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2 ABJECTION AND MEANING IN THE WORK OF JULIA KRISTEVA

2.1 *A Brief Sketch of Julia Kristeva's Life and Work*

Julia Kristeva is the recipient of eight honorary doctorates, and the winner of the prestigious Norwegian Holberg Prize 2004 for her innovative work at the intersection between linguistics, culture and literature. In addition to academic work, Kristeva wrote fiction because, as she said in an interview, fiction is a space where the imaginary (the semiotic: that which eludes everyday rational discourse, yet affects meaning) can still find an outlet in a globalised and therefore standardised world. Furthermore, a re-formulation of psychic diversity might be possible through the novel, but only if it is understood as a novel of the subject, and thus of the unconscious, and not only of the ego. The subject is the actual process of language of meaning of the instantiation of identities, which are continually surpassed.

A predominant feature in Kristeva's work is her concern to bring the unanalysable, i.e. the semiotic, into the experience of language. I will go into her notion of the semiotic more extensively later in this chapter. This is Kristeva's own brief formulation of the semiotic in relation to the symbolic, as expressed during an interview:

...to be schematic, I would say that for me signification is a process that I call signifiante. To recognize the dynamics of this process, I distinguish between two registers (of meaning): the registers of the symbolic and the semiotic. By symbolic I mean the tributary signification of language, all the effects of meaning that appear from the moment linguistic signs are articulated into grammar, not only chronologically, but logically as well. In other words, the symbolic is both diachronic and synchronic; it concerns both the acquisition of language and the present syntactic structure. By semiotic, on the other hand, I mean the effects of meaning that are not reducible to language or that can operate outside language, even if language is necessary as an immediate context, or as a final referent. By semiotic, I mean, for example the child's echolalia before the appearance of language, but also the play of colors in an abstract painting or a piece of music that lacks signification but has meaning.⁹

The distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic marks Kristeva's farewell to structuralism and a hello to post-structuralism:

⁹ Ina Lipkowitz and Andrea Loselle. "A Conversation with Julia Kristeva". *Julia Kristeva, Interviews*. By Ross Mitchell Guberman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 22.

I have realized that it was not necessary to apply mechanically models to the literary text, but that it was necessary to consider the literary text as another language, another type of discourse. From this theoretical conception of the literary text as another type of discourse, I had to change the models of my approach, and eventually make use of linguistic models. But after modifying them, I had to take into account that the text is not the language of ordinary communication. I was very much influenced at the time by the works of Bakhtin, who, with respect to the formulation of the Russian Formalist critics, also tried to seize upon something specific in the literary text that did not necessarily appear on the level of language, even if it involved deep laws of communication that could also be attributed to this same level of language.¹⁰

In the late 1960s, when Freud and Lacan were not yet part of her universe, Kristeva introduced the work of the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin to a European audience, particularly his notions of the dialogical novel and of carnival. Kristeva's interest in analysing the heterogeneous nature of poetic language distinguished her from other semioticians, who were exclusively interested in the symbolic, that is, in formalising the conventional workings of language.¹¹ Kristeva grasped language as a dynamic, transgressive process rather than a static instrument as the analyses of linguists implied. The static view is tied to the notion that language is reducible to those dimensions (such as logical propositions) that can be apprehended by consciousness, to the exclusion of the material, heterogeneous and unconscious.

After 1979, Kristeva's work focuses on the formation of identity and the roles that abjection and the other play in this process. Her writings of the 1980s include transcripts from her practice as an analyst, such as *Tales of Love* (1983) and *Black Sun* (1987).

In her 1980 publication, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, Kristeva differs from Freud and Lacan by situating the process of individuation before the child's entrance into language (Freud) and before the mirror stage (Lacan). In that pre-language stage, according to Kristeva, maternal regulation (breastfeeding, etc.) operates as a law, foreshadowing and providing the grounds of paternal law as the entry of the child into language and society.

Kristeva's writings maintain the logic of an oscillation between symbolic identity and semiotic rejection: the child's earliest experiences of difference from the

¹⁰ Lipkowitz and Loselle. Ibid. 19.

