



Foreign Body

Julia Kristeva; Scott L. Malcomson

Transition, No. 59. (1993), pp. 172-183.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0041-1191%281993%290%3A59%3C172%3AFB%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V>

Transition is currently published by Duke University Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/duke.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FOREIGN BODY

A conversation with Julia Kristeva and Scott L. Malcomson.

At the age of 25, Julia Kristeva emerged full-grown from the cabin of a Bulgarian airplane. It was 1966. Lacan published *Écrits*, Foucault published *The Order of Things*, and Kristeva let herself loose in the candy shop. The next year her articles began appearing in the most prestigious journals and have been ever since.

Roland Barthes reviewed her first book: “She always destroys the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by, the one of which we could be proud.” The atmosphere of those years was evidently both destructive and communitarian, such that an intellectual could at once demolish the preconceptions of her companions and join with them in groups. Both decisions were seen as political. Kristeva was affiliated first with the structuralists and semioticians, then with the avant-gardists at *Tel Quel*, then with Maoists (*Tel Quel* again), and on to Lacanian psychoanalysts. At the same time, she was critiquing all of them and some others besides, notably feminists.

To have had so many loyalties, and been disloyal simultaneously is, if noth-

ing more, a testament to the intellectual vitality of Kristeva and of Paris. There have, however, been some consistent themes in her work. She nearly always proposes some rebellious, fearfully unhinged realm—pre-Oedipal semiotic, maternal, imaginary, chora, foreignness—which exists alongside and with an orderly, closed domain—symbolic, Law of the Father, the nation (or universalism). The two worlds don’t often get along. Kristeva usually sides with the first one, which is not surprising, as she is a foreign, maternal rebel with plenty of imagination.

Strangers to Ourselves, first published in 1989, translated into English in 1991, is a meditation on *l'étranger*, the foreigner/stranger. Its first section is a delirious “Toccatta and Fugue for the Foreigner,” combining autobiographical material with stories gleaned from her psychoanalysts. The rest is a history of the Western notion of foreigner, from Aeschylus to the EEC. The book’s sequel, *Nations Without Nationalism*, will be published this year. In both, Kristeva tries to figure out a way to keep her two



Julia Kristeva

© John Foley

warring worlds, one raw, one cooked, in a happy balance. Wanting neither the cold tyranny of One World universalism nor the isolationist microtyranny of nationalisms, Kristeva is looking for a better cosmopolitanism. Unfortunately, Paris isn't what it used to be, and she's also looking for a new country, as she told me one wintry day in a borrowed apartment overlooking the Hudson River.

Julia Kristeva: I don't feel very comfortable now in France. I feel like a very privileged immigrant, but nevertheless an immigrant. I feel an increasing hos-

tility. So one of the reasons I came is to see whether I can begin a new exile, maybe not in the United States, as my English is not very good, but perhaps in Canada. I had the notion that these countries, maybe because they are countries of immigrants, would be more open. But I don't have the impression that you are much more advanced than we! There is perhaps a history of welcoming immigrants, but in actual fact there's a war here between the ethnic groups, and an intolerance. Of course I could live in a university ghetto. But that isn't what I want. I would like to live in a polyvalent national community. But I don't have

the impression that, in the United States, there is any national community. There are splits, fragmentations. But there is no bridge between the communities. The various newer populations, especially, seem to stay closed within their communities, and that only leads to increased hostility between communities. I haven't really seen anything that ties these communities together.

At the same time, in the presidential campaign I could see the development of

**The nation remains, for
now, the only
communitarian ideology in
which people can find
refuge**

an aggressive nationalism—one that will probably develop further, first of all with regard to other nations. The war with Europe has already commenced over wines. The United States has generally defined itself by war, as a kind of lowest common denominator, whether in the Persian Gulf or in Vietnam.

Scott L. Malcolmson: You've written about the possibility of a "good" or "healthy" national idea. Do you think this is conceivable in the United States?

JK: I don't know. It appears to me that this would be much more difficult in the United States than in Europe. There are such differences, such conflicts between communities here.

It also seems to me that, for the time being at least, politicians here don't interest themselves in the ideas that intellectuals can provide toward this goal of

unity. In Europe we have organizations that do bring intellectuals and specialists together with government to try to address these issues. There is an effort, at once intellectual and political, to address the question, "What is the nation?"

