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## ON THE DIALECTICS OF SIGNIFYING PRACTICE

Kay Salleh

This article is a response to both the crisis in Marxism and the collapse of received bourgeois philosophical notions about what constitutes valid knowledge. The response takes the form of a sketch for what might be called a *critical materialist* sociology of knowledge, and, as such, cuts a trajectory across two very fundamental issues: What is it that makes a certain understanding distinctly sociological? And, how is this understanding related to the need for radical action? The inheritance of positivist structuralism with its neutralising assumption of one basis for life and another for science has long dominated both mainstream empirical and many Marxist social analyses, leaving some quarters of the sociological profession in a quandary as to how to theorise the active subject, let alone face the possibility of practice itself.<sup>1</sup> A close reading of Kristeva, along with earlier fragments from Adorno, however, locates the germ of just such a critical materialism which tackles these questions about knowledge and action head on.<sup>2</sup> The move out of this conventional impasse can only be described in a brief and expository way here, but it combines some exciting and promising new developments: a rejection of the principle of linguistic identity, the use of a psychoanalysis to articulate the subject in the ideological medium and a phenomenology of deconstruction based on personal crisis. It gives weight to the existential consciousness of the individual, but more significantly, it broadens the understanding of materialism to include not only external historical conditions but *somatic* factors which activate subjectivity from the *inside* as well. In looking for a criterion which marks the sociological off from other knowledges, it is taken as *a priori* here that sociology is not just an academic discipline, but a normative practice directed against whatever brings about human suffering. What is more, and contrary to standard methodological imperatives, it is argued that this involvement does not cut across the production of valid knowledge but is the very precondition of it. Such a position advances that the only genuinely sociological perception is to be had by those who are personally and immediately lodged within ideological/material conditions that are contradictory and unlivable: those, in other words, whose position in a given historical conjuncture has become marginal to acknowledged institutional formations. The experience of dislocation and pain thus becomes a phenomenological laser; it fractures appearance and the false, commonsense consciousness that rests on it, letting the subject, or subjects if the insight is consensual in character, glimpse essential relations at work behind the ideological facade.

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## Dialectics

The focus of Kristeva's signifying practice is *negativity*, and it is in its treatment of this key dialectical notion that orthodox Marxism, she believes, demonstrates two regressive consequences as social theory; that it loses, in fact, both dialectical and materialist aspects. The extraction of contradiction from the human thought process, and its relocation by Marx in objective macro-historical relations of production external to subjectivity, denies the energy and efficacy of the negative movement. By this conceptual re-orientation, according to Kristeva, the terms *class consciousness* and *class contradiction* become disembodied and meaningless realisms. The emphasis of the early manuscripts on mediation and sensuous practice is lost and dialectical materialism slides into a view of practice without a subject to practise. Only Mao, she notes, redeems this with emphasis on direct personal experience as a necessary component of the authentic materialist engagement.<sup>3</sup>

Kristeva's thesis is set within the current movement led by Derrida in France, which seeks to reconstruct the traditional *metaphysics of presence*.<sup>4</sup> But she gives credit to Barthes for being the first since structuralism to recognise the crucial role of *non-identity* and *contradiction* in confronting the political complicity of language, cultural monotheism, the State, whatever is bound up in a positive Unity, "the Name of the Father", the all pervasive regimental identity principle of western philosophy.<sup>5</sup> The introduction of this transformative negative or second dimension through fracture of the linguistic code is made theoretically possible by the assimilation of psychoanalysis, an acknowledgement of primary process functioning in the body-subject: the language of dream, of crisis, the poetic text. In this state, new significations may be discovered by association across the sensory modalities of sight, sound, and touch, through a logic and syntax that is polymonic, analogical, very different to the static binary models of conventional discourse.

