

# Engendering the Formula: Engendering a Notion in the Early Kristeva

## Abstract

The present text is focused on the genealogy of one of Julia Kristeva's early notions – the notion of *formula* that appeared first in *Semeiotiké* (1969). The origin of the notion can be traced back to an earlier linguistic theory – that of Sebastian Shaumyan and Polina Soboleva. Kristeva integrated some of Shaumyan-Soboleva's central notions in her essay "L'Engendrement de la formule." She used, the notion of *formula*, in the first place, but also two other concepts that formed the basis for the functioning of the formula, the concepts of *phenotypical* and *genotypical language* that also appear in her later work. The present text claims that Kristeva didn't simply adopt these notions but presented several very important critical remarks. She re-modelled them, endowing them with a new meaning. Thus, we explore the terminological consequences of the transformations introduced by Kristeva, namely replacing *language* in the phrase *phenotypical and genotypical language* with the new concept of *text* and, hence, giving rise to the new terminological couple, *phenotext* and *genotext*.

## Keywords

*formula, phenotext and genotext, Soviet structuralism, Julia Kristeva, the semiotic*

In the work of Julia Kristeva, the notion of *formula* appears only once, in *Semeiotiké* (1969), her first book published in French. However, exploring its genealogy can lead us to the origins of a terminological set that plays a crucial role in Kristeva's *La révolution du langage poétique* (*Revolution in Poetic Language*) (1974). This is the conceptual pair of *genotext* and *phenotext*, which could be read as a sort of precursor of one of Kristeva's seminal terminological inventions, the couple of *the semiotic* and *the symbolic*. Here, we will attempt to trace their origins back to structural linguistics.

## 1. The early work of Julia Kristeva

In her 1969 book *Semeiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* Julia Kristeva developed the framework of her first significant theoretical project – that of *sémanalyse*, a French neologism of Kristeva’s, traceable to the structuralist linguistics of the Copenhagen circle (mainly that of Viggo Brøndal) or to Algirdas Greimas’ research in structural semantics (Greimas 1966, 18–29). However, in Kristeva’s thought, *sémanalyse* has a different meaning. Especially after the introduction of psychoanalytic concepts into her work, it functions as an analog of and counterpart to the notion of psychoanalysis (*psychanalyse*); for this reason, I consider it translatable into English as “semioanalysis.”<sup>1</sup>

Borrowing substantially from structural linguistics, Kristeva’s early project seems to go beyond it by transforming some of its key concepts. *Semeiotiké* is structured as a collection of essays (composed between 1966 and 1969), rather than a systematic monograph, and one might conceive of it as a collection of experimental variations for a new literary theory.

I am going to focus here on the last essay in the book, “L’Engendrement de la formule” (literally: the engenderment of the formula). The essay consists of two main sections: a theoretical introduction and a detailed analysis of Philippe Sollers’ 1966 novel *Nombres* (*Numbers*). The analysis of the novel is proposed as an application of the notions from the theoretical part. However, leaving the analysis aside, I will focus on the four key notions that construct the theoretical framework: 1. *Formula*; 2. *Engendering*; 3. *Genotext* and *phenotext*. The last two terms look to be the most innovative ones, since *formula* is a more or less usual term in mathematical metalanguage. *Engendering* is actually a very specific case, to which we will come back later.

The notions of genotext and phenotext are related to a version of structural linguistics that Kristeva probably first encountered while still in Bulgaria, associated with two Soviet authors, Sebastyan Shaumyan and Polina Soboleva. Let us outline the main traits of their linguistic theory.

<sup>1</sup> Kristeva discussed the project of *sémanalyse* again in a contribution to a collection of studies edited by Greimas and published under the title *Essais de sémiotique poétique* (Kristeva 1972). For a detailed articulation of the relation between psychoanalysis and semioanalysis, see Backés-Clément 1971, 24–29.

## 2. The applicative linguistic model of Sebastian Shaumyan and Polina Soboleva

### 2.1. First appearance of the model

Shaumyan and Soboleva describe their linguistic project as embedded in the framework of structural linguistics, and linked to Noam Chomsky's generative transformational grammar, calling it the *applicational generative model*. Shaumyan and Soboleva presented their work in Sofia, Bulgaria as members of the Soviet delegation to the Fifth International Congress of Slavic Studies, which took place at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia, September 17 – 23, 1963 (when Kristeva was still a student at Sofia University).<sup>2</sup> A more elaborated version was published the same year in Moscow, under the title *Applicational Generative Model and Transformational Calculus as Applied to the Russian Language* (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963).

I intentionally cite the title in English according to the authorized translation given in the English abstract at the end of the book. In Russian, it reads *Апplikативная пораждающая модель и исчисление трансформаций в русском языке* [*Applikativnaya porazhdayushchaya model' i ischisleniye transformatsiy v russkom yazyke*]. There are some telling differences between the original and the authorized translation that will later prove important for Kristeva. We could translate the title more literally as *Applicative Generative Model and Calculus of Transformations in the Russian Language*, as well as *Applicative Engendering Model* etc. We can perceive the line of displacement: from *generative* to *engendering*.

<sup>2</sup> The Fifth Congress of Slavic Studies in Sofia was a very important event. It was