I come from a generation that rejected the nation as an archaism, whether in favor of an egalitarianism, a Third-Worldism, or a belief in the homogenization of the world by virtue of economic or communications changes. One anticipated a unified world in which the nation would be a thing of the past. And perhaps this will still happen in fifty years or a century, but it is clearly not for now, this cosmopolitan or universalist view of humanity. One sees now a reemergence of national wounds and national hatreds. The nation remains, for now, the only communitarian ideology in which people can find refuge.

SLM: Why should one need to seek refuge?

JK: It is an identitarian need that is at once psychological, political, and social.

SLM: But why should it be so strong?

JK: Because the old mirrors of identity are past. The mirrors of identity such as Marxism, feminism, Third-Worldism, or even economic success. Thus one finds the return of this older mirror: regressive, archaic. It is a form of pathology, if you like, but you cannot condemn a pathology. As a psychoanalyst, I can tell you that if someone comes to you and they are sick, you can't just look at them and say, "Look, pal, you're really sick." You have to do something to

help the patient surpass the symptom. That is why I think that the solution lies neither in national fundamentalism nor in a denial of the national. Provisionally, one ought instead to propose an optimal idea of the nation.

The last time France had a reasonably healthy idea of itself was under de Gaulle, who could posit France as a leader among the great. But more recently there have been changes in the equilibrium of the world. France has been, for the last 10 or 15 years, in intensified competition with Germany and the United States, as markets have been opened and France has become less protected. French farmers have found themselves in a competition that has been extremely humiliating. At the same time, there has been a displacement of populations. One has never seen such numbers of Arabs and blacks in France. These populations, these new immigrants, are very different from the Italian, Spanish, or Polish populations of the thirties or fifties, which wanted to integrate themselves and become French. At that time, there was a very positive image of France, connected with the French revolution, such that one might say, "Yes, I am Polish, but my children shall become ministers of France." One might retain various traditions of one's grandmother, but one would be proud to be French.

SLM: Surely it's easier for an Italian in France because of the relative similarity between Italy and France.

JK: Well, yes, as a community it is much closer. They have the same religion—they are Catholic, or in any case Christian. They have a similar cultural heri-

tage—everyone has read Dante, or Descartes. One takes part in the same cultural discourse.

In this new world equilibrium, people coming from Pakistan, Senegal, or the Arab world, for example, want to guard their own religious or cultural customs. It's much less clear than here in the United States. Here there is a kind of enclave—groups without communication. Whereas in France, while there is isolationism, it is less clear. I've seen this with Arab students, who arrive in France secular, then, in order to affirm their Arab identity against French racism, they rediscover their religion.

SLM: Well, if one were as an Arab to read in school about "our ancestors the Gauls," one might well rush to the arms of Islam, however sketchily conceived.

JK: The school curricula are a bit more supple than that these days. Indeed, my son now has quite a bit of difficulty finding much that he can really grasp about the history of *France* in his classes.

As a foreigner, I can be less reserved about defending the values of France

Though the French system is less anti-canon than, say, the MLA. For me, there are exaggerations taking place here that are as unacceptable as rejecting Arab culture. There is certainly no reason to accept Arab culture as a means of rejecting Shakespeare.

I was quite shocked, after a presentation I gave at Columbia University, to be asked why I had spoken of

Montesquieu, given that he's a colonialist and antiwoman. He was certainly Eurocentric, but he was not a person advocating racial violence, and above all he was not antifeminist. And even if he was, that's hardly a reason not to study the positive aspects of his thought. There is a tendency to reject, in the name of cultural pluralism, the good aspects of a tradition.

SLM: Like saying that because Aristotle supported slavery. . . .

JK: Voilà. It's too rigid. And it's this kind of exaggeration, which has been taken up by many people of our generation, which is really like carrying water to the mill of the extreme Right. If you go about saying, "Destroy France. Take down the statues of Joan of Arc. No more champagne or foie gras," then you only further the sense of others that their identity is being menaced. Being a foreigner, I can be less reserved about defending the values of France. And I know from experience how important French traditions—of human rights, of the rights of women—have been for people from Eastern Europe.

SLM: When you were growing up in Sofia, did you associate such values with France alone, or with the West generally?

JK: With the West, but particularly with France, because of the Enlightenment and because of the important role that French women played in the culture of the 18th century. I am a secular spirit; I believe that the realization of the rights of men and women can aid those indi-

viduals who don't have need of religious protections. There is a universalist spirit to the Enlightenment that ought to be recovered.