Similarly, critical Marxists of the Frankfurt School urge an examination of this link between identitarian thinking and domination. Adorno claims that "Identity is the primal form of ideology" and Marcuse traces its origin to the formal logic of Aristotle, which, while remaining partly committed to the ancient dialectic, abstracts a conceptual unity from the tension of opposites; sterilises the material content of language and seeks a universal validity for propositional forms. This move towards symbolisation is a move towards cultural instrumentalism and manipulation, later, towards closure and control. But the installation of identity as first fact, forces another fact out of sight: and this is the fact that meaning is always structured in the communication process itself. Every term carries a multiplicity of meanings because what it refers to has facets, implications and effects that cannot be insulated. This potentiality within the concept gives it a transitive meaning beyond mere

reference to a given object; the concept thus contains alternatives which may bypass or undermine the given state. Hence,

When historical content enters into the dialectical concept and determines methodologically its development and function, dialectical thought attains the concreteness which links the structure of thought to that of reality . . . The ontological tension between essence and appearance, between 'is' and 'ought', becomes historical tension, and the 'inner negativity' of the object-world is understood as the work of the historical subject-man in his struggle . . .<sup>6</sup>

Adorno describes this recognition of the constitutive role of the material order in language and vice versa, as the very "hinge of negative dialectics". Its practice in critical theory, and the pursuit of *difference* by Derrida and Kristeva, share a close correspondence. In contrast to the Hegelian dialectic, where all negativity is ultimately reconciled by a positive, the Absolute Idea, Adorno argues that essence perception should be the perception of breaks not identities; it should acknowledge the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing concerned. Kristeva meanwhile urges the "pulverisation" and dissolution of authoritarian idealist dichotomies, linguistic stratifications such as nature and culture, subject and object, as indispensable to a radical discourse; nor is there, she argues, any ". . . single isolable symbolic principle to oppose itself and to assert itself as transcendent law".<sup>7</sup> But neither Adorno nor Kristeva carry this deconstruction as far as Derrida, who would erase all identity, including that of the constituting subject itself. Kristeva's assimilation of Hegel, Husserl and Freud preserves an historically reflexive subject in her work, just as the subject of critical theory is. In Adorno's conceptualisation, subject and object ". . . constitute one another as much as — by virtue of such constitution — they depart from each other". "An ontological moment is needed in so far as ontology will critically strip the subject of its cogently constitutive role without substituting it through the object in a kind of second immediacy."<sup>8</sup> This is the 'indeterminacy' principle at work in social theory. The perpetual shift of perspectives defies totalisation in terms of binary opposition or theoretical reduction to fixed premises: Adorno's negative dialectic and Kristeva's "*polylogue*" reject any arbitrary commitment to first principles such as that displayed by the logocentric systematising philosophies of science; if any domain assumption can be said to inform their practice, it is the notion of non-identity or difference.

### Estrangement

Standard forms of scientific explanation depend on a taken-for-granted conviction that the positive identity of an object is a permanent given,  $A=A$ , and

that it is nonsensical and contradictory to argue otherwise, that A may be equal to not-A. The notion of non-identity rests in part on the Hegelian distinction between essence and appearance. The positives, first facts, givens of perception, are, according to this *critical view*, mere appearances, temporary manifestations, even distortions of a more fundamental essence. The translation of essence or potentiality in to appearance with the movement of history, involves the estrangement of essence through reification. The object, whether commodity or construct, which embodies this estrangement is sensuously cathected by individuals in everyday life and assumed to have a presence, permanence and value independent of its source in the social totality, the multitude of signifying practices which fashioned its apparently immediate form. The truth of the matter, according to Adorno, is the opposite: “. . . the essential laws of society . . . are even more real than the facts in which they appear, the facts which deceive us about them”.<sup>9</sup> And again, “He who wishes to know the truth about life must scrutinise its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses . . . Our perspective on life has passed into ideology.”<sup>10</sup> The sociological task is to penetrate and dissolve this comfortable but illusory reification. The requisite negation uncovers the underlying structural or essential principle which dominates false consciousness in a particular historical period, and which expresses itself *negatively as a positive* in each single aspect of the discursive order. Neither causes *per se*, nor personal meanings in Weber’s sense, are pertinent explanatory tools for this kind of investigation.