¹¹ In Bakhtin's view, an expression in a living context of exchange – termed a “word” or “utterance” – is the main unit of meaning (not abstract sentences out of context), and is formed through the speaker's relation to otherness (other people, others' words and expressions, and his cultural world in time and place). A “word” is therefore always already embedded in a history of expressions by others in a chain of ongoing cultural and political moments.

mother. *Revolution in Poetic Language* and *Powers of Horror* focus on maternal rejection, which prefigures signification and sets up the logic of rejection.

Tales of Love and *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholy* focus on primary narcissism, which prefigures all subsequent identity and sets up the logic of repetition. *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989) and *Lettre ouverte à Harlem Désir* (1990) concentrate on rejection or difference within identity.¹²

2.2 Some Key Concepts in Kristeva's Work

Freud first investigated the ambivalent, drive-oriented dynamics within the context of his anthropologically oriented research on group's identity-formation in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). Almost seventy years later, Julia Kristeva extended Freud's research on the ambivalence of group's identity-processing in *Totem and Taboo* to a universal principle of all identity-processing including that of individuals, which she called abjection (1980), a notion that I will discuss in some detail in this chapter. Kristeva's theorisation of abjection, and the wider philosophical context of identity and meaning in which abjection appears in her work, are the subject matter of this chapter and the focus of research in my analysis of the literary texts in this study.

2.3 Abjection Within the Wider Context of Kristeva's Philosophy of Nihilism

Kristeva's interest in abjection as a narcissistic structure of identity-formation is part of the wider context of her philosophical interest in the problem of nihilism in modernity in the aftermath of secularisation. Nihilism in Kristeva's work is structurally different from the philosophical idea of the loss of transcendence, which, "for one, is predominantly metaphysical (like the death of God in Nietzsche's work), and for the other predominantly political and cultural (like the loss of great political narratives, for instance, Marxism)".¹³

¹² Sources for this introductory section are: *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986. Also *Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Post-Humanism*. Ed. John Lechte. New York: Routledge, 2008; Sarah Beardsworth's eminent study of Kristeva, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity*. New York: State University Press of New York, 2004. And, last but not least, Marc de Kesel's introduction to Julia Kristeva's work in the series *Lectures and Debates for Deepening Knowledge. 2010. Modern Thinkers: Introduction to the Ideas of Contemporary Intellectuals*. Soeterbeeck Programme: Radboud University, Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

¹³ Beardsworth. *Ibid.* 1-22.

2.4 *The Semiotic and Symbolic Registers of Identity and Meaning*

Kristeva's view of nihilism is a psychoanalytic approach rooted in her notions of the symbolic and the semiotic as two opposing, yet inter-dependent cultural registers of meaning and identity: the semiotic as tied to the world of instincts/drives and the symbolic to the social world of authority, values, traditions and signification. She sees the problem of nihilistic modernity in the drifting apart of the semiotic and the symbolic: the two registers that albeit separate need to be connected, if self-relations and relations with others are to be possible at all, a need, she claims, that modern institutions and discourses have failed to meet.

Kristeva's psychoanalytic work on abjection aims to mediate that nihilistic gap by giving symbolic form to what is culturally neglected: the instinctive, drive-oriented onset to narcissism which she calls abjection and which she sees as a universal, instinctive (and thus ambivalent) psycho-dynamics of exclusion and renewal, susceptible to ideologies:

... all identity, including cultural identity, is processed on the basis of exclusion, an instinctive, drive-oriented process often tapped, rationalized, and made operative by ideologies, for instance, Nazism and Fascism.¹⁴

Kristeva repeatedly shows her indebtedness to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, to begin with in her thesis *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1974):

...We will make constant use of notions and concepts borrowed from Freudian psychoanalytic theory and its various recent developments in order to give the advances of dialectical logic a materialist foundation - a theory of signification based on the subject, his formation, and his corporeal, linguistic, and social dialectic.¹⁵

She reconnects the social (the symbolic) and the affective/instinctual (the semiotic) by presenting a theory of identity-formation (abjection) that – as I will presently show – does justice to both aspects and thus prevents one from dominating over the other. From that perspective Kristeva's theory of abjection is actually an attempt at restoring the balance between the instinctive and the social aspects of identity-formation, for what happens when the instinctual seeps into and dominates the social we will see in the next chapter on anti-Semitism.

