respected and preserved.

⁵⁰⁷ STO p.191

⁵⁰⁸ STO p.192

⁵⁰⁹ See Emmanuel Levinas's essay “The Trace of the Other” trans. A. Lingis, appearing in Deconstruction in Context, ed. Mark Taylor, University of Chicago Press 1986. See also Ethics as a first Philosophy: the significance of Emmanuel Levinas for philosophy, literature and religion Adriaan T Peperzak ed., Routledge, 1995.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid. p. 346

⁵¹¹ STO p.183

Allowing for Kristeva's use of Freud's notion of the uncanny, a number of other more fundamental problems with Kristeva's thesis remain. Firstly, her thesis can be seen to be inherently individualistic. In a telling passage in Strangers to Ourselves Kristeva states,

“We are far removed from a call to brotherhood, about which one has already ironically pointed out its debt to paternal and divine authority – “In order to have brothers there must be a father”.”⁵¹²

This rejection of notions of an essential unity, or more properly community, between persons emphatically underlines the inherent individualism in Kristeva's schema. The strongest critique of such notions can be found in feminist commentaries on Kristeva. For example, Anna Smith says that the Kristevan thesis on the stranger within “precisely turns “we” into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible.”⁵¹³

Rosi Braidotti asks,

“Can feminists, at this point in their history of collective struggles at redefining female subjectivity, actually afford to let go of their sex-specific forms of political agency? Is the by-passing of gender in favour of a dispersed polysexuality not a very masculine move?...A multiplicity or polysexuality that does not take into account the fundamental asymmetry between the sexes is but a subtler form of discrimination. It reinstates and reinforces women's subordinate position.”⁵¹⁴

Furthermore, Kristeva's ethical construction re-situates the problem of political and social violence to the realm of the psyche. Can the internal dissolution of the self and the privileging of avant-garde poetry, as Kristeva suggests, address social disorder and violence? Several feminist commentators have taken offence at such a suggestion.

Gayatri Spivak says there is

“Something faintly comical about Joyce rising above sexual identities and bequeathing the proper mind-set to the women's movement.”⁵¹⁵

Elizabeth Grosz agrees,

“Advocacy of the (male) avant-garde as spokesman for a repressed femininity coupled with [Kristeva's] call for a feminism that is not confined to sexual differences but analyses and confronts the question of sexual differentiation...imply the annihilation of women's struggles for sexual specificity and autonomy.”⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² STO p.192

⁵¹³ Anna Smith, Julia Kristeva: Readings of exile and estrangement, MacMillan Press, 1996.

⁵¹⁴ Rosi Braidotti, Patterns of Dissonance, Oxford Polity Press, 1991, p.120-1.

⁵¹⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “French Feminism in an Intellectual Frame” Yale French Studies no. 62, 198, pp. 159-64.

⁵¹⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, Sexual Subversions Allen & Unwin, 1989, p.97

The tendency to re-situate the political to the textual was worryingly apparent in our research of a number of Kristeva's interviews. For example, we found it unsettling that, when asked to comment on possible solutions for the appalling rise in rape within French ghettos (*The Guardian* April 5, 2003), Kristeva sent a pre-written article on psychic space.⁵¹⁷ This was interpreted in the article as unwillingness "to do both practical and intellectual work". We suggest that it perhaps demonstrates a tendency to 'psychologise' very real social problems. With an over-individualistic framework, no "we" of women, and the tendency to re-situate social crisis to psychic space, Kristeva's approach offers little if anything to the plight of the women in the article. In fact, such theorising without direct recourse to political action seems hugely offensive.

A further criticism that can be made against Kristeva's notion of the Stranger as other is that it appears at times to be internally incoherent. As has been demonstrated, it ironically appears to privilege the experience of women, whilst maintaining that gender difference is merely discursive. Kristeva falls into essentialism by speaking of the experience of women as being especially related to the experience of being an "exile" or "stranger".⁵¹⁸ This inherent contradiction is apparent in the article "A New Type of Intellectual Dissident":

"A woman is trapped within the frontiers of her own body and even her species, and consequently always feels *exiled* both by the general clichés that make up a common consensus and by the very power of generalisation intrinsic to language."⁵¹⁹

In essence, Kristeva argues that women's experience of estrangement from political, historical and social strata offers them a unique insight into the hegemonic rationalism of modern society. However, there is nothing in Kristeva's anti-realism and rejection of the categories of sex and gender that accounts for such a statement. By suggesting

⁵¹⁷ "The feminists have deserted the banlieue," reads the national appeal of the Neither Slags Nor Submissives campaign. I put this accusation to Julia Kristeva, one of France's leading feminists. Why hasn't anyone paid attention before now? She sent me back a one-page article she'd written a year ago - on "the damage to psychic space". "It'll be the same thing elsewhere," says Michelle Le Doeuff, a professor of philosophy and one of the few intellectual feminists willing to dirty her hands with practical issues. "It's frowned upon to do both practical and intellectual work." *The Guardian* April 5, 2003.

⁵¹⁸ See Anna Smith, *Julia Kristeva: Readings of exile and estrangement*, Macmillan Press, 1996.

⁵¹⁹ Kristeva, "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident" was originally published as an editorial in *Tel Quel* Winter 1977 (no.74), pp.3-8, this citation p.5.

that a woman's place of estrangement provides unique insight into the power of modern hegemony, Kristeva appears to be positing a universal female experience, which she has taken pains to reject.

The final two criticisms we offer of Kristeva's use of otherness are inter-related: the way in which it disallows a place for a marked or real body in the creation of the self and the lack of reciprocity in her understanding of selfhood.

The lack of a place for the body in Kristeva's notion of personhood has led Susan Bordo to accuse post-modern feminists of exchanging the Cartesian "myth of a view from nowhere" with any equally incongruent "myth of a view from everywhere."⁵²⁰ This is described as exchanging the Cartesian metaphors of spectatorship for post-modern metaphors of dance, the "dance of the disembodied shape-shifter". Kristeva's desire to see the self as polysexual and able to transgress sexual boundaries appears to have led to the outright denial of bodily experience in selfhood; there is no place for the embodied self. This might be due to what Bordo terms "an increasingly paralyzing anxiety over falling (from what grace?) into ethnocentricity or 'essentialism.'" This appears evident to some extent in Kristeva's work where the adoption of post-modern understandings of identity, even in relation to motherhood, might be seen to be a response to the fear of universalisation.

Kristeva disallows corporeal experience in the first instance with the removal of the maternal experience from the real mother and therefore will not allow for the mother to be a reciprocal partner in the formation of the self. This is achieved by dislocating motherhood from the agency of real women. This tendency is echoed in her use of the foreigner as stranger. By her immediate recourse to Freud's theory, the foreigner, as a person, becomes overshadowed, we believe, by the theoretical notion of the "uncanny". This again replaces the agency of the foreigner, and the ability for there to be a coadunate encounter with the stranger, with an individualistic intra-subjective experience. This will become an important contrast with Rahner's alternative view of the other.

⁵²⁰ Susan Bordo's essay "Feminism. Postmodernism and Gender-Scepticism" appears as chapter 6 of Feminism/Postmodernism ed. Linda Nicholson, Routledge 1990

In this chapter we have examined the role Kristeva gives to the maternal in the creation of subjecthood. She sees the pre-Oedipal M/Other as replacing the former significance of psychoanalytical Father. It is at the M/Other that the emerging subject first experiences semiotic union, abjection and finally the splitting of the self. It is the maternal semiotics that persists to disrupt all monolithic structures of meaning. In this sense, the M/Other is both a space and a powerful disruptive force for the creation of subjective experience.

We have raised a number of issues with Kristeva's notion of the speaking subject in relation to otherness. Primarily our concern has been with the lack of coadunancy that is present when the agency of the mother or the stranger is reduced to an encounter with impersonal otherness where agency is dismissed, rather than a reciprocal relationality between two persons. We shall return to this theme in a subsequent chapter as we contrast Kristeva's use of otherness with that of Rahner.⁵²¹

However, we have appreciated the strength of Kristeva's argument that notions of intra-subjectivity affect those of inter-subjectivity, and can be party to the creation of an ethics of toleration of the "others" in society. This could be used to inform a theological notion of subjectivity, such as Rahner's. We propose that this explicit linkage is a useful tool as we turn to Rahner's use of notions of otherness: God as Trinity, and the neighbour.

⁵²¹ See ch.8.12 and 10.4 of this thesis.

**7. Rahner –The Trinity and the Neighbour:
Models of intra-subjectivity and the experience of inter-subjectivity.**

Our previous chapter explored the way in which Kristeva adopts a model of otherness based on the M/Other and uses this to forward an ethic of societal equanimity whereby the stranger in society is encountered as other and reminds the subject of its original experience of abjection from the M/Other. We identified a two-fold model of otherness here, with both intra- and inter-relationality based upon a confrontation with the other. This identification has enabled us to discern a similar two-fold use of otherness within Rahner's writings, which is perhaps less explicit than that found in Kristeva's. We seek to explore this here. Fundamentally both our theorists offer models of subjectivity that emphasise the formative influence of the other and make a connection between intra- and inter-subjectivity.

In our thesis so far we have considered Rahner's arena of subjectivity and the means by which he imagines the person as hearer to be created. This has involved an examination of Rahner's theological methodology, his adoption of Thomist ontology and theories of symbolisation.⁵²² We can summarise our findings by saying that, for Rahner, all being fundamentally exists in a dynamic relationship to divinity realised in history. Furthermore all beings express themselves symbolically and relationally to other beings in order to actualise their being.⁵²³ This is succinctly posited in the idea of the person as hearer. In this we note that Rahner inverts the usual notion of otherness so that the hearer becomes 'other' to divinity; God's being is prioritised and the human being is a derivative. God's being is privileged since God is self-sufficient.

We shall now turn to an examination of Rahner's ultimate affirmation of such notions of being and personhood: the nature of the divine as Trinity. In Rahner the inner plurality of the Trinity perfectly expresses the relation to otherness found to lesser degrees in symbolic expression, relationality and communion. The Trinity is Rahner's

⁵²² See chapters 1 and 4 of this thesis.

⁵²³ In this we do not infer that for Rahner God must by necessity actualise God's being in relation. Rahner will argue that the unity-in-community of the Trinity is perfect self-actualisation. God's decision to relate to humanity is an act of love and grace.

model of intra-subjectivity and the human experience of otherness is derived from this model.

As we examine Rahner's treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity we encounter "Rahner's Rule" and consider the impact that his programme of bringing together the understanding of the "economic" and "immanent" Trinity has had in contemporary theology. This is relevant to our thesis since Rahner's particular interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to the special nature of the person. The Trinity serves a similar purpose to Kristeva's M/Other in that it contains the model of otherness that will shape the human subject. However the Trinity has ultimate agency for Rahner, in contradistinction to the agent-less "space" of the feminine maternal in Kristeva. The relationship to otherness is, for Rahner, entirely personal.

This chapter also relates to our previous discussion about Rahnerian theories of the symbol. For Rahner, the doctrine of the Trinity is the ultimate basis for a theory of direct and coherent relation between being and its symbol. The triunity of God establishes that all beings become present to themselves as they express themselves through the act of symbolisation.⁵²⁴ For Rahner, the Trinity is far more than a model of symbolic, plural being, it is both the origin and telos of all being; the 'alpha' and 'omega' of being and of personhood in particular. According to Rahner, a proper understanding of the social Trinity fixes human personhood as reciprocal and relational.

Having examined Rahner's use of the Trinity to model intra-relationality, we then explore the intimate relationship Rahner proposes between the experience of self, of God and of neighbour. It is here that we observe a similar desire to relate theories of intra-subjectivity to those of inter-subjectivity that we appreciated in Kristeva's writings. Rahner's radical argument is for a unity between the experience of God, of neighbour and of self. Openness to inner-plurality fosters openness to communality. There is a striking similarity, and a number of contrasts here, that will be significant in our dialogue between Rahner and Kristeva

⁵²⁴ Rahner's theory of symbolisation was explored in ch.4.3 of this thesis.

7.1 The Trinity – Rahner’s re-assessment.

We begin with a brief analysis of how Rahner revises former understandings of the Trinity. He begins with an historic survey of Trinitarian statements. In Foundations of the Christian Faith Rahner admits that,

“Statements about the Trinity in their catechetical formulations are almost entirely unintelligible to people today.”⁵²⁵

Whilst he certainly does not desire to depart from traditional formulations,⁵²⁶ Rahner suggests three reasons why these expressions have become less than helpful today. Firstly, there is the historic ordering of the doctrine of God prior to that of the Trinity. Secondly, there is the unhelpful separation between the economic and immanent trinity. Thirdly, there is the problematic use of terms such as “person”. We shall briefly address Rahner’s concerns in turn. In this we suggest that Rahner’s revisions have opened the way for contemporary theology’s relational view of God and human personhood, which is of great interest to our project.

7.2 Oneness before Threeness? Rahner and the Ordering of the Doctrines of God and Trinity.

Systematic theology traditionally places the account of the Doctrine of God, the existence and nature of God, before that of the doctrine of the Trinity. Of this, Rahner says,

“Even historically speaking, the relationship between the general doctrine of God and the doctrine of the Trinity is problematical.”⁵²⁷

Rahner suggests that this ordering mistakenly leads to divine triunity being understood as less than central, and perhaps even of marginal importance, to the Being of God. Rahner says that this infers a disjuncture between God being One and God being Triune. He even suggests that the average Catholic (and, we might add, Christian) has no sense of what it means to be in communion with God as Trinity.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁵ FCF p.134

⁵²⁶ He makes this clear in his discussion in the use of the problematic and often misleading phrase “God as one in three persons” (Sacramentum Mundi 4.b. p1763, 1975) saying that such a phrase could not be eliminated from use since “no individual preacher has the authority to do so.”

⁵²⁷ TI IX, p.127-144

⁵²⁸ Rahner, The Trinity Burns and Oats, 1970

In order to understand how this problem has arisen Rahner begins with a survey of Scripture. Writing on the Trinity in Sacramentum Mundi he points out that the triune aspects of God's being were formerly exclusively spoken of within the dimension of salvation-history.⁵²⁹

“In the New Testament the theology of the Trinity...is entirely orientated to the economy of salvation. God and the Father are synonyms. The Son and the Spirit are spoken of inasmuch as they come into the experience of faith as the actual presence of God (the Father) in the history of salvation.”⁵³⁰

Rahner's historical survey states that he does not see the present disjuncture between God's inherent Oneness and Threeness evident in either the Credal formulations or early Patristic Councils. Here, the existence and attributes of the Father were the setting for the discussion of Trinitarian aspects of God's being.

“This makes the Trinitarian theology of the fathers a theology based from the start on the history of salvation and soteriology.”⁵³¹

Furthermore, as his survey continues, Rahner finds that within early Greek formulations the setting for God's Trinitarian nature was once again soteriological and was “entirely orientated to man.”⁵³²

“Hence too the Greek patristic theology was content to define the relation between the one nature and ... the three ways of being there (for us) in terms of formal ontology, by understanding these as relations.”⁵³³

Rahner's survey leads him to conclude that modern Trinitarian statements have lost or obscured two essential and interrelated aspects that were present in their early patristic heritage. He identifies these as the setting of Trinitarian statements within soteriology and, secondly, that they were dealt with under the doctrine of God (the Father).

We note here that Rahner's suggested return to a Greek patristic order might be seen to risk the threat of subordinationism, similar to that faced by the Greeks. While this is clearly one possible disadvantage, for Rahner this remains only a potential risk to be overcome by a proper understanding of the relational nature of God's triunity. For Rahner, the advantages of resituating the centrality of divine triunity as an essential

⁵²⁹ SM pp.1756-1758

⁵³⁰ SM p. 1767

⁵³¹ SM p. 1768

⁵³² SM p. 1768

⁵³³ SM p. 1768

aspect of God's personhood and of our salvation experience merit change within systematic theology. Without such a change Rahner fears it will be impossible for Christians to overcome their "psychological unitarianism," and calls for theology to become "more consciously Trinitarian than it has been".⁵³⁴

7.3 Resolving the Separation between the Immanent and Economic Trinity: the Development of 'Rahner's Rule'

In respect to otherness, Rahner suggests that the human being's relation to divinity as other is an experience that takes place within human history. It is in his writings on the Trinity that Rahner's ideas about the nature of reality, symbolisation and anthropology meet, and as such an examination of his treatment of this doctrine is entirely relevant to our task. The divine is not to be thought of as alien to human history. For Rahner, we experience God as God is: in history and as the "God who saves us, through Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵³⁵ For Rahner a false interpretation of reality is intertwined with a misinterpretation of the Trinity. He proposes a 'rule' to resolve this misapprehension.

"The 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity".⁵³⁶

Rahner arrives at his rule by suggesting important disadvantages of 'psychological approaches' to the Trinity, such as Augustine's, which separate the immanent trinity from the economic trinity.⁵³⁷ Rahner expresses concern with the tendency within psychological approaches to be overly speculative and disconnected from personal experiential knowledge of God. Rahner fears that this runs the risk of becoming what LaCunga terms, "presumptuous prying into something about which we know nothing."⁵³⁸ We recall that, for Rahner, all human knowledge is based upon a metaphysical a priori of existing within a self-disclosing God.⁵³⁹ The experience of

⁵³⁴ Rahner's essay "Observations on the Doctrine of God" p.130 from TI 9 pp.130-134

⁵³⁵ We quote here from Catherine LaCunga's God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life Harper Collins, 1991 p. 3. LaCunga takes Rahner's Rule as the starting point for her understanding of the relational Trinity. We shall take the opportunity to appraise her work later in this chapter. In short, following Rahner, LaCunga sees the doctrine of the Trinity as rather "what it means to participate in the life of God through Jesus in the Spirit."

⁵³⁶ Karl Rahner The Trinity Burns and Oats, 1970, p.22

⁵³⁷ SM p.1768

⁵³⁸ Catherine LaCunga op.cit. p.11

⁵³⁹ See chapter 1 and 4.1 of this thesis, which deals with Rahner's epistemology. We shall consider the nature, or "modality" of God's self-communication later in this chapter.

God is, we recall, unthematic and persistent.⁵⁴⁰ Our experience of the Trinity as Other must therefore be an experience attained through unthematic knowledge and not rational speculation. It is the failure of psychological approaches to the Trinity to begin with our experience within salvation-history, and the separation of the immanent trinity from the economy of salvation, which leads Rahner to conclude, “Perhaps we can say that ultimately they are not really that helpful.”⁵⁴¹

Rahner proposes that a false understanding of the nature of reality compounds and exacerbates problems in Trinitarian debates. We note that the desire to bring the human realm fully back into the continuum of the divine realm has often been used to characterise Rahner’s entire theological project.⁵⁴² He rejects the dualistic separation of the secular and the divine⁵⁴³ drawing upon ideas of Thomist participational continuity. For Rahner the Thomist understanding of reality, one wherein humans participate in the divine, is essential to resolve the disjuncture between God as One and Three. When the two spheres of humanity and divinity are not construed as parallel realities, but rather as continuous, the understanding that we know God as God is becomes more possible.

“In the Trinity in the economy and history of salvation and revelation we have already experienced the immanent trinity as it is in itself.”⁵⁴⁴

Here Rahner confidently expresses that the participation between human and divine realms enables the experience of how God to us as humans directly relates to how God is in Godself.

We appreciate then that Rahner’s Rule sets the scene for an encounter with otherness that is within human history, personal and achievable through unthematic experiential knowledge rather than rationality. This encounter with otherness is far more than propositional; it is a revelation of relatedness in which the other of God reveals Godself as God really is. In revisiting the doctrine of the Trinity we find Rahner builds the foundations of a notion of otherness that brings together the notion

⁵⁴⁰ See ch.s 1.3, 5.1 and 5.6 of this thesis

⁵⁴¹ FCF p. 134

⁵⁴² David Ford *The Modern Theologians: an introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century*, Blackwell 1997 suggests that at the core of Rahner’s theology is a desire to see the human realm as completely embraced and irreversibly transformed by divine grace.

⁵⁴³ See ch.1 of this thesis.

⁵⁴⁴ FCF, p.137

of a Social Trinity with that of the human person as in dialogue with the divine Other. In this, the inner-plurality of the Trinity is the basis for the human being's revelational encounter.

7.4 The influence of Karl Barth's revelationism⁵⁴⁵ on the development of Rahner's Rule

Our examination should not infer that Rahner stands alone in the desire to re-instate the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology. Neither is he unique in modelling God's revelation as an encounter with God as God is. Here we briefly discuss the influence of German Idealism and Karl Barth's theology upon Rahner. In this we see that the hearer of God, proposed as a model of subjectivity in Rahner, has its roots in a return to the doctrine of the Trinity which is informed by German Idealism.

Stanley Grenz argues that it was Hegel's philosophical trinitarianism that set the stage for the twentieth century's revised interest in the nature of divine subjecthood.⁵⁴⁶ For Grenz (following Claude Welch and Ted Peters) the most significant contribution Hegelian philosophy made to later theology was the notion that God as Trinity was a metaphysical truth that could be established more or less independently from Christian revelation.⁵⁴⁷ It is, perhaps, unsurprising then that the two foremost twentieth century Christian theologians who drew upon German Idealism, Barth and Rahner, should be concerned to revise notions of the Trinity within their theological programmes.

Barth's revelation-orientated approach to discussions about the Trinity have clearly been greatly influential for contemporary debate. Claude Welch⁵⁴⁸ sees Barth's "thorough-going theological revelationalism" as a new development in contemporary theology, in that it develops doctrines, not by appealing to proof texts alone, but with an appeal to the whole Gospel as Christocentric. Welch says of such revelational approaches to the Trinity,

⁵⁴⁵ This term is from Welch, C. *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952. Welch describes Barth's theological approach this way in that it appeals not to proof texts alone, but to the whole Gospel as Christocentric.

⁵⁴⁶ Stanley Grenz *The Social God and the Relational Self* Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p.24.

⁵⁴⁷ See Grenz, op.cit. p. 29, also Claude Welch *In This Name: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Contemporary Theology* Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952, and Ted Peters *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life*, John Knox, 1993.

⁵⁴⁸ Welch, op.cit.

“The doctrine of the Trinity is thus not to be understood as per se a ‘revealed doctrine’, but as a doctrine by which we seek to explicate the meaning of the revelation in Christ as it bears on the nature of God.”⁵⁴⁹

According to Barth, the triune God both issues and is encountered within revelation. Revelation is, in itself, a ‘God-event’.

“Thus it is God Himself, it is the same God in unimpaired unity, who according to the biblical understanding of revelation is revealing God and the event of revelation and its effect on man.”⁵⁵⁰

There is, therefore, nothing that can be said of God’s actions that is not wholly coherent with God’s being; in other words, the theological distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity is misplaced. Barth says,

“All our statements concerning what is called the immanent Trinity have been reached simply as confirmations or underlinings, or, materially, as the indispensable premises of the economic Trinity.”⁵⁵¹

We see that it is in his particular notion of revelation that Barth holds together the immanent and economic trinity, “God reveals himself. He reveals himself through himself. He reveals himself,”⁵⁵² which leads to Barth’s famous dictum of the Triune God as ‘Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness’.⁵⁵³

We note that Hill sees the influence of Barth on Rahner as almost co-incidental,

“Strange to relate, the movement of Neo-Orthodoxy in German Protestantism found an ally in German Catholic thought developing in an inverse direction, i.e., not away from liberalism introduced by Schleiermacher but, in a qualified sense, towards it.”⁵⁵⁴

Whilst Rahner makes no declarations about nature of Barth’s influence in this regard, there is clearly a shared revelationalism as well as the clear influence of German idealism generally. Rahner’s work can be seen as co-extensive with Barth’s desire to

⁵⁴⁹ Welch op. cit. p.26

⁵⁵⁰ Karl Barth Church Dogmatics I/1, The Doctrine of the Word of God 2nd edition
Trans, G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, T & T Clark 1975, p.299

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. p.429

⁵⁵² Barth op. cit. p 296

⁵⁵³ Ibid. p.299

⁵⁵⁴ Hill op.cit p.130

establish the importance of God's self-communication as central to the doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁵⁵

7.5 Rahner's Two Formal Modalities of God's Self-Communication

Rahner adopts Barth's "revelation and revealedness" as "two formal modalities" of God's self-communication. Here we observe Rahner exploring the inner-plurality of the Trinity to posit a notion of God as Other and as intrinsically relational.

For Rahner aspects of God's self-communication relate to the persons of the Trinity. In The Trinity the Father is termed "God as Such," while the Son (Rahner often favours the terms Word or Logos) is God's self-communication as "knowledge," and the Spirit is God's self-communication as "love". Importantly for Rahner, and in contradistinction to Barth, we note that the double aspects of God's self-communication should be seen to pre-suppose the ability of the "hearer" to receive divine self-communication.⁵⁵⁶ In other words, the human person is always, fundamentally and constitutionally, a hearer of God who can receive both formal modalities of God's revelation. This contrasts with Barth's theories of God's revelation whereby human sinfulness results in an inability to hear God, which can only be overcome by the work of the Spirit. For Rahner, elements within the human personality relate to the dual aspects, or modalities, of God's self-revelation. He sees the human ability to search beyond our own situated history as relating to God's self-communication of "knowledge", while the ability to be open and receptive reflects God's self-communication of "love". For Rahner, these important double aspects of God's self-communication allow a duality of "word and response" and "going out and return" between the human person and God.⁵⁵⁷ In other words, the hearer of God is also able to truly communicate with God in a dialectical experience of receiving and responding to God's self-communication. This is important to our thesis since it establishes the self as "hearer" in a dialogical experience of otherness.

⁵⁵⁵ Hill sees that this influence as almost co-incidental; "Strange to relate, the movement of Neo-Orthodoxy in German Protestantism found an ally in German Catholic thought developing in an inverse direction, i.e., not away from liberalism introduced by Schleiermacher but, in a qualified sense, towards it." op. cit. p. 130. We believe it does not take into account fully enough the shared roots of German Idealism and the influence of Barth's revelationalism drawn from such notions of a dialectical reality.

⁵⁵⁶ A theme Rahner expounds in Hearers of the Word as well as many other works including The Trinity and his writing on nature and grace in TI 4 and 9.

⁵⁵⁷ Rahner, HW and Rahner, "Remarks on the Treatise 'De Trinitate'" TI 4, p. 95-102.

In reviewing Rahner's theory of revelation it is important to keep in mind that Rahner stresses that our knowledge of God is ultimately of a God who is both, and at the same time, revealed and profoundly hidden. For Rahner, at best, we hear a mystery.⁵⁵⁸ However, our experience of God in salvation history is not of God as proposition,⁵⁵⁹ received, so to speak, from outside of our reality, but of the God who fills and contains our reality. As such our experience of God is precisely of God as God exists within Godself. In other words the self as hearer is engaged in an intimate and relational communion rather than listening to propositions from beyond.

