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ON KRISTEVAN CONCEPT OF INTERTEXTUALITY

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ABSTRACT

French feminist and Poststructuralist, Julia Kristeva hits upon her theory of Intertextuality in the late 1960s, while she was engaged in her somewhat combined study of Saussure and Bakhtin's theories of language and literature. She represents a transitional phase described "in terms of a move from structuralism to poststructuralism". Allen outlines the pervasive presence of 'intertextuality' in contemporary major theoretical contexts. Accordingly, Intertextuality originates in Kristevan blending of Saussure and Bakhtin. Its subsequent poststructuralist articulation is evidenced in Roland Barthes and its variant, structuralist formulation in Genette and Riffaterre. Thereafter, the feminist and postcolonial theorists adopt and adapt the term, which conform to their perspectives fairly well. Its widespread application is, finally, seen "within the non-literary arts, the current cultural epoch and modern computer technologies" (Allen 6).

Broadly speaking, Kristina's coinage 'Intertextuality' refers to interconnectedness of a given text to other texts. It is argued that any text "can be analyzed in terms of the other texts that it has absorbed and transformed. Thus, Intertextuality embraces various forms of textual borrowing and echoing, such as allusion, parody, pastiche and quotation". (Longhurst & Smith *et al.* 41)

Keywords: Intertextuality, subjectivity, speaking subject, semenalyse, geno-text, pheno-text, semiotic chora, polyvalence, symbolic, polyphonic, ideologeme, dialogism, heteroglossia, carnival, transposition, polysemy.

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Julia Kristeva (1941-) is a Bulgarian born French theorist and a member of the *Tel Quel* group. She is well-known for her inter and multidisciplinary studies where literature, linguistics psychoanalysis and philosophy converge. She is a poststructuralist who has a certain fascination for "a psychologically inspired exploration of subjectivity" of speaking subject, namely human being (Macey 218). Kristeva upholds Lacan's thesis that human being with its entry into language (symbolic phase) enters the very stuff of subjectivity enmeshed in the endless web of signification. In other words, human being becomes the human subject embedded in and dominated by language, which precedes her/his existence.

Kristeva is acknowledged to have developed a number of key concepts, such as *semanalyse*, the *geno-text* and *pheno-text*, semiotic chora and symbolic, and intertextuality. According to Macey, Kristeva hits upon and elaborates her outstanding concept of intertextuality during her studies of Mikhail Bakhtin. In a major sequel of her essays she begins to formulate her theory of 'semanalysis', combining 'semiotics' and 'psychoanalysis', in which she studies the subject and her/his relations to the archaic drives and the pre-linguistic elements that circulate in the *chora* and the semiotic (*Ibid.*).

Kristeva's one of the major works is *Problems de la structuration du texte* (tr. *Word, Dialogue and Novel*) in which she propounds her theory of intertextuality. Kristevan concept of "intertextuality" is built upon Bakhtin's notion of "polyphonic" utterances, that is to say, a free play of at times contesting voices in a single text such as a novel" (Lane 189). In her notion of "textuality" the *ideologeme* forms its micrological unit. In other words, in a system the smallest ideological component is the ideologme. Lane further explains that to Kristeva:

The ideologeme coordinates the connectivity of texts to form an intertextual network of meaning (e.g. the coordination of semiotic and symbolic system). The act of reading/writing becomes the transformative reorganization of the socio-historical intertextual work". (*Ibid.*)

Kristeva perceives the structuralism as leaning towards the closed systems. Her concept of intertextuality presents its antithesis in which she argues "in favour of the open systems of poststructuralism". She, therefore, formulates "a wider theory of text as 'productivity' where there is always a subject-in-process spoken and situated by the relations between sign systems" (Lane 190). Intertextuality, thus, constitutes one significant component of her theory of textual productivity.