¹⁴ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 155. All references refer to this edition as *Powers of Horror*.

¹⁵ See Kristeva's thesis for the French Doctorat d'État in 1974: "Prolegomenon". *Revolution in Poetic Language* (*La Révolution du langage poétique*). Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984. 14-5.

2.5 *Abjection*

Abjection – a key concept in my analysis of Kafka and Vogel’s work – is theorised in Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* as an ambivalent, narcissistic psychodynamics of exclusion and renewal, an overcoming through suffering, set in motion by the pre-Oedipal child’s instinctive attempts at individuation (primary narcissism).¹⁶ Kristeva’s interest in abjection as a pre-Oedipal and pre-language stage of individuation was fuelled by clinical research on that subject by the Austrian-born British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960), as set out in *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (1932). Klein wrote in 1932 in the introduction to the first edition of this work:

The beginnings of child analysis go back more than two decades, to the time when Freud himself carried out his analysis of ‘Little Hans’ (“Analysis of a phobia in a five-year-old boy” 1909, Standard Edition of Freud’s Works, Volume 10, p. 3 ff). The great theoretical significance of this first analysis of a child lay in two directions. Its success in the case of a child of under five showed that psycho-analytic methods could be applied to small children; and, perhaps more important still, the analysis could establish, beyond doubt, the existence of the hitherto much-questioned infantile instinctual trends in the child himself which Freud had discovered in the adult. In addition, the results obtained from it held out the hope that further analyses of small children would give us a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the working of their minds than analysis of adults had done, and would thus be able to make important and fundamental.¹⁷

At some point, the child, sojourning in a blissful, subliminal unity with the mother (referred to by Kristeva as the *chora*), before it has any notion of itself as a separate body, instinctually (we are in the world of affects here) begins attempts at individuation by making space in the *chora* for an individuality of its own.¹⁸ To

¹⁶ Kristeva wrote a biography of Melanie Klein: *Melanie Klein*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

¹⁷ Melanie Klein. *The Psychoanalysis of Children*. Trans. Alix Strachey. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1986. xv.

¹⁸ The *chora*: the term is from a chapter in Kristeva’s thesis for the French Doctorate d’État, 1974: *Revolution in Poetic language*. See *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. Chapter 5: “Revolution in Poetic Language”. 90-136.

Here Kristeva expounds some key-notions from her psycho-linguistic theory, one of which is the semiotic *chora* ordering the drives. She also adopts the term semiotic from the Greek, where it has a variety of connotations of which distinctiveness is the one that “allows us to connect it to a precise modality in the signifying process”. This modality of the semiotic facilitates and structures the disposition of drives, and also the primary processes which displace and condense both energies and their inscription. In this way the drives, which are energy, charge ... articulate, what we call a *chora*: a non-expressive totality formed by the

that end the child begins to exclude (object) parts of the *chora* (instinctive mother-child unity). Once excluded, those parts form an outside to the subject-to-be's inside, or to put it differently: the excluded parts, now-turned-into-an-other, or object, confront the child with an inside/outside border where before it drifted in the centre of an instinctual, borderless mother/child sameness (the *chora*).