“The one God imparts himself as absolute self-utterance and absolute gift of love. This communication – the absolute mystery, which is only received in Christ – is however self-communication. God does not merely give his creature a ‘share’ ‘in himself’ (indirectly) by creating and denoting finite realities through his all-powerful efficient causality: but gives himself, really and in the strictest sense of the word, in a quasi-formal causality.”⁵⁶⁰

Revelation is not just what God reveals about Godself, but is an encounter with God. Using the transcendental argument,⁵⁶¹ Rahner says that we can argue back from our experience of God towards the understanding that this must be how God is, within God's innermost being.⁵⁶² Our ‘pre-thematic knowledge’ of God as Trinity rests upon our experience of the persons of God within salvation history (both individually and collectively). In this we can say with Rahner that the doctrine of the Trinity is profoundly and experientially understood while the precise nature of the social trinity remains a mystery which we cannot fully understand.

As Rahner points out, by beginning with our experience, building a theology ‘from below’, the doctrine of the Trinity will never become merely a subtle theological speculative game. It is rather “an assertion which cannot be avoided” it is, “so very

⁵⁵⁸ This concept is outlined in Rahner's philosophical works Spirit in the World and Hearers of the Word. See ch.5.5 for our consideration of this theme.

⁵⁵⁹ Here is an example of the surprising similarities between Rahner and Karl Barth, although Barth's schema has often been accused of subsuming the history of the world within that of God.

⁵⁶⁰ Rahner, “Remarks on the Treatise ‘De Trinitate’ ” T1 4, p. 97.

⁵⁶¹ See FCF, p.136

⁵⁶² See an explicit statement of this in LaCunga's God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life Harper Collins, 1991.

incomprehensible and so very self-evident.”⁵⁶³ Rahner presents us with a God “of infinite distance and absolute closeness.”⁵⁶⁴

Using a similar transcendental method Rahner argues for God as personal.⁵⁶⁵ He begins by stating,

“The statement that God is a person, that he is a personal God, is one of the fundamental Christian assertions about God.”⁵⁶⁶

Rahner will again affirm here both the “self-evidence” of this assertion and the utter mystery of its truth. Here the triunity and personal nature of God are brought together. This facet of Rahner’s exploration is important to our task since it is his interrelation of these concepts that offers a striking contrast to the relation to the other that we find in Kristeva. For Rahner, the triunity of God is also a personal communion. The human relation to God as Other is therefore necessarily personal. Again using a transcendental method Rahner says that God’s personhood is self-evident in that,

“The ground of reality which exists must possess in itself beforehand and in absolute fullness and purity this reality which is grounded by it.”⁵⁶⁷

Ultimately, for Rahner, the unique way in which a human can be said to be a person recalls, in part, the truths about divine personhood. This personhood of God is at one and the same time obvious to the human subject and entirely outside traditional or scientific methods of proof. It belongs to a metaphysical pre-knowledge within the human subject, whose search for the nature of being must necessarily be founded upon the existence of a “ground of being” an “Ultimate Subject.”⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶³ FCF p. 137

⁵⁶⁴ FCF p. 137

⁵⁶⁵ FCF.p. 55-71

⁵⁶⁶ FCF p. 73

⁵⁶⁷ FCF p.73

⁵⁶⁸ See Rahner, Ch.8 “The Free Listener” from HW

7.6 How Does Rahner's Revised Trinitarianism Impact Upon his notion of human personhood? Rahner's Intra and Inter-subjectivity.

Here we shall assess how Rahner draws the axiomatic belief that the human person is necessarily relational from his understanding of the Trinity. In doing so we draw together two strands of Rahnerian thought so far encountered in this thesis: the triunity of God, and the nature of being as symbolic. Taken together, these notions form a fundamental belief that to be is to be in communion. In this we shall assess Rahner's notion that God, as Trinity, is other (in community) and that the human person is eschatologically also to be viewed as becoming a person through 'otherness-in-community'. Here we shall further assess Rahner's use of the Trinity as a model and originator of otherness, and encounter his use of the neighbour as the opportunity to realise the self through an inter-subjective ethic of love.

Colin Gunton points out that social models of the Trinity, such as Rahner's, imply two important aspects of divine personhood which, in turn, relate to theories of human relationality. For Gunton, these are the aspects of 'space' and 'relatedness.'⁵⁶⁹ In essence, Gunton claims that a conception of God which sees the persons of the Trinity in a communion, whereby they maintain their distinction and emphasise their relatedness, will foster an understanding of the human person as similarly relational. Persons both human and divine realise their being in relations. The "image of God" present in human persons is therefore understood as the ability to have reciprocal relationships; to reflect the communion of the Trinity and, in so doing, to actualise personhood. An important advantage which Gunton identifies here, and to which we shall return in chapter ten of this thesis, is the way in which such an understanding of the *imago dei* allows for the bodily aspects of human personhood to be included as reflective of the image of God. Since it is relationships which foster the image of God, all relationships, whereby the dual aspects of otherness and the relatedness are evident, can be said to reflect God's image of community. This can include the body and corporeality, which was formally discounted in Cartesian notions of selfhood where human reason alone reflected God's image. Gunton surmises that it is most especially the experience of love in which otherness and relation are coexistent and

⁵⁶⁹ Colin Gunton (ed.) *Persons Human and Divine: King's College Essays in Theological Anthropology* T&T Clark 1991. See especially Gunton's essay "Trinity, Ontology and Anthropology" pp.47-61, this quote p.58.

experienced. We shall go on to see that Gunton's thesis is fully convergent with the writings of Rahner, where love is privileged as the means to actualise personhood. From this we suggest that Rahner's social Trinitarianism fully relates to Gunton's thesis and, as would be expected, leads to a relational view of the human person. This is doubly important to our thesis since we are considering how the self as hearer is able to critique the speaking self. We anticipate that the hearing self contains aspects of corporeality that are denied to the speaking subject and has a notion of relationality that is truly reciprocal and personal.

One further witness to the plausibility of Rahner's social Trinitarian model, as one which facilitates a relational anthropology, is an examination of this process in the work of contemporary theologians who have followed Rahner's Rule.

Peters (1993) and Grenz (2001) identify examples of this process.⁵⁷⁰ Grenz suggests that the influence of Rahner's Rule can be seen as greatly evident in initiating the "History of God" projects of Jurgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg.⁵⁷¹ For Peter's, Rahner's revision of the doctrine of the Trinity raised the possibility of the history of God project *per se*. Rahner's rejoining of the notions of economic and immanent trinity enabled theologians to ask the question as to what could be true of the history of God if classical assumptions about God's immutability were cast aside, and in their place was an understanding that God, in Christ, experiences time and change. Just such a question is the crux of Moltmann and Pannenberg's projects. Grenz summarises these as intending "to reconceive the doctrine of the Trinity by looking at the work of the three Trinitarian persons in history."⁵⁷² According to Grenz's useful summary⁵⁷³ both theologians can be seen to follow the direction set in Rahner's Rule. Whilst they make a number of adaptations, basically both continue the trend began by Rahner and Barth, to re-imagine the doctrine of the Trinity within a soteriological setting.

⁵⁷⁰ Ted Peters God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in the Divine Life Westminster John Knox, 1993. Stanley J Grenz, The Social God and the Relational Self: a Trinitarian theology of the imago dei, Westminster John Knox, 2001.

⁵⁷¹ Grenz op. cit p. 41-46

⁵⁷² Ibid. p.41

⁵⁷³ Ibid. pp.41-50

This has resulted in a prolonged contemplation in Moltmann's work regarding God's ability to experience change. Fundamentally, for Moltmann, God is not immutable. God is relationally affected by the historic events in Jesus' life.⁵⁷⁴

Pannenberg's relational trinitarianism can similarly be seen as an attempt to take Rahner's Rule seriously and explore the consequences for God experiencing within Godself what Christ achieves in human history. Pannenberg restates the understanding of God's self-differentiation in light of a Hegelian understanding of identity. In essence, he agrees with Hegel that the one who differentiates oneself from another is dependent upon the other for their identity⁵⁷⁵. In short, Pannenberg makes clear that, based upon the social model of the Trinity, relationality is reciprocal. The persons of the Trinity give and receive identity through differentiation, and this is a reciprocal process.

“As Jesus glorifies the Father and not himself, and precisely in so doing shows himself to be the Son of the Father, so the Spirit glorifies not himself but the Son, and in him the Father.”⁵⁷⁶

Therefore, for Pannenberg, the personhood of the members of the Trinity is a received personhood. In turn, the personhood of the human being is not a given, but an eschatological possibility for the being possessing human nature; they may become a truly human person.⁵⁷⁷ This process can similarly only be achieved in relation to others.

Grenz sees a third contemporary theologian, John D. Zizioulas, as being similarly moved by the desire to explore the consequences of Rahner's Rule.⁵⁷⁸ Zizioulas himself writes,

“Both in the case of God and of man the identity of a person is recognized and posited clearly and unequivocally, but this is only in and through a

⁵⁷⁴ We stress that Moltmann dismisses any notion that God is interdependent on the world. Rather, it is in God's decision “to go outside himself” that allows the history of the world to be brought into the eternal history of God. Furthermore, God experiences the historical events of the person of Jesus Christ in a mediated way through the dialectic of the separation of the persons of God as Father and Son.

⁵⁷⁵ Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality* trans. John Maxwell, London Search Press, 1977

⁵⁷⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* trans. Geoffrey Bromiley 3 vols. Eerdmans, 1991, p. 315.

⁵⁷⁷ We examine this fully in ch.8 where we consider Rahner's distinction between “person” and “human nature” and raise this idea here in support of the notion that Pannenberg's notion of received personhood is fully coherent with that begun by Rahner.

⁵⁷⁸ Grenz op. cit p. 51

relationship...Personal identity is totally lost if isolated, for its ontological condition is relationship.”⁵⁷⁹

Zizioulas can be credited with instigating the precedence of the phrase “Being as Communion” in contemporary theological anthropology. In summary, Zizioulas’ understanding sees personhood as constructed through communion with others. Such reciprocity maintains the uniqueness of the individual and, for Zizioulas, their value as an irreplaceable part of relational existence. As Rahner had done previously, Zizioulas arrives at his notion of ‘being as communion’ by way of reconsidering Eastern conceptions of the Trinity. Both Rahner and Zizioulas question the Western emphasis on divine substance replacing the emphasis on a model that centres on hypostasis. Zizioulas re-phrases this as “ek-stasis of being” to stress the dynamic drive towards communion present in all persons, both human and divine.⁵⁸⁰

So far we have traced how Rahner’s Rule can be said to have opened the possibility for further relational anthropological notions. We shall add one further example of this in the work of the Catholic theologian Catherine LaCunga. Here, there is the explicit desire to take Rahner’s Rule to its fullest conclusions and formulate an ethic based on personal relationality. We cite LaCunga here to show what can be achieved in developing Rahner’s Trinitarian work. LaCunga expresses this saying,

“The identity of the ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ trinity means that God truly and completely gives God’s self to the creature without remainder, and what is given in the economy of salvation is God as such.”⁵⁸¹

In other words, God’s relations to the world are God’s relations to Godself, or as it was formally termed, God *in se* is also God *pro nobis*. In this, there is an essential connection between the doctrine of God, as triune, and soteriology. LaCunga insists that theology is inseparable from soteriology. In LaCunga, the ultimate expression of how the social Trinity can be a model for human relationality.

⁵⁷⁹ “On Being a Person” Zizioulas’ essay appearing in Persons Human and Divine (1991 p.46) Christoph Schwobel and Colin E Gunton, ed. T&T Clark, 1991, pp. 33-47.

⁵⁸⁰ Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church Contemporary Greek Theologians 4, St Vladimir’s Press 1985

⁵⁸¹ La Cugna “Introduction” to Rahner’s The Trinity, Seabury Press, 1997, p. xiv.

Of this, LaCunga says,

“The doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately a teaching about ‘God’ but a teaching about God’s life with us and our life with each other. It is the life of communion and indwelling. God in us, we in God, all of us in each other.”⁵⁸²

We see in LaCunga the ability to move from theories of Trinitarian relations to those of human personhood. All of the contemporary theologians we have briefly examined here have made the same use of Rahner’s Rule in making such a move. We turn now to see the extent to which Rahner himself develops the theory of personal relationality. A key part of this consideration is the role of neighbour-love in expressing otherness in communion with the human person. However, before we examine the neighbour as other, we begin with a brief restatement of Rahner’s notion of “otherness within” in the role of symbolisation for the emerging person.

7.7 Otherness Within

We examined Rahner’s axiom that being is symbolic in chapter four of this thesis and recall it briefly in summary here. We saw that for Rahner the human person, as with all beings, creates its own “other”, a symbolic representation of itself in order to actualise its own being,

“Our first statement, which we put forward as the basic principle of an ontology of symbolism, is as follows: all beings are by their very nature symbolic, because they necessarily ‘express’ themselves in order to attain their own nature.”⁵⁸³

The human ability to create and use symbols, most particularly seen in the use of language, is the means by which the human being can become its own other.

“The symbol strictly speaking is the self-realisation of a being in the other which is constitutive of its essence.”⁵⁸⁴

We recall that this process is one of “emanation and return” from itself and into its own “other” by creating a mediating sign, a “realsymbol.”⁵⁸⁵ The process of recognising or “returning” to this “other” is the means by which being constitutes itself as a reality. Symbolisation is therefore a dynamic process and the means by which any category of being achieves expression and ultimately self-fulfilment.

⁵⁸² Catherine LaCunga *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* Harper Collins 1991 p.228

⁵⁸³ Rahner, “Theology of the Symbol”, TI 4, p.224.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid. p.234

⁵⁸⁵ See ch. 4 of this thesis, where we consider Rahner’s notion of the Realsymbol.

In this, we recall that otherness is intrinsic to all beings because all beings are symbolic. However, our research has identified that when Rahner desires to construct a notion of inter-subjectivity from intra-subjectivity he does so from theories of Trinity (as a model of intra-subjective communion) moving to notions of neighbour-love (as an ethic of inter-subjective relations).⁵⁸⁶ We do not find him drawing directly upon notions of symbolic otherness within the emerging subject, which he has previously established as present in his philosophy of language⁵⁸⁷. We recall that he does not see the process of symbolisation as operating within an isolated individual but only within the historically placed person who operates within both ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ axes of relations to God and other beings. The otherness of the symbol, constructed by the emerging being, is driven by the need to be in communion with others outside of the being.⁵⁸⁸ The creation and return to the otherness within, as the formation of symbolic representation, is therefore part of a greater encounter with otherness externally: that of the neighbour. This achieves an anti-individualistic characteristic of Rahner’s notion of the self that is vital to our thesis and from which we shall draw conclusions in chapter ten. We now turn to the inter-personal aspect of Rahner’s use of otherness: his consideration of the neighbour.

7.8 The Other as Neighbour

Rahner posits three creeds in Foundations of the Christian Faith.⁵⁸⁹ In the second of these, “A Brief Anthropological Creed,” he emphasises the inter-relational facet of human life explored through the concept of ‘neighbour-love’. Here the term “neighbour” implies another to whom we are morally obliged.

In this second creed Rahner explicitly emphasises the essential relationality of the human person,

“A person really discovers his true self in a genuine act of self-realization only if he risks himself radically for another. If he does this, he grasps unthematically or explicitly what we mean by God as the horizon, the

⁵⁸⁶ See FCF 1970 and The Trinity, 1978

⁵⁸⁷ See ch. 4, of this thesis where we consider Rahner’s theory of symbolisation.

⁵⁸⁸ TI 4

⁵⁸⁹ Rahner, FCF. These are “A Brief Theological Creed”, “A Brief anthropological Creed” and “Future Orientation”. It is possible to discern the theme of relationality and otherness in all three creeds, however, we chose to focus on the second brief creed in that it adds most to our consideration of inter-subjectivity.

guarantor and the radical depths of love, the God whose existential and historical self-communication made himself the realm within which such love is possible. This love is meant in both an interpersonal and a social sense, and in the radical unity of both of these elements it is the ground and the essence of the church.”⁵⁹⁰

Here, Rahner makes clear that the experience of “neighbour love” is an everyday act of self-transcendence. For Rahner, the transcendent aspect of human personhood makes authentic inter-personal relationships possible. This is because God has made Godself the realm, ground and possibility of interpersonal love. In an awareness of his or her “horizon” the human person is drawn outwards from ego-centrism, to borrow Pannenberg’s phrase, and towards acts of love for an other, the neighbour. In other words, according to Rahner, God’s self-revelation, whether comprehended in an “unthematic” or an explicit way, has made relationality both possible and necessary for the human condition. We are drawn towards the other because we are fashioned after the ground of being whose very nature is communality.

Rahner speaks of “risk” in offering neighbour-love since inter-relationality involves sacrificial love towards the “other.” The hearer is a social being, who can only realise his or her potential to personhood in reaching beyond themselves in ‘risky’ acts of neighbourly love. These must be offered in the hope of reciprocity, but without the guarantee that the moral obligation to act kindly will be returned. The ultimate success of human love exists in a process whose fulfilment lies in hope.⁵⁹¹

We have observed that Rahner’s “brief anthropological creed” can be seen to stress the social and interpersonal aspect of the human condition. It also introduces ecclesiology to relational anthropology.⁵⁹² For Rahner, the church is the future-orientated community which transcends itself and offers authentic interpersonal relationships. It is the place where the existential experience of the love of God is equally matched by a historical and social expression of the Spirit as truth and love.⁵⁹³ The church exhibits the interpersonal and social aspects of love. Rahner sees that

⁵⁹⁰ FCF p. 212

⁵⁹¹ FCF p. 398

⁵⁹² FCF p. 398

⁵⁹³ Rahner is aware of the failings of the Church to live up to this calling. He speaks of our obligation to love the Church as it is, in a similar manner to loving imperfect parents. FCF p.390

ecclesiastical life could be transformed with an appreciation that “neighbour-love” is “a concrete manner of actualising love for God instead of being understood only as a secondary requirement.”⁵⁹⁴ Rahner asks,

“Would not the Christian life look entirely different if we spontaneously and unquestioningly heard “Save your soul” as “Save your neighbour”? ”⁵⁹⁵

We complete our appraisal of Rahner’s use of notions of otherness by noting that every experience of otherness, either within the self, or towards God as the ultimate other, constitutes a unity. This concept is expounded in Volume XIII of Theological Investigations in the Chapter entitled “Experience of Self and the Experience of God.” Here Rahner states,

“The experience of self is the condition which makes it possible to experience God...they constitute a unity.”⁵⁹⁶

Rahner radically suggests that a unity exists between all relational experiences: of the self, the other as ‘neighbour’ and the divine. He suggests that the extent to which a subject experiences himself or herself is inextricably dependent upon how a subject encounters their fellow human beings.

We postulate a similarity here with Kristeva’s notion of ‘the stranger’. In recognising, and not eliminating the ‘stranger within’, we learn to accept the strangeness in others. Rahner inverts this and prioritises experiences of inter-subjective otherness, with God and the neighbour, to shed light on our own internal relationality. Rahner suggests that,

“Human beings discover themselves or lose themselves in their neighbour.”⁵⁹⁷

Inter-subjectivity fundamentally informs intra-subjective understanding for Rahner, vice versa for Kristeva, where inner plurality is prioritised.

⁵⁹⁴ Rahner “Who are your Brother and Sister?” essay from The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbour, 1983, and reprinted pp.305-319 Karl Rahner: theologian of the graced search for meaning ed. Geoffrey Kelly, T&T Clark, 1993. This citation from Kelly, p.306.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. p.306

⁵⁹⁶ TI 13 p. 122-132

⁵⁹⁷ FCF p. 456

In summary, in this chapter we have seen that Rahner gives a central place to notions of otherness in the human person as hearer. The hearer is continually faced by the otherness within itself (as it creates symbols to express itself), as a hearer of the triune God, and in its social relations with others as neighbours. These relationships fundamentally shape it. Rahner suggests that these experiences cannot be separated from each other but together are intrinsically part of what it means to be a human person.

Rahner's thought can be typified as a theological anthropology that sees the person as open to otherness, both to the world and to the future. It is an essentially exocentric view of the self. In common with such views, and with obvious similarities to Moltmann and Pannenberg's theological anthropologies, there is the co-related aspect of the person in process. Being human is, for Rahner, a process of shaping personhood by free decision in a relationship of love for God and neighbour.⁵⁹⁸ The person as hearer in Rahner's writing is 'becoming' itself and exercising transcendence not only in relation to its context in the world, but with a transcendence that draws it towards the relational God in whose nature it is imaged. The notion of "communion", as suggested by Zizioulas, has been entirely helpful in expressing how the human person is in the image of the triune God. For Rahner, all being desires relationship and has an orientation of "ek-stasis", a dynamic desire to share in communion with the other.

The relationality of the persons of the Trinity is used to underpin and provide a telos for the experience of human personhood. The triunity of God is the ultimate expression of relational selfhood. Within the Godhead such relationality is entirely self-fulfilled and fully experienced. The human self is a finite spirit, a creation of God, which nevertheless transcends its environment and is transcendently orientated towards the mystery of God. It is therefore a form of subjectivity justifiably explored through metaphysics, and characterised by a search after knowledge of being, and the ultimate Being. It has the freedom to form and shape itself as it complies with the pull of God in all-incumbent revelational experience, and as it offers itself in loving service of its neighbour.

⁵⁹⁸ We shall return to the theme of freedom in ch.s 8 and 9 of this thesis.

Rahner's project to re-instate and elucidate the doctrine of the Trinity may be seen as fully coherent with the "turn to the subject" in his work, and his desire to propose a theology of the human person. A properly formulated and social concept of the personhood of God provides, in his thought, the origin, arena and telos for the person as hearer in the process towards self-realisation and self-actualisation.

8. Freedom as explored in the Speaking Subject and the Person as Hearer

The nature and extent of human freedom is a major focus for both the person as hearer and the speaking subject. We propose to deal with Kristeva and Rahner together within this chapter and offer an appraisal of the different ways in which our thinkers explore this theme. We might mistakenly imagine that because our writers adopt the term “freedom” to express something inherent and characteristic in the experience of human subjectivity that there is an area of correspondence here. However, this is far from the case. Whilst contemporary debates on subjectivity might be seen as focussing upon freedom as both a pre-supposition and goal of human existence, “freedom” is defined in a variety of ways. Both our writers extend the definition of freedom beyond the ability to choose certain options or actions. In each freedom is linked to ideas of process and metamorphosis; but to very different ends.

8.1 The Nature of Freedom: Kristeva’s Carnival of Shapeshifters

In our reading of Kristeva we find that freedom is primarily the ability to defy classification, to be “anti-identificatory”. Speaking about her project alongside that of other “post-structuralists” Kristeva says,

“In the wake of Freud... we tried to highlight the heterogeneous, contradictory, and multifaceted nature of the psychic apparatus, and thus of human existence itself... Our work fought against [humanism’s unifying] tendencies, producing instead a vision of man and his discourse that is not “antihumanist” in the simplistic amoral sense that people have attributed to it, but it is clearly anti-identificatory.”⁵⁹⁹

In this Kristeva can be seen to portray her work, and the wider deconstructionist programme, as attempting to extend human freedom. David Cheetham suggests that post-modern writing on freedom often sees itself this way.

“True liberation, according to an intellectual culture deeply influenced by postmodernity (and the various ‘isms’ that accompany it), is about the realization of total autonomy from foundational metaphysics and assumptions. That is, the post-modern freedom may be characterised as a breaking out of

⁵⁹⁹ Kristeva responding to a question by Ross Guberman in *Time and Sense* trans. Ross Guberman, Columbia University Press, 1996, p.259. This passage is also cited and commented on in “The Subject, the Abject and Psychoanalysis” ch. 2 of *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory* Megan Becker-Leckrone, Palgrave Macmillan 2005 p.21-22, where Becker-Leckrone explores Kristeva’s relation to post-structuralism.

the Enlightenment straightjacket, a loosening of the bonds of reason and realism.”⁶⁰⁰

For Kristeva, freedom relates to the ability to relocate the speaking subject. We recall that subjectivity is about the positioning the speaking subject within a “place” or “space”. Aside from such a “stance” the subject has no intrinsic, positive value.⁶⁰¹ Subjectivity is about place rather than essence. Following Lacan, for Kristeva the subject is always and only defined by absence rather than presence. In this Kristeva can be seen to draw from Lacan’s use of the notion of subjectivity as “negative space”.⁶⁰² It is the task of the subject to move freely among many subject positions. This offers the possibility of tracing its path and tentatively, momentarily defining it. This notion of flitting from various subject positions is the principal expression of freedom for the speaking subject.

“Individuals in postmodern social conditions do not bind space-time from the point of view of one placed at the centre...but move through space-time configurations in order to discover the possibilities of what one might become.”⁶⁰³

One way Kristeva connotes the freedom of the subject is in her use of the metaphor of “carnival”.⁶⁰⁴ Adopting this notion from Bakhtin Kristeva uses this metaphor to relate to the subject’s ability to transgress and challenge norms as it reconfigures itself in various subject positions. It is the transgressive quality of freedom that is key for Kristeva. She says,

“[Carnival] challenges God, authority and social law.”⁶⁰⁵

Kristeva sees the free “carnavalesque” quality of the speaking subject as operating beyond simple parody. The “carnival” Kristeva speaks of has transformative powers. Defying boundaries the carnival subject incorporates layers of other identities from

⁶⁰⁰ David Cheetham’s essay “Postmodern Freedom and Religion” appears in *Theology* vol. 103 Jan/Feb 2000 pp. 19-26, this quote p. 19.

⁶⁰¹ See ch. 2 & 3 pp.29-81 of this thesis where Kristeva’s notion of subjectivity is explored fully. See Lacan *Ecrits* “The agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason after Freud” trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: WW Norton 1977, where Lacan says, “[subjectivity after Freud is] a question of the place man assigns to himself at the centre of a universe”.

⁶⁰² Lacan op.cit. p.165 where he expounds his notion of the “eccentric” rather than “co-centric” subject; a subject defined by forever being elsewhere and unconscious.

⁶⁰³ Anthony Elliot *Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity* Polity Press 1996, p.98.

⁶⁰⁴ See Kristeva “Word, Dialogue and Novel” the essay reproduced in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi, Columbia University Press, 1986.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.50.

the other side of a given boundary. The carnival subject therefore is not only able to occupy different gender positions but to layer them so that the boundaries between them dissolve. For Kristeva the carnival tradition is best exemplified in “polyphonic novels” of avant-garde writers.⁶⁰⁶

When speaking of carnival outside of the realm of “polyphonic writing” Kristeva relates this quality of transgressive freedom to the ability of the speaking subject to exercise freedom over the body.⁶⁰⁷ It is when Kristeva writes on a subject’s freedom that she often turns to a discussion on gender, sexuality and the body, to which we now turn. We anticipate that it is this particular facet of the speaking subject’s freedom that will allow for the most striking contrast to that of the person as hearer.