SLM: There was also an enthusiasm, among many thinkers of the Enlightenment, for the absolutist nation-state as a means to combat, among other things, the power of religion.

JK: That is true, but I don't think that as a whole the Enlightenment was enthusiastic for the nation-state, much less nationalist. Diderot conceived of power as a kind of carnival. Montesquieu saw the nation as a transitional form on the way to something better. They sought to overcome the dichotomy between "Long live the nation" and "There is no nation," and that struggle is what is most relevant for us today. We need to develop an optimal idea of the nation; the alternative is simply a less-than-optimal nation.

An optimal nation is strong enough to welcome foreigners as transplants or grafts. As a graft, you can enlarge and expand the culture; but you have to respect it, too. We can only be welcomed if those who are doing the welcoming do not feel rejected or humiliated.

SLM: And you have a sense that French culture now is less welcoming? That if you were right now 25 years old and arriving from Bulgaria, you would find less of a welcome than in 1966?

JK: Absolutely. Not only unwelcome but rejected. Partly for economic reasons—there aren't any jobs for new arrivals.

The majority of French people now feel that they can't accept any more immigrants, including intellectuals.

SLM: The majority of French postwar intellectuals of whom one hears over here were not entirely Christian, or not entirely French, broadly speaking. Has their situation become more difficult?

JK: I have the impression, personally, that it's more difficult, that there is a rejection. The people you are thinking of came to prominence in the late sixties—the period covered in my novel *The Samurai*—when France was relatively more permissive. At that time the French had left Algeria—they were shaken, they were seeking new values—the Right was in retreat, and the progressive population was seeking new ideas, critical ideas, that

The United States is nothing but grafts without a tree

weren't necessarily communist or Marxist. The tendency that we developed, structuralist and psychoanalytic, was above all critical, questioning, corrosive. There was a need for this corrosive outlook in order to renovate culture, in the spirit of a renaissance. And that lasted rather a long time, I think until the eighties. Now there is a very great distrust. Moreover, the mass media does not welcome critical intellectuals, finding that their intellectual discourse is a sort of betrayal of the French genius. I am persuaded also that there is a certain anti-Semitism at work.

SLM: In *Nations Without Nationalism*, you have an article on Charles de Gaulle, in which he appears as something of a "good father" for France. Was this figure of a good father also conducive to the permissive atmosphere of the sixties?

JK: I believe so. Of course I was also among those who cried in the streets, "De Gaulle, that's enough!" etc. But I think he did give to the French an assurance, a self-confidence, that permitted them to be welcoming. He was a sort of "paranoid who succeeded." It is after an idea of Freud's—he said, "I succeed where the paranoid fails." The paranoid fails because he is crazy, whereas Freud, occupying the very same place, succeeds because he is powerful enough to recognize the splitting of his own personality, the combination of weakness and strength, and is able to analyze it. De Gaulle wasn't just a good father, but also a kind of crazy king. He was able to take France out of its postwar depression, out of its fears, and give it a confidence in itself.

In a way this is what we need now—a good image of the nation that will not degenerate into Le Pen and the National Front. Such an image, such self-assurance, is a way to enable the grafting of cultures from outside France. In order for a transplant to succeed, the body itself must be healthy. If I am the body of France and I am not healthy and you send me Julia Kristeva who is a transplant, I will reject her. I don't have the strength to accept her.

I don't know if this is applicable to the United States. France is relatively homogeneous and perhaps capable of

accepting grafts. The United States is nothing but grafts without a tree.

SLM: I don't think there's really a possibility now for a new de Gaulle, since he was able to say not only, "Let's pull together and France will be beautiful once again," but also, "If we pull together, France will become even bigger and greater, larger than itself"—in a sense, expansionist. That notion that a really healthy nation is one that, in some way, is capable of expanding beyond its borders no longer seems viable. I think it is impossible to say that any nation could any longer achieve a "victory," or glory. Yet such an image has long been part of the "healthy nation," not to mention the good, strong father like de Gaulle.