The not-yet (because pre-Oedipal) subject – trying to negotiate the anxieties and suffering that go with separation and the frightening, very first looming of a border – frantically starts setting and re-setting that border by excluding all that is experienced as not me. That border, presented to the fledgling subject by its separation from the *chora*, now forms the fragile limit of the fledgling subject's budding self. Behind that border, however, the object (the discarded part of the *chora*) threatens the fragile border of the pre-Oedipal subject's self. Anxious to return to the *chora*, the pre-Oedipal subject-to-be struggles to tighten its fragile border by frantically excluding everything felt as “not me”. Paradoxically, that very struggle in what Kristeva refers to as a space of anxiety turns the child into a (pre-Oedipal) subject. It is this space of anxiety that Louis-Ferdinand Céline intuitively hints at when he writes:

You know, in the Scriptures it says: “In the beginning there was the word”. No! In the beginning, there was emotion. The Word came later, like the trot replaced gallop while the natural law of the horse is gallop, it is forced to break into trot. Man was removed from emotional poetry and pushed into dialectics, in other words splattering, is not that so?¹⁹

drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. Kristeva reads in this rhythmic space, which has no thesis and no position, the process by which signification, the psychosomatic origin of meaning, is constituted. “Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle, or *chora*: nourishing and maternal.” (Moi. 94). Kristeva points out that the *chora* has a maternal connotation in many religious ceremonies: Roman, Byzantine, Chinese. She borrows the term from Plato's *Timaeus*. 52-53. (See *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*. Eds. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. 1179.) Kristeva writes “If our [her] use of the term *chora* refers to Plato, who in this instance seems to follow the pre-Socratics, the notion that we will attempt to formulate concerns the organisation of a process, while being that of the subject, moves through the unitary cut-off [Freudian], or separation between [conscious/unconscious] which installs it and introduces into its topos the struggle of drives which makes it move [subject-in-process] and puts it into danger [subject-on-trial]”. My additions between brackets.

¹⁹ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 188. No reference to Céline's work is given by Kristeva but, along with the other quotes from Céline's work on the same page (188), it refers to *Romans II*. Paris: Gallimard, 1974. 933-34.

2.6 *The Abject: Kristeva's Abject and Heidegger's Nothing*

As noted before, paradoxically the pre-Oedipal child's suffering in *Angst* after separation from the instinctive unity with the mother (*chora*) simultaneously presents the frightful subject-to-be with its first border and its first confrontation with an other, or abject. The separation is final: it makes a return to the *chora*, the realm of drives where language does not exist, impossible, except in psychosis. The subject-to-be's first confrontation with the border is "on the edge of non-existence and hallucination where the borders of one's very own self are simultaneously threatened and drawn".²⁰ From that perspective the threat of the abject, or non-differentiated other (is it me, or is it other?) literally scares the subject into being: a paradox reminiscent of the ambivalent psychodynamics of Freud's *Eros/Thanatos* principle.²¹

McAfee suggests that Kristeva's psychoanalytical notion of the abject, though different, functions similarly to Heidegger's philosophical notion of the Nothing. McAfee writes that the state of mind of one experiencing abjection has its parallel in Heidegger's description of the state of encountering the Nothing.²² Both the Nothing and the abject present an abyss where one is, Kristeva writes, on the edge of non-existence and hallucination.

Heidegger extensively explores the nature and depths of anxiety (*Angst*) that go along with a confrontation with the Nothing or what Kristeva would refer to as a confrontation with the abject presenting the borders of the I beyond which the collapse of meaning and language threatens.²³

The Nothing, according to Heidegger, like the abject in Kristeva's work, can only be faced in anxiety (*Angst*). To explain the nature of anxiety (without which the reader's emotional grasp of the Nothing is actually impossible), Heidegger

²⁰ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 2.

²¹ S. Freud. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. 18. London: Hogarth Press, 1922. Freud introduced the concept of death instinct (Thanatos) to explain the existence of certain phenomena in psychoanalytic treatment: aggressive impulses towards the self and others which were incompatible with his theory of sexuality (Eros) as the root of instinctual life. The Eros/Thanatos principle is in keeping with Freud's tendency to seek for dualistic explanations of psychic phenomena. Melanie Klein (see note 6) has developed and augmented the concept postulating that there is strong clinical evidence in the analyses of small children for the existence of a death-instinct. Melanie Klein. *The Psychoanalysis of Children*, 1986.

²² Noëlle McAfee. "Abject Strangers: Towards an Ethics of Respect". *Ethics, Politics and Difference in Julia Kristeva's Writing*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Routledge, 1993. 119.