Kristeva does not favour the term *essence*, probably due to Barthes’ tendency to use it in its literal, bourgeois ideological sense, where essence denotes *the reality* of the immediate situation; but bourgeois idealism is not inherent to the term, as its negative application in critical theory demonstrates. In place of essence Kristeva refers sometimes to an “immanent causality”, sometimes to an

‘Underlying causality’ — a figure of speech that alludes to the social contradictions that a given society can provisionally gag in order to constitute itself as such. But a figure of speech used to designate that other terrain as well: unconscious, impulsive, trans-verbal, whose eruptions determine not only my speech or my interpersonal relationships, but the complex relations of production and reproduction which we so frequently mistake as dependent on, rather than shaping, the economy.<sup>11</sup>

In both bodies of work a polyvalent dialectical model of social reality is employed as opposed to the simple, specular representation of conventional empiricism. The tracing of isolated causal linear sequences is considered inadequate to comprehension of social processes which are multi-levered and

and always moving ambivalently. Again, neither specifically material nor ideological factors are sought as primary determinants: this antinomy is regarded as yet another artifact of the reifying mode of symbolic production that is the object of investigation in the first place. The *immanent principle* or pure underlying causality is unearthed by means of a painstaking examination of discrepancies between ideology and practice wherever these occur in the social fabric, and, after the model of psychoanalytical interpretation, the vantage points for such observation are ambiguities, fractures, crises, in the brittle texture of daily life. Why should this be so?

### Crisis

For Kristeva, as for Adorno, the power of hurt and defeat to activate social criticism from the quarters where it is most apposite becomes a major epistemological tool, a material one:

. . . there actually is a mental experience – fallible indeed, but immediate – of the essential and inessential, an experience which only the scientific need for order can forcibly talk the subjects out of. Where there is no such experience, knowledge stays unmoved and barren. Its measure is what happens objectively to the subjects as their suffering.<sup>12</sup>

The micro-physics of signification spelled out by Kristeva is thus complemented by the methodology of critical theory. Adorno considers the old debate over the priority of mind or body to be a pre-dialectical concern: the fact is that “all mental events are physical impulses”. Kristeva writes of the bodily deployments of energy, *discharges* and quantitative *investments* which are “logically prior” to linguistic entities and to subjectivity. To paraphrase her: when the fragile equilibrium of consciousness is destroyed by the violent heterogeneity of contradiction, the body returns to a state of *difference*, heavy, wandering, dissociated. In Kristeva’s view, it is this moment of annihilation and decomposition of the sense of subjective unity, anguish and disarray, which gives up to a new productive unity, reaffirms the subject as active *signification in process*.<sup>13</sup> Adorno in turn, asserts that physical pain and negativity provide the motor for dialectical reason: “. . . it is a last epistemological quiver of the somatic element, before that element is totally expelled . . . the unrest that makes knowledge move . . . Hence the convergence of specific materialism with criticism, with social change in practice”.<sup>14</sup>

The logic of this process is developed in Kristeva’s reading of Freud on negation: a reading shaped by her prior acquaintance with Lacan and Husserl. Signification and indeed, judgment, is managed in the body-subject through

the twin drive functions, introjection and projection. The affirmative, identifying moment is essentially introjective. The object is cathected, taken in and satisfies a *lack*. The opposite, negation, is a moment of tension expulsion in relation to an irritant object. This is based on de-cathexis withdrawal of somatic energies, denial and projection. The subject, "signification in process", as she calls it, is seen to be created in just such a moment of negation. It corresponds developmentally to emergence from the Lacanian mirror phase, whereby an infant achieves the ability to recognise presence and absence; self and other; to posit *this* and not *that*. It is thus an act of predication, a *thetic* moment in Husserl's terms, which positions the subject in the social totality. The later facilitation of subjectivity, through language, the symbolic representation of self and other, now allows the individual some degree of control over the environment, in that what is *other* can be fixed or manipulated and what is absent can always be re-presented.