JK: Yes, that is why I think that the nation is a transitional object. In the current situation a nation cannot expand; no nation can aspire to be recognized as the leader or universal model. It is our responsibility as intellectuals to see that the rivalry between nations not descend into fratricidal war. We must try to find intellectual changes, ideological goals, a new common denominator that isn't just a patchwork, a polyphony, a culture of otherness. That's why I don't understand those who ask, like the Spanish friends you once mentioned who fought Franco, "Did my friends die so we could enter the European community?"—because they didn't fight just to sit isolated in Spain either. That, too, is death. The European Community right now is just an economic space, but it is for a new generation to see if it can't become something more. The alternative is to fall back into nations.

SLM: You've spoken of a national sense of humiliation, and of a national "wound." In *Strangers to Ourselves*, you argue that each of us is both a self and a foreigner, or "stranger"—that there is an internal tension, constitutive of identity, which can be conceived of as a sort of unhealable wound. Yet at the national level, you seem to be saying that the wound of split identity is in fact healable.

JK: There is no possibility of a nation without a wound, or of a nation without foreigners. But still one must recognize the wound in order to be healthy, in order to avoid falling into the mania of naming scapegoats.

I want to respond in a clinical manner. When you have a depressed person, the first thing you do is reassure him or her. You can't begin by attacking the wound. If you begin immediately by attacking the wound, the person will collapse. At first it is crucial that the person should have confidence in you, and in herself. Therefore a narcissistic reassurance is made. Any cure begins with an assurance, a narcissistic gratification. Then you can dig into things and touch the wound.

But you can't go all at once because you would risk catastrophe. Thus one returns to this idea of a double strategy, of a recognition that will permit one to enter the depths, and then to recognize that we are all "others," that hell is within us, that the foreigner is within us, that we must accept it. But if a worker from a poor neighborhood of Paris, an ex-member of the Communist Party who is now with Le Pen, comes to you and you say to him, "Listen, pal, hell is within you, it's your own fault, these are pro-

found problems, it is your own alterity which is in difficulty”—the guy’s not going to understand anything. Not only won’t he understand anything, but what you’ve said won’t help him at all to overcome his animosity. Thus you have first of all to give him work, to give him favorable economic conditions, to give

**You want French workers
who are unemployed to
accept Arab workers?
Not a chance!**

him a feeling of pride and identity, so that he might be able to dig into things and not attempt to resolve his internal sense of foreignness or strangeness by taking it out on his neighbors. This is something that demands subtlety.

SLM: It isn’t entirely honest, either; but in any event, at what point is it advisable to tell the patient of his illness?

JK: Well, it is most important that your initial reassurance not take the form of helping the patient into a nationalist frenzy. You don’t want the reassurance to take an extremist, *lepeniste* form. That’s why I speak of an optimal idea of the nation. It’s extremely subtle and difficult to do, but I think that if we don’t, we will find ourselves unable to progress in the building of bridges between different communities. I don’t think it’s dishonest; I think it’s the only way of moving forward. Or else you can give sermons in the desert.

You have French workers now who are unemployed, and you want them to accept Arab workers? Not a chance! In

the name of what? In the name of proletarian internationalism? They don’t believe in it. What is the common denominator? All men are brothers. What is the new religion that can bring them all together? It doesn’t exist. Maybe I say this just because I don’t want a religious revival. Some people say that I want to put everyone on the couch. But I know that isn’t possible. Not everyone has the money! Or the desire. It’s a job of education, for the media, for the schools, the politicians. In Europe we have a conception of the political that includes an educative role; it isn’t so robotized as in the United States. There is a rapport between the cultural and political worlds that could still provide a place for this sort of education, which consists, at the same time, of consolidating these ethnic and national identities without hardening them—to enable each person to explore his or her own alterity and foreignness.

SLM: You seem to see this as, to a great extent, a *European* rather than a *national* effort. For European intellectuals, is the task then to find cultural and ideological goals for the European Community?

JK: At least I think so. [Kristeva mentions a program she did for Dutch television on “What is the role of the European novel as a link in the European mentality?” Dostoevsky, Cervantes, Joyce, Voltaire, and Kafka were discussed by five writers, one each from the deceased writers’ countries of origin, with Kristeva as moderator.] Thus we looked at the work of Dostoevsky as an expression of the Russian mentality, but also of the European mentality. And one

saw people who came from different parts of Europe but who found a language that, while not a language of religion, was a language of culture and of spiritual preoccupations—a polyvalent language, and one which could touch many people.

SLM: Were there writers or intellectuals from Morocco or from Turkey?