8.2 Freedom from the “Marked Body”

It could be said that the body has become a primary focus for post-modern discourse on freedom and the politics of difference.⁶⁰⁸ If post-modern and post-structuralist identity theories can be characterised as desiring freedom from ontology and materially determinant categories, then for some post-structuralist writers, including Kristeva, these determinant categories have centred on the “marked body”. The freedom of the speaking subject is therefore imagined to be the ability to transgress these categories, and, to borrow Bordo’s phrase, to become a *shape-shifter*.⁶⁰⁹

Kristeva’s desire to theorise the body in non-essentialist ways is coherent with her broad agenda of promoting difference and heterogeneity.⁶¹⁰ In her writing, the body comes to be thought of as the site where different social and discursive modes of subjectivity compete. The body is stripped of inherent meaning and re-imagined as a “site” across which energies travel and upon which meaning is inscribed.

⁶⁰⁶Ibid. p.50. Kristeva lists Rebelais, Cervantes, Swift, Sade, Dostoevsky, Joyce and Kafka as “carnival” polyphonic writers. We consider her use of the term “carnival” in pp.181-192 of this thesis.

⁶⁰⁷ See Kristeva “Word, Dialogue and Novel” the essay reproduced in The Kristeva Reader ed. Toril Moi, Columbia University Press, 1986.

⁶⁰⁸ See S. Suleiman ed. The Female Body in Western Culture, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986; Chris Weedon ed. Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference, Blackwell, 1999; Jane Gallop Thinking Through the Body Columbia University Press, 1988.

⁶⁰⁹ Susan Bordo, “(Re)Writing the Body: the Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism” pp7-29 of The Female Body in Western Culture ed. S. Suleiman, Harvard University Press, 1986.

⁶¹⁰ See ch., pp.29-52 of this thesis, examining the broad post-modern arena within which Kristeva imagines the subject to be formed. This idea is explored fully in Jane Gallop’s Thinking Through the Body Columbia University Press, 1988.

“Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of this development, they are arranged according to the various constraints always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures.”⁶¹¹

The desire to re-think and theorise the body is perhaps unsurprising given that contemporary theories about identity are being formed at the intersection of several critical disciplines: feminism engaging with post-modernism; post-structuralism with psychoanalysis; literary theory with gender theory. All of these contemporary disciplines share in the desire to emphasise diversity and express heterogeneity, as a reaction to the universalising tendencies of modernism. When considering human identity, post-modernists, including Kristeva, reject dogmatic modernist ideas and norms. Given this disposition, contemporary inter-disciplinary contact has centred upon theories of anti-essentialism and social constructionism.⁶¹² Within contemporary reflections on identity and difference, feminist theory has contributed its hard won understanding that the body, and especially the female body, is central to the debate. As Chris Weeden says,

“The female body has been central to a range of feminist approaches to difference.”⁶¹³

It might be said that as these various contemporary theories intersect it has been postulated that discussions about the givenness of identity can be focussed upon, and perhaps resolved, by a consideration of the extent to which the body is biologically determined.

We might argue that that there is an intrinsic and irresistible process apparent in contemporary theories of identity and sexuality. By this we mean that social construction theories of the *body* and of *sex* expand previous theories about the social construction of *gender* (which was a central tenet of second wave feminism).

“[In postmodernity] the question whether our sexuality is constructed or created was taken to a new emphasis. Modernity based its arguments on a distinction between sex (created) and gender (constructed). Postmodernity began to reject the differentiation between sex and gender and argue instead that all identity, indeed sexuality itself, was constructed.”⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ RPL p.93

⁶¹² See Diana Fuss The female body in Western culture: contemporary perspectives Cambridge University Press, 1986 and Essentially speaking : feminism, nature & difference, Routledge, 1989.

⁶¹³ Chris Weeden, Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference , Blackwell, 1999, p.99.

⁶¹⁴ See Elaine Storkey Created or Constructed: the great gender debate, Paternoster Press 2000, p.37.

For example, Kristeva's writings could be seen to be the continuation of the previous feminist hermeneutics of suspicion; the questioning of the "already saids" of gender being extended to those of biological categories such as sex. If gender is biologically indeterminate, perhaps being "performed," then what basis is there for saying that binary sexual difference, as a facet of biological *discourse*, is immune from erasure? Kristeva says,

"Sex is an unconscious and, consequently, a symbolic arrangement structured like language."⁶¹⁵

In all this, the body has been rediscovered as a site of knowledge and a place of discourse. For Kristeva the sexual identity of the body is another place where meaning is *inscribed* rather than apparent. Kristeva says,

"In this third attitude, which I strongly advocate – which I imagine? – the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*. What can 'identity', even 'sexual identity', mean in a new theoretical and scientific space where the very notion of identity is challenged? I am not simply suggesting a very hypothetical bisexuality which, even if it existed, would only, in fact be the aspiration towards the totality of one of the sexes and thus an effacing of difference. What I mean is, first of all, the demassification of the problematic of *difference*."⁶¹⁶

In seeking to understand how Kristeva arrives at such a vision of *difference* we recall her celebration of diversity and desire to undermine the myth of the single, creating author.⁶¹⁷ Davis Harvey suggests that ideas of "collage" and "bricolage" have become the primary form of post-modern discourse.⁶¹⁸ Reading Kristeva on sexual identity is entirely evocative of a sexual bricolage whereby sexual identity is playful and ironic: a juxtaposition of identities that break the myth of bi-gendered identity.

Kristeva subscribes to the notion that political and social exercise of power provides, or inscribes, meaning to the body. She rejects the notion of governance by "inner will" preferring one that emphasises the operation of discourse as prior to subjectivity.

⁶¹⁵ Kristeva's essay "Feminist Postmodernism" p.199 appearing in Peter Brooker (ed.) *Modernism/Postmodernism*, Longman, 1992.

⁶¹⁶ Kristeva, "Woman's Time", appearing p.209 of *The Kristeva Reader* op. cit.

⁶¹⁷ See ch.2 pp.29-52 of this thesis where we consider how Kristeva arrives at the text-only active stance which dissolves the notion of the author.

⁶¹⁸ See David Harvey's essay "The Condition of Postmodernity" in *The Post-Modern Reader*, Charles Jencks (ed.) St. Martins Press, 1992, p.308.

To observe how she arrives at this position it is necessary to revisit aspects of her theories from their foundations in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis.⁶¹⁹

Kristeva's theories of the body can be seen as both a progression and revision of those of Freud and Lacan. Briefly, we can say that in the theory of "penis envy" Freud re-situated the body as a site of psychic importance and the place of identity creation.⁶²⁰ Freud rejected the idea of a "givenness" for the body. He understood the body to be overlaid with psychical and social significance, which displace what might once have been understood as a "natural body".⁶²¹ However, there is some contention among feminist theorists in adopting Freud's notion of the body. His theory has been criticised as patriarchal in that it posited the creation of female identity as one of "lack". As Weeden says, for Freud,

"The male body is the desirable norm, and a women's lack of a penis the key factor determining their intellectual and moral differences from men."⁶²²

Although Kristeva rejects Freud's biologism and essentialism, she apparently finds valuable resources in the understanding that femininity and masculinity are psychic constructs and that, prior to the awareness of possession or lack of the phallus, infants are "polymorphously perverse". The polymorphous subject, or "shape-shifter", is presented as a contradiction to those suggesting identity is necessarily biologically determined. Kristeva arrives at this position by adopting some of Lacan's revisions of Freudianism.⁶²³ We recall that Lacan's primary contribution to post-structuralist psychoanalysts, such as Kristeva, is the understanding that language pre-exists and produces subjectivity.⁶²⁴ In summary, Kristeva can be said to move beyond Freud's identification of sexual identity as possession and lack (a binary opposition). She retains the notion of sexual identity as originally polymorphous and psychically structured and then adopts Lacan's theory of the pre-existence of language to produce a theory of the "unmarked" body. The body becomes, for Kristeva, a site where a changeable subjectivity expresses itself in a polymorphous way. In short, any number

⁶¹⁹ Kristeva relation to Freud and Lacan was explored in chapter 2 and 3 pp.29-64 of this thesis.

⁶²⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* SE, 7, pp.123-246 See Jane Gallop's commentary on Freud in *Thinking Through the Body*, Columbia University Press, 1988 and Chris Weeden's *Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference*, Blackwell, 1999.

⁶²¹ See "The Body" from *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* Elizabeth Wright ed. pp.35-40.

⁶²² Weeden op. cit. p. 78

⁶²³ We further consider Kristeva's notion of the shape-shifter in ch.8.1-8.3 pp.181-192 of this thesis.

⁶²⁴ See ch. 3.1-3.3 pp.52-64 of this thesis.

of sexual identifications are available to the subject and each is formed by the operation of discourse.⁶²⁵ We highlight here that this produces, in Kristeva's theories, a notion of the speaking subject whereby subjectivity and sexual identity are not fixed prior to language. Freedom is imagined as the ability to choose among a spectrum of sexual identities and create a collage of sexuality.

We suggest that current academic debate about the body has been further encouraged by the technological and cultural possibilities for body metamorphosis explored in post-modern society generally. Technological advances in virtual reality and gender re-alignment, for example, and the typically post-modern interest in the 'cyborg,' all typify the contemporary interest in re-defining the body.⁶²⁶ A popular expression of this has been the proliferation of 'body marking' such as tattooing and cosmetic surgery. Increasingly the "givens" about the body have been broken down and replaced by a sense that the body is a canvas or collage that can be shaped to fit or express the subject's desired identity. It seems that the areas where post-modern culture finds its most striking expressions are also, concurrently, centred on the body. Anne Balsamo sees that the post-modern discourse on the body

"[E]merges through the articulation between technologies, cultural narratives, social, economic and institutional forces."⁶²⁷

She adds,

"The body also serves as the locus for thinking differently about both feminist histories and feminist futures, and political aims of feminist cultural criticism more broadly."⁶²⁸

We might conclude that ideas of the body have faced unprecedented revision both academically and in popular post-modern culture. The revision of the body is, we suggest, symptomatic of the paradigm of post-modernism. In the same way that linear or syntactically simple writing is rejected as the propaganda of the dominant

⁶²⁵ For Kristeva this involves the relation of the semiotic upon the symbolic. See ch. 3.1-3.3 pp.52-64 of this thesis.

⁶²⁶ See Cartographies : Poststructuralism and the mapping of bodies and spaces Diprose and Ferrell (ed.s) Allen & Unwin, 1991 and Virginia Eubanks, "Zones of Dither: Writing the Postmodern Body" pp. 73-88 . - v.2 no. 3 Body and Society , 1996. We shall also be referring later to the important work of the feminist writer Donna Haraway A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's, 1990. Here Haraway uses the metaphor of the cyborg to suggest a post-modern *telos*. We consider the *telos* of the speaking subject in ch.9, pp.215-225 of this thesis.

⁶²⁷ Anne Balsamo, Technologies of the Gendered Body; reading cyborg women, Duke University Press, 1996, p.162.

⁶²⁸ Ibid. p.163

patriarchal order, postmodernist writers on the body desire it to become a problematised concept, to be decidedly obscure. Kristeva seeks to promote the value of diversity and the fragmentation of binding categories.

However, before we continue, it is worthwhile recalling that Kristeva uses very particular and unusual connotations for gendered terms and this further displaces the notion of a biologically “marked” body. Kristeva completely rejects the idea that the biological man and the biological woman can be identified with “masculine” and “feminine”.

“The ‘I’, subject of a conceptual quest, is also a subject of differentiation – of sexual contradictions ...All speaking subjects have within themselves a certain bisexuality which is precisely the possibility to explore all the sources of signification, that which posits a meaning [male] as well as that which multiplies pulverizes and then finally revives it [female].”⁶²⁹

As we saw in chapters two and three of this thesis, terms that usually refer to the body and human sexuality are relocated to refer to types of discourse. In this Kristeva succeeds in further fracturing notions of prescribed meaning and identity. In speaking of “masculine” and “feminine” she refers to modes of textual reality, not biological categories of human beings. This can be observed to a great extent in Kristeva’s work where the very terms masculine and feminine do not relate to the material body at all, but rather to modes of discourse.⁶³⁰ The purpose of this dislocation can be seen as an appeal to a subject’s freedom.

Kristeva’s use of the body as metaphor for semiotics can be seen in a positive way as freeing women from biologically determined roles. However, this aspect of her theory has been vigorously criticised. The main contention is that such approaches have been, at best, ambivalent towards the corporeal, material body, preferring to stress the body as a “site of signification.”⁶³¹

⁶²⁹ DIL p.167

⁶³⁰ See also the denial of the mother’s body in ch. 6.1-6.3 pp.132-139 where the body of the M/Other is defined as a agent-less space.

⁶³¹ A point made by Kathy Davis in her essay “Embody-ing Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body” in *Embodied Practises: Feminist Perspectives on the Body* ed. Kathy Davis, Sage Press, 1997

It could be said that such theories deny the corporeal experiences of women (and men) and disallow women from speaking about their physical bodies as a means of experiential knowledge and identity creation. Susan Bordo says,

“The study of cultural representations of the female body has flourished, and it has often been brilliantly illuminating and instrumental to a feminist rereading of culture. But the study of cultural representations alone, divorced from consideration of their relation to the practical lives of bodies, can obscure and mislead.”⁶³²

We recall, from chapter three of this thesis that Bordo describes the post-modern propensity to emphasise identity fluidity as “the myth of the shape shifter.” According to Bordo post-modern notions of identity have exchanged the Cartesian “myth of a view from nowhere” for a co-related myth of “a view from everywhere.”⁶³³ The freedom imagined for the speaking subject is one that ignores the formative influence of historical situation and the experience of particular embodiment. In this, Sara Ahmed suggests postmodernism offers a “phantasy of woman,”

“That phantasy fills woman with the very meaning of difference (from him) as it assumes that woman is precisely the impossibility of meaning *per se*. The relationship of woman to women as embodied (molar) subjects is denied, a denial that enables the philosopher to claim her figure and inhabit her (swollen) body.”⁶³⁴

Ahmed is critical of the “disappearing body” of postmodernism, in that,

“The disappearing post-modern body is a body without material limits or constraints. The body which knows no limits- which appears unmarked as such – conceals the mark of the masculine.”⁶³⁵

Ahmed is critical of all theories that posit technological progress as the means by which bodily transcendence is offered. We shall consider this criticism as we offer a comparison later in this chapter between this notion of freedom from the body and the understanding of freedom drawn from Karl Rahner.

⁶³² Susan Bordo’s essay “The Reproduction of Femininity” in Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory ed. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p 104.

⁶³³ Susan Bordo “(Re)Writing the Body: the Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism” pp7-29 of “The Female Body in Western Culture” ed. S. Suleiman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986

⁶³⁴ Sara Ahmed op.cit. p.77

⁶³⁵ Ibid. p.112

8.4 The Shape-Shifter and Agency

Here we consider the question, “What does this theory of the body mean to human freedom and agency?” Speaking of Kristeva’s approach to the body, and other post-structuralist theories, Anthony Elliot says,

“At the centre of these standpoints lies an unrelenting conviction of the irrelevance of selfhood, ego, intentionality and agency.”⁶³⁶

It might be said that, in its purest form, the post-modern subject’s agency is totally negated. This is so because the subject, and its agency, arrives after the operation of discourse and is an illusion created by it; there is no agent deciding independently from discourse as to the form or shape the subject adopts. Rather, the interaction and competition of a whole web of discursive factors and influences determine this. This type of approach, the dismissal of agency, portrays the subject as an anarchist in the face of a tyrannical monolithic system. Althusser makes this point,

“The individual is interpolated as a (free) subject in order that he shall freely submit to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection.”⁶³⁷

The suggestion here is that autonomy is a mask for subjection, that “the system” sets up a notion of subjectivity in order to subjugate individuals. It might be said that such an understanding gives no place for the notion of agency as individual freedom, and therefore sees nothing much to lose in the loss of the free subject.

However it could be said that some post-structuralist schemas, such as Kristeva’s, retain a tentative place for the subject as *mediator* in this process once it has begun.⁶³⁸ In other words the speaking subject has the power of mediation in the process of identity creation. If the subject is able to choose between conflicting sexual and other identity markers and create itself from a spectrum of identities, to have some decision in the way that it “shape-shifts”, then a notion of limited agency is retained. Agency becomes the ability to mediate between conflicting and competing discourses of identity. This is the notion of identity construction and the freedom of the amorphous subject that we have encountered in Kristeva’s writings. Pamela Sue Anderson says,

⁶³⁶ Anthony Elliot Subject to Ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity Polity Press 1996, p. 99.

⁶³⁷ Louis Althusser, Essays in Self-Criticism 1976 trans. Graham Lock, NLB, p.169.

⁶³⁸ We noted a similar tendency for Kristeva in ch.2 of this thesis.

“The formation of sexual identity is seen [in post-structuralism] to be a mediated process; this implies that social and symbolic meanings would not directly or strictly construct our identities. Instead our subjectivities, including sexual identity and non-identity would be formed through a self interpreted in the context of our symbolically mediated affective relationships.”⁶³⁹

However, even retaining this tenuous place of agency, Kristeva’s subject is far from “free.” It may be able to transcend its biology, but not the arena of discourse within which it has been called into being. The speaking subject is entirely at the command of linguistic operations which have formed it as an illusion and which continue to shape it. At best the speaking subject can mediate in a textual process that it cannot transcend. We anticipate that this will contrast with the hearer’s agency that we shall turn to later in this chapter.

8.5 The Free Subject in Literature

There is another area of freedom that Kristeva is currently exploring, that of the free subject in literature. It might be suggested that her axiom that language precedes subjectivity has driven her focus from earlier philosophical considerations of the discursive self to increasing amounts of fictional writing, such as her novels The Old Man and the Wolves⁶⁴⁰ and Possessions: a novel.⁶⁴¹ Considering her latest work, it could be said that literary criticism and the production of novels have been of greater importance for Kristeva most recently. Literary theory maintains that notions of subjectivity cannot be *explained* so much as *explored* and that literary representations of the subject in novels offer this opportunity.

One major characteristic of the subject in Kristeva’s writing is dislocation. Kristeva consciously disrupts the syntax and logical sequence of her novels and, in doing so, problematises the point of view of the narrator. In this she disrupts both the notion of the author as the originator of meaning and the stable narrating subject in the text. With many “voices” heard in the text, often in a conflicting and disruptive way, the notion of “polylogue” is explored. Freedom explored by Kristeva here is the freedom of the literary subject.⁶⁴²

⁶³⁹ Pamela Sue Anderson, A Feminist Philosophy of Religion, Blackwell, 1998.

⁶⁴⁰ Kristeva, The Old Man and the Wolves trans. Barbara Bray, Columbia University Press, 1994.

⁶⁴¹ Kristeva, Possessions: a novel trans. Barbara Bray, Columbia University Press, 1998.

⁶⁴² We will consider that writing meaning-disruptive novels is the only means of political action Kristeva endorses having discounted the possibility of collective political action on theoretical grounds. See ch. 9.4 pp.233-237 and our conclusion in ch.10.5 p.253 of this thesis.

Kristeva's trend towards fictional writing is perhaps unsurprising. We noted in chapter two that post-modern discursive reality is the pre-supposed arena for subjectivity for Kristeva. The subject can only truly be explored within text.⁶⁴³ For Kristeva, freedom is a textual freedom just as sexuality was a textual category.

As we saw from chapter three many contemporary feminist writers have judged this position as unsatisfactory. In our opinion this position may similarly be interrogated by theology. In a very pragmatic sense the question of human freedom does not arise from academic literary interests but is what Rahner terms a lived experience. The awareness of a notion of freedom arises "unthematically" in lived experiences.

In summary, we can say that, for Kristeva, the speaking subject experiences itself as free from prescribed sexual binaries and has the ability to transgress subject-positions within texts. In Kristeva's schema, unlike many post-modern schemas, the speaking subject retains a limited measure of agency in that it can mediate its position within a discursive reality. This process of textual freedom is the means of self-actualisation for the speaking subject.

8.6 Freedom in Karl Rahner

Rahner primarily links freedom to the extent to which the person transcends their immediate given situation and is, to a varying extent, a hearer of God. He says,

"We are the free ones, who decide about ourselves and thus make up our minds whether and to what extent we wish to hear the truth and to let God's light shine in our spirit."⁶⁴⁴

This is a sort of notion of "metamorphosis", and has certain resonance with the speaking subject's ability to "shape-shift". Certainly, from Rahner's writings, self-transcendence is the decisive characteristic of personhood.

⁶⁴³In reviewing *Possessions* Rebecca Brittenham is not convinced of the ease in which Kristeva uses literature to discuss philosophical questions. She says "Kristeva's fictional work acts as a vehicle – no, a *jalopy* – for conveying her theories...Kristeva the mystery writer is overwhelmed by Kristeva the socio-psychoanalytical philosopher". "Why Theory Matters :A Review of Julia Kristeva's *Possessions*" in *PORT*, www.humanities.org/port/99/0315-kristeva.html.

⁶⁴⁴ HW p.89

For Rahner, self-transcendence is connoted in a person's "openness" to the world and the horizon of being.⁶⁴⁵ This understanding of the human being as always "on the way" to personhood has important implications for human freedom, which we shall examine in this chapter. It places freedom at the very centre of what it means to be a person and, for Rahner, the operation of freedom has eschatological and soteriological ramifications. In short, Rahner sees freedom as the means by which a human being actualises their nature and becomes a person. This too is reminiscent of an aspect of the speaking subject, where, we recall, the only possibility for identifying the subject is to trace it through its process of displacement. In both schemas emphasis is on process.

However there are very striking contrasts between Rahner and Kristeva apparent here. For Rahner, human freedom is not so much construed as a right but as a responsibility. The hearer's freedom is not unbounded but prescribed by its relationship to the divine. It is a prescribed metamorphosis, such as that of a chrysalis, we might say, rather than the supposed boundless shape-shifting of the speaking subject. We shall examine this notion of freedom by a careful study of Rahner's writings on this subject, drawing comparisons with Kristeva's speaking subject as we progress.

We recall that freedom is one of the six existentials that Rahner purports to be universally characteristic for the human being.⁶⁴⁶ Here we shall study his terminology, most notably *potentia obedientialis* and *concupiscentia*, as well as the themes of freedom as self-actualisation and moral freedom. We will also examine the role of freedom in distinguishing between "nature" and "person."⁶⁴⁷ Freedom is ultimately a freedom to love, which will be the final focus for this chapter.

⁶⁴⁵ An idea closely related or even perhaps identical in meaning to Pannenberg's "exocentricity" from Anthropology in Theological Perspective T & T Clark, 1985, p.34-40.

⁶⁴⁶ See ch.5 pp.112-121 of this thesis.

⁶⁴⁷ To this end we refer to several of Rahner's essays and major works on freedom, including "Theology of Freedom" in Theological Investigations 4, "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia" Theological Investigations 1 and "The Dignity and Freedom of Man" in Theological Investigations 2 and Grace in Freedom (1969). We shall also consider ch. 8 of Hearer of the Word and commentaries on Rahner's work including Andrew Tallon's, "Personal Becoming: The Concept of Person in Karl Rahner's Transcendental Anthropology" Thomist 43 (1979) pp.1-117 and "Spirit, Freedom, History: Karl Rahner's Hearer des Wortes (Hearers of the Word) Thomist 38 (1974): pp. 908-19; Mark Lloyd Taylor's, God is love: A study in the Theology of Karl Rahner. Atlanta Scholars Press, 1986; George Vass's "The Mystery of Man and the Foundations of a Theological System." Vol. 2 of Understanding Karl Rahner Westminster Christian Classics, 1985; Tiina Allik's

8.7 How Rahner relates the term “Person” to “Freedom”

In his essay “The Theology of Freedom”⁶⁴⁸ Rahner begins by stating that human freedom is a given, not something that can be chosen. It exists before it is exercised,

“Freedom is first of all “freedom of being”. It is not merely the quality of an act and capacity exercised at some time, but a transcendental mark of human existence itself.”⁶⁴⁹

For Rahner, the nature of human freedom differs in degree, though not type, from divine freedom. This is because Rahner links freedom to *being*. For Rahner, God is perfectly realised being and freedom. Humans, as the creation of God, *possess* being and freedom, neither of which is perfectly realised. Human freedom “exists truly in the mode of a creature”⁶⁵⁰

Rahner distinguishes human freedom from God’s in two ways. Firstly, he says that human freedom is “borne and empowered by its absolute horizon.”⁶⁵¹ In other words, human freedom is contingent upon God. In Foundations of the Christian Faith Rahner argues that freedom is a “reality of transcendental experience.”⁶⁵² Rahner states that it is only because God is the horizon of our being as well as the source and pattern of our being that “we are subjects at all, and hence free.”⁶⁵³ Importantly, for Rahner this dependence on God does not diminish human freedom, but rather, as he states in Sacramental Mundi,

“Dependence on God – contrary to what takes place in intra-mundane causality – actually means being endowed with selfhood.”⁶⁵⁴

Given the contingent nature of human freedom Rahner suggests that,

“In this sense we encounter God in a radical way everywhere as a question to our freedom.”⁶⁵⁵

“Nature and Spirit: Agency and Concupiscence in Hauerwas and Rahner” Journal of Religious Ethics 15 (1987) pp. 14-32 and Robert Hurd’s “The Concept of Freedom in Rahner” Listening 17 (1982).

⁶⁴⁸ Rahner’s essay “The Theology of Freedom” appearing in TI 6.

⁶⁴⁹ TI 4 p.184

⁶⁵⁰ TI 4 p.193

⁶⁵¹ TI 4 p.193

⁶⁵² FCF p.37

⁶⁵³ FCF p. 98

⁶⁵⁴ SM p.362

⁶⁵⁵ FCF p.98

This is a similar argument to that concerning the act of human knowing that we explored earlier, whereby the presence of God as horizon enables the human being to know of particular objects. With respect to freedom, God's absolute and perfect freedom has endowed the human being with freedom. We therefore encounter God in every act of freedom, as the horizon of our freedom. This encounter, as it is for knowledge, is unthematic and can operate on an unconscious level. The notion of freedom for Kristeva's speaking subject does not include this idea of contingency. As we saw, freedom there is more likened to transgression and the ability to shift positions in text. This too operates beyond the realm of conscious choice, but is not a contingent facet of personhood. For Rahner, there is a "givenness" about human freedom, due to the doctrine of creation. Just as the human being is a created being, human freedom is created freedom. To the extent to which a person surrenders to God and accepts their dependence on God, they are free.