²³ Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. Capital letters originate from the translation out of the German language. References to *Being and Time* refer to this edition.

begins with an exposition on the difference between fear and anxiety, comparing the former to the object-related fear of something: for instance, the dark, insects, spiders, crowds, open spaces, difference, etc. Anxiety, however, is not, according to Heidegger, a mere psychological (or even pathological) symptom but a basic and fundamental experience of *Dasein* (Being-in-the-world) in the face of Nothing, an experience of bottomless existential fear, that simply *is*: it has no object, yet it is experienced as real and immensely threatening, which is why it is warded off by projection on persons, situations, images, which, rationally speaking, are not threatening in themselves, but are experienced as such, as they somehow evoke that uncertain borderland between Being and Nothing that Heidegger associates with authentic Being. Heidegger's anxiety, however, differs from fear in another way, one which seems somehow akin to Kristeva's notion of the abject: its structural ambivalence as a simultaneously threatening and shaping force.

In anxiety one feels “uncanny” [*unheimlich*]. Here the peculiar indefiniteness [Nothing] alongside of that which *Dasein* (Being in the World) finds itself in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the “Nothing and nowhere”. But here “uncanniness” also means not-being-at-home [*Das Nicht zuhause sein*] ... On the other hand as *Dasein* falls, anxiety brings it back from its absorption in the “world”. Everyday familiarity collapses. *Dasein* has been individualized as being-in-the-world.²⁴

Dwelling on the difference between fear and anxiety, Martin Heidegger distinguishes in *Being and Time* two modes of Being-in-the-world: authentic Being, and inauthentic Being, the latter referring to a mode of Being in which one simply does the things one has to do: living life as it comes to you. Authentic being, however, is living life with a strong awareness of its finality, and consequently a deep concern for the meaning of existence whose reverse side is a deep anxiety (*Angst*) for the loss of either, for loss of meaning signifies Nothing-ness, indeterminateness, loss of self, loss of language/meaning, psychosis/death. Authentic being is thus inherently ambivalent, it hovers over the borderland of Being and Not Being (Nothing) and this border position paradoxically shocks into and threatens Being.

Kristeva, following Lacan, seems to transfer Heidegger's ambivalent borderland between Being and Nothing to the inner, drive-oriented world of the speaking subject: the Lacanian subject constructed in and by language and meaning.²⁵

²⁴ Heidegger. *Being and Time*. 233.

²⁵ The term “speaking subject” is used by Kristeva to elucidate the difference between her semiology and semiotics (Saussure, Peirce, the Prague school and Structuralism). The latter presupposed a Cartesian (authoritative) subject and language as an act of that subject. Freud

She appears to translate the ambivalence of Heidegger's Nothing into an equally ambivalent psychoanalytic principle: the object as ambivalent as the Nothing, in that it inspires deep anxieties as well as the possibilities and need for subjectivity and being.

My above discourse struggles to give expression to the ambivalence of instinctive processes that elude description, such as the one that Kristeva calls abjection, or primary repression. This means that notions like mother, child, border, other, should be taken as attempts to name the unnameable/instinctive. The real (flesh and blood), pre-Oedipal-child gives expression to the following, anxiety-ridden passage from sameness to separateness by symbolic acts of rejection/exclusion, for instance by vomiting the mother's milk:

Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want nothing of that element, sign of their desire; I do not want to listen, "I" do not want to assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' to 'me', who am only in their desire, *I expel myself, spit myself out, I abject myself in the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself*.²⁶

2.7 *Psychodynamics of Subjectivity*

Kristeva views this pre-Oedipal, ambivalent psychodynamics of exclusion (rejection) and renewal (through overcoming) which abjection *is*, as setting the pattern for post-Oedipal subjectivity-in-process, "the latter, ... functioning by way of the reiteration of the [initial] break, or separation, as a multiplicity of expulsions ensuring [the subject's] infinite renewal".²⁷