JK: No, it was on the European Community. There were already plenty of problems with each person speaking his or her own language, with simultaneous translation; it was necessary to do it with one idea, which was “Europe.” And there was some money from the European Community. Though there should

**Me, I can't see giving
Europe's past over to Le
Pen. It's not true to say that
the canon of dead white
men is shit**

be similar programs for the Mediterranean. I think very much that, after some consolidation, a Europe should address the question, “What is going on in the Mediterranean?” And then enlarge the Community into the Maghreb.

SLM: Isn't that a kind of expansionism, or of imperialism?

JK: It shouldn't be, it must not be.

SLM: How might one guard against this possibility?

JK: If you take an Arab writer, you try to bring the particularity of his thought

to the greatest possible number of Europeans, how he sees a tree beneath the sun, sexual relations, their ties to childhood—to transmit the mentalities of such people is our work as intellectuals in the cultural domain. I believe very much in the intellectual's responsibility to give the right of expression to people from different cultures, without hypostasizing the culture of the Occident and without hypostasizing their own cultures. It is very difficult to do; you have to keep in view the two dangers. On the Left, one has always emphasized the danger of colonialism, putting the Third World first. And of course we must continue to do this since they are not as materially favored as we are. Yet it must be done with moderation and not against others, for we must not reinforce the extreme Right. Me, I can't see giving Europe's past into the hands of Le Pen. Chartres, Pascal—they are mine, too. It's not true to say that the canon of dead white men is shit.

I understand Enlightenment universalism in the sense of a mosaic. That's why I cite Montesquieu as an example, for there are others who were more rigid. But Montesquieu speaks of a universalism that transcends the simple fact of the nation.

In Europe there is a whole range of intellectual preoccupations with the foreigner, immigration, the Other—for 15 or 10 years we have worked on these questions at the level of ideas. Perhaps it all comes to nothing; perhaps it should be ridiculed. But it is an effort to avoid reducing the human being to the European Currency Unit.

SLM: The idea that you develop—basing yourself, in *Strangers to Ourselves*,

primarily on Montesquieu—of a heterogeneity that is at once transformative and permanent: Do you see that as growing out of your earlier work on the pre-Oedipal semiotic versus the Law of the Father?

JK: When I was writing I didn't have that in mind. When I write I like to think that I am always creating something new. [Laughter.] But when I look at it I see that there is also continuity. And I see there a permanent obsession! Right now I am doing a course on Proust, which concerns the question of language and sensation. In structuralist theory one doesn't concern oneself with sensations, and I am trying to rehabilitate sensation. And there again I find a dichotomy; I try to rehabilitate that which is repressed—and that's virtually the same process that I went through with the semiotic and the symbolic. So I find again the same pattern in different situations. There is a continuity in my polyphonic personality. [Laughter.]

SLM: Well, I'm very glad there is. I'm wondering about your ideas on the "disturbing strangeness" [*inquiétante étrangeté*, a French translation of the German *Unheimliche*, which is usually rendered, at least in psychoanalytic English, as "the uncanny"]. It is usually the feminine that is considered disturbingly strange, though I wonder, can't the Law of the Father also be strange, and disturbing?

JK: Yes.

SLM: I mean, when I go to another country there are symbolic systems, very strong, which while evidently qualifying

as Law of the Father in their own regions are to me, as the foreigner, a source of strangeness that can be quite disquieting.

JK: The idea that the feminine is disquieting and strange is a Freudian idea, in his text on the uncanny. As for me, I've argued that the feminine is an unrepresentable passion, a rebel passion, that it's something uncanny for men *and* for women. Women are wary of their femininity; they have many difficulties in gaining access to their femininity. Even if feminists say, "We are women!" and give their femininity a virile form, it is very troubling to be in contact and in sympathy with femininity—for men and for women.

SLM: More so for women?

JK: Perhaps more so for women—it's differently difficult, because this encounter with femininity for women is not necessarily eroticized. In the psychoanalytic literature, one finds that a man can encounter the feminine, make it an object of desire, can fetishize it, and therefore can reassure himself. A woman can do that if she is homosexual. If this is not the case, she confronts a duality with an Other that is the same, and it's quite destabilizing. This can throw one back into something of the *psychogique* or the depressive. That's why women have many difficulties in encountering the disturbing strangeness that is the feminine.