Of the two modes, introjection and projection, the latter provides two options for the resolution of painful significations: the first, displacement, shunts libidinal charges from one symbol to another; the second, condensation, forces energies from several significations together under the one symbol. Signification may also by-pass the discursive order altogether and be expressed in a language of the body, the so-called hysterical symptom being a case in point. The normal expectation for social development is that drives will become fixed or *positivised in identification* with culturally appropriate institutional roles, but even so, there is throughout life a continuing rearrangement of investments and significations. An intensification of this primary process activity is experienced if the individual occupies a conflicted site in the social order, and further, this reorganisation of somatic drives and concomitant symbolic transformations may dislodge the subject as an effective bearer of the discursive reticulation previously identified with. The reaction to incongruities in the social fabric generates displacement in the uneasy consciousness. A new arrangement in the signifying chain, a new predication and repositioning of subjective identity in the ideological/material medium now becomes possible.

The moment of practice puts the subject in relation to, and so in a position of negation of, objects and other subjects in the social milieu, with which it enters into antagonistic or non-antagonistic contradiction. Although it is situated outside the subject, the contradiction within social relations ex-centres the subject, suspends it, and articulates it as a place of transit where opposing tendencies struggle, drives whose moments of *resistance* and theses (the *representamen*) are caught up as much in the affective (familial and loving) relations as in the class struggle.<sup>15</sup>



Suspension is an important notion here. Unlike the phenomenological suspension however, which is a voluntary, cognitive and somewhat artificial exercise, the process described by Kristeva is a *somatic and material* crisis, induced by antagonisms within the individual's conditions of existence. Kristeva describes this state of special apprehension as "the chora", a Platonic term referring to a place that is active in consciousness before "the Unity of the Name" is imposed.<sup>16</sup> It is a receptive matrix where opposing forces, the bodily drives and their ideations, disintegrate and re-constitute themselves. The chora is the very kernel of subjectivity in process, renewed again and again through the multiplicity of cathexes which perpetually organise the relation of signifier and signified. The division, circulation and fusion of energies in crisis, rotates the chora, re-orienting the signifying constellation of the experiencing subject in social space.

### Signification

Adorno likewise speaks of the hermeneutic deployment of concepts in terms of a moving "constellation". "The model for this is the conduct of language . . . where it becomes a form of representation, it will not define its concepts. It lends objectivity to them by the relation into which it puts the concepts, centred about a thing."<sup>17</sup> In semiological terms, meaning emerges from the ensemble, the *systematic* arrangement of *difference* in the signifying chain. Adorno's constellation is at once method of apprehension and critique. It is an interpretive device made up from a complex of shifting perspectives on the problem at hand, a series of partial complexes. The constellation represents not only the multiple determinations at work in any given moment of the social totality, but suggests as well, the fluidity of social time and the necessarily relative and *indeterminate* character of the subject's knowledge of it; for "History enters into the constellation of truth". "The chorismos of without and within is historically qualified . . . Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object."<sup>18</sup> A feature of the foregoing procedure, the attempt to blend both form or technique and content or matter in the one act, is a desire to convey the playful diversity and discontinuity of appearance, the *dialectical reversals* taken by the immanent principle as it is perceived to ramify through each facet of the social totality. Not surprisingly, Adorno and Derrida both share a common ancestor in Nietzsche, and their respective practices, negative dialectics and the *erasure*, each reflect Nietzsche's textual strategy of inversion. What western science has been unable to get at is irony, remarks Kristeva, the moment of tension when the signifier is suspended between two competing senses.<sup>19</sup> Adorno makes frequent resort to *ironic constructions*



in order to express the perverse and dishonest logic of a social process that folds back upon itself; one that is built on denial. Everyday language is *encratic*, to use Barthes' term, heavy with identity and ideologically loaded, and so techniques to crack open and purge such understandings of their historically congealed semantic residues are applied. Sometimes that is achieved by conveying the analysis through the chiasmus, a parry and riposte of entithetical phrases which qualify and refine a given concept. Or again, a particular concept may be applied so that the signifier is forced to move from one sense to another in a deliberately sliding fashion. In this way the tensions between opposed levels of meaning hidden in a term are disclosed and the *subject in process* impelled towards the formation of a more differentiated construct. This is Adorno's *signifying practice*.