Thus, she considers subjectivity/identity in terms of a repetitive process of exclusion and renewal, a being as becoming, where the I continually re-positions itself vis-à-vis an inassimilable, internal or external other (object) who is, paradoxically and simultaneously, a threat to, and a condition for subjectivity to arise

displaced the Cartesian subject by splitting it into a conscious and an unconscious, but Lacan went further by postulating a subject created in language and the ever shifting production of meaning. Kristeva expands on the work of both Freud and Lacan and advocates the notion of *the speaking subject* as a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) and specifies the operations on two sides of the split as both imperative for the process of signification: on the one hand the bio-physiological processes (the drives) and on the other hand the social constraints (family structures, etc.). For an extensive explanation see Julia Kristeva. "The System and the Speaking Subject". *The Kristeva Reader*, 1986. 24-33.

²⁶ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 3.

²⁷ Julia Kristeva. "The Subject in Process". Paper given at the 1972 conference Artaud/Bataille: "Towards a Cultural Revolution". Trans. Patrick Ffrench. *The Tel Quel Reader*. Eds. Patrick Ffrench and Roland-François Lack. London: Routledge, 1998. 134.

at all: without abjection no subjectivity, writes Kristeva. She relates how her borderline patients with abjection gone wrong discourses again and again testify to their sojourn in that space of anxiety (the *chora*) where meaning collapses: patients

...with no longing but to last, against all odds and for nothing; on a page where I plotted out the convolutions of those who, in transference, presented me with the gift of their void – I have spelled out abjection.²⁸

Kristeva's notion of abjection as an iterative psychodynamics of identity-formation not only differs from Freud and Lacan's perceptions of identity/subjectivity as only coming into being after the child's entrance into language, but also from their postulation that pre-Oedipal, unconscious content, because it is repressed after the Oedipal phase, has no direct access to the conscious mind: only indirectly, in dreams, or as parapraxis. Instead, Kristeva postulates that it may be true that

...the 'unconscious' contents remain here excluded, *but in strange fashion*: not radically enough for a secure differentiation between subject and object, and yet clearly enough for a defensive position to be established ... one that implies a refusal but also a sublimating elaboration.

In other words: Kristeva argues that repression is never absolute, and that it is at the borderline of the conscious me, and that the not-me – the other, or the abject – keeps threatening the (post-Oedipal) subject, which is excluded from consciousness, but not quite:

... a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which nevertheless does not let itself be seduced.²⁹

Thus, paradoxically, the other, or abject, presents the subject with a border where the fragile, indeterminate boundaries of the self (is he me, or is he an other?) are simultaneously threatened and drawn. This uncertainty or indeterminateness is why the abject inspires anxiety/horror. This is, writes Kelly Oliver, the psychoanalytic explanation of the social fear of the other, or stranger, whose face bears the sign of a transgressed border, which immediately affects us as horror or fascination; but regardless of which, the other is a foreigner: not me/us. The appearance of the other/foreigner gives us an uncanny feeling – of a burning experience gone through, but not remembered. The boundaries between imagination

²⁸ Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 7.

²⁹ Kristeva. *Ibid.* 1.

and reality are erased. The foreigner is not just someone else, different, he is the abject threatening to transgress the borders of our selves.

2.8 *Motivations for Choosing Kristeva's Work for Exploring Literature Written by Jews*

Kristeva's work not only makes the drive-oriented sources of exclusion/renewal thinkable, but she also shows the universality of that psychodynamics by tracing it back to an archaic, instinctive struggle that lies at the heart of any form of identity-formation. Yet, abjection can only be inferred in the therapeutic relation, and dramatized in literature and art no matter from what specific historical period, culture, national or ethnic origin. Abjection, in itself a universal psychodynamics, only appears in the specificity of a certain literary or cultural/historical context. My work is concerned with how abjection, as a universal psychodynamics of identity-formation, appears in the works of assimilated/acculturated European Jewish writers like Kafka and Vogel, at a time when Jewish identity was at a deadlock, when, as I noted in the first chapter, it was as impossible to *be as not to be* a Jew.