As for the father, that is something that interests me very much, and I will try to respond to your question. First of all, in my psychoanalytic experience, whatever the civilization—I have Japanese clients, African, from central Europe—I am convinced that the Law of

the Father is an indispensable condition for the constitution of an identity. It is an anthropological absolute in the current stage of humanity, an absolute for psychic coherence. You have a dyad, mother and child, but you have also the father—not necessarily the genetic father—it could be a grandfather or a professor or a neighbor—but a “third instance,” who plays the role of the symbolic third. If you don’t have that, there’s a strong chance that you will face difficulties in individuation.

The Law of the Father is extremely important. This being said, it can take extremely different forms, some of which can be very disquieting—whether they are extremely tyrannical, authoritarian, inhibiting, which is often the case with our Judeo-Christian traditions, or in other traditions where the function of the father is mixed with a portion of femininity, of bisexuality, of polymorphous sexual experience, which can all be sources of great richness for these cultures but which are often troubling for an

By my intellectual work, I think I’m doing political work

Occidental. The “disturbing strangeness” can also be a strangeness of the father.

What interests me is: What paternal function—the role of the father—can one hope for in our society, in the West? Just as I spoke of an “optimal nation,” I wonder—is there an optimal paternity? From this point of view I’m interested in the figure of the pre-Oedipal father. Because the image of the tyrannical father, the father of the law, is the Oedipal fa-

ther. This father is fundamentally structuring, I should repeat, but it can degenerate into tyranny.

To make up for this, Freud went a little further, though he was rather cautious. . . .

SLM: He was a foreigner. . . .

JK: Yes, he was indeed a foreigner. Yet he spoke of what he called the father of individual prehistory, who is the pre-Oedipal father. The first axis of identification for the child is not yet the law, in all its severity, but the pre-Oedipal father—that is, the father of individual prehistory, who has the characteristics of both parents. He is therefore maternal and paternal, feminine and masculine. This is the figure which religion has proposed as the God of Love. Contrary to what is often thought, in the great religions the God of the Law is also the God of Love.

It is this God who, both in the religious and social fields, must be recovered to try to valorize the function of the father. I meet many young men who are very attracted by the role of paternity—it is an issue, at least in France, “How to be a father?”—but who do not wish to be restricted to being only the father of the law. Who want to recover these latencies that are at once masculine and feminine, but which are above all the domain of love—love for the child and for themselves. I wrote about this at some length in *Tales of Love*, because one of the central points of the crisis of our civilization is the crisis of this image of the father as the father of love. One has experienced authority as oppressive; but, in secular societies, we do not have an image of authority based on love.

SLM: As I understand some of your earlier work, the pre-Oedipal semiotic was, in a sense, the homeland of psychosis, whereas now it sounds as if the pre-Oedipal, that uncanny realm preexisting the father of the law, is not only not psychotic, it is our only hope.

JK: Well, there has been some misinterpretation in the United States of what I was saying at that time. I never felt that the semiotic and the symbolic could be separated. One cannot exist without the other; they are two aspects that are always combined in a sort of dialectic of mutual contradiction. If you isolate one of them then you have psychosis. The semiotic is always dependent on this symbolic surrounding. There is, of course, a psychotic latency in the semiotic if it is split off from the symbolic process. But generally this semiotic is an agency, a motor, an engine that pushes the development of the symbolic—its subversive side, its creative side.

SLM: But presumably there can be a psychosis of the symbolic as well.

JK: Yes, if it is split from the semiotic. For example, we have the paranoid fixation on law and authority without any recognition of desires, fragilities, etc., which is another kind of psychosis.

SLM: In your early writing, when you talk about Mallarmé or Lautréamont, most of the evidence for semiotic-inspired work comes from art; in *Strangers to Ourselves* it seems that the semiotic is making a transition from art into ethics.

JK: I have searched for those means that are most efficacious. And this theoretical work that was developed at first on literature has later been applied in the social field. It was my form of engagement, a form of commitment. And I had the impression that these ideas that were aesthetic or abstract could be applied socially—in effect, a moral engagement, which is parallel to my work as an analyst because I use this type of understanding in effecting a cure. It's an ethical and moral work. Though this doesn't mean I would abandon literature. I mentioned the program on the European novel—literature is not an ivory tower, but rather a means for moral activism in society. I want to displace these linguistic ideas into the moral domain. And perhaps it was also a matter of a certain disengagement from immediate politics. I am not involved in a party or political movement. By my intellectual work, I think that I am doing political work. And politics, for an intellectual, is a moral activity.