Secondly, Rahner distinguishes human freedom from God's by stating that the operation of human freedom is always mediated through the world and other persons.⁶⁵⁶ This gives important parameters to our individual freedom, which is a direct contradiction of the unbounded freedom supposed by the notion of a speaking subject. Every free act of every person will affect, and may impinge upon, the free acts of other persons. Rahner stresses that each individual life is also full of events and circumstances that are not freely chosen, but have to be borne. Even in this Rahner maintains that the human being is not purely passive, but can still be open to active self-creation.

"A human life is an inextricable pattern of doing and being done to, of activity and passivity. Yet the passivity on one level can become the material of a more profound activity – the doing of my one life...Even what we did not choose for ourselves in our lives can become the expression of who we desire to be."⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁶ TI IV p. 193-4

⁶⁵⁷ Brian McDermott's essay, "The Bonds of Freedom" p.53, appearing in A World of Grace: An Introduction to the Themes and Foundations of Karl Rahner's Theology ed. Leo J. O'Donovan, The Seabury Press, 1980. McDermott gives the example of the human responses to imprisonment and injustice as examples of how, even in a concentration camp, the human person can choose to live in a way that affirms themselves as a person. With this amazing ability the person can exhibit a free spirit even while the body is oppressed and confined in the most inhuman way. In making decisions about how we will behave in such circumstances, even the most terrible, McDermott argues that we can maintain the ability to create who we will be through them.

The emphasis on self-creation relates to the metamorphosing subject of post-structuralism, however, in this second distinction of human freedom, Rahner underlines the historicity of the person as an important aspect of human freedom. For Rahner, the “time and space” of the particular human person is the only arena for their freedom to be exercised. He uses this argument to suggest that other notions of human freedom which do not allow for the spatial and temporal realities of human life should be rejected,

“(Human freedom has) a certain space for realizing itself...Seen from this point of view, a retreat into the merely ‘private’ is contrary to nature.”⁶⁵⁸

This emphasis on how freedom relates to human finitude may be an important contrast between Rahner’s hearer and the post-structuralist speaking subject, and again demonstrates the fundamental importance of the pre-supposed arena for subjectivity.

There is a further area of direct contrast between hearer and speaker that can be drawn from Rahner’s consideration of freedom. This is the emphasis Rahner gives to the personal nature of freedom, which directly challenges the a-personal quality of the carnivalesque shape-shifter. Andrew Tallon considers Rahner’s emphasis on human freedom saying his anthropological approach is one of “personism”. Tallon defines “personism” as an anthropology having “contemporary focus on freedom...and relationality rather than on knowledge (consciousness, thought, mind, intellect etc.) and substantiality as characteristic of man.”⁶⁵⁹ According to Tallon the term “person” is absent from Rahner’s Spirit in the World and appears for the first time in the second of Rahner’s major works, Hearers of the Word. Tallon argues that from this monumental work the ‘turn to the subject’ is highly developed in Rahner’s thought to the extent that his anthropology can be meaningfully termed “personist.” Tallon identifies the close link in Rahner’s thought between “person” and “freedom”, saying that these terms are “coextensive” in Rahner’s writings. According to Tallon, it

⁶⁵⁸ Rahner, “The Freedom and Dignity of Man”, p.240. The essay appears in TI 2. Rahner’s insight here will be useful in comparing the notion of freedom he offers with that of postmodernist theorists. We shall return to the emphasis Rahner gives to human finitude when we compare his work with postmodernism later in this chapter.

⁶⁵⁹ Andrew Tallon’s essay “Personal Becoming: The Concept of Person in Karl Rahner’s Transcendental Anthropology”, appearing in Thomist 43, 1979, pp.1-17. George Vass agrees with Tallon. See “The Mystery of Man and the Foundations of a Theological System”, appearing in Vol. 2 of Understanding Karl Rahner, Westminster Christian Classics, 1985.

would be entirely fitting to say that, for Rahner, freedom is the vehicle through which a human *being* becomes a *person*.

Rahner succinctly states this in his essay “The Freedom and Dignity of Man,”

“Freedom is self-achievement of the *person*, using a finite material, before the infinite God.”⁶⁶⁰

The human being fully becomes a human person by the operation of free choices.

The notion of becoming, of process, is seen as forming an eternal state. Rahner expresses this in Foundations of the Christian Faith,

“In our passage through time we are performing this event of freedom, we are forming the eternity which we ourselves are and are becoming.”⁶⁶¹

This relation with and movement towards God is a given for Rahner, in fact he states that the human is,

“[A]lways already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressively, whether or not we will it. We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God.”⁶⁶²

Such an argument might not be given much of a hearing by anything other than a theological audience, where the presupposition that the human is created and lives in relation to God is admissible. However, by positing freedom as a broad notion of openness it is hard to completely dismiss Rahner’s argument by confining it to a religious arena. Postmodernism itself, which we would expect to be most dismissive of Rahner’s claim that freedom is contingent upon God, could in fact be construed as an example of the pushing back of the horizon of human freedom. The existential of self-transcendence could be one way of interpreting the post-structuralist desire for metamorphosis that we have identified in Kristeva’s notion of the speaking subject.

An important way to understand the nature of human freedom is Rahner’s use of the term ‘*potentia obedientialis*,’ which shall now become the focus of our examination. Rahner states that the human person is endowed with a number of characteristics in order to enable them to enter the divine life. For Rahner, these are tellingly not

⁶⁶⁰ Rahner, 1963, p246-7

⁶⁶¹ FCF p. 96

⁶⁶² HW p.53

rationality but freedom, spirit, sociality, individuality and embodiment.⁶⁶³ Within each human being is the potential for a life of divine grace, of becoming truly a human person. This turn from rationality as the primary human characteristic, the essential attribute of the *imago dei*, is common in existentialist-based theologies and we believe makes it more possible to relate this theory of personhood to those emerging in post-modernism where there is a similar focus on freedom and experience.

Rahner calls the experience of transcendence “*Vorgriff*” the reaching outwards toward being. In his translation of Hearer of the Word Andrew Tallon sees this term as best translated as “anticipation” in that it essentially carries the same meaning as Aquinas’ “*excessus*”.⁶⁶⁴ Rahner says,

“Only in Christianity is each ‘person’ completely unique and of eternal value – in God’s personal love for men – and hence a personality which must be accomplished through the highest personal responsibility and hence in freedom.”⁶⁶⁵

For Rahner, the human *being* is a created being standing in the distinguished position of a “Hearer of the Word.” In this, they have an inherent dignity, even before they proceed towards becoming a person. Rahner argues for the inherent dignity of the human, one independent of the individual’s decisions to use their freedom positively, or not. This belief maintains a respect for all human life, despite the actions of individuals.

“The human person by its nature and dignity demands an unconditional respect which is independent of any freely exercised determination of an end and value – i.e., is absolute.”⁶⁶⁶

However, for Rahner, the actions of an individual, upon other individuals or objects, determines their status in achieving personhood. We note that their “being” is not under question; they possess the dignity of a human being irrespective of their actions and should never be seen as an “object”. They should be treated with the dignity of one who is a partner in dialogue with God. Such a view of the inherent dignity of all human beings is a clear appropriation of Kant’s ethical imperative that states that a

⁶⁶³ See “The Dignity and Freedom of Man”, TI 2.

⁶⁶⁴ Andrew Tallon, Introduction to “Hearer of the Word” xiv.

⁶⁶⁵ Rahner “Theology of Freedom” p.179

⁶⁶⁶ “The Dignity and Freedom of Man” p.245

human being should always be treated as an end in themselves, and never a means to an end.⁶⁶⁷

8.8 The Distinction Rahner Makes Between Person and Human Nature

Rahner's essay "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia"⁶⁶⁸ clearly distinguishes between his use of the terms "person" and "nature". "Concupiscentia" is the lived tension between human nature and human personhood. "Nature" here is the set of traits that exist before a human being takes free decisions. This would include emotions, reflexes and the spontaneous actions of the body. This also importantly includes the theological existentials of sin and grace. On the other hand, "personhood" is dependent upon the free will decisions made. Nature is given; personhood is self-created. "Concupiscentia" is the human being in tension with itself.

Tiina Allik argues that Rahner's use of the term "concupiscentia" allows for, and even celebrates, the vulnerability of the human.⁶⁶⁹ Allik contrasts Rahner's use of the term with that of Hauerwas where "concupiscentia" is viewed as a negative limit on human agency. Allik says that Rahner avoids devaluing nature in the way that Hauerwas might be said to. This avoids the dualism between matter and spirit, with matter seen as negative or evil, against the goodness of spirit. Relating "concupiscentia" to human freedom Rahner sees the tension between nature and personhood as being experienced when either "good" or "bad" moral decisions are made. He gives the example of lying to demonstrate this. A person may make the free decision to lie (a decision relating to their personhood) but might be expected to involuntarily blush (an act of nature).⁶⁷⁰ Personal freedom, therefore, is seen in Rahner's thought as having the dual aspects of spontaneous acts (those arising from our given nature) and moral acts (relating to us as a person). These dual aspects need not always be thought of as in conflict with one another and often work coherently as nature presents the evolving person with inclinations to differing moral decisions.

⁶⁶⁷ "The Dignity and Freedom of Man" p.245.

⁶⁶⁸ TI 1

⁶⁶⁹ Tiina Allik, "Nature and Spirit: Agency and Concupiscentia in Hauerwas and Rahner" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 15 (1987), pp. 14-32.

⁶⁷⁰ See Rahner "Theological Concept of Concupiscentia" p.365 where Rahner rejects the understanding of this inherent tension as sinful in itself. It is rather the distinction between "nature" and "person" apparent as the human being is drawn to exercise free moral decisions that may or may not be in conflict with their nature.

Furthermore, commenting upon Rahner's essay "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia" Allik sees the human tension between nature and person in Rahner's thought as another continuation of his underlying distinction between form and matter.⁶⁷¹ Just as form can never fully express itself in matter, the human nature can never be totally expressed, and so become a complete and finished human person, whilst expressing itself in this life. This tension between personhood and nature is to be seen as a definitive aspect of human life. We note that this somewhat relates to the Kristeva's notion of the subject as unfinished and always "on the way".

8.9 Rahner's "Fundamental Option"

Rahner states that human freedom has a *telos*. This is an obvious and stark contrast the boundless nature of freedom supposed in post-structuralism. For Rahner, in choosing to become myself, I am in fact choosing to respond positively to God's invitation. Choosing self and choosing God are inseparable acts. Therefore, for Rahner, human freedom has soteriological implications. He says that in the way in which a human being lives he or she chooses a "fundamental option" for or against God. The *telos* of every human life is to choose to become a person, through freely taken acts of "openness to the world." In doing so, the person says "yes" to God, which is a salvific act. The choices and openness of a person can be said to determine their self-actualisation and their salvation,

"Freedom in its origin is freedom of saying yes or no to God and by this fact is freedom of the subject toward itself."⁶⁷²

In the way a person decides to live, whether "open" to others and to the world, or closed-off, he or she chooses a "fundamental option". Reading Rahner, Brian McDermott says each individual "chooses an ultimate way."

"Which kind of person do I choose to be and become in all my particular choices and actions – open to a possible "more" or closed in a finite circle of meaning and value?"⁶⁷³

In "Theology of Freedom" Rahner carefully defines what the fundamental is not. Firstly, it is not to be seen as the sum of a person's moral choices. Neither is it the moral value of our last act or moral choice before death, unless this act or decision

⁶⁷¹ Rahner, "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia" p365-9.

⁶⁷² Rahner, "Theology of Freedom", p.182.

⁶⁷³ Brian McDermott, op.cit., p.53.

constitutes an expression of the whole person. Rahner says that the “fundamental option” is never undertaken in ignorance. If we choose to say “no” to God it is a definite and conscious decision,

“(The evil person) understands this evil as what he is and what he definitely wants to be.”⁶⁷⁴

The fundamental option is therefore the sum total of who we are, whom we choose to be.⁶⁷⁵

“The entire life of a free subject is inevitably the answer to the question in which God offers himself to us.”⁶⁷⁶

In McDermott’s terms if we reject openness, we are, in effect, “choosing to be a thing not a person.” We are a “thing” in that we opt for a closed system of behaviour, energy and outlook and this will eventually lead to a “rigidity and paralysis of spirit” where the human being is “for and by themselves alone”.⁶⁷⁷

The fundamental option is, therefore, nothing less than the exercise of freedom and leads to the human being becoming a human person. This is deeply inscribed within each human being in what McDermott calls “the experience of original grace.”⁶⁷⁸ Our very being is predisposed to pursue this given existential of openness and freedom.

8.10 Is the Fundamental Option a Real Freedom?

Our question now is whether the arena of grace, pre-supposed by Rahner, negates the real freedom of the person as hearer. Intrinsically, for Rahner, given the extent of God’s grace, we are created to say “yes” to God. This raises the question of whether we can say “No” to God? Rahner calls this the “mystery of evil”. It is a mystery first and foremost because saying “no” to God runs entirely contrary to our created nature, which is to be open and directed towards transcendence. It frustrates our nature and is in fact a rejection of ourselves as God’s creatures. Rahner speaks of the actions of Adam and Eve as just such a rejection. He says that the Genesis act was “an act of

⁶⁷⁴ FCF p.103

⁶⁷⁵ Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man” p.246.

⁶⁷⁶ FCF p.101

⁶⁷⁷ McDermott op.cit. p.54

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid. p.56

basic and original self-interpretation.”⁶⁷⁹ It is self-interpretation, rather than the acceptance of the givenness of our created nature. In this way it is “sin”, which is for Rahner, the rejection of God’s grace.⁶⁸⁰

The “no” to God is also a mystery because it does not carry the same ontological significance as the life that is a “yes” to God. This is because the “yes” to God fits with our nature, it ‘follows the grain’ of our created being, and is as God wills human life to be. The “no” to God is never willed by God but is permitted in his decision to give human beings real and autonomous freedom. Here, Rahner presents the “no” as a real possibility. However his careful language tempers this by saying that saying “no” to God is

“[A]bortive, something which miscarries and fails, something which is self-destructive and self-contradictory”⁶⁸¹.

The “no” to God therefore exists as a coincidence of the greater and more fundamental possibility to say “yes” to God. The “no” is a “miscarriage” of the “yes”, not its corresponding opposite.⁶⁸²

Rahner presents the “yes” to God as effecting positive change and progressing the human self-actualisation; the “no” to God degrades the human being. However, even in this state Rahner states,

“Men cannot, indeed, cancel out or change his pre-established essential dignity as he pleases...he can degrade it by becoming culpable before God.”⁶⁸³

“(The “no” to God) remains embraced by this “yes” of God, which remains victorious in the history of salvation as a whole.”⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁷⁹ FCF p.115

⁶⁸⁰ See Rahner “Original Sin” in *Sacramental Mundi* 4, p.328-34 and “The Sin of Adam” in TI 11 pp.247-262.

⁶⁸¹ FCF p.102

⁶⁸² In this way “evil” is not seen as having the same ontological significance as good, a view that agrees with Barth’s notion of evil as absence, lack or “nothingness” rather than substantive presence. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3 (3) ed. GW Bromiley, T&T Clark, 1961, p.289-368. Using a similar argument to Barth’s theodicy Rahner strongly rejects dualism and insists that creation is “good” and evil is an aberration, or miscarriage of good, that is only possible because of God’s decision to create beings other than Godself. See Stephen T Davis *Encountering Evil: Live options in theodicy*, T & T Clark, 1981, for a discussion of the similarities in approach by other modern theologians including Moltmann.

⁶⁸³ Rahner “The Dignity and Freedom of Man” p.242

⁶⁸⁴ Rahner “Theology of Freedom” p.196

This raises the question as to whether there is any strength or power at all in the “no” to God. It may be a possibility, according to Rahner, but is it at all effectual in terms of a person’s salvation? If not, then does the possibility of saying “no” to God have any soteriological significance at all? Rahner seems partly to avoid this question by speaking of “the whole” of salvation history rather than the salvation of the individual. He says that salvation history “cannot be reduced to that of the various individuals”.⁶⁸⁵ Salvation, for Rahner clearly relates to all humanity (and in fact, as he states elsewhere, the whole created order) rather than the individual. God’s “yes” to humanity appears to overrule the “no” of an individual to God. This has led Rahner’s soteriology to be described as “Universalist”. Rahner’s notion of the universality of grace in Christ is important in this regard.⁶⁸⁶ The individual “no” to God is embraced in the much greater “yes” of God to humanity as a whole achieved in Christ.

However, this reading does not pay enough attention to Rahner’s contention that the freedom to say “no” to God is a real freedom, which he elsewhere states does indeed have eternal consequences. For instance, in Foundations of the Christian Faith Rahner says that when we refuse God’s offer, his question of our being, we face, and can choose “in the absolute, the deadly and final loneliness of saying “no” to God.”⁶⁸⁷ Is there a contradiction here? It would appear that the difficulty arises in that this is spoken of as a *possibility* for the human being, in Rahner, but that the emphasis in other works appears to be on the improbability of such an act and the extent to which the “no” to God must be taken with full awareness and extensively throughout life, so that it constitutes the “heart” of who we are. Could any person actively choose such “deadly, final loneliness”? Furthermore, while this decision, Rahner explicitly states, will damage the person’s self-actualisation and their relationship to God, it is held within the macro scale of God’s greater “yes” to humanity.

Is it therefore possible that the person saying “no” to God is in any sense damned? In our study we have found, that, as on this occasion, Rahner resists addressing such questions. This should not be taken to be hesitation or a lack of ability on his part. It is rather that we are asking the wrong question. Rahner rejects notions of a separation

⁶⁸⁵ Rahner, “Freedom” in SM p.245

⁶⁸⁶ See “The Sin of Adam” TI 11, p247-62 where Rahner sets out his interpretation of the Genesis account and outlines his understanding of the universal grace achieved in Christ – the greater “yes” of God into which an individual “no” is encompassed.

⁶⁸⁷ FCF p.103

between the transcendent and the immanent; he therefore does not accept the separation of heaven and earth, or indeed earth and hell. In resisting polarities Rahner argues for a holistic and communal experience of life and salvation. Hell, where it does exist, is the chosen and self-imposed egocentricity that defies our very nature and leaves a human being as less than a person; rigid of spirit and closed to the world.

“One has chosen the hell of the false self, the hell which consists in being without the other.”⁶⁸⁸

Where Rahner does address the question of how the “fundamental option” relates to eternal salvation he first dismisses the idea that God holds out two possible ends for human beings, that of heaven and hell. Rahner rejects this oversimplification, stating that God *is*, in effect, heaven, and that hell is what we create for ourselves if we say no to God.⁶⁸⁹ This, therefore, would appear to suggest that “hell” is the process and state of a life lived saying “no” to God. The soteriological significance of the “no” to God is felt in this life, as the consequences of separation from God. In this the human person is degraded and ultimately experiences the full weight of chosen loneliness and isolation. With no separation between this and what others suppose to be the “next” world it remains unclear as to whether this state of loneliness continues after God’s fully realised “yes” to humanity in the consummate redemption of creation at the end of time. It is this ambiguity that leads Rahner’s soteriology to its ultimate universalism. He suggests, although never explicitly, that “hell” is subsumed in God in his consummate act of redemption in Christ, and that this is the only eschatological reality.

Rahner adds that the human person can never be sure whether their life is offering a “yes” or “no” to God. He says,

“(The human person) cannot “judge itself” because it is historical and hence while its process is still going on it can never be fully present to reflection.”⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁸ McDermott op.cit p.55. He relates this to John-Paul Satre’s “bad faith” from Being and Nothing where the inauthentic life is one lived in a rejection of the other, and withdrawn from the existential reality of a chosen existence.

⁶⁸⁹ “Theology of Freedom” p.191

⁶⁹⁰ “Theology of Freedom” p.195

This expresses the Roman Catholic reticence over and against the Protestant doctrine of assurance. In this respect, the final fundamental option is the final and total orientation of the human being. This will be either outwards towards God as the horizon, or as a decided rejection of openness, a state similar to Pannenberg's egocentricity.⁶⁹¹

For Rahner, this end state cannot be judged by the human subjects themselves, since they stand within the history, and cannot judge its final state; God can only make such a judgement.

8.11 Freedom as Neighbour-Love

Rahner's emphasis throughout his treatment of the fundamental option is that it is the "yes" to God which is ultimately the *telos* of human being.⁶⁹² This follows the created nature of the human and actualises its being to become evermore a human person.

This perhaps leads to the question, "How does the life of "yes" to God show itself?"

For Rahner, the "yes" to God is a life intrinsically containing a yes to the value and dignity of God's creation, and most especially other human persons. In essence it is a life of neighbour –love. Such a life is the *telos* and goal of human being, where personhood is achieved. Summarising Rahner's position Mark Lloyd Taylor says,

"The capacity to love is the single, final structure that adequately expresses the authentic nature of the human person."⁶⁹³

This type of love is distinguished in its willingness to be "open" to the other person, at self-sacrificial cost.

"What love demands of a person in none other than his very self."⁶⁹⁴

The recipient of such love, the neighbour, is not necessarily the person closest to the person. Rahner argues that true neighbour love is,

⁶⁹¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* translated Matthew J. O'Connell, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1985

⁶⁹² We consider Rahner's writing on *telos* in the ch.9, pp.225-237, and only briefly introduce the theme here.

⁶⁹³ Mark Lloyd Taylor op.cit_ p.39

⁶⁹⁴ Rahner, "Theology of Freedom" TI 9 p.188

“The sombre service of political love...which is directed toward the whole of humanity and makes the most distant person one’s neighbour.”⁶⁹⁵

Rahner sees no distinction between neighbour-love and love of God. Commentating on 1 John 4:20-21, Rahner says,

“The original relationship to God is love of neighbour.”⁶⁹⁶

Rahner states that neighbour-love contains the whole truth of the Gospel and is human freedom at its ultimate and fullest realisation.⁶⁹⁷ It is in loving the other person that Rahner says humans can experience God most directly.⁶⁹⁸ Andrew Tallon says that for this reason being, freedom and love are correlative,

“For me to will and to love is to be present to the other...Love is being for the other”⁶⁹⁹

Rahner is clear in pointing out that neighbour love, whilst being correlated with the love of God, is not a “moral consequence” of the person’s foremost love of God. Rather the neighbour is loved for his or her own sake and this “concrete act” is affirmed as love of God. The love of God as the act of neighbour-love is “unthematic” and may well be unconscious.

“The explicit, categorical love of neighbour is the primary act of love of God, which, in the love of neighbour as such, intends God...unthematically, but genuinely and without fail.”⁷⁰⁰

Rahner sees the exercise of neighbour love as the means by which the human person reaches “maturity”. He defines this term as the total integration and self-actualisation of the person in love. “Maturity”, for Rahner involves the integration of all the existentials of human nature, and says that the act of self-giving love alone unites them all.⁷⁰¹

Our last point on how neighbour-love is distinctive is that it reaffirms the person as a relational being. According to Rahner, part of the human existential is to be a

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. p.191

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. p.189

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid. p.187

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 190

⁶⁹⁹ Tallon, “Spirit, Freedom, History: Karl Rahner’s *Hörer des Wortes* (Hearers of the Word)” p.917
Appearing in *Thomist* 38 (1974) pp. 908-19.

⁷⁰⁰ Rahner, *Systematic Theology* 6 p.295

⁷⁰¹ Rahner, “Theology of Freedom” p.187

“community-building person”. This requires the person’s acceptance and protection of the dignity of the other person, which is in itself an act of love.

“The person is not the opposite of community; rather both are correlative realities...there is community only where there are persons and where persons are protected; he is a perfect person in the measure in which he opens himself in love and service for other persons.”⁷⁰²

The human person is therefore formed in relation to other persons. In such relationality there is a reciprocal self-creation of our own personhood and that of others. This is, according to Rahner, the most fundamental human responsibility.

Given that a life ultimately saying “yes” to God is a human responsibility to be realised in freedom, we might ask how human freedom relates to divine sovereignty. With such an emphasis on freedom the theological question of human autonomy and divine sovereignty seems apparent and will be dealt with briefly here. Can a human be free if there is a God who is sovereign?

In reading Rahner, McDermott presents this question as a “false dilemma”.⁷⁰³ It assumes that the self-creating subject cannot exist if it is fundamentally the object of a greater, infinite, controlling subject. Or, in other words, that human autonomy cannot exist alongside divine sovereignty. It is here that the link Rahner makes between freedom and love is vital. Rahner maintains that God’s sovereignty is acted out in pure love. When love impacts upon freedom it does not control but nourishes and develops the possibility for growth and achieving potential. An example of this is the determination of a child’s personality when it experiences the love of its parent. Parental love is “controlling” in that its presence is hugely and fundamentally significant to the child’s development. Such parental love is, in this way, a determinant of the child’s personality and who they will become, but it does this by enabling the child to flourish and grow into their potential, rather than setting a prescriptive and fixed account of exactly who the child will be. The parental love allows the child to become who they are. A lack of parental love would be devastating in this situation. The “control” of the parent is therefore an act of love which nurtures the self-development of the child. Love “causes” in a specifically different way from

⁷⁰²Rahner, “The Dignity and Freedom of Man p.239

⁷⁰³ McDermott op.cit p.56

“mechanical or impersonal modes of causality.”⁷⁰⁴ Its “causing” is an “enabling to become” rather than a “causing to become”⁷⁰⁵. It is this model of divine sovereignty which Rahner offers, and as such is entirely coherent with maintaining human autonomy and real freedom. God, as the parent of humanity, loves and so enables the process of self-actualisation with which God has imbued human beings.

“Love offers nourishment to the other persons to be and become themselves, their own most authentic selves.”⁷⁰⁶

According to Rahner, human beings have true freedom and are autonomous. By the “dark mystery” of evil, a side-effect of the act of their creation, they can even reject God’s invitation and offer lives that are a “fundamental option” of saying “no” to God.

8.12 The Theme of Freedom in Contemporary Theology

The importance Rahner gives to the aspect of personal freedom within his notion of the person as hearer resonates with other theological anthropologies. We shall briefly consider wider theological notions of freedom in order to contextualise Rahner’s writings. This might prove useful as we draw conclusions later about the extent to which this interface between Rahner and Kristeva might infer further possibilities for other theological engagement with post-structuralist theories. Again, as we observed in the theological anthropology in chapter 6 of this thesis, a return to the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen as informing this debate. Here we shall briefly examine how other contemporary theologians have explored the theme of human freedom through a consideration of the freedom of God the Father within the Trinity.

Zizioulas shares Rahner’s interest in Greek Trinitarianism and draws from it a similar theme of personal freedom. Zizioulas sees Greek readings of the Trinity as emphasising the freedom of the Father in “willing communion”.⁷⁰⁷ God, as Trinity, is portrayed as enjoying relationality and freely choosing communal relationships. God

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. p.56

⁷⁰⁵ Process thought and theology takes this notion further by limiting God’s omnipotence and viewing God’s action as only a “call” or “drawing forward” rather than the imposition of divine will. See Charles Hartshorne *The Divine Relationality: A Social Conception of God* New Haven, 1948, and the commentary on Process thought, “The Attributes of God in the light of Process Thought” appearing in *The Expository Times* 81 1969-70.

