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## Kristeva's subject-in-process: From structure to semiotic criticism

As presented in the early work, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Julia Kristeva's "subject-in-process" can be interpreted as a semiotic alternative to older conceptions of the philosophical subject. However, although previous discussions of Kristeva's early work have centered around the break with structuralism, the feminist implications of the early work as well as the application of semiotics to cultural analysis, we require a somewhat different exposition to see how the theory of a "subject-in-process" involves a departure from received notions of subjectivity. This discussion will attempt to demonstrate how Kristeva (i) opposes Fregean logic to Husserlian phenomenology and (ii) adopts a Lacanian view of negativity and exclusion in displacing the traditional philosophical subject, while (iii) employing Hegelian dialectics to introduce a "textual" conception of cultural practices that (iv) allows actual works of art to be used as the material basis for a critical analysis of social reality.

### I. Subjectivity in Husserl and Frege

Kristeva's early work is immediately concerned with the task of clarifying the possible role of phenomenology within the semiotic context. Phenomenology in its 'classical' form evokes a thematic of subjectivity and argues that experience is brought to light through intentional acts of ego-consciousness. Its notion of constitution is based on a conception of the ego that tends to privilege the results of normal functioning, rather on modes of awareness associated with non-intentional mental activity. Hence, while acknowledging that phenomenology provides a source of insight into the importance of constitution to verbal experience, Kristeva challenges the

tendency of 'classical' (Husserlian) phenomenology to identify linguistic research with the operations of the ego as such. The genesis of the ego is more crucial than the issue of how the ego consolidates the space of signification. In Kristeva's account, the genesis of the ego is related to the positioning of the subject, rather than to its phenomenological constitution. While phenomenology suggests that the "speaking subject" can be interrogated and linked to various horizons, Kristeva claims that the conditions that *produce* the subject cannot be examined within the scope of phenomenology (1984: 36).

Kristeva discusses Frege in order to develop an alternative to a phenomenological conception of the speaking subject. The analytical tradition, dominant in Anglo-Saxon countries for nearly a century, has drawn upon the contributions of Frege as an epistemologist, and, more recently, as a philosopher of meaning. Kristeva attempts to establish the internal difference between predication and meaning through a new reading of Frege that replaces the traditional subject with an inherently divided structure: "By straddling these two 'levels,' Frege's *Bedeutung*, in our view, designates, precisely, the break that simultaneously sets up the symbolic thesis and an object; as an externality within judgment, it has a truth value only by virtue of the scission" (53). Thus, rather than attribute the bestowal of meaning to the activity of a philosophical subject, Kristeva examines the structure of judgment from within and identifies the emergence of the Thetic with "the pre-condition for both enunciation and denotation" (53).

Nevertheless, Kristeva does not completely invalidate the oppositional framework in which Frege operates. While citing "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" as a key source, Hans Sluga has argued that "empirical objects as items of acquaintance" should not be posited as the primary concern of Fregean logic (Sluga 1980: 159). Comparisons have been made to the medieval theory of supposition and also to J. S. Mill's distinction between connotation and denotation, but Sluga contends that an originally Kantian background is essential to an understanding of Frege's thought: "My suggestion here is that Frege's distinction is to be found in neither of these sources but that it lies in the Kantian distinction between objects and concepts" (154). According to Kristeva, however, Frege demonstrates how a break occurs within the structure of judgment, instead of foregrounding transcendental unity. This new approach to judgment would allow Kristeva to re-articulate Foucault's "empirical-transcendental doublet" as