Kristeva in the 1960s coined the term intertextuality, which may be taken as an attempt on her part to synthesize her readings of Saussure's structural semiotics and Bakhtin's 'dialogism' (double-voicing in novel) and 'heteroglossia' (other- languageness), which may produce "multivalence" or "plurisignation" in a work of art. In his book's 'introduction' section Peter Barry sums up Bakhtin's contribution in the field of literary theory in the following words:

Bakhtin admires the way the literary text is never 'univocal' (single-voiced) but generates a riotous plurality of meanings. He sees this as being especially so of the novel, which for him is characterized by its 'heteroglossia' (the word means 'different tongues') whereby the text provides us with a dialogue or carnival of many different voices, some ironic, some humorous, some self-mocking or self-parodying. Within this textual carnival there can be no place for the reasoned, authoritative, single voice to silence all others and impose a fixed and reliable version of the events depicted, for the text is by nature anarchic rather than authoritarian.(Barry 17)

Kristeva "challenges traditional notions of literary influence, saying that intertextuality denotes a transposition of one or several sign systems into another or others" (Cuddon 424). She borrows the term 'transposition' from Freudian psychoanalysis and uses it not only to point out as to how texts tend to echo each other, but also "the way that discourses or sign systems are transposed in one kind of discourse are overlaid with meanings from another kind of discourse" (*Ibid.*). To her such a discourse manifests a kind of 'new articulation'.

Noëlle McAfee expresses his disagreement with the view in which the term intertextuality is mistakenly construed to mean "the way texts intersect or can be analysed together" (26). To him "passage from one sign system to another is what she meant by the term, which indicates the way in which one signifying system is transposed into another one. Kristeva explains her view-point about intertextuality as under:

The term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another; but since the term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of resources," we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demand a new articulation If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), In this way polysemy [multiple levels or kinds of

meaning] can also be seen as the result of semiotic polyvalence – an adherence to different sign systems. (Kristeva cited in McAfee 26)

It is held that signifying practices by their nature, being the result of multiple origins or drives are unable to produce a simple and uniform meaning. The speaking being furnishes the field where from issues forth the signifying practices leading to textual production, and hence Kristeva "has insisted that the study of language is inseparable from the study of speaking being Her study of signifying practice rests on psychoanalytic theory, drawing a developmental picture of the speaking being . . ." (McAfee 26-27).

We need to take note of the point that in Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogic" a mutual relationship is discernible among the author, work, reader, society and history. In such a situation it would be fallacious to look at the text as something like an individual and isolated object. A text rather than that looks like a compilation of cultural textuality. A kind of interplay is implied in Bakhtin's notion of the "dialogue" although he never used the term "intertextuality". Under the influence of Bakhtin, Kristeva comes to believe that the individual text and the cultural text are made from the same textual material. They cannot be separated from each other: the speaking subject and the medium (the signifying practices) converge.

The point of similarity between Bakhtin and Kristeva is that they both subscribe to the view that texts are constructed out of the larger cultural or social textuality and hence they cannot be separated from that context. All texts are, therefore, embedded in ideological structures expressed through discourse. Nonetheless, it is equally important to draw a distinction between the two: Bakhtin's works center on human subject, the author-writer, using language in specific social situation; whereas Kristeva's works focus more on abstract notions, such as the text and textuality, and their relation to ideological structures. As has been already stated, to Kristeva a text is a conglomeration of or a compilation of cultural textuality.

Kristeva's main concern in her essays "the Bounded Text" (36-63) and "Word, Dialogue, and Novel (64-91) is to examine the manner in which a text is constructed out of the already existing discourse. The essays as mentioned above form the part of her work *Desire in Language : A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980). In the work she claims that authors do not create their texts from their own mind, but rather compile them from pre-existent texts. Authors and texts are influenced by linguistic and textual processes.

Kristeva is also known to have introduced to the Western academy the then unknown Russian Formalist thinker, Mikhail Bakhtin. She explains and develops Bakhtin's notions of inter-textuality, dialogic and the carnivalization of the novel genre so well that she soon gets a job offer to teach in the United States, which she refuses to accept as a protest against American involvement in Vietnam. She instead prefers to join the *Tel Quel* group. In her first book, *Semiotike : Recherches pour une Semanalyse* (tr. *Semiotics: Investigations for Semanalysis*) she writes about Bakhtin:

Writer as well as "scholar", Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply exist but is generated in relation to another structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the "literary word" as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a point (a fixed meanings), as a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context. (Kristeva cited in McAfee 5)

Kristeva, thus, visualizes the text as embodying society's conflict over the meaning of the words. She, therefore, denies any possibility to texts as presenting any clear and stable meanings. She sees texts as thoroughly linked to ongoing cultural and social processes. This being the case, the text has no unity or unified meaning of its own. According to Kristeva a text's meaning is understood as a temporary re-arrangement of elements with socially pre-existent meaning. Such a perspective allows meaning to be seen as a simultaneously residing 'inside' (reader's view) and 'outside' (society's influence) the text.