What is the status of this exercise? The hermeneutic recovery of the immanent principle is simply an academic version of the spontaneous rearrangement of the signifying chain which Kristeva describes as the root source of political contestation in the conflicted subject. The methodical application of this *unmasking process* in critical theory leads the subject to a dissolution of the illusory commonsense social reality and to the reorganisation of symbolic investments so imperative to a critical practice. Intelligence is here regarded as a moral category, not a neutral instrument, and the sociologist is seen as committed critic and activist.

Adorno pays homage to the ideal fusion of feeling and thought that characterises the marginal sensibility of the oppressed and which leads to their special perception. "The dialectician's duty is thus to help this fool's truth to attain its own reasons, without which it will certainly succumb to the abyss of the sickness implacably dictated by the healthy common sense of the rest."<sup>20</sup> Habermas' insistent linking of emancipation with *rational dialogue* is totally subversive of this insight. With its fetishised break between feeling and thought, it automatically subsumes such communication, however competent, within terms of reference of the dominant discourse. Marcuse in recent debate with Habermas affirms this: revolution must have a *biological and psycho-sexual* basis.<sup>21</sup> He names this act of negativity "the great refusal" and individuals who manifest this catalytic insight, and who validate it consensually through the shared experience of consciousness raising, may become "anticipatory groups". Their immediate life experience is the very stuff a *critical materialism* is made of. For Kristeva this radical potential is to be found in "A jouissance which breaks the symbolic chain, the dominance, the taboo. A marginal speech, with regard to the science, religion and philosophy of the *polis* . . . the means by which

this 'truth' cloaked and hidden by the symbolic order and its companion time, functions . . . <sup>22</sup>

### Polyvalence

Far from proposing a "source" which transcends and operates the social system from outside of it, Kristeva asserts that her "semanalysis" uses a model of historical *over-determination*: the symbolic thesis predicates continuous mediation, *rupture*, and material displacement in the semiotic process. At the same time however, she does point to an "originary crime", inherent in the social contract and hence language itself: the genesis of a common rule, with its prohibition of incest, which has killed "the body's memory" of its polyvalence. Existent linguistic structures suppress all but a small number of the potential semantic and logical combinations *latent* within their basic elements. Kristeva demands the release of this "jouissance", "*la polylogue*", from its hiding place, the chora, the ultimate "centre"; the rediscovery of *multiple logics* in discourse, and the revitalisation of the social in terms of this "anterior future".<sup>23</sup> In its most profound moments signifying practice works *to recover* these possibilities. "A revival of archaic pre-Oedipal modes of operation? A consonance with the very latest methods of logic and psychology?"<sup>24</sup> The dissolution of pure intentionality and evocation of the "body subject" again recalls Nietzsche. However Adorno and Kristeva do not enter entirely into the spirit of the gay science which the French have celebrated so unreservedly in recent years. Derrida would characterise their deviation like this:

Turned toward the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth . . . <sup>25</sup>

For Adorno the so called radical affirmation of play, just like Habermas' will to rational dialogue, remains lodged in a fabricated secondary order of discourse; one that is established in repression and amnesia, the instruments par excellence of social control. The *affirmative act* is not materially grounded in the body as the dialectics of signifying practice is, it cannot locate itself, but offers merely a trivial interruption on the surface of events. More than this, it distracts and subverts the sensuous reaction and negativity which open into the chora bringing the *active*

*constituting subject* into existence. For the immediate conjuncture, only a “melancholy science” has relevance. To ridicule the difference between essence and appearance as Nietzsche does, is to capitulate to the total ideology.