⁷⁰⁶ McDermott op.cit p.56

⁷⁰⁷ Zizioulas, *Human Capacity* p.410

freely wills that God's image on earth be similarly free. Bonhoeffer expresses the link between God's freedom and relationality and that of created humans,

“Only in something that is itself free can the one who is free, the Creator, see himself.”⁷⁰⁸

Rahner, Zizioulas and Bonhoeffer link the theme of relationality with freedom. God as relational Trinity creates external beings to relate to, and, as God's images, they must too be free.

Although a full consideration of human sexuality is not apparent in Rahner's writing it is an issue that other contemporary theologians have turned to when considering models of human freedom as reflective of divine freedom. Here the theme of freedom as freedom to relate to the other is paramount.

In The Social God and the Relational Self, Stanley Grenz⁷⁰⁹ offers a summary of how contemporary theology has included notion of human sexuality in the examination of created relationality. He suggests that contemporary theologians have sought to understand how human sexuality might be seen as an *analogia relationis* to God's own Trinitarian relationality.

Bonhoeffer made the connection between sexual differentiation and divine relationality. According to Bonhoeffer, human freedom can only be exercised in relation to other beings, and the template for this is best observed in the sexual differentiation of humans.

“Man is free for man, *Male and female he created them*. Man is not alone, he is in duality and it is in this dependence on the other that his creatureliness consists.”⁷¹⁰

For Bonhoeffer, freedom only exists where it can be experienced as “freedom for the other.”⁷¹¹ Barth takes up this theme in the development of his dialogical personalism found in the explanation of God's own “I-Thou” Trinitarian relationality. According to Barth, cosmic expressions of relationality are threefold. God in Godself enjoys the

⁷⁰⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer Creation and Fall/Temptation: Two Biblical Studies trans. John C Fletcher and Eberhard Bethge, MacMillan Press, 1959, p.38.

⁷⁰⁹ Stanley Grenz, “Human Sexuality and the Divine Relationality” pp.294-298 of The Social God and The Relational Self, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001

⁷¹⁰ Bonhoeffer op. cit. p.38

⁷¹¹ Bonhoeffer op.cit. p.37

“I-Thou” relationality of the Trinity. God desires to express this in the creation of human beings, also created as free and relational, with whom God can relate. Furthermore, human beings are characterised by their freedom to relate to each other as “I-Thou.” Intrinsic to this is the inherent relationality supposed in the duality of human sexuality. Human sexuality is therefore theologically important. For Barth “male and female being is a prototype of all ‘I and Thou’.”⁷¹² Grenz finds Barth’s ability to find a place for human sexuality within the *imago dei* as offering “among his greatest contributions to theological anthropology.”⁷¹³ Grenz sees human sexuality as essential to notions of relationality. He says,

“At the heart of human sexuality is embodiment, which includes the sexed body that marks the person as male or female and out of which other aspects of human existence emerge. Bound up with embodiment is the sense of incompleteness, coupled with the drive for completeness, that together lead to bonding. Sexuality, therefore, is the dynamic that draws human beings out of their individual isolation into relationships with others.”⁷¹⁴

How does this reading of human sexuality relate to Kristeva’s notion of the dispersal of dualistic sexuality that we examined earlier in this chapter? If Grenz is correct the notion of relationality that Barth has arrived at through the model of human sexuality is undermined by the dispersal of sexual categories. However, Grenz might be overstating the importance of sexuality, and specifically a *dual* understanding of sexuality. It might be seen that the duality of sexuality explored by these theologians is *secondary* to the notion of relationality *per se*. If this is the case the understanding of “I-Thou” relationality is not damaged by the removal of sexual polarity. Certainly, Grenz views Barth as demoting the relationship of male to female beneath the opportunity it offers for “I-Thou” encounter.

Grenz says,

“In viewing human bipolarity in this way, Barth fails to find theological significance in the creation of humans as embodied, sexual creatures, despite his focus on the creation of humankind as male and female. In the end, human sexuality serves as little more than a symbol for what Barth perceives to be deeper I-Thou relationality that makes humans similar to the triune God and hence casts them as the *imago dei*.”⁷¹⁵

Kristeva’s dispersal of sexual categories need not therefore be detrimental to the theological understanding that the relationality of human experience mirrors that of

⁷¹² Barth *Church Dogmatics III/4* T&T Clark, 1961 p.150, quoted in Grenz op.cit. p.298

⁷¹³ Grenz, op.cit. p.300

⁷¹⁴ Grenz op.cit. p.301

⁷¹⁵ Grenz, op.cit. p.301

the divine. Previously, the duality of human sexuality has perhaps mirrored and symbolised “I-Thou” relationality. It does this because it has been understood as offering a model of similarity and difference in relation, expressed through a dualistic understanding of sexual categories. This appreciation might be obscured slightly were this duality lost; however, male-female sexual relationships could never encompass all expressions of human relationality and could never be conceived as an *apologia entis* for divine relationality. We suggest here that theological relational anthropology need not be threatened by Kristeva’s fragmentation of sexual categories in the theory of the speaking subject.

9. A *Telos* for Subjectivity: Christology and *Jouissance*

We propose to examine one final area of significance in our theorists' writing on subjectivity. This is the consideration of whether a *telos*, an ultimate end or purpose for subjectivity is possible or permissible.⁷¹⁶

We are immediately required to clarify that no *telos* exists for Kristeva's speaking subject in terms of an absolute or universal norm. Kristeva attempts to deconstruct all such universals.⁷¹⁷ However, if we leave aside the idea of a normative or absolute goal for the speaking subject we do find in Kristeva the idea of the speaking subject's most authentic experience of actualisation in the notion of *jouissance*. This concept provides Kristeva with a means to judge the "subject on trial".⁷¹⁸ In this, the Kristevan notion of *jouissance* is a goal for the speaking subject and as such a tentative *telos* in terms of actualisation. We seek to contrast this with the definitive *telos* of the person as hearer.

9.1 Post-modern ecstasy as a *telos* for the speaking subject

In reading Kristeva's work we have become accustomed to the way in which her writing is syntactically disrupted and its meaning purposefully heterogeneous. The medium is very much the message. This is no more apparent than when Kristeva speaks of the experience of *jouissance*. The difficulty in unpacking this notion does not lie in identifying this term within Kristeva's writing; it is more that her notion explores literary concepts through corporeal and sexual terminology.

The usual English translation of the term *jouissance* is "enjoyment." However, this translation does not carry the sexually orgasmic connotation of Kristeva's original French word. Her term implies an ecstasy similar to sexual orgasm. However, this should not infer that Kristeva has stepped beyond the purely discursive paradigm we

⁷¹⁶ *Telos* is the Greek term for the end, completion or purpose or goal of any thing or activity. Aristotle gave this term the inference of a final cause that accounts for the existence and nature of a thing. In this he can be seen to connote a universal goal in actualising being for the nature of any thing, such as the self. See F. E. Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon, New York University Press, 1969.

⁷¹⁷ We explore Kristeva's post-structuralist schema and anti-universalist notion of the self in ch.s 2, 3, 6 & 8 of this thesis.

⁷¹⁸ This is inferred from her phrase *le sujet en proces*. The French term both denotes the self in process and has legal connotations: the self on trial. See chapter 3 pp.60-64 of this thesis.

outlined in chapter two. Employing a word play, Kristeva connotes *jouissance* with the ecstatic joy found in the presence of meaning; *j'ouïs sens*, "I heard meaning". When sexuality refers to a linguistic reality the sexual ecstasy produced is *jouissance*: the play of desire.

In order to understand her use of this term we note that Kristeva develops her notion from its use by Lacan. In Lacan (1975)⁷¹⁹ the term *jouissance* expresses an interrelation between three French meanings. It signifies an extreme or deep pleasure, sexual orgasm and the sense of having the legal right to use something. The form of sexual ecstasy that Lacan connotes here is unrelated to phallic forms of sexuality.⁷²⁰ We recall that both Lacan and Kristeva relocate sexuality to text.⁷²¹ They see desire as only being satisfied in language.⁷²² *Jouissance* involves the symbolising of unconscious desire in free-associating speech. This takes the form of imaginative, poetic writing where the endless loops of meaning defy the constraints of rational language.

Lacan uses the term to connote the condition of merging with the other, which can be associated with orgasm, but also with gaining a desired object or condition. In his use of the word, Lacan emphasises the aspect of following a sensation to a point of discomfort. In this, Lacan draws from Freudian theory. In the essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920) Freud posits that ecstatic pleasure experiences are related to the death drive. In this, Freud implies that ecstatic pleasure contains an urge to regress to the oblivious state that preceded life. In her notion of *jouissance* Kristeva adopts these ideas from both Freud and Lacan, describing the subject in a state of *jouissance* as being on the boundary between the symbolic and the semiotic. This is, for her, the same as being both in a state of merging with otherness and coming close to personal annihilation. For Kristeva, in the state of *jouissance*, the speaking subject is positioned between symbolic centred life and semiotic total dispersal, which is in effect the death of selfhood.

⁷¹⁹ Lacan, The language of the self : the function of language in psychoanalysis translated with notes and commentary by Anthony Wildenn New York: Dell, 1975

⁷²⁰ Lacan, op.cit., 70-71

⁷²¹ See ch. 2 & 3 of this thesis where we consider Lacan and Kristeva's situating of sexuality within textuality.

⁷²² Kristeva, RPL and Lacan The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis ed. Jacques Alain Miller, Penguin 1979 pp.281-91

“On the one hand, there is pain – but it also makes one secure – caused as one recognizes oneself as subject of (others’) discourse, hence tributary of a universal Law. On the other hand, there is pleasure – but it kills- at finding oneself different, irreducible, for one is borne by a simply singular speech, not merging with the others, but then exposed to the black thrusts of a desire that borders on idiolect and aphasia.”⁷²³

Kristeva, therefore, links *jouissance* with the ability of the subject to embrace a state of inner plurality. This state merges the semiotic and symbolic and so actualises subjectivity at the borders of its collapse. It is a state of dynamic balance between actualisation and annihilation of the subject. Jean Graybeal usefully translates *jouissance* as “the joying of self-division.”⁷²⁴ The pleasure aroused in this state has its origins in the remembrance of original pre-Oedipal M/Other where the pre-subject fully experienced semiotics.⁷²⁵ Later the speaking subject recalls this experience through the disruptive act of the semiotic. Rather than attempting to deny or reconcile this division, Kristeva argues it is possible, through aesthetic practices, for the self to learn how to ‘joy’ in such division. The experience of *jouissance* is therefore closely allied to the acceptance of otherness.

Kristeva goes on to describe the means by which the subject can access such experiences. She sees aesthetic practises such as writing transgressive poetry or creating avant-garde art as helping the subject to express and joy in self-division. In other words, *jouissance* is the enjoyment of expressions of internal difference. Meaning is “present” here, but not in a dogmatic sense, rather in the realisation and enjoyment of the heterogeneous nature of meaning. This understanding is also a *self-*understanding which revitalises self-actualisation. It is in this respect that *jouissance* is a possible *telos* for the speaking subject. The speaking subject is, in moments of *jouissance*, experiencing its fullest expression of self-actualisation.

As we noted at the beginning of this thesis, Kristeva’s speaking subject is the *sujet en process*, both a “self in process” and “on trial”. Kristeva seems to suggest that the subject can be judged on the extent to which it can balance between the opposing forces of the semiotic and symbolic, experiencing *jouissance* in its own

⁷²³ Kristeva DIL p.x

⁷²⁴ In her chapter with this same heading appearing as ch. 7 of *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva* ed. David Crownfield.

⁷²⁵ RPL p. 101

insurmountable division. In this way *jouissance* is a tentative but persistent notion of *telos* for the speaking subject.

This notion is explored in Kristeva's essay "Woman's Time". Here, Kristeva suggests two basic options for the divided subject. One path involves a variety of ways to ignore, repress or attempt to resolve the tensions inherent in such self-division, the other, ways to explore and play with division. Although Kristeva resists making overt normative judgements as to which path is better she clearly infers that latter represents a more actualised state of being than the former. Kristeva includes religious practices in this less authentic option, viewing them as repressive of semiotics. As we have observed, Kristeva sees religion as a place where the semiotic is only allowed to surface in order for it to be sublimated.⁷²⁶

However, Kristeva states that even "feminist" ideologies and practices, which celebrate heterogeneity, can be corrupted and become a less authentic pathway for the speaking subject, one that resists the experience of *jouissance*. In "Women's Time," describing herself as an avant-garde feminist, Kristeva fears that resisting *jouissance* leads to an ideology becoming "a religion". She sees this in the feminist propensity to "sacralize the Woman"⁷²⁷. She views the attempt to stabilise and secure identity, of women, or any individual, by the creation of a static "I", as a rejection of otherness. For Kristeva this will perpetuate the subject's subjugation to the Law of the Father. For Kristeva this is a state of being a "slave of meaning," which is based upon attempts to deny difference, both within and outside of the subject. She says,

"Our only chance to avoid being neither master nor slave of meaning lies within our ability to ensure our mastery of it (through technique or knowledge) as well as our passage through it (through play or practice). In a word *jouissance*."⁷²⁸

Kristeva suggests that the "passage through" mastery of the male symbolic order is found in keeping in touch with semiotic forces that disrupt this system. In other words, a tentative *telos* for the speaking subject is found in living with the acceptance of the paradoxical nature of reality and, most especially, of our own heterogeneous subjectivity. This is ultimately what Kristeva has to offer as a *telos* of the speaking subject.

⁷²⁶ We examined this view of religion in chapter 3.5 pp.70-80 of this thesis.

⁷²⁷ WT p. 208

⁷²⁸ DIL p.x

“The subject “masters” the symbolic system – knows what it means, knows how to speak and participate in the system of which she is a part – and yet is also in touch with the semiotic forces on the other side, which both require and make possible her individual playful passage through that system.”⁷²⁹

In this, there is a measure of coherence between Kristeva’s notion of *jouissance* and the more general post-modern notion of “play”. The *telos* or “trial” of the speaking subject is its ability to get by in the realm of the Law of the Father without being entirely confined and crushed by it; to revolt against the set categories of identity and meaning and yet not to fall into the extreme other state of semiotic psychosis. In “playing” with the balance between semiotic and symbolic the subject knows *jouissance*.

Before we move on we note that Kristeva suggests that the experience of marginality, such as that of women, is a refuge for *jouissance*.

The various forms of marginalism — according to sex, age, religion or ideology — represent in the modern world this refuge for *jouissance*.⁷³⁰

Kristeva sees the marginalised place of women in society as offering them a more ready access to *jouissance*, alongside other marginalised groups. She suggests that this is because they already feel excluded by the symbolic order and so are more prone to seek ways to express this exclusion. In this there is somewhat of a contradiction between Kristeva’s philosophical anti-realism and its dismissal of sexual categories and her inferred privileging of the experience of women.

Allowing for this inherent inconsistency it remains to ask how the post-modern goal of the speaking self, the expression of *jouissance*, can be seen in post-modern culture. Grenz suggests that “the central hallmark of post-modern cultural expression is pluralism.”⁷³¹ Cultural expressions of a post-modern ethos intend to confront the audience with an irreconcilable cacophony of ideas, or the reader with a polyphony of de-contextualised narrative voices. This creation of bricolage, with its juxtaposition of eclectic styles, is just the type of endeavour that Kristeva sees as eliciting *jouissance*. An example of this can be seen in the way in which Kristeva herself plays

⁷²⁹ Joyce Graybeal, “Joying in the Truth of Self-Division” p.133 appearing in *Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: religion, women and psychoanalysis* ed. David Crownfield, State University of New York, 1992.

⁷³⁰ Kristeva, “Women’s Time”, p.202.

⁷³¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, Eerdmans, 1996, p.20.

with the structural format of her essay “Stabat Mater”. The “male” symbolic text scrolls down the right hand side of the page to be occasionally interrupted by Kristeva’s poetic writing about her experience of childbirth, which appears occasionally in the left-hand column. Sometimes the right hand column takes precedence over the whole page, only to be interrupted later. This format makes the page less easy to read. Should you follow the voices separately, read down one column at a time, or interrupt your reading by mixing both voices? Here Kristeva demonstrates a simple notion of hypertext. This is a textual collage, disrupting the symbolic nature of the text in just the same way that the semiotic disrupts the symbolic order.

It is the ironic play with ideas of identity and the dissolution of set meaning in popular cultural expressions such as fashion, the visual media, art and texts, which Kristeva suggests will force a re-evaluation of meaning and identity *per se*. This phenomenon is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in contemporary science fiction where there is an overt questioning of what is possible in terms of human identity and a play with ideas of what constitutes reality.⁷³² Often these explorations are undertaken with reference to the cyborg.

“The dominant image [in post-modern science fiction] is that of the cybernetic cyborg, a figure of indeterminate interface. The body is dissolved: malleable as data and more ephemeral than its own stored image. Even sexuality is distilled to the meaninglessness of transparency and surface.”⁷³³

Theorists seeking to understand the prevalence of this genre suggest that the cyborg has become a projection of the type of amorphous selfhood imagined by post-structuralist, post-modern theories such as Kristeva’s.

“The dissolution of boundaries, the “end of borders and frontiers”...the waning of affect, the erosion of meaning and representation, the rise of spectacle and simulacra, and the demise of history – all these familiar tropes are played out upon the physical manifestation of the subject – the [cyborg’s] body.”⁷³⁴

⁷³² See Scott Bukatman Terminal identity: the virtual subject in post-modern science fiction Durham: Duke University Press, 1993. For a general discussion on postmodernism as a cultural phenomena see Madan Sarup Identity, culture and the post-modern world, Edinburgh University Press, 1996 For a consideration of post-modern culture in film see Norman K. Denzin, Images of post-modern society : social theory and contemporary cinema, Sage, 1991.

⁷³³ Bukatman op. cit p. 245

⁷³⁴ Ibid. p.246

Given the prevalence of so many varied cultural phenomena exploring the crossing of symbolic boundaries, post-modern society should be rich with *jouissance*.

In all this, the preferred state is one of perpetual conflict. Commenting on this Kristeva makes an interesting point about the place of psychoanalysis in displacing Western philosophical and religious heritage. Here she identifies a fundamental difference between the self as hearer and as speaker.⁷³⁵ She describes traditional philosophical and religious practices, such as praying and reading, as “subjective self-interrogation” whereby,

“ ‘Man’ can learn to know ‘himself’, his being, by turning inward upon himself, by turning a gaze upon himself, by looking back into himself.”⁷³⁶

Kristeva sees psychoanalysis as the contemporary expression of this desire. However she indicates important differences.

“The aim of the traditional modes was a form of reconciliation – in religious terms, with God. The result or aim was grace and a sense of happiness. This is not the aim or end with psychoanalysis. ...In contrast to the tradition I have outlined, analysis reveals that reconciliation is not possible because the permanent condition is that of conflict. Reconciliation is provisional. To use a metaphor, analysis is intellectual Trotskyism: the revolution is permanent.”⁷³⁷

Whilst religion sought ultimate reconciliation, psychoanalysis embraces a process of continual evolution achieved through conflict, according to Kristeva. Given this, Kristeva asks,

“So what is the solution to this permanent condition of conflict?

Creativity...the best outcome is a recognition of permanent conflictuality.”⁷³⁸

We might well challenge Kristeva’s notion of the aim of religion as a reconciliation that implies subjective stacity. Rahner’s notion of sanctification through a process of deification would certainly disallow her reading of the Christian tradition as offering a kind of stagnant *telos* whereby reconciliation is a realisable goal and the self is static rather than process. However, even allowing for this, Kristeva identifies here that there is no true final purpose for the speaking subject. The best the self as speaker can

⁷³⁵ Parallax: Julia Kristeva 1966-96 Aesthetics, Politics, Ethics vol. 4, no.3, p.13-15.

⁷³⁶ Ibid. p.14

⁷³⁷ Ibid p.15

⁷³⁸ Ibid p.15

hope for is to be driven to creative practice by its own inner conflict. There is no resolution to this conflict for Kristeva.

Perhaps one might conclude that experiencing *jouissance* leads to an ethic of social tolerance and pluralism. This would build the post-modern society that rejects notions of centre or norm; Foucault's "heterotopia."⁷³⁹ As we have seen in Kristeva's argument in Strangers to Ourselves⁷⁴⁰ it is the acceptance of internal otherness, or strangeness, that reduces the tendency to project differences outward. Rather than the depiction of the foreigner as the other, the battle with differences must take place within the psyche itself,

"... in order that the struggle, the implacable difference, the violence can be conceived in the very place where it operates with the maximum intransigence, in other words, in personal and sexual identity itself, so as to make it disintegrate in its very nucleus."⁷⁴¹

Certainly, Kristeva's earliest writing was formulated under a Marxist framework and linked the individual transformation to a wider societal shift.

"There can be no socio-political transformation without a transformation of subjects: in other words, in our relationship to social constraints, to pleasure and more deeply, to language."⁷⁴²

In other words the ever-disruptive speaking subject would, from its own inner-plurality, break social constraints and lead a political revolution against dogmatic humanism. In this the individual's goal would be to assume subjective positions that refuse to conform to binary or other fixed classifications; a goal which encourages a plurality of expressed subject positions. Margaret Whitford identifies that this goal would be to adopt a "stance of perpetual negativity" a "position of dissidence;"⁷⁴³ in other words the speaking subject aims to make a continual assertion of what it is *not*. According to Whitford, for Kristeva, this is a "feminine" or "feminist" practise in that it is driven by the work of the subversive "feminine" semiotic.

⁷³⁹ Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, Pantheon Books, 1970, p. xviii

⁷⁴⁰ See chapter 6.6, pp.153-161 of this thesis, where we consider the stranger as "other".

⁷⁴¹ WT reprinted in The Kristeva Reader p. 209

⁷⁴² Kristeva interviewed in Tel Quel Autumn 1974, reprinted in New French Feminisms: An Anthology ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron Harvester Press, 1981

⁷⁴³ Margaret Whitford "Preface" in Mapping Women Kath Jones (ed) CPL 1994, p.10.

As Kristeva herself says,

“Woman can never be defined; a feminist practice can only be negative.”⁷⁴⁴

We observe here that a political and social revolution is construed as the goal of the individual and carried out by acts of literary dissidence.

However, we would like to raise some objections to casting a socio-political goal for the speaking subject. We do not believe that this is a correct reading of Kristeva. As Whitford suggests, the socio-political goal of the speaking subject appears somewhat obsolete given that, in order to subvert society, there is a concurrent loss of the notion of communality.

“The fragmentation of identities (the multiplicity of sexed positions), to which Butler’s and Kristeva’s detotalising positions lead threatens to eliminate the basis for any kind of solidarity or action on behalf of women.”⁷⁴⁵

A socio-political goal for the speaking subject is undermined in this; the “detotalisation” of personal identity leads to the fragmentation of society into a web of loosely drawn and ever-shifting subject positions. The goal of bringing about a revolution through dissident uses of language leads to the dissolution of the notion of communality. What purpose then for a socio-political goal if, in achieving it, the individual comes to obliterate the very notion of society?

Furthermore, Kristeva shows an apparent lack of interest in describing the eventual, post-revolutionary state.

“The solution is infinite, since what is at stake is to move from a patriarchal society, of class and of religion, in other words from a pre-history, toward – *Who knows?* In any event this process involves going through what is repressed in discourse, in reproductive and productive relationships.”⁷⁴⁶

It is also worth noting at this point that Kristeva limits the goal of *jouissance* to an individual’s solitary experience. *Jouissance* cannot be shared. The writer, artist or performer can involve themselves in the aesthetic practices that Kristeva suggests are keys to *jouissance*, but they cannot directly share this experience with another. We have already suggested there is an inherent individualism within Kristeva’s notion of

⁷⁴⁴ Kristeva in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, Harvester Press, 1981, p.137.

⁷⁴⁵ Margaret Whitford, “Preface” in *Mapping Women* Kath Jones (ed) CPL 1994, p.10

⁷⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva from “Woman can never be defined” an interview by “Psychoanalysis and Politics” in *Tel Quel* Autumn 1974. This is reprinted in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (ed.s) The Harvester Press Ltd 1981pp. 137-141 (with my emphasis added).

the speaking subject, and this is one more example of it. We believe that the solitary experience of *jouissance* demonstrates the inherent individualism of the speaking subject, and is, as such, vulnerable to a critique from Rahner. We find the impossibility of constructing communal social or political action from the notion of the speaking subject extremely disturbing. Feminist commentators were the first to outline and critique this facet of post-structuralist notions of selfhood.⁷⁴⁷ We find their dissatisfaction with post-structuralism on this point compelling and anticipate a similar criticism from a theological standpoint, such as Rahner's, where the communality of the human self is emphasised and there is a collective aspect to self actualisation, often expressed in terms of ecclesiology.

We conclude therefore that the notion of *jouissance* offers a tentative *telos* for the speaking subject. The subject in process can be judged by the extent to which it joys in plurality. This is again a textual experience which somewhat denies corporeality. It is also an inherently individualistic experience which can be neither reciprocally shared nor lead to communality.

9.2 Rahner's use of Christology in the *telos* for the person as hearer.

Rahner has no apprehension in speaking of a *telos* for the person; one which infers not only a goal or aim but, in the Aristotelian sense, a final cause which accounts for the existence and nature of a thing.⁷⁴⁸ His notion of the self as hearer includes a model of the fullest actualised human self in the person of Christ. In this, Christology is closely allied to anthropology. As Rahner says,

“Christology is transcendent anthropology, anthropology is deficient Christology.”⁷⁴⁹

We shall consider Rahner's Christology and see how the person of Christ embodies the *telos* of the person as hearer and how this contrasts with the individualism of the speaking subject.

Rahner seeks a Christology that allows for Christ to be seen as the most actualised or “ascended” human being: the embodiment of the fully-actualised hearer of God. With

⁷⁴⁷ Chapters 3 and 6 of this thesis outline a number of feminist critiques of Kristeva in this regard.

⁷⁴⁸ F E Peters Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon New York University Press, 1967

⁷⁴⁹ TI 1 p.164

this is mind he begins by critiquing classical “descending” Christologies.⁷⁵⁰ Such approaches begin with the premise that God “descended” to earth in the man Jesus, beginning with the assumption of divinity and approaching humanity from that perspective. Rahner believes that by returning to other Christian sources, such as the New Testament accounts and the apostles’ sermons, the possibility for an “ascending” Christology arises. This will present Christ as the most actualised human being and provide a model for all hearers of God.