It was Anne Fuchs' *A Space of Anxiety* (1999) that set me on the trail of exploring abjection in the work of Kafka.³⁰ Fuchs argues that the works of the German Jewish writers she investigated (including Kafka) shatter the fixity of modernity's definite borderlines between self/other, subject/object, Jew/Aryan, together with the assumption of a unitary self vital to it.³¹ Instead, according to Fuchs, they dramatize those borderlines as highly uncertain, and identity as holding a simultaneity of conflicting strivings turning it into a space of anxiety, a phrase borrowed from Julia Kristeva who conceptualises that space (which I have referred to as the *chora* earlier) as the epitome of uncertainty and anxiety about the borders between self and other, where

... identities (subject/object) do not exist, or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.³²

³⁰ Anne Fuchs. *A Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. Fuchs' study explores Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene*, 1912 (English title: *America*) and works by Sigmund Freud, Joseph Roth, Albert Drach and Edgar Hilsenrath.

³¹ Unlike modernism, which can be defined as an intellectual and aesthetic practice, Modernity is a political, legislative, administrative and discursive practice whose overriding aim is the production of a rationally designed order. Based on Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991. 3.

³² Kristeva. *Powers of Horror*. 7.

Having explored abjection in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis", written at a time when assimilated German-oriented Jewry had discovered the failure of Jewish assimilation, in terms of national identity, had become an empty notion, it seemed to me that – since identity was in a different way as controversial for Vogel as a Russian-Jewish exile (an *Ostjude*) in Vienna – it was plausible to try and read the logics of abjection in Vogel's novel *Married Life* as well. The question arose whether this methodology would open up dimensions/meanings in those works as yet unexplored in the Jewish and general reception of either.

My research, however, takes the preceding methodology one step further: it shows, or at least aims to show, that the works of acculturated (that is, aiming to live as Germans and as Jews) Jewish writers reveal, alongside the exclusion aspect of abjection, a drive-oriented power for renewal or, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, those works testify to a "power not to represent the world of located subjects but to imagine, create and vary affects, that are not already given: not already tied down to communication and signification in the social order". This is what Deleuze and Guattari call avant-garde writing: writing which does not add another work to the great tradition (naturalised ways of dramatizing Jewish identity), but disrupts and dislocates that tradition. This is what happens in what Deleuze and Guattari call minor literature. Minor literature represents nothing but the power to be different. All great literature, according to them, is minor in this sense, as it is the vehicle for the creation of identity rather than the expression of identity.³³ Kristeva's notion of abjection makes the ways that process works psychoanalytically accessible, and how its logics of exclusion and renewal can be read in the text. In contrast to Deleuze and Guattari she calls texts functioning as vehicles for the creation of identity avant-garde literature. I will come back to this term when analysing my texts in chapters 4 to 6.

In summary, I aim to show in this study on Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and David Vogel's *Married Life* that both works, albeit in a different way, qualify as avant-garde literature in the sense of Kristeva: they are literature of the (archaic) Border enabling its contemporary, Jewish audiences to experience abjection and, in doing so, to find possibilities for new Jewish identity-formations not already tied down in the symbolic order. I have given an example of the dynamics of avant-garde literature in that specific sense in the Wasserman example in chapter 1 of this study. Rather than delving into the different theoretical ways in which

³³ This paragraph is based on: Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari*. London: Routledge, 1989. Chapter 5. 102-23; Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005. Chapter 6. 102-22; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986. Chapter One: "Content and Expression". 3-8. Chapter Two: "An Exaggerated Oedipus". 9-15. Chapter Three: "What is Minor Literature?". 16-27.

Kristeva, and Deleuze and Guattari arrive at that curious phenomenon which Kristeva calls abjection, and Deleuze and Guattari de-territorialisation, suffice to say that I was fascinated by the idea that *both* have in common - each from their own theory/research-field - that they register, a domain of affects not already given in the symbolic order. Reading those affects through the lens of Kristeva's notion of abjection in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" and David Vogel's *Married Life* is the object of my research in this study.

In the next chapter, I will explore the cultural-historical ambiance in which abjection emerged as a universal phenomenon in the specificity of the lives and times of Kafka and Vogel.