When Adorno discusses Nietzsche’s joyous affirmation of the present, it becomes apparent that for all his erasive dialectics, he, like Kristeva, has never really abandoned the Hegelian anamnesis, the idealist concept of essence as reconciliation; thus “Dialectical reason’s own essence has come to be and will pass, like antagonistic society.”<sup>26</sup> Clearly, it is not possible to focus an exercise in political *deconstruction* unless some ultimate criteria of judgement are *posited*: even Derrida succumbs to this apparent paradox. Where social theory would be critical there is no remove from the finality of the *first postulate, structure of structures, origin* or *essence*. This is not to say that the dialectics of signifying practice fails as a materialism though: if so, then the Marxist resort to one fundamental explanatory principle, albeit economic, fails on the same account. Rather, what Kristeva and Adorno demonstrate is a highly mediated form of materialism; one that undercuts more arbitrary and linear sociological paradigms; an analysis of contradiction which moves across conventional knowledge boundaries; a keen comprehension of the social process through all its moments, somatic, symbolic, and structural.

### Practice

The unique contribution here, hitherto unexplored in relation to critical action, is that *somatic states* actively make and unmake sociability and political identity. Schematically, the thesis, understood as outline for a *critical materialist* sociology of knowledge and practice, can be presented as follows. There exists an *inverse relation* between knowledge and power, but it is not the free-floating condition of the socially unattached intellectual which gives privileged access to the sociological perception. Rather, the ideologically contrived lack experienced by the culturally marginal individual produces an intensification of the introjective phase. The frustration of this moment in turn, the *subjective invalidation* which arises from the encounter with *contradictory* historical significations, moves the subject into the *negative moment* of the primary process, whence a cathectic identification with the social order is dissolved and the complacent fabric of appearances penetrated. Crossed and perplexed, the *subject in process* disengages from the objective material medium that an earlier somatic organisation sustained, and predicates a new relation to the totality. In a system based on the negation and deformation of reason, only a dialectical negation of that negation

gives access to what is true. This *paradigm shift* is the sociological coup *par excellence*, and it is integrally related to the need for radical change. It may, of course, subsequently become a shared experience, as in the case of consciousness raising, and it may be theoretically mediated as well. However, as the recent political emergence of *new marginal groupings* demonstrates, and as Kristeva herself points out, in a time totally absorbed by the logic of the whole, where repressive tolerance in all spheres is the supreme technique of subsumption, a theory of *class consciousness* has proved insufficient.

Furthermore, in practical terms, *individual action* is the only real leverage in the displacement of material entities, it is the ultimate effective source even of a collective political practice. In Adorno's words, individuality is "the energy centre for resistance". But this is not to hypostasise the ego; rather the aim of the critical materialist is "To use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity . . ."27 The subject is *destroyed and made* in the signifier; the subject is but *the place* of intention; but when the subject becomes a reactive field of play for contradictory significations, then a *constituting* subjectivity is realised; that is not, however, a constant and permanent state. Traditionally, the subject of bourgeois right and of dialectical materialism is assumed to participate in the democratic process or class struggle with a consistent identity and status. This theoretically abbreviated notion merely serves the political violence of both ideologies by depriving the subject of the potential to transcend the given. The present conception of subjectivity as signification, permanently forming and reforming itself in collision with a heterogeneous historical order moves beyond this limit.

Earlier attempts, such as Engels' to situate Marxism within a comprehensive materialist framework failed, because these became assimilated to a vulgar positivism which lost touch with the subjective moment of the action-structure nexus: with the signifying capacity of human consciousness, sensuous practice and symbolic exchange. More recently, this tendency has been manifest in the work of Althusser, who presents a mechanical notion of the totality, very much centred in the last analysis by the hidden hand of the economy and comprehending change as global displacement or condensation within institutional structures. The subject becomes a mere bearer of the objective order now, while all such analytical concepts, *subjects, structures, knowledges*, are posited unproblematically as simple *presences*, empirical givens. The collapse of language, including Althusser's own, and the absorption of the subject into the ideological medium, effectively closes off the potential for movement out of that medium: the end result being a

static idealism in theory and a paralysing managerial radicalism in practice.