To Peter Barry, poststructuralists tend to discover divergent cross-currents of meaning in texts. The text becomes sites, where the 'unconscious' of the text emerge into and disrupt the 'conscious' or 'surface' meaning (124). Kristeva views the 'conscious' as represented by the symbolic aspect of language, while the non-obvious 'unconscious' content of the text is represented by the semiotic aspect of signification and

communication. Roughly speaking, semiotic *chora* is pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic phase, which can be equated with Lacan's 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic' with his term of same denomination.

An intertextual relation between words and their prior-circulation in proceeding or say past texts are the things that influence the communication between the author and reader. That is why according to Kristeva "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (Kristeva 66). The term "Subjectivity" is Kristeva's substitution for the conventional term the "self". She perceives subjectivity as a dynamic process which never comes to completion. For the human subject, to be living alludes to continue in a state of change. Moreover, this speaking subject has to have full awareness of her/his personal intentions. The subject is fully capable to act as an autonomous being situated in the World, and guided by her/his rational or intellectual faculty.

Kristeva visualizes "subjectivity" (as a process) and relates it to both language and the play of psychic drives and impulses within the speaking being anterior to language. To her subject is not a unified identity but a split between the two signifying fields. She, accordingly, considers a speaking being "a subject in process/ on trial" formed in the "practice of the text", which remind one of Bakhtin's terms, monologic and dialogic poles. Traces of which, one can have in both a psychoanalytic discourse and artistic practice. On the basis of her readings of Lane and Habib *et al* the researcher has drawn a diagram which is given below (fig. 1). The diagram is intended to present a broad view of Kristevan psychoanalytical perspective (admitting two different aspects of the same language: the semiotic and symbolic poles), in which she sees the text as a product of an intercalated relationship between language and speaking being (subject), and situate both within in an overall socio-cultural and historical-political environment.

Structuralism is supposed to view text-function as a closed system or a kind of sealed universe, in which a text is perceived to exist as a "hermetic or self-sufficient whole", using the words of *Michael Worton* and *Judith Still* (1). The concept of intertextuality is, therefore, seen as a counter-point to this rather narrower and generalized view of the text. Intertextuality interrogates any claim to textual originality and uniqueness. To support this claim, two reasons are commonly ascribed to justify textual open-endedness accruing from intertextuality. They are:

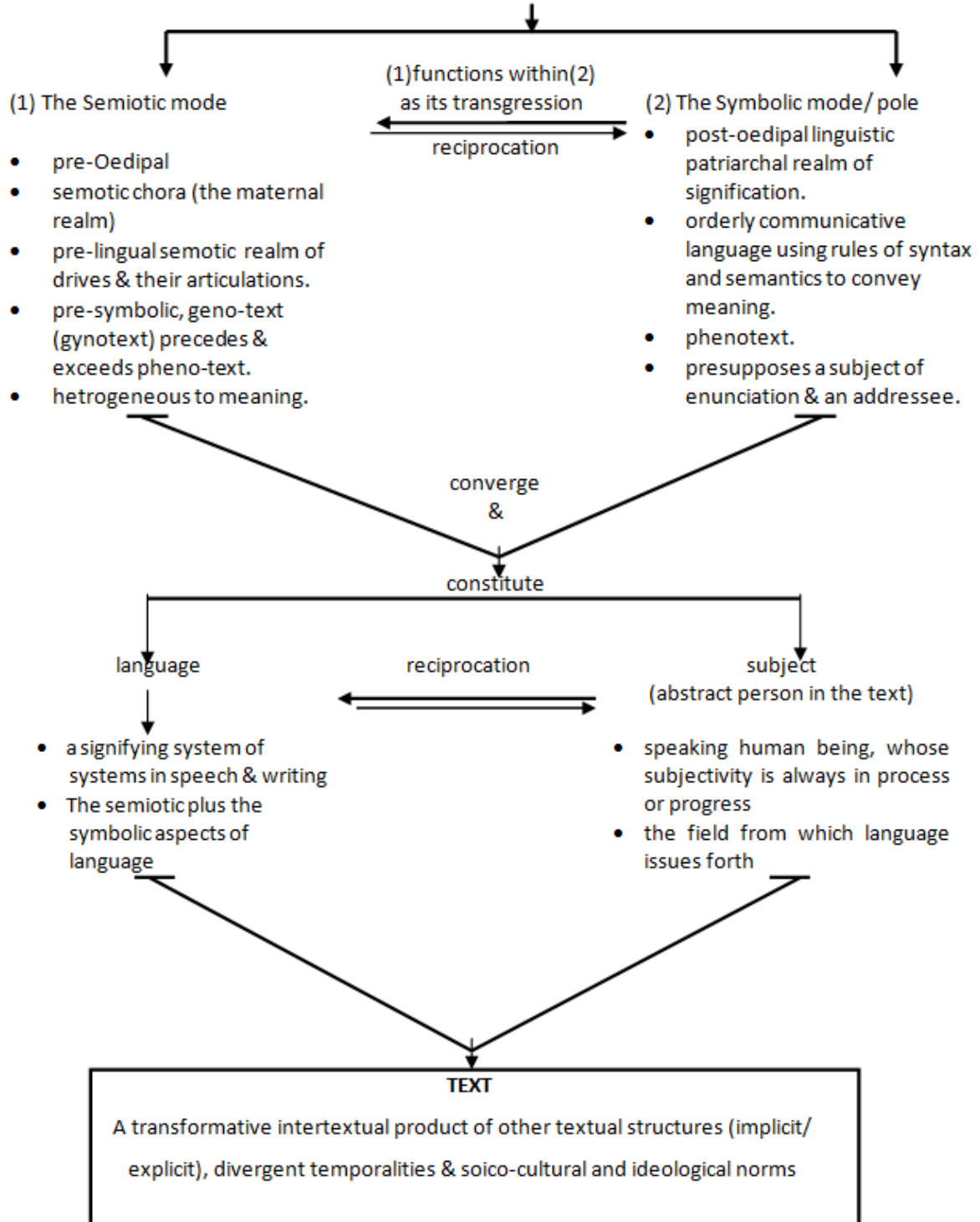
Firstly, the writer is a reader of texts (in the broadest sense before s/he is a creator of texts, and therefore the work of art is inevitably shot through with reference, quotations and influences of every kind. . . . secondly a text is available only through some process of reading; what is produced at the moment of reading is due to cross-fertilization of the packaged textual material (say a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it (Worton and Still 1-2).

To sum up, Kristevan perspective, therefore, allow us to celebrate the plurality and to see the texts as emotionally, politically and culturally charged, for both the "axes of intertextuality" are subject to temporal contextuality of the world that surrounds authors as human beings. The two axes of intertextuality are : (i) texts entering via authors (who are, first, readers)" and (ii) texts entering via readers (co-producers)" (Ibid. 2). Theorists across various disciplines of knowledge have been drawn towards the writings of Kristeva "to look into how the speaking, desiring, subject in process influences art, literature, dance, philosophy and theology" (McAfee 120).

Graham Allen argues that since the theory of intertextuality has been a vital and productive influence in literary theory and cultural studies in the recent past, its impact is very likely to continue in the future, also because the term (intertextuality) has gained currency of a potent tool within reader's theoretical vocabulary. The theory of intertextuality has two main strands and they both underscore its prime feature of interconnectedness. We may conclude the foregoing discussion on intertextuality with Allen's apt remarks:

Whether it be based in poststructuralist or Bakhtinian theories, or in both, intertextuality reminds us that all texts are potentially plural, reversible, open to the reader's own presuppositions, lacking in clear and defined boundaries, and always involved in the expression or repression of the dialogic 'voice' which exist within society. A term which continually refers to the impossibility of singularity, unity, and thus of unquestionable authority. . . . (209)

Fig. 1
Two Dialectical Modes Forming Signifying Processes of the Textual Productivity



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