To this end Rahner points to the preaching of the apostle Peter, as it appears in Acts, which builds Christological statements about Jesus’ divinity from a description of a fully human Jesus, who suffers and dies,

“This Jesus, whom you crucified, God has made Lord and Christ”.⁷⁵¹

Rahner asks whether such “ascending” Christological statements can be dismissed as merely “primitive” in comparison with the more sophisticated “descending” Christology of the later passages in John 1.⁷⁵² However he suggests that these New Testament statements portray important Christological pointers, which classical “descending” Christology obscures. For Rahner, classical Christology needs to be measured against the original experience of the risen Christ as reported in the New Testament, both in the synoptic Gospels and the preaching reported in Acts.

Rahner argues that whilst New Testament Christological statements are somewhat at odds with classical descending Christologies, neither should be seen to undermine the other. Rather, classical Christology is a straightforward development of the “late” Christology found in the New Testament, such as that in John 1.⁷⁵³ Rahner cites the example of Galatians 1:4, “Christ gave himself for our sins”, as implying the later classical ontological statements of Chalcedon, so providing a link between New Testament statements and later reflection in the Creedal formulations.⁷⁵⁴ Despite their differences, Rahner sees a legitimate link between New Testament and Creedal Christologies.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁰ See TI 1, 2 and TI 5 pp.187-192. The same material is treated in similar terms in FCF pp178-203.

⁷⁵¹ Acts 2:36, NIV

⁷⁵² Rahner, TI 1, p.155.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ FCF p.285

⁷⁵⁵ TI 1 pp.149-155

To summarise, for Rahner, the classical formulations require re-balancing with the primitive New Testament ascending Christologies that arose from the original experience of meeting the Risen Christ. Rahner overtly expresses this in his essay "Current Problems in Christology."⁷⁵⁶ Rahner famously states that the Chalcedon formulation should be viewed as a *beginning* rather than an *end* of the Christological quest,

"The clearest formulations, the most sanctified formulae, the classic condensations of the centuries-long work of the Church, in prayer, reflection and struggle concerning God's mysteries: all these derive their life from the fact that they are not the end but the beginning, not goal but means, truths which open the way to the ever greater Truth."⁷⁵⁷

In our desire to see how Rahner links Christology to a *telos* for personhood it is important to note that Rahner constructs his Christology within a soteriological setting;⁷⁵⁸ one which emphasises the divinisation of the self. According to Rahner, salvific meaning is found in that,

"We are saved because this man who is one of us has been saved by God."⁷⁵⁹

Rahner's concern here is to offer a Christology that is fully applicable to non-substitutionary soteriological themes. It portrays the man Jesus as the one in whom God intended from all eternity to reconcile human beings. The hearers of God accept God's invitation to respond in the hope that God will affirm them in a similar way to that in which God affirmed Jesus.

The apparent emphasis on participation and divinisation need not infer that Rahner lessens the uniqueness of Christ. Rahner purports that the incarnation is an unsurpassable event within salvation history. The "event of Jesus Christ" is absolute and eschatological. Rahner says,

"God must live out its history as his own history and retain it permanently."⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁶Rahner, TI 1, pp. 149-200

⁷⁵⁷ Rahner, TI 1 p.149

⁷⁵⁸ Rahner, FCF

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid. p.284

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid. p.301

Here we see the notion of Christ as *telos* as having a soteriological component. This quote also makes the point that Christ as *telos* has implications for the being and interrelatedness of God.

Rahner views Christ as the evolutionary pinnacle of temporal life, the most actualised human spirit. This is, in some ways, similar to the “degree Christologies” that see Jesus as the “divinised man”⁷⁶¹. However this is offset, in Rahner’s writings, with ontological, “high” Christological statements as he examines Jesus’ eternal Sonship. It is also important to recall that Rahner refuses to separate transcendence from immanence.⁷⁶² The evolutionary process, which reaches its peak in Jesus, is not “either/or” human or divine action but rather “both/and”, since this world is a “both/and” world where God is present transcendentally and immanent in every common event.

Rahner’s concern in adopting the language of evolution is not therefore to suggest a purely “degree Christology”. Such approaches were developed in the twentieth century and have since been viewed as relying too heavily on Hegelian views of history, which might be said to lead to an overly humanistic and optimistic view of the human state. Rahner does not offer a “degree Christology”, although he does draw from Hegelian principles of evolution⁷⁶³. He seeks rather to marry his Christology with his view of the temporal realm as completely infused with God’s grace; as the realm where immanence and transcendence meet.⁷⁶⁴ The “both/and” world requires God’s consistent grace to redeem it, a process that reaches its climax at the Incarnation and will be fulfilled in Christ’s return. This, we believe, does not indicate an overly optimistic or humanistic confidence in the ability of the human to evolve, but rather a confidence in the faithfulness and loving action of a gracious and redeeming God. For Rahner, the evolutionary aspect of history relates to the process

⁷⁶¹ For a critique of such views see Gunton, Yesterday and Today: a study of continuities in Christology, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983 p15-18 and p 98-100

⁷⁶² We consider Rahner’s notion of reality in ch.1 pp.13-24 of this thesis and Rahner’s Rule for resolving the tension between the immanent and economic Trinity, which is the basis for this notion of reality, pp.165-167.

⁷⁶³ See Gunton’s analysis of Hegel’s influence on Rahner, Gunton, op.cit. p. 16-17.

⁷⁶⁴ This desire will lead some Christian commentators such as Gunton to say that Rahner has divinised creation and conflated the order of salvation with the order of creation in what Gunton terms “near-Pantheism” (op.cit. p. 127). This critique is not easily dismissed as this is in effect what Rahner’s understanding of the human realm entails. God is immanently present in this world and must never be objectified into a world or realm beyond.

of God's communication rather than the unaided progression of the self as hearer. Rahner sees that the revelation of God in Christ guarantees and anticipates the "divinization of the world as a whole".⁷⁶⁵

It is difficult to confidently place Rahner's understanding of Jesus salvific work within any one commonly used soteriological model, although commentaries often place Rahner within the "example" model. However we do not believe that this adequately expresses all that is contained in Rahner's notion of Christ as *telos*. John McIntyre offers thirteen soteriological models: ransom; redemption; salvation; sacrifice; propitiation; expiation; atonement; reconciliation; victory; penalty; satisfaction; example and liberation.⁷⁶⁶ He places Rahner in the "example" model category. McIntyre distinguishes the various types of "example" models from the others, seeing them as being of "second order" in that they require the presence of other models, usually those of salvation or atonement. McIntyre argues that Christian theologies offering "example" models do so having already established the unique role of salvation achieved by Christ. This categorisation, with its caveat, seems to fit Rahner's soteriology much more adequately than a simplistic "example" model. It requires the reference to first order models where in some way Christ's death *enables* as well as inspires us to follow his example.

Within this evolutionary framework, the incarnation represents the climax of God's relation to human history. Soteriologically therefore, there is the expected Catholic emphasis on the incarnation, rather than the cross and resurrection, as salvific event. For Rahner, the incarnation quite simply means salvation. It means that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, who preached the kingdom and died in obedience to God's will, showed himself to be the one whose life and words were affirmed by God. As we encounter Jesus, through revelation and the Gospels, we understand that the transcendental offer of God was, at least in Jesus, fully accepted. Further, we realise that we can also hear God's offer and respond to it as Jesus did.

Situating the person's *telos* within an ascending Christology acknowledges the extent of continuation between the human state and the divine. Rahner finds assurance of

⁷⁶⁵ TI 5, p.161.

⁷⁶⁶ John McIntyre, The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the doctrine of the death of Christ, T&T Clarke, 1992.

this in the “solidarity” between the incarnate Word and human beings.⁷⁶⁷ This is perhaps where Rahner’s anthropology is decidedly optimistic and why it so easily relates to his Christology. The hearer is,

“ a reality absolutely open upwards; a reality which reaches its highest perfection ...when in it the Logos himself becomes existent in the world.”⁷⁶⁸

It is his positive and optimistic approach to the state of the human being that establishes a real place for Jesus’ human will and nature to come to the fore, bequeathing modern Christology with a very human Christ. At the same time the human being is elevated, and its salvation is seen as a progression rather than an obliteration of what was formerly present. It gives the self as hearer a *telos* that is perfectly exemplified in the person of Christ and realised as a possibility for all hearers through Christ’s unique salvific work. Jesus is humanity’s “limit-case.”⁷⁶⁹ In Christ we see the possibility of what the hearer can be, and how far short we fall from this *telos* or ideal.

The important theme of relationality is apparent as Rahner relates Christology to the *telos* of the person as hearer. This theme, which has been central in the creation of the hearer, remains central to its *telos*. It is here that Rahner’s notion of *telos* confronts the individualism of the speaking subject. According to Rahner, the human person should be redefined as not only a subject (rational and free, an existential event) but also a *subject-in-relation* (a being defined in relation to others, and ultimately an ontological category).⁷⁷⁰ It is only in the dual personhood of Christ as subject and subject-in-relation that the human and the uniquely divine coincide.

According to Rahner, as a *subject*, Jesus Christ shares, but exceeds, our understanding of the infinite within the finite. Jesus’ human consciousness is more attuned to the Absolute, but only in degree. However, as a *subject-in-relation* Jesus exceeds our experience in quality (and not solely degree) in his relationship with God. He is uniquely related to the Father. In this respect, Jesus’ understanding of the infinite and eternal differs from ours and his uniqueness is maintained. All human subjects can

⁷⁶⁷ FCF p.289

⁷⁶⁸Rahner, TI I, p.183.

⁷⁶⁹ Gerald O’Collins Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus, Oxford University Press, 1995, p.214.

⁷⁷⁰ We see in notion of the self as relational in ch.1.2 and ch.5.7 of this thesis.

follow the example of Jesus' radical openness to divinity. However, for Rahner, Christ is also a *subject-in-relation*, and as such he is shaped by all of his relationships. Christ's particular relation with God is unique. His relationship with the Father is not fully attainable by other human persons.

By distinguishing these two essential components in all persons (both subjects and subjects-in-relation) Rahner's Christology holds together Christ's twin natures, his uniqueness and the evolutionary model of soteriology. Christ is the realsymbol of God and models the fulfilment of the human person. This bequeaths the notion of the hearer with an important facet, stressing relationality whilst concurrently allowing for an aspect of individuation.

A further facet of Rahner's Christology as it relates to the *telos* of the person as hearer is that it overcomes the problem of Christ's self-knowledge being seen as purely a product of beatific vision. By this we mean that it need not be supposed that Christ, as the *telos* of personhood, walked by sight (or understanding) rather than faith. In Rahner's understanding, Jesus, the subject, is not aware that he is a divine subject by means of beatific vision, but by means of openness to the Absolute. He walks by faith, as do all hearers of God. The recognition of the infinite contained within the finite is possible to all human persons and exceeded in the person of Christ by a matter of degree. We need not feel disadvantaged if we are not graced with beatific vision, but should rather foster a sense of openness to the Absolute which is available to everyone in the "mysticism of everyday life".⁷⁷¹ In this we are reassured that the *telos* of personhood is achievable.

We should briefly consider here that other critics find that Rahner has not been completely successful in marrying the themes of Christology and self-transcendence.⁷⁷² Gunton asserts that the notion of self-transcendence itself, "actually obscure(s) the heart of Christianity."⁷⁷³ For Gunton, the "heart of Christianity" is the fact that in this one particular human life God brings salvation for all. Gunton states that according to biblical testimony the difference between Jesus and us is not any degree of self-transcendence but the fact that we succumb to temptation where he did

⁷⁷¹ See ch.5.5 where we consider Rahner's theme of mystery.

⁷⁷² Colin Gunton, *Persons Human and Divine*, T&T Clark, 1991.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.* p.16

not. This may not be an entirely legitimate criticism of Rahner since it appears to overlook the link between self-transcendence and moral purity that is apparent in Rahner's writings. Jesus' sinless state is seen as the by-product of his self-transcendence, the extent of his openness to the divine. Rahner views sin as the corruption of the proper human desire for God, which is overcome by self-transcendence. For Rahner, the ordinariness of Jesus is maintained in the emphasis on building a Christology from below which seeks to maintain the real humanity of Christ.

Gunton's more compelling contention with Rahner's Christology is the degree to which Rahner allows findings of transcendental philosophy to dominate (Gunton uses the term "obscure") aspects of Christological tradition. We believe that there are some grounds for his complaint. However, this is partly due to the way in which Rahner writes and the way in which his work is published. In particular there is a noticeable attempt to revisit high Christological statements and re-emphasise the unique Sonship of Christ in the later work Foundations whereas in the earlier Theological Investigations the emphasis is far more on evolutionary Christology. This might be interpreted as Rahner himself understanding the need to provide checks and balances to his earlier emphasis on "fully ascending" Christology. Without this chronological overview of Rahner's work a false impression of Rahner's Christology and his broader relationship to philosophy can emerge.

Ultimately, we can say that Rahner's anthropology and Christology together suggest to us that our life too can be open to God's offer of self-revelation; that we can be hearers of God.

9.3 Openness as *Telos*

In seeking to establish the person of Jesus as the ultimate "limit case" of human personhood Rahner presents us with a model of human life. In this he states that the purpose of human life is essentially "openness." Rahner views openness as a universal characteristic; it is essentially what it means to be human. It is in realising this openness that the human being actualises personhood. The theme of "radical openness" is therefore the link between Christology and anthropology and is offered as a *telos* for human personhood.

Pannenberg and Macquarrie agree that the concept of openness is increasingly prevalent in both Christian “doctrines of Man” and secular anthropologies.⁷⁷⁴ They argue that it is *the* key theme in all contemporary anthropologies. Pannenberg expresses this in the notion of “exocentricity,” which is revealed in the phenomena of human existence such as imagination, trust, self-consciousness and the hope for life after death. Neither Pannenberg’s “exocentricity” nor Rahner’s “openness” limits this notion to religious experience alone. Rahner agrees with Pannenberg that human beings are in a very real sense naturally religious; that an awareness of the presence of God gives “a correct appreciation of what it is to be human.”⁷⁷⁵ As Pannenberg states,

“It is the ability to transcend one’s own situation which characterises man...In questioning the reality he encounters and going beyond its currently given aspects to its very essence through this inquiry, thus disclosing its questionable-ness, man is in the last analysis asking about himself, about his own destination. Thus it makes good sense to describe man as a question that continually pushed him further into the open.”⁷⁷⁶

Both argue that human openness, expressed as a super-natural existential or as exocentricity, is a universal trait. Furthermore, in support of this, Pannenberg claims that both secular and theological anthropologies draw the same conclusion: that humanity is characterised by self-transcendence, an “openness to the world”.⁷⁷⁷ This correlates to Herder’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophical claim that human personal identity must be grounded outside of itself.⁷⁷⁸ Rahner’s anthropology can be readily situated within this stream of theological thought. He suggests that not only is there a religious component in individual and corporate human life, but furthermore, the destiny of human existence is eschatologically to become evermore in the image of God. The *telos* for human personhood lies outside of ourselves in becoming evermore like God, as exemplified in the person of Jesus Christ, through whom we achieve this goal. Openness to transcendence is therefore the foremost characteristic of Rahner’s ascending Christology.

⁷⁷⁴ See John Macquarrie, Jesus Christ in Modern Thought, SCM, 1990, and Pannenberg, Anthropology in a Theological Perspective, T&T Clark, 1985

⁷⁷⁵ Pannenberg’s own description of anthropology Anthropology in Theological Perspective T&T Clark, 1985, p.21.

⁷⁷⁶ Pannenberg Basic Questions SCM Press, 1970, p.216.

⁷⁷⁷ Pannenberg Anthropology in Theological Perspective, p.42.

⁷⁷⁸ Pannenberg op.cit p.58 for a discussion of Kierkegaard’s “The Sickness unto Death” on this theme.

9.4 The speaking subject's *jouissance* and the hearing person's openness

We shall attempt to suggest what can be learnt by a critical comparison between the notion of *jouissance* and the theme of radical openness to transcendence. We suggest that the notions of openness and *jouissance* are akin to an understanding of a *telos* for the subject, although, as we have noted, this claim needs to be modified for Kristeva's schema.

Immediately we foresee problems in that claims of universal characteristics are highly problematic for post-modern theorists, but essential to Rahner. Pannenberg attempts to resolve this with a consideration of scientific anthropological studies. Rahner does not adopt this approach, but rather leaves the claim for a universal openness to transcendence as an obvious and unavoidable facet of the human state; one which our own experience will validate for us. We find this hard to argue with. Firstly because Rahner extends the definition of human "openness to transcendence" to encompass far more than religious sentiment alone. Rather, it is inclusive of all categories of human questioning and especially the task of self-understanding. In this, Rahner seems to encapsulate the very project Kristeva undertakes (and indeed our own project) in that to question the "already saids" can be seen as an expression of radical openness. Kristeva's work might infer her openness of being, the universal characteristic suggested by Rahner, Pannenberg and others.

Secondly, we note that there is an inherent individualism in Kristeva's notion of *jouissance*, which is not found in the idea of the openness of the hearing subject-in-relation within Rahner. This is best exemplified by recalling Kristeva's contention that there should be a rejection of collective political action in favour of "A New Political Dissident" – the individual experimental writer. Kristeva's argument that the subversion of Western society, with all its discriminating hierarchies, lies in the hands of avant-garde artists and writers negates the possibility of the collective political activism of marginalised groups. Kristeva goes as far as to suggest that political action from within the symbolic order, such as the "Women's Movement" remains "within the limits of the old master-slave couple"⁷⁷⁹ and is at best counter-productive in that it does not overthrow the notion of set categories such as "women". We recall, in

⁷⁷⁹ Kristeva's essay "A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident" first appeared in *Tel Quel* 1977, no.74, Winter 1977. It is reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi (ed.) pp.292-300. This citation from Moi, p.295.

summary, that for Kristeva, *jouissance* is the *internal* experience of joying in *internal* self-division. The emphasis is on intra-subjectivity. *Jouissance* cannot be transferred to another. Political action is therefore resituated to the individual work of a number of poets and artists rather than the collective action of marginalised people. We take issue with the individualism of such a notion. It contrasts with the pains Rahner takes to differentiate between the *subject* and the *subject-in-relation* and annuls the facet of interpersonal reciprocal relationality. As we have seen in his Christology, Rahner views these aspects of selfhood, the separate and the relational, as needing to be taken together in order to understand the nature of the self. As demonstrated in his Christology, the relational aspects of the self are vital.

Furthermore, it seems somewhat naïve to suggest that expressions of experimental writing can overturn political systems. Feminist writers have expressed this incredulity. In relating Kristeva's call for the new dissident to feminist political action, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak says,

“There is something even faintly comical about Joyce rising above sexual identities and bequeathing the proper mind-set to the women's movement.”⁷⁸⁰

Elizabeth Grosz agrees,

“Advocacy of the (male) avant-garde as spokesman for a repressed femininity coupled with [Kristeva's] call for a feminism that is not confined to sexual differences but analyses and confronts the question of sexual differentiation...imply the annihilation of women's struggles for sexual specificity and autonomy.”⁷⁸¹

The critique of feminists in this respect is relevant to all marginalised peoples. Kristeva's *telos* of individual *jouissance* does not therefore equate to collective experience or action. As we suggested in our consideration of the notion of freedom, this individualism can be seen as undermining theological understandings of the Church. Against this, Rahner posits a notion of the Church⁷⁸² as a community of subjects-in-relation who, by their free acts of love, assist and express a communal *telos* and move together in a process of divinisation.

⁷⁸⁰ Spivak, “French feminism in an intellectual frame” Yale French Studies no.62, 1981, pp.159-64.

⁷⁸¹ Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, Allen and Unwin, 1989, p.97.

⁷⁸² The remit of this thesis will not allow for a consideration of Rahner's ecclesiology. However this does not greatly disadvantage our task since we can draw this inference from his Christology and anthropology in the ideas of subject-in-relation and the existential of being a community-building-person. See ch.1.2 pp.17-24, ch.5. 7 pp.122-124 and 9.2 pp.225-237.

However, the *jouissance* Kristeva describes relates somewhat to Rahner's concept of openness in its understanding that the *telos* of the self inherently involves a process of de-centring. In a similar way to that which we identified in chapter eight on freedom, for Rahner, this is a process of *exo*-centricity, the joying of self-actualisation in relation to transcendence. For Kristeva this is a process of *ex*-centricity, the dispersal of the illusionary self in relation to text. However, both stress the notion of change involved and in doing so stress the human subject as being-in-process. They share a confidence in the ability of expressions of semiotic disturbance, such as religious art and poetry to enable this process. Whilst Kristeva has viewed religion itself as a repression of the semiotic she allows religious art and poetry to be helpful transgressive expressions. Rahner sees such experiences of transgression (for him this is transgression from the confinement of a false focus on temporal life) as unconfined to the religious sphere. Both emphasise the joy found in journeying self-realisation, as well as temporary moments of 'loss' of the self, which are inherent in de-centring. Furthermore, they judge those who resist seeking behind or within the apparent order to be rejecting the *telos* for selfhood. For Rahner this is ego-centricity, for Kristeva it is being the slave of the symbolic order. In both, resistance to de-centring is viewed as anti-actualisation of the subject or person. This is an important area of agreement that encourages the subject to be seen as a process of de-centring and leads to joy in both accounts.

Ultimately, the fundamental difference in this discussion on *telos* is the arena of reality within which either *jouissance* or openness takes place. As we saw in our previous chapter, the subject or person's ability to transcend itself, or in other words, the extent of its openness, is defined by its arena. Within Kristeva, the subject's transcendence is restricted to changing positions, or voices, within a discursive reality. In shifting positions it experiences *jouissance*, but it cannot break free of the meta-narrative of the text. For Kristeva then the process of de-centring the subject leads to the realisation of heterogeneity. However, for Rahner the de-centred person experiences more than *self-realisation* but full *self-actualisation*. This is due to the fact that Rahner's view of reality suggests that much more is available to the person. He suggests that in Christ we see the fullest extent of human self-actualisation. This is the divinisation of the human person in a radical openness to transcendence. For Rahner, Christ demonstrates the pinnacle of temporal life and both points the way,

and makes a way, to eschatological self-actualisation which breaks free from the bonds of discourse or temporality and lives out a dialogue with divinity.

10: Reflections and Conclusions

This study demonstrates the significant value of Rahner's theology in relating Christian anthropology to the challenges raised by post-structuralist notions of subjectivity. Rahner's capacity for engagement with post-modern concerns is verified in many areas where this dialogue has been constructed. This is relevant to contemporary theology as it seeks to engage with post-modernism.

The critical comparison between the speaking subject and the person as hearer has thrown up areas of surprising similarity as well as those of significant divergence. These have elucidated issues in contemporary discussions about human subjectivity; the tension between individualism and relationality, the possibility of transcendence and the recognition of social construction, the role of otherness and the place of rationality and symbolisation. Here we consider each area of asymmetry and coherence between the person as hearer and the speaking subject and draw conclusions from this critical comparison.

From the outset it has been made clear that this project has sought to critically compare and contrast notions that do not exactly relate; this is immediately apparent in the difference in terminology alone. We are not bringing together like with like. Our project deals with thinkers from divergent paradigms, which some might see as adversarial. Given their paradigmatic differences a straightforward comparison has not been possible. This has shaped our methodology. We have allowed each theorist to speak in their own terms and tried to avoid inferring a false symmetry between them. Given these methodological difficulties, in defence of this endeavour, we contend that their fields of questioning are clearly not unrelated, however different their pre-suppositions and methods. Both seek to revise ideas around what it means to say that an individual human experiences a sense of "self". Both ask how human subjectivity be best explored and which former conceptions need to be revised or dismissed. Rahner and Kristeva seek to interrogate the notion of selfhood, sharing dissatisfaction with modernist substantive conceptions. They both undertake types of deconstruction in order to compose more adequate concepts. In this endeavour, from divergent camps, with distinct tools and to different effects, they seek to explore a

notion that has become problematised. Kristeva brings the findings of post-structuralist linguistics, Continental post-modern philosophy and the findings of psychoanalysis to this task. This brings her to the notion of the speaking subject. Rahner brings renewed Thomism, theological theories of language and symbols and a contemporary social trinitarianism to the task and formulates a notion of the person as hearer.

Here we identify three fundamental areas of asymmetry between the speaker and hearer. We then turn to shared themes and outcomes. We suggest that there are three significant areas where the hearer and speaker share coherent themes and one important area where they arrive at consistent outcomes.

After considering these areas of concurrence we offer a reflection upon the value of Rahner's theology to a contemporary theology that seeks to interface with post-modern and post-structuralist theories.

10.1 Areas of Asymmetry: The Arena for Human Subjectivity

The most obvious difference between Rahner and Kristeva has been the arena they imagine human subjectivity to take place within. Chapters one and two found them at their most fundamentally divergent. Rahner describes a theistic realist paradigm that circumscribes human subjectivity. The particular flavour he gives his theological reading of reality is one where divinity co-exists with materiality and speaks through it. Rahner has been seen to pursue a notion of reality that resolves the separation between transcendence and immanence. The arena for the hearer is a relational reality where the human being is the creature reflecting God's inner-plurality. It is an interpersonal reality where the form of both divinity and humanity is expressed in and through the material realm. It is also to be understood as a dialogical reality, best characterised as the place of divine revelation. It is also an historic situation which both confines and offers the possibility of transcendence to the self as hearer. In summary, Rahner's hearer is created, exists and can be explored within a reality that is theistic, graced, dialogical, historical, relational and personal. In this, evidently, Rahner was re-thinking the nature of reality; the grand-narrative arena of human subjectivity. In offering a process, dialogical account of creation and an anthropological approach to theology, Rahner can be seen as revising the Christian

understanding of the arena for human subjectivity significantly before the challenge of post-modernism.

Even given this early revision, Rahner's paradigm is at immediate odds with Kristeva's arena of speaking subject. For her, reality is purely discursive. This is not to say that Kristeva dismisses the existence of a material realm. It is rather that post-structuralism informs her that there can be no fixed meaning for any material entity. Meaning is inscribed upon the material order by discourse, rather than described by pre-existent subjects.⁷⁸³ In short, language precedes both meaning and subjectivity. Initially, we can say that Kristeva does not see the subject as existing outside of this textual, discursive arena, although we note that she retains a tenuous place for its persistence in what she terms "the chora".⁷⁸⁴ In this she holds a position between the outright anti-realism of postmodernism and the emphasis on multiple subject positions found in post-structuralism. Given this, we may conclude that her task is not so much to dissolve the self entirely within a "text-active" schema but rather to retain a place for selfhood as a "space" or "stance" within discourse. Our study in chapter two suggests that Kristeva has arrived at her understanding of a non-realist reality from a study of linguistics rather than an *a priori* rejection of realism.⁷⁸⁵

Is it really possible to relate ideas that come from theistic realism to others rooted in a purely discursive post-modern paradigm? It appears that one stream of contemporary theology has concluded that this is not possible and that the findings of post-modernism require a paradigmatic shift within theology; the concurrent rejection of realism. The theological movement adopting a non-realist paradigm is sometimes known as the "Sea of Faith" network, after Don Cupitt's book of the same title (1984). Hugh Dawes, David Hart and Mark Taylor can be seen as other examples of this movement.⁷⁸⁶ "Sea of Faith" theologians believe that post-modern anti-realism

⁷⁸³ See ch. 2 of this thesis, where we discuss the anti-realist paradigm pre-supposed by Kristeva.