The epistemological breakthrough provided by psychoanalysis, with its re-establishment of the reflexive link between the somatic material order and the symbolic, is a crucially important corrective here. In addition, it needs to be noted that Freud mapped out the dialectical logic of negation and overdetermination, condensation and displacement at work in the individual psyche. That the cognitive credibility of any ideology is sustained by an *affective infrastructure* had long been recognised in critical theory, but consistent with the Enlightenment emphasis on the natural order, and by extension the body, as inherently regressive, this infrastructure was considered a politically conservative phenomenon. Adorno and Kristeva's new grasp of the active somatic element however, indicates that in the context of social contradiction and a phenomenology of individual crisis, the dialectics of signifying practice may have a liberatory potential: political action, knowledge and even subjectivity itself, is constituted in and through the experience of negation. Precisely because this sort of sociology rejects an identitarian, instrumentalist politics, individual consciousness remains its focus. The aim is not to marshal cadres and collectivities according to some pre-packaged historical formula; *voir pour prévoir, prévoir pour prévenir*, as Comte and Marxist positivists after him would do. A *critical materialism* rests in a conception of action sensitive to the immediate life conditions of the *subject in process*, an approach to knowledge and practice consonant with the insight that *the personal is the political*.<sup>28</sup> Only a spontaneous crystallisation of consciousness like this is guaranteed that a revolutionary movement has matured as an organic response to its historical conditions. Meanwhile, as far as the profession of sociology itself is concerned, the suggestion is that unless it can find a way either to catalyse this marginal sensibility, or to apply its insights without corrupting them in the process, it is of little use, and runs on counter to its proper study.

## NOTES

1. Most articles in the *American Sociological Review* would instantiate this as far as general sociology goes. On the left it is typified by the Althusserian tendency, for example: Barry Hindess, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (Hassocks, Sussex: 1977); Parveen Adams and Jeff Minson, "The Subject of Feminism", *m/f* (1978).
2. Julia Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject", *TLS*, (1973, October 12th); *La Revolution du langage poetique* (Paris, 1977); *About Chinese Women*, trans. A. Burrows (New York, 1977); Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. Jephcott (London, 1969); *Negative Dialectics*,

trans. E. Ashton (London, 1973). I am indebted to Kristeva's encouraging comments during the preparation of the manuscript. *Personal Communication*, Paris, May 5th 1981.

3. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 58, 130.
4. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass, (Chicago, 1978).
5. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The reference is to Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (London, 1974). For a general account of non-identity and contradiction in social theorizing see Salleh, K., "Dialectics, problematics" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, (1983, forthcoming).
6. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, (London, 1972), p. 117; see also his paper "The Concept of Essence", *Negations*, trans. J. Shapiro, (Harmondsworth, 1972).
7. Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
8. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 174, 185.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
10. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
11. Kristeva, "The System and the Speaking Subject", *op. cit.*, p. 1249; *About Chinese Women*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.
12. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.
13. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33, 80, 85.
14. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
15. Translation Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism*, (London, 1977), pp. 146-7. This chapter offers an exposition of Kristeva's 1974 thesis. See also Philip Lewis "Revolutionary Semiotics", *diacritics*, (Fall, 1973).
16. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, p.57.
17. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 162.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
19. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, (London, 1978) contains a commentary on this technique of Adorno's.
20. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
21. Jurgen Habermas, et. al., "Interview with Herbert Marcuse", *Telos*, 38 (1979). Contrast the position of Axel Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation", *Telos*, 38 (1979).
22. Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
23. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 14, 19.
24. Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
25. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, *op. cit.*, p. 292. Kristeva's application of the term *difference* varies from the currently dominant French usage where the essence/appearance distinction is dropped. The discussion in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. D. Bouchard and S. Simon, (Oxford, 1977), pp. 183-187 illustrates the case in point. See also Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak, (Baltimore, 1976), p. 321.
26. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
27. *Ibid.*, p. xx.
28. There is a moving account of this discovery in the context of contemporary feminist/marxist politics in Sheila Rowbotham, et. al., *Beyond the Fragments*, (London, 1979).