⁷⁸⁴ See ch.3 of this thesis, where we examine the notion of the chora.

⁷⁸⁵ See ch.2. and ch.3 of this thesis where we discuss Kristeva's arrival at anti-realism from a consideration of post-structuralist linguistics.

⁷⁸⁶ See Hugh Dawes *A Credible Christianity for Today* SPCK, 1992; Mark Taylor *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, Chicago University Press, 1984; Don Cupitt *Sea of Faith*, 1984 and *Taking Leave of God*, SCM Press, 1980 and David A. Hart, *Faith in Doubt: Non-Realism and Christian Belief*, Mowbray, 1993. The willingness of some theologians to embrace anti-realism is discussed in *Is God Real?* Edited by J. Runzo, Macmillan, 1993 and A. Walker's *Different Gospels*, SPCK, 1993.

presents an opportunity to re-envision both faith and God. This process is seen as both positive and existentially painful.

“You have to go through inner turmoil; you have to descend into the primal chaos, into that meaningless region in the depths of the human soul where all meanings are unmade and remade. There at the source of the creative energy that makes us and our world, you pass through a kind of death and rebirth. The more you lose, the more you have to gain.”⁷⁸⁷

Such theologians see realism as oppressive and an objective God as tyrannical.⁷⁸⁸ We have encountered these beliefs in post-modern philosophy, yet it seems unsettling to our project that they appear in contemporary theology. Are Rahner, and other realists, anachronistic in not accepting the metaphysical freedom of postmodernism’s anti-realism?⁷⁸⁹ Certainly the type of “Nomadic A/Theology” which Taylor envisions, and Cupitt’s “Sea of Meaning,”⁷⁹⁰ welcome the type of freedom imagined by Kristeva.⁷⁹¹ Indeed, the textual freedom they describe is the only *possible* freedom in a world of discourse rather than objective reality.

“We have come to see that there can be nothing for us but the worlds that are constituted for us by our own languages and activities. All meaning and truth and value are man-made and could not be otherwise....It is we who impose shape upon it to make a world to live in.”⁷⁹²

Taylor and Cupitt see that within a non-realist paradigm the human self is free to set up its own religious discourses, creating Gods (or not) and leaving behind the shackles of objective truth and realism.

“Your God is only your faith in him; your values are only your commitment to them. That is liberation. You’re free.”⁷⁹³

In examining non-realist theology, Colin Crowder suggests that for this group, “what matters then is not theism, but spirituality.”⁷⁹⁴ In other words, Crowder suggests that it is a crisis within the spiritual pragmatism of Christianity, for these writers, which prompts them to seek a different understanding of reality. In Crowder’s words

⁷⁸⁷ Cupitt, Sea of Faith p. 14-15

⁷⁸⁸ See Cupitt op.cit. p.3

⁷⁸⁹ Our remit does not allow for a full examination of post-modernist a/theology, we are only able to consider it as such in its relation to the issue of freedom.

⁷⁹⁰ Cupitt The Time Being, SCM Press, 1992, p.66.

⁷⁹¹ See ch.8 of this thesis where we consider Kristeva’s notion of freedom as the ability to adopt new subject positions within language and so disturb and recreate meaning.

⁷⁹² Cupitt, Sea of Faith, p.20

⁷⁹³ Cupitt, The Time Being, p.66.

⁷⁹⁴ Colin Crowder, God and Reality: Essays on Christian Non-Realism, Mowbray 1997, p.4.

“They tend to be far less interested in establishing the claim that theism (as understood by realists) isn’t true than in arguing that it doesn’t work.”⁷⁹⁵

It would seem that exchanging theism for non-realism is possible for this group because they believe that religion is entirely man-made.⁷⁹⁶ As such it is in the hands of the human self to re-imagine a religion where reality is constructed from discourse and activity alone.

Can non-realist theologies be seen as Christian theologies? David Cheetham questions whether such post-modern a/theologies can be seen as theologies in any *religious* sense. He asserts,

“It is surely possible to argue that the hope for some kind of metanarrative or objective assurance is the very heartbeat of religion.”

Citing June O’Connor, Cheetham continues,

“Non-realism offers a profound pessimism in so far as we alone and in this life alone, constitute the resources for our own fulfilment and transformation.”⁷⁹⁷

Cheetham concludes,

“Cupitt’s joyous autonomy is O’Connor’s profound pessimism.”⁷⁹⁸

Cheetham contends that post-modern anti-realism might give rise to a type of a/theology but this could not be seen as “religious” in that it undermines one of the foundations of religious experience and one of its main characteristics: to turn the subject outside of itself to a transcendent reality beyond. This stance is clearly entirely antithetical to Rahner whose person as hearer is characterised by just such a transcendental existential.

It may also be telling that a growing number of those who might have been termed “non-realist” Christian theologians would now prefer to describe themselves (or face being described by their theological contemporaries) as “post-Christian”. We refer

⁷⁹⁵ Crowder op. cit. p. 4

⁷⁹⁶ This relates to Pannenberg’s discussion of modern atheism, which he relates to Feuerbach. See Pannenberg Basic Questions vol. II

⁷⁹⁷ David Cheetham “Postmodern Freedom and Religion” Theology 2001 Jan-Feb p. 24, citing June O’Connor’s essay “It’s time to talk about trust” in Runzo (ed.) Is God Real, p.177.

⁷⁹⁸ Cheetham op.cit., p. 177.

here to Daphne Hampson and Don Cupitt himself.⁷⁹⁹ Crowder warns us that the “Sea of Faith” group is itself diversifying⁸⁰⁰ and that some of its members stop far short of the increasingly rigorous post-modern anti-realism which Cupitt and Hampson pursue today. It might be said that embracing post-modern anti-realism has such a fundamental effect on the construction of theology that it moves it decidedly away from being a recognisably Christian theology. Certainly the type of a/theology posited by Taylor and Cupitt finds no place in Rahner’s thought, where the very meaning of human personhood is the given desire and ability to relate to a transcendent reality external to itself, one which is unbounded by a textual arena; God who is the primordial “speaker.”

Realist theologians might well conclude that the non-realism of the “Sea of Faith” group is a disguised atheism. After all “God” here is only what the self makes God. Consequently there is no objective measure for ethics and no norm for the self beyond being a type of metaphysical web-spinner.⁸⁰¹ Graham Ward argues that the non-realism of this group, and we might add, the challenge of post-modern anti-realism in general, could be an opportunity to re-imagine “theological materialism”.⁸⁰² The crux of Ward’s argument is that a realism that places God “out there” in a “more real reality” than our own is rightfully challenged by post-modern theology. However, there are resources within theology and within theological materialism that hold that immanence should not be discounted at the expense of transcendence. We have appreciated just this emphasis in Rahner’s writing where the transcendent is found *alongside* immanence.⁸⁰³ Ward suggests that realism can justifiably be understood with a model of transcendence which is more akin to the notion of the sublime *within* reality rather than objective meaning *beyond* it. Perhaps it is the otherworldliness of some theologies, which posit meaning as “at a distance”, that are at the root of the spiritual crises prompting the Sea of Faith group’s non-realist quest? Therefore such a

⁷⁹⁹ Hampson’s progression towards post-Christianity can be seen in comparing Theology and Feminism, Blackwell 1990, with the later After Christianity, SCM Press 1996. Don Cupitt’s The Last Philosophy SCM Press, 1995 and Solar Ethics SCM 1995b might also be seen as moving to a post-Christian position when compared to his earlier works.

⁸⁰⁰ Crowder op. cit. Introduction

⁸⁰¹ This is the opinion of the philosopher Daniel C. Dennett in Consciousness Explained, Penguin, 1991 who describes human consciousness as the illusion created by its inherent ability to “spin a web of discourses” p. 416.

⁸⁰² See Graham’s “Theological Materialism” in Crowder op. cit. pp. 144-159.

⁸⁰³ See ch.1 of this thesis where we consider Rahner’s holistic notion of reality where transcendence and immanence co-exist.

rejection of theism could be based upon a misunderstanding of the nature of realism. This need not happen. Mark Elliot suggests that the model of a separate transcendent reality is actually unbiblical. He says,

“According to Derrida and other non-realists there is nothing ‘behind’ what we encounter. There is no hidden ‘presence’, nothing more...In one sense the Biblical witness agrees with this. The Bible does not think of the spiritual realm as a ‘place’ happening ‘somewhere else’ while we speak ...(God’s) presence is not behind, but in our encounter with the world, although not swallowed up in anything.”⁸⁰⁴

From our consideration of Rahner we have appreciated that there is a very different way to view reality than the dualistic modernist approach. We have seen Rahner present an arena for selfhood that does not remove transcendence from immanence. Our consideration of the graced arena Rahner posits will not allow for the separation of immanence and transcendence, and will not allow God to be displaced to a place “beyond” the hearer’s arena. In Rahner, the emphasis on dialogue infers that Cupitt’s reality is unnecessarily reductionist. If reality is only “the worlds that are constituted for us by *our* own languages,” then Rahner would argue that this view takes into account only one of the partners in the dialogue that creates our world. For Rahner, God speaks too. God eternally offers symbolic emanations of divine being; the foremost being found in the nature of the human being which reflects the double aspects of God’s self-communication.⁸⁰⁵ In Christ, the Realsymbol of God, Rahner states that God became present in history, taking the particularities and limitations of a given place within such a matrix of meaning and pointing to transcendence from and within it. God’s revelatory Word does not exclude, or even devalue, the voices of God’s hearers, but rather enables the hearer to receive and respond, and so to be a speaker too. Within this multi-faceted dialogical reality the voice of God is reciprocally responsive to that of the hearer and co-creative of human subjectivity.⁸⁰⁶

Clearly, the paradigmatic differences circumscribing the speaker and hearer cannot be underestimated. However, seeing theism and discursive visions of reality as entirely antonymic relies on a particular dualistic understanding of immanence and transcendence. We find that there is scope within Rahner’s symbolic realism for self-

⁸⁰⁴ Mark Elliot “Human Embodiment” appearing in *The Dynamics of Human Life*, Paternoster Press, 2001 p. 87

⁸⁰⁵ See the knowledge/love duality as examined in ch.7 of this thesis.

⁸⁰⁶ See ch.1 and 4 of this thesis where we consider the relationality of the hearer of God.

creative dialogue between divinity and humanity and space to consider language as other than purely referential and to appreciate its importance in the creation of human subjectivity. In this we do not suggest that there is any great measure of coherence between Rahner's theism and Kristeva's purely discursive anti-realism, only that a the type of symbolic realism Rahner purports is not at such odds with the tenets of a discursive reality as to disallow any opportunity for dialogue. In this project, Rahner's symbolic realism opens a way to engage with the anti-realist challenge offered by post-modernism. Where this task is necessary as contemporary theologians such as Ward suggest,⁸⁰⁷ Rahner can be said to be an important and relevant resource for this engagement.

10.2 Areas of Asymmetry: Epistemology

The second area of fundamental difference is epistemology. Clearly each thinker's theory of knowledge arises from their respective pre-supposed ideas of reality. Kristeva adopts an anti-foundational perspective of knowledge. Her work is informed by post-modern theories of the dispersal of meaning. In this way knowledge and meaning are transient and provisional and meaning can only be fleetingly grasped through tracing its path through a web of textual connections and slippages. Meaning is created in the play of text and reaches a climax in the experience of *jouissance*; the ecstatic experience of "hearing meaning".⁸⁰⁸

In contradistinction, Rahner's theory of the hearer rests upon a much wider and multifaceted epistemology that includes pre-thematic knowledge.⁸⁰⁹ Rahner's epistemology rests upon Thomist ideas of the intellect as a facet of the spirit. This allows for non-sensory knowledge to be accessible to the human being. For Rahner, the experience of searching for answers outside of the immediate realm and of possessing the ability to stand back from self-examination and make judgements as a "unity-in-plurality"⁸¹⁰ all point to the existence of pre-thematic, inferred knowledge. He views pre-thematic knowledge as utterly profound and yet entirely obvious within each person's lived experience. For Rahner, knowledge can be inferred in an extra-

⁸⁰⁷ See Graham Ward's "Theological Materialism" in Crowder op. cit. pp. 144-159.

⁸⁰⁸ See ch. 9 of this thesis.

⁸⁰⁹ See ch 5 of this thesis

⁸¹⁰ See ch.5 of this thesis.

textual way, through the fundamental relationship with a transcendent horizon of being. Inferred knowledge might be inaccessible to rationality yet is always present as the background to every act of knowing. From this perspective, Kristevan epistemology appears to be reductionist.⁸¹¹ Non-realists assume that nothing can be known, or said to have meaning, outside of the arena of textuality. Of this, Ward says,

“The question remains, then, that there may be nothing outside textuality that we can intellectually grasp and possess, but is there that outside textuality which can be inferred, the recognition of which provides the basis for any knowing at all?”⁸¹²

Rahner clearly answers “yes”. We posit that Rahner’s pre-thematic knowledge of God is the kind of inferred extra-textual knowledge Ward speaks of. Ward suggests a notion which, we argue, is similar to Rahner’s awareness of the “horizon of being” saying,

“Language is not a totality. It presents the aporias, the effects of an alterity which has preceded and gone ahead of it. This alterity we can neither capture nor tame. But neither is this an other which is so other that we can know nothing about it. It is an other, a negative plenitude, which makes possible all our mediations and promotes the endlessness of supplementation – *as the empty margins that enable the text to be positioned.*”⁸¹³

God, as the horizon of our given situation, or perhaps of textuality, can be seen as the “negative plenitude” or “empty margins” around the text. Rahner suggests that God, the “extra-textual”, can be known in that God freely wills communion and has created the human to be precisely the being which can hear and respond in creative, reciprocal dialogue with divinity.⁸¹⁴ For Rahner, the basis of this free willing of relationships is precisely found within the nature of the Godhead.⁸¹⁵ According to Rahner’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, communality and relationality is experienced within God’s self as an “enjoyment of relationality.”⁸¹⁶ God has created humans as beings who can hear and know God in precisely this non-textual way: a knowledge that is both self-evident and mysterious. For Rahner, this is a universal characteristic of the human person. Furthermore the unthematic knowledge of God

⁸¹¹ See ch.3 of this thesis, which approaches this question from the stance of a critique of Saussurian linguistics.

⁸¹² Ward op. cit. p.147

⁸¹³ Ward op. cit p. 158 – our emphasis.

⁸¹⁴ See ch.5.9 of this thesis where we considered how we become better hearers of God.

⁸¹⁵ See ch. 7 on Rahner’s understanding of social trinitarianism.

⁸¹⁶ See Zizioulas’s *Human Capacity* where he views the Trinity as enjoying relationality, this was examined in ch. 7 of this thesis.

guarantees a “backdrop of being” which makes other particular events of knowing available to the “hearer”. Rahner’s understanding of the self as hearer therefore posits that whilst the subject cannot intellectually grasp knowledge outside of language, as the speaking subject suggests, it can “hear” in a pre-thematic way the experience of transcendence. This hearing forms a backdrop to all other knowledge.

We note that Rahner’s methodology of speaking of the subject in its totality, an aspect of “original experience” that was allowed for in Rahner’s extended epistemology, was made before the full impact of post-structuralism’s deconstruction had been felt. Does this make his views on the self-reflective individual archaic? We do not believe that this is necessarily the case. More recently a similar line of argument is found in the feminist Seyla Benhabib’s critique. She takes issue with the post-structuralist denial of the self-reflective individual.⁸¹⁷ Benhabib uses Jurgen Habermas’s communicative ethics to argue for a notion similar to Rahner’s “original experience”. She is committed to viewing the person as socially situated and interpersonally constructed, however she argues that a narrative conception of the self renders the idea of a core self and coherent identity intelligible without promoting the type of transcendence found in the Enlightenment subject. Benhabib argues that autobiographical stories can include the many voices within us and be constantly under revision; nonetheless, these narratives do not collapse into incoherence. They pre-suppose a core capacity to describe and reflect on one’s experience; much in the same way that Rahner’s notions allows for self-reflection upon many theories relating to subjectivity from a range of disciplines.⁸¹⁸ This is vital for Benhabib, as she views self-reflection and reason as indispensable to the feminist emancipatory project. Benhabib’s contemporary critique of the post-structuralist dissipation of the centre of subjectivity perhaps suggests that Rahner’s view need not be viewed as archaic. It may have been formulated before Kristeva’s post-structuralism, but Rahner points to an idea of the subject that has been viewed as important in a most recent feminist reflection. We would suggest that, far from being archaic, Rahner’s view of the self-reflective original experience of the hearer, and its plurality-in-unity, offers theology with a useful resource to engage with the challenges of post-structuralism.

⁸¹⁷ Seyla Benhabib (ed) Habermas and the unfinished project of modernity : critical essays on The philosophical discourse of modernity, Cambridge Polity Press, 1996. Also addressed in Feminist Contentions, Routledge, 1995.

⁸¹⁸ We considered Rahner’s notion of “original experience” in ch.5.1 of this thesis.

Having considered the vital differences in epistemology between Rahner and Kristeva we cannot imagine a way in which they can be wholly correlated. We note that within Rahner's epistemology there is scope to include the findings of a Kristevan understanding of the transitory nature of meaning as it is elicited *within a text*. In other words, it would appear possible to have a theory of the unstable meaning in relation to textual meaning and the knowledge gained from language within a Rahnerian schema. However, Rahner would be totally unwilling to restrict all facets of knowledge to the textual arena alone but rather insists upon the presence of a transcendent horizon, a margin, around textual reality. In this, Rahnerian epistemology is fundamentally irreconcilable with Kristeva's schema. She does not hold with any conception of knowledge that transcends discourse or can be inferred from outside of it. This is why we connote the difference as *asymmetrical* rather than diametrically oppositional. Rahner's schema can make room for Kristeva's post-structuralist epistemology, in one respect, but Kristeva's cannot accommodate Rahner's on any level.

10.3 Areas of Asymmetry: Is Subjectivity fundamentally Personal or Textual?

There is a final area of interesting asymmetry between the speaker and hearer; they respectively privilege textual and personal entities. We have found that in all aspects of the person as hearer there is an emphasis on a personal nature of being. Rahner's arena for the human subject, his theory of knowledge, his model of relationality and the telos he proposes all have a decidedly personal emphasis. The arena for personhood is found in a dialogical relationship between divine and human persons, revelation is encounter with a three-personned God, the telos of the hearer is to better pursue these in inter-personal acts of neighbour love. His notion of the self as hearer includes a model of the fullest actualised human self in the person of Christ. He offers a notion of the hearer that is emphatically a *subject-in-relation* (a being defined in relation to other persons) as well as subject.⁸¹⁹ At every level Rahner's understanding of subjectivity involves personal relationality.

By contrast Kristeva privileges textual entities in all areas of her construction of the speaking subject. Subjectivity exists secondary to language and is produced solely by

⁸¹⁹ We see in notion of the self as relational in ch.1.2 and ch.5.7 of this thesis.

the interplay of semiotic and symbolic facets of discourse.⁸²⁰ The subject has no real agency external to this realm and acts only as a mediator in the conflict between these two textual, impersonal forces. We have suggested that this gives rise to an impersonal view of subjective relationality. This was seen most emphatically in Kristeva's treatment of pregnancy as a process without a personal subject or personal agency.⁸²¹ We recall that the maternal other is a "space". In this, Kristeva posits a very controversial notion of pregnancy and maternity, taking great pains to remove the mother's presence as subject and dismisses her agency because subjecthood is viewed as a process undertaken in isolation from other person-subjects.

We suggested here that it is the anti-realism of postmodernism that threatens notions of the autonomy of the self. It does this without hesitation seeing the illusion of autonomy as a tool of oppression and control. In an anti-realist schema the speaking subject is free to create its own reality. This involves artistic and literary creation as well as the positioning of itself in a variety of subject positions within various discourses, most importantly those of sexuality and gender. We noted that Kristeva retains a tenuous place for agency for the speaking subject as mediator in the process of a subject's repositioning of itself.

The theme of freedom also highlights the hearer and speaker's respective emphasis on personal or textual entities. For Rahner the hearer's freedom is based on the ability to choose acts of neighbour love. It is only possible to exercise ultimate freedom in love as one person to another, in an act of self-sacrifice, where the other's needs are preferred. This is an inter-personal and reciprocal act. It is creative in two respects. It enables the recipient to flourish in their creative process of becoming a person, because it respects their inherent dignity. This process also fundamentally moves the giver into a state of ekstasis that will actualise their personhood. In being open to the other person, and not subsuming their being in the process, the giver of neighbour-love is moved towards self-fulfilment and the *telos* of a life of love. This relationship is, Rahner suggests, most beautifully portrayed in the parental love shown to a child. This notion relates somewhat to Kristeva's thesis of the M/Other as the site of original self-creation. However, quite tellingly, Kristeva displaces this act to be a function of discourse, happening apart from the actions of a real embodied woman, to be a

⁸²⁰ See chapter 3 of this thesis

⁸²¹ See ch.6 of this thesis.

process without an agent.⁸²² By positing this act as the work of the Maternal or M/Other (denoting a separation from real individual women) this removes the element of reciprocity from the act of self-creation through love. In Rahner's case, the exercise of freedom creates selfhood for two persons. For Kristeva the arena of self-creation, whilst appearing to be bodily, is repositioned to the arena of semiotics. In this interpersonal relationality is ultimately rejected.

In this respect our two theorists are at odds. The different privileging of personal or textual entities in relationality results in a loss of autonomy for the speaking subject, which we explored in our consideration of the subject's freedom.⁸²³ The lack of interpersonal relationality might also be viewed as falling into individualism. For Kristeva, this position is preferable to a personal account of relationality because, for her, subjectivity itself is an illusion of language and the lack of autonomy more accurately reflects the reality of human subjectivity. We have noted her careful insistence on the connectivity and cultural influences upon the subject, from which it is unable to escape. The subject is only able to *mediate* its position within a pre-existing matrix of discourse. The speaking subject cannot act autonomously. It has rather to find a measure of transcendence by seeking ways to "shape-shift" and explore its "carnavalesque" anti-identificatory positions within an encapsulating discourse. Kristeva suggests that poetic writing, art and the rejection of binary sexuality are a means to this end. Our evaluation of Kristeva's position notes a distinctive difference between the roles of *jouissance* and that of spirituality on this point. The textual nature of the speaking subject, and its incapability to transcend the discursive matrix, fixes the experience of fullest actualisation as momentary moments of *jouissance*. There is no final resolution or fulfilment for this process. The purpose of *jouissance* is to catalyse further disruption. It is also fundamentally individualistic, a "subjective self-interrogation."⁸²⁴ In contrast, the type of spirituality Rahner describes is also a process of self-actualisation, but one with eschatological resolution and fulfilment as the hearer becomes a fully-actualised person.⁸²⁵ This is carried out in the context of communality and acts of freely chosen "neighbour love". This important contrast

⁸²² See our examination of the M/Other as agent-less subject in ch.6 of this thesis.

⁸²³ See ch. 8 of this thesis.

⁸²⁴ Ibid. p.14

⁸²⁵ See ch.s 8 and 9 of this thesis.

highlights one possible way whereby Rahner's hearer can be used to highlight and critique the inherent individualism of the speaking subject.

Given these three areas of fundamental asymmetry we might be surprised to find large areas of correspondence, both in terms of shared themes that run throughout their work and in an important outcome of their reconstructions of subjectivity. We shall now explore these in turn and go on to suggest possible conclusions that these similarities might offer to contemporary theology as it seeks to engage with post-modern and post-structuralist theories.

10.4 Areas of Coherent Themes: Language is creative in Subjectivity

From our study of the person as hearer and the speaking subject we note that both share the privileging of language as the means to actualise the subject or person. For Kristeva there is a direct and all-encompassing relationship between language and the subject. The subject is a facet of language, formed through the dynamic relationship between textual forces. There would be no subject without language. This is apparent in borderline patients where withdrawal from the realm of the symbolic results in the threat of complete subjective dissipation.

Rahner also privileges language and has a complex view of its nature and role. He retains the element of language as a "vehicle of meaning" and the notion of "forms" of pre-existent meaning. Initially this type of theory of language seems incompatible with Kristeva's theories which insist that language *precedes* meaning rather than being *conveyed* by meaning.⁸²⁶ However, in his consideration of poetic language Rahner allows for the idea that human language is unstable and has transcendent qualities that prevent it being viewed as merely descriptive of meaning. In this, he too rejects the purely "referential" theory of language. This is expressed in his notion of the "surplus of meaning" within words. This "surplus" is seen to disrupt the simple identification between signified and signifier.⁸²⁷ Furthermore, we recall that, for Rahner, the ability to process meaning from words is a facet of the *soul* rather than the

⁸²⁶ See ch.2 & 3 of this thesis where we consider how the subject emerges after language.

⁸²⁷ See ch.4.4 of this thesis where we examine the notion of the surplus of meaning.

intellect.⁸²⁸ Given this, he too rejects theories of language whereby meaning is attained through stable rational capabilities alone. Rahner can be seen as somewhat sharing the post-structuralist desire to re-examine how meaning is conveyed. With this in mind it appears possible to use Kristeva's notion of the semiotic alongside that of Rahner's notion of symbolic language, since both stress the flexibility and transience of meaning. Both see a sublime quality to language that disrupts the notion that it is possible to directly refer to a signified concept. In this, Kristeva's semiotic relates, in some respects, to Rahner's notion of horizon; both point to the limitations of language as simply objectively descriptive.

We suggest that Kristeva's understanding of the disruptive nature of semiotics can be seen as coherent with Rahner's and can be used to inform his notion of a "surplus of meaning". Kristeva's theory of the semiotic implies that this surplus of meaning is a constant disruptive force *within* the self rather than externally in the way of a pre-existent "forms". This need not be seen as incompatible with Rahner's understanding, but rather as refining it. In the first case, Rahner's "forms" are not, in a Platonic sense, fundamentally external to the realm of the self. We recall that divinity and objective reality is emanated through material reality.⁸²⁹ It could therefore be possible for the disruptive semiotic to be viewed as *within* the self as hearer, since for Rahner form is expressed through the materiality of the self. The self as hearer could then retain a semiotic facet, which would be due the remembrance of its subjective development as Kristeva suggests.

Kristeva makes the point more strongly than Rahner that the language available for self-expression is not self-made. In Rahner's understanding of symbols there is an implicit understanding that symbols are given rather than made. Kristeva goes much further in emphasising that the system and codes of language are inherently unstable and arbitrary. Rahner's theory of language can be informed by this understanding so that his notion of the "mystery of language" includes that of the transience of the very linkages between signified and signifier.

⁸²⁸ See ch4.2, 4.3 of this thesis, where we examine the Thomist roots of Rahner's belief that the language is processed in the soul in order to attain meaning.

⁸²⁹ See ch.4 of this thesis, where we consider symbolisation as a means to self-actualisation.

Our consideration of the theories of language in Rahner and Kristeva has suggested that both view language as fundamentally important to the self. For Rahner, language, as symbolic representation, is the foremost means by which a being expresses itself and so achieves self-actualisation.⁸³⁰ Although Rahner is careful to stress its limitations, the process of symbolisation within language is viewed in an entirely positive light. Kristeva shares the view that language is central to self-creation. However, she does not seem to view the self's entrance into the symbolic order of language in a completely positive way. She does say that this process into the male symbolic is necessary in creating a subject position and she is careful not to use normative terms. However, there is a sense that can be inferred from her writing that the necessary adoption of language is, in a very real way, a confining experience. We have seen this in her choice of terms to describe the different experiences a self goes through in the two modalities of language. The semiotic is described in inviting and pleasant terminology. This can be contrasted with the more confrontational terminology and notions of "loss" when describing the imposition of the male symbolic order. This can be seen in comparing the two passages below,

"Fragrance of honey, roundness of forms, silk and velvet under my fingers, on my cheeks. Mummy. Almost no sight – a shadow that darkens, soaks me up or vanishes amid flashes. Almost no voice in her placid presence."⁸³¹

"Language-learning can therefore be thought of as an acute and dramatic confrontation between positing-separating-identifying and the motility of the semiotic *chora*. Separation from the mother's body, the *fort-da* game, anality and orality, all act as a permanent negativity that destroys the image and the isolated object even as it facilitates the articulation of the semiotic network, which will afterwards be necessary in the system of language where it will be more or less integrated as a signifier."⁸³²

The semiotic is clearly spoken of in more positive and preferential terms than the symbolic. We suggest, therefore, that Rahner's theory of language could not take on board the notion that the symbolic order is repressive or constrictive in a negative sense. He views symbols as limited and finite, since they are evidently immanent. Given this the finitude and constraints of language are a given for Rahner, but he does not view these negatively, preferring to emphasise an appreciation of the self-

⁸³⁰ See ch.4 of this thesis.

⁸³¹ "Stabat Mater" first appeared in *Tel Quel* (Winter) p.30-49, and is reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi (ed.) This citation, Moi, p.180.

⁸³² RPL p.100-101

actualisation possible in language. Symbols are rooted in, and lead to transcendence and as such are a way in which the self can express its being and achieve self-actualisation.

Our consideration of Rahner's writing suggests that his lack of concern for issues of gender is one area where his theories are found lacking and offer little to this aspect of post-modern concern. His use of masculine pronouns as inferring "anthropos" rather than a gendered subject is an obvious example of this. We note that where Kristeva speaks of the subject in masculine terms she explicitly infers the subject's necessary positioning within the male symbolic order. This is a particular use of gendered terms, used to contrast with the pre-subjective, semiotic experience centred on the M/Other. We recall that the gendered terms within Kristeva relate to aspects of language. Rahner does not approach the use of gendered terms for the subject with this awareness, and as such has little to offer contemporary interest in gender issues within subjectivity.

10.5 Areas of Coherent Themes: Otherness

We identified that notions of otherness form an important and fundamental role in shaping the subjectivity of both the hearer and speaker. In both, otherness has a two-fold function, being present in both inter- and intra-relationality, and leads to an appreciation of inner plurality. In our consideration of the self as "speaker" and "hearer" we can say that both writers view the self as *de-centred* by otherness. We have identified in both theology and critical theory the desire to topple the centred self by means of a consideration of otherness.

According to Rahner's theories of symbolisation the hearer is continually faced by the otherness within itself (as it creates symbols to express itself), as well as being held in a creative dialogue with the supreme otherness of its divine horizon. For Rahner, the process by which the self is de-centred involves the self turned outside from its centre in "I-Thou" reciprocal relationships; in so doing the human self mirrors the perichoretic Trinity.⁸³³ Only in this exo-centricity can the self achieve actualisation and become a person. Jüngel termed the notion of de-centred selfhood "a new and

⁸³³ See ch.7.6 of this thesis where we considered how Rahner's social trinitarianism impacts upon relational selfhood.

highly differentiated unity of the I with itself,” a unity that is “opened up from the inside.”⁸³⁴ Here relatedness encompasses both distinctive identity and difference, where selfhood is given to the other in the interests of the other. The human being, in becoming a person, is driven to express itself through social relations with others as neighbours. In each respect relationality is linked to love. Rahner suggests that these experiences cannot be separated from each other but together are intrinsically part of what it means to be a human person. We identified Zizioulas’ notion of “communion” as entirely helpful in expressing how the human person relates to otherness. We further noted that the emphasis on otherness and relationality typifies the exocentric anthropologies of much contemporary theological reflection.

Our reading of Kristeva found that her initial use of the notion of otherness is related to early pre-Oedipal experience of the M/Other. In order to build the imaginary ego the subject has to reject the mother and begin to embrace the realm of distinction and symbolisation. Even after this separation is achieved, otherness persists as the semiotic realm. This facet of language, the threat of meaning dispersal, comes from beneath the realm of symbolic language and disrupts the emergence of a stable ego or static meaning. In this, Kristeva’s Other is unnameable; existing outside of the symbolic order. We noted the tension that this brings to Kristeva’s writing; she struggles to deal in the symbolic order with notions that are always beneath it. We saw that this distinguishes her from other “French feminists”, such as Cixous who believe that the feminine other can exist apart from the male symbolic order in non-linear, irrational “*écriture féminine*”.

We identified a second use of theories of otherness in Kristeva in her consideration of the foreigner or stranger in society. Later in subject’s life, the foreigner comes to represent the “uncanny” the presence of the other among the familiar that reminds the subject of its tenuous existence. Kristeva brings notions of inner division and the experience of social division together and attempts to relate theories of intra-subjective difference to inter-subjective relationships. This provides her with an ethic of tolerance that she relates to the socio-political arena, although we posited several critiques of her in relation to this. We found that the speaking subject, just like the

⁸³⁴ Jüngel God as the Mystery of the World p. 395 quoted by Charles Marsh in “In Defence of a Self: the theological search for a postmodern identity” Scottish Journal of Theology, 2002.

person as hearer, is de-centred. However, we suggest, that this is not in terms of being turned outside of itself but rather turned *in* to its own inner plurality and instability. Perhaps this is more a notion of dispersal rather than de-centring; of the *ex-centric self*, the self apart from its centre rather than turned outwards *from* its centre. When related to ethics the privileging of the individual over communality might be expected to give rise to a lack of inter-personality; to introspection over practical social action. This is the very criticism of Kristeva's ethics that we covered in chapter six of this thesis.

In contrast, Rahner's hearer is *exo-centric*; the self realised by turning to acts of self-giving to others, by making symbols which express the self to others and ultimately by relating to God as Other. Kristeva's speaker is *ex-centric*; the self aware of its inner-plurality and forming new and ever-tenuous subject positions within discourse.

Both the hearer and speaker are formed through relations to otherness. In this both are forced to confront their inner-plurality and, given this, may be driven to deal with the foreignness of other subjects in a way that does not attempt to conflate or repulse them. We have suggested that Kristeva's direct linking of intra- to inter-subjectivity is stronger than Rahner's and can be used to encourage a greater appreciation of this aspect in Rahner's work. In this way the speaking subject can help to refine ideas within the hearing person.

However, we have suggested that the emphasis on impersonal otherness and relationality in the speaking subject can, ironically, be viewed as leading to individualism. We saw that the speaking subject appears to privilege intra-relationality and, as such, might be seen as an example of *egocentricity*, which Rahner and Pannenberg warn against.⁸³⁵ This is due to the rejection of truly personal relationality for a concept of impersonal textual relations where no agent is present in any other than a restricted mediatory role, because it is *ex-centric* rather than *exo-centric*. We recall that for Kristeva the personal nature of the foreigner is not as important as their significance as a representation of the uncanny to the speaking subject.

⁸³⁵ See ch.8 where we consider openness as a *telos* for the self as hearer.

“In that sense, the foreigner is a “symptom”...he signifies the difficulty we have of living as an *other* and with others.”⁸³⁶

A hearer (personal or otherwise) is not necessary for the speaking subject in the way that a speaker is required for the hearing person, since other ways are found to represent the uncanny, such as in the disruptive power of art and poetry.⁸³⁷ The relationship with the stranger is not reciprocal in that the effect of an encounter with the uncanny is representational, turning the subject inwards to explore its own inner-plurality. It is only then that there is an opportunity for social or political effect, as the subject becomes at ease with its own heterogeneity and ceases to be afraid of the plurality in society. This is a much reduced and introverted relation to the other. In this respect we suggest that there is a fuller notion of social relationality in Rahner’s work than in Kristeva’s; one which might prove to be more immediately useful in practical application and the construction of an ethic of social justice. Rahner’s notion of the ex-centric hearer positions the person in a reciprocal dialogue with otherness, where both self and other possess a measure of distinction and yet offer the possibility for self-actualisation in relationship. As we saw, this is modelled on the three-personned God.⁸³⁸ This position ensures that the other is never subsumed within the identity of the hearer, but is freely loved as a neighbour. This has proven to be a key theme in contemporary theology that seeks to prioritise praxis and community explorations of spirituality, of which there are many examples. These include the theoretical explorations of relationality in the context of ecclesiology such as those found in work of Zizioulas⁸³⁹ and Moltmann⁸⁴⁰, to the practical outworking of this understanding of relationality by many Christian feminist and liberation theologians such as Russell and Ruether-Radford⁸⁴¹, Gutierrez and Bonino⁸⁴².

In stressing the personal and reciprocal nature of relationality Rahner offers a clear alternative to that of Kristeva; one that rejects introspection and individualism of the speaking subject’s emphasis on *intra*-relationality in favour of an *inter*-personal

⁸³⁶ STO p.103

⁸³⁷ See ch. 6 of this thesis.

⁸³⁸ See ch. 7 of this thesis.

⁸³⁹ Zizioulas Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church, St Vladimir’s Press, 1985.

⁸⁴⁰ Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit SCM Press, 1977

⁸⁴¹ Letty Russell, Church in the Round: feminist interpretation of the church, J Knox Press 1993,

Ruether-Radford, Women-Church: theology and practise of feminist liturgical communities Harper and Row, 1985.

⁸⁴² Gutierrez A Theology of Liberation, SCM Press 1974 and Miguez-Bonino, Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation Philadelphia, 1974

subjectivity to be found in the context of community. We noted the critique of the socio-political usefulness of post-structuralism made by a number of feminist writers⁸⁴³ and contend that Rahner's notion of otherness has more immediate currency in the type of practical application they seek.

10.6 Areas of Coherent Themes: Rationality as deficient.

In our study we found that both the speaking subject and the person as hearer reject rationality as a competent means of characterising or exploring subjectivity. For Rahner, there is a component to human subjectivity that cannot be effectively explored through rational means. This position is arrived at by a careful study of the extent to which he promotes mystery and revelation by encounter outside of the realm of rational proposition. This stance is evident in Rahner's devotional writings, prayers and meditations, which have been an important resource for this study. This notion of a revelatory arena for human subjectivity has been summed up as "symbolic realism". We have seen that the intellect is a facet of the spirit for Rahner and that this Thomist basis allows for a form of "knowing" that is more properly an inferred revelation, or "hearing". Given this we have argued that it would be misleading to connote Rahner's person as a "knower". His theories of language suggest that there is a pre-thematic "surplus of meaning" that can be "heard" in words apart from their rational content; this in itself strengthens this less rationalist reading of Rahner. There is a mysterious non- or extra-rational component to knowledge that cannot be grasped by the intellect is more properly described as "hearing music".⁸⁴⁴ He views liturgy, art and poetry as key ways to encounter the divine; the "happy danger of meeting God."⁸⁴⁵ He writes widely on religious poetry and has an interest in the use of "primordial words". In this, Rahner places an emphasis on religious imagination and non-rational ways to encounter meaning as the horizon of our being. Whilst religious sacraments and Scriptures are special examples of the transformation power of the symbol, for Rahner, poetry and art enable the creative transformation to take place where Christianity is both present and anonymous.

Kristeva shares the view that art and poetic language are self-transformative, transgressive and disrupt the illusion of unitary oneness. Given this they are to be

⁸⁴³ See ch.6.6 of this thesis.

⁸⁴⁴ TI 3 and TI 4, as examined earlier in chapter 4.

⁸⁴⁵ Rahner, "Poetry and the Christian" TI 3, p. 365

privileged in the exploration of subjectivity. We recall that, for Kristeva, in art, music and literature semiotic processes are liberated from the unconscious. We have considered her focus on religious art.⁸⁴⁶ Kristeva has a complex view of its role. We considered that she begins from a positive stance, with an analysis of religion as a place of possible semiotic renewal and envisions the potential of this were it carried out in full measure.

For Rahner art and poetry offer nothing less than an encounter with the divine as “holy mystery”. Recent trends in contemporary theology have taken the importance of art and imagination more seriously, exploring the relationships between faith and aesthetics.⁸⁴⁷ This is another area where Rahner might be said to be ahead of his time, with perhaps Tillich concomitantly sharing in this endeavour. In privileging poetry and art, Rahner seeks to explore religious motifs through religious imagination as much as by rational enquiry. In this he anticipates the current interest in exploring theology through the media of art, film and literature. It is an example of his desire to conduct theology in an open way. This is an expanding area of current theological enquiry, and can be seen specifically where theology seeks to engage with postmodernism. With Rahner, this line of theological enquiry sees that art and poetry offer places where theology can not only engage with contemporary culture, but explore facets of spirituality, among other things, in ways that rationality has been found deficient. By seeing art and poetry as important sources for theological expression and contemplation Rahner shares the desire to seek non-rationalistic ways to explore the themes of theological investigation and as such is in accordance with post-modern rejections of rationalism. His notion of “anonymous Christianity” as present in art and poetry concurs with a strengthening desire to see the power and truth of art as precisely what spirituality is about at its heart.⁸⁴⁸ In this, again, Rahner can be said to pre-empt later trends in contemporary theology.

Kristeva shares this belief in the power of art to inform, and indeed transform, subjectivity. For her, art is the new religion and the only possible place to mount

⁸⁴⁶ See ch.6 of this thesis.

⁸⁴⁷ See G. Pattison Art, Modernity and Faith SCM Press 1991, E. Farley Faith and Beauty: a theological aesthetic, Ashgate, 2001 and P. Sherry Spirit and Beauty SCM 1992.

⁸⁴⁸ E.g Farley Faith and Beauty: a theological aesthetic, Ashgate, 2001 and P. Sherry Spirit and Beauty SCM 1992.

social revolution. She therefore shares in Rahner's interest in the wealth of Christian art and views it as a place where semiotic power is elicited.

However, despite her interest in Christian art and writing, we found that Kristeva goes on to draw negative conclusions about Christianity itself, viewing the tradition as a grand attempt to repress the semiotic. She presents her study of Mariology in evidence of this conclusion. However, we suggest that her conclusion has overlooked other important aspects of Christian doctrine. We have suggested that Rahner's understanding of the inner-plurality of the Trinity offers the opportunity for an appreciation of inner-plurality to disrupt the notion of the unitary and static self and so is an example of the very disruptive semiotic power that Kristeva seeks in art. This contradicts Kristeva's pre-supposed reductionist view of Christianity.

For Kristeva art and poetry are vital to the continual process of fragmenting and resituating the subject within the matrix of discourse. In this, both Rahner and Kristeva agree that the operation of poetic words is fundamentally redemptive. Both dismiss primordial oneness for relational dynamism. For Rahner, this process is driven by divine grace, for Kristeva it is the activity of the semiotic. In both there is the remembrance of an original state of inner-plurality. Importantly, for both Rahner and Kristeva poetic language and art have the power to transform our subjectivity and open the way for further creative encounter.

10.7 Areas of Coherent Outcomes: Process not stativity

This leads us to our final area of coherence between the speaking subject and the person as hearer. Considerations around questions of subjectivity lead both Rahner and Kristeva to conclude that human subjectivity is a process, not an entity, and dynamic rather than static.

For Kristeva the unstable and dynamic nature of the subject mirrors the nature of the discursive reality that circumscribes it. The speaking subject is a dynamic process because it is situated within a process and is created by it. The "sujet en process" emerges through its passage through an arena of disruption and deconstruction; its ability to do so is a trial. The pinnacle of this process is found in moments of *jouissance*. Subjectivity requires the careful balancing of the ability to speak in the

symbolic realm coupled with the awareness of the operation of the disruptive semiotic found in poetic and artistic media.⁸⁴⁹

For Rahner, too, personhood remains radically “on the way”.⁸⁵⁰ This process is spoken of in terms of freedom and responsibility. Its unfinished nature is expressed as a “radically openness” both to the horizon of its being and to other persons which are encountered as neighbours.⁸⁵¹ The human being is a ‘becoming’ and personhood is a telos for the process rather than a given. The process is one of self-actualisation through the realm of self-expressive symbols and in freely chosen acts of neighbour-love.⁸⁵²

We appreciated that viewing human subjectivity in terms of relational process and openness has become widespread in theological reflection since Rahner. We note that Rahner’s emphasis upon process and openness is synchronous with that found in Pannenberg, Moltmann, Jüngel and others. In fact, Christoph Schwöbel describes such relational understandings of the human person as, “forming a common element in contemporary anthropological reflection.”⁸⁵³ . According to Schwöbel, contemporary Christian anthropology can be defined by a desire to re-situate what is characteristic about the human being away from the notion of a substantive core and rationality towards an emphasis on relationality and eschatological process. What is of interest here is that Rahner is at the beginnings of this trend. Although certainly not alone in this, we might mention the work of Rahner’s contemporaries within Process Theology as well as Teilhard and Tillich. With Rahner, their theology pre-empts many future contemporary reflections.

We have suggested that Kristeva’s notion of *jouissance* is somewhat coherent with Rahner’s idea of the encounter with holy mystery.⁸⁵⁴ Both contain the idea that an encounter with otherness contained within the straightforward rationalistic realm leads to the actualisation of the subject. This happens in a series of moments of a heightened appreciation of otherness. Within Kristeva’s textual schema *jouissance* is

⁸⁴⁹ See ch. 9.1 of this thesis.

⁸⁵⁰ Rahner, FCF p.32

⁸⁵¹ Rahner TI 9 p.213

⁸⁵² See ch.9.2 of this thesis.

⁸⁵³ Christoph Schwöbel, “The Human Being as Relational Being” *Persons Human and Divine*, p.141.

⁸⁵⁴ See ch.9 of this thesis.

similarly intangible yet transformative and powerful as Rahner's description of spiritual ecstasy. Both view these facets of subjective experience to the "telos" of the subject.⁸⁵⁵ Both speaker and hearer experience increasing self-actualisation through moments where otherness breaks through the perceived stable order. This has been an important area of cohesion, and is related in both theorists to the power of art and poetry.

Conclusion

The significant areas of coherence between the speaking subject and the person as hearer point to Rahner's usefulness in the task of engaging with post-structuralist theories. This engagement need not overlook or downplay the areas of fundamental asymmetry between these disciplines; they are of themselves informative. Both areas of coherence and asymmetry have demonstrated that Rahner shares many of the concerns that have arisen in later post-modern thought. This has resulted in many shared themes and even outcomes as Rahner and Kristeva consider human subjectivity.

From our study we suggest that a notion of the subject that is immediately acceptable to both post-structuralists and many Christian theologians seems implausible. Fundamentally, the suggestion of an accessible, objective, extra-textual reality, such as we have drawn from Rahner, is at immediate odds with post-modern suspicion of grand narratives. As Anthony Thiselton says,

"How can the post-modern self which has become habituated to suspect and distrust, know whether such an extended narrative is anything but a wish-fulfilment deceptively projected by the self, or, still worse, a manipulative construct which serves the power-interests of those who suggest it?"⁸⁵⁶

From our consideration of the interface between Rahner and Kristeva we suggest that where theology desires to engage with post-modern or post-structuralist theories there is a need to appeal to post-modern thinkers to rethink the nature of grand narratives. We suggested earlier in this chapter that Rahner can be said to have begun this process in his re-evaluation of reality where transcendence is seen as coherent with immanence. We have suggested that the pre-suppositions about the arena of selfhood

⁸⁵⁵ We noted in ch.9 that Kristeva would never allow for this term in its Aristotelian sense.

⁸⁵⁶ Anthony C. Thiselton Interpreting God and the post-modern self: on meaning, manipulation and promise Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995, p. 160.

fundamentally shape the subject. Furthermore it is a particular interpretation of the Christian schema that has been rejected by Kristeva, and other post-modernists, seeking to position the subject away from the imagined oppression of a dominant or “master” voice. We might therefore ask whether a grand-narrative always a “master-narrative” based upon will-to-power? In this, theology, with Rahner, might stress that a Christian understanding of reality is one governed by perichoretic love rather than will-to-power. The relation to otherness becomes then, as Thiselton says, something in the manner of the “lover-in-relation-to-loved, or loved-in-relation-to-lover”.⁸⁵⁷ We would argue that the notion of the person as hearer, as based upon the social Trinity, suggests just such a paradigm; one where the distrust of the grand narrative might be dissolved in the experience of being loved by a self-giving Lover (and this in both senses; one where the individual gives of themselves to the other, and in doing so gives “selfhood” to the other). Could such a re-envisioning of reality extend the notion of what is accepted as “real” in the post-modern mindset?

Thiselton suggests,

“Perhaps the self of modernity had been right to hope, but wrong about the basis on which it built its hope. Perhaps the post-modern self had been right to despair if will-to-power exhausted the content of all reality, but wrong in its assumption that this exhausted all that might be called ‘real’.”⁸⁵⁸

The appreciation of shared themes, and even outcomes, between Rahner and Kristeva is surely an encouragement, and perhaps a resource, to the task of contemporary theologians such as Graham Ward⁸⁵⁹ and Anthony Thiselton who seek an interface between theology and post-modernism/post-structuralism. In this, we believe that there are other possibilities for such an engagement besides that taken by the Sea of Faith theologians and their adoption of non-realism. Importantly, we have suggested that there are aspects of Rahner’s work that make his theology especially fitting for such an endeavour. We have found these to be his understanding of symbolic realism, his ability to relate intra- to inter-subjectivity, the privileging of poetic language and religious imagination and an emphasis on otherness and communality.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid. p.161

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid. p.161

⁸⁵⁹ See Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the language of theology*, Cambridge University Press, 1998 and *The Blackwell Companion to post-modern theology*, Blackwell, 2001 (ed.) .

The suggestion that Rahner is a fitting collaborator in the contemporary task to engage with post-modernism may appear somewhat surprising given that more developed theological considerations of relationality and social trinitarianism have been constructed recently. However, we suggest that the themes identified in Rahner's notion of the person as hearer pre-empt many recent theological findings. Furthermore, his theology is broad in scope and open in nature. His axiomatic belief that anthropology is the starting place for theology is wholly relevant to the task of relating theology to a contemporary arena where there is a "turn to the subject", and we might go as far as to suggest that Rahner provides a methodological and theological rationale for such a task. Rahner's desire to engage with other disciplines contrasts with many of his contemporaries; perhaps the starkest being Barth's closed theological system. However, allowing for this, Rahner's work remains unapologetically "Christian" in focus and method. It might at first seem unlikely that considerations of religious motifs and a series of devotional meditations would be of use in an attempt to engage with post-modernism. However, in this study we find that from such sources we can identify a complex reflection on the nature of symbols and words that, we believe, is able to engage with a post-modern emphasis on language. Perhaps this is even confirmed by the Kristeva's interest in religious belief. It would also seem surprising that there could be any use for reflections on the doctrine of the Trinity and Christology in the inter-disciplinary task. However, we find that Rahner's understanding of the social, relational Trinity and the multi-faceted nature of subjectivity, as explored through Christology, are indeed useful. They foster confidence in subjective inner-plurality and privilege communality above individualism. All of these themes within Rahner's social trinitarianism concur with a contemporary desire to counter the Enlightenment substantive self. We note that they do this without dissolving the individual in pure relationality and also allow for the experience of being a self-reflective individual, which has been appreciated as necessary in contemporary feminist emancipatory programme by Seyla Benhabib. Furthermore, Marit Trelstad warns us of the inherent danger done to women when they are defined in such a solely relational way.⁸⁶⁰ We recall that the subject-for-itself and the subject-for-others are both facets of subjectivity explored through social trinitarianism and Christology within Rahner's theology.

⁸⁶⁰ Trelstad, "Relationality Plus Individuality: The Value of Creative Self Agency"⁸⁶⁰From *Dialog* vol. 38, number 3, summer 1999, pp.193-198. See chapter 1 of this thesis.

We would expect such an interface to be instructive to both perspectives. We have found ways where Kristeva's theories can be used to refine and bring into sharper focus some aspects of Rahner's as well as areas where Rahner's work provides a critique of some aspects of Kristeva's. In this, the critical comparison between the person as hearer and the speaking subject has provided a useful experiment in the ability to relate Christian theology to contemporary post-structuralist theories that we believe might open the way for further exploration and engagement.

Finally, we have found that confronting the "otherness" of post-structuralism has acted as a catalyst to return to familiar theological resources with a greater sense of appreciation. Engagement with disciplines outside theology is hardly avoidable and given the paradigmatic challenge of post-structuralist ideas to all "grand-narratives", such as Christianity, it is surely a timely and important engagement. From such an inter-disciplinary interface we can challenge previous theological conceptions of subjectivity. In this we find that the deconstructive process that is at the heart of post-structuralism should be embraced rather than feared. It appears possible to take on board many post-modern concerns (about the privileging of language, the relational process of the construction of the subject) without falling into the dissolution of meaning and anti-realism, as Cupitt and the Sea of Faith theologians do. With Rahner, we have found that concerns of postmodernism can be, and perhaps were already being, met within a Christian theist paradigm based upon symbolic realism and a social trinitarianism that provides a model for the self-expressive person to emerge. Perhaps, we can say that Rahner provides us with the impetus for a different kind of engagement with postmodernism other than that taken by the Sea of Faith. Rahner's schema appears able to accept many of the findings of post-structuralism, as these relate to reality within language, whilst maintaining the possibility for an extra-textual dimension, or horizon of being. Such an original and pre-thematic knowledge can be argued for in that it appears to concur with our lived experience and makes sense of our ability to stand back from the provisional answers we raise in questioning our subjectivity to judge their adequacy. Finally, we take from Rahner that it is from vigorous explorations of theological concepts in relation to those from other disciplines that contemporary theology is able to explore subjectivity in the fullest sense.

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 HR Hearer of the Word (1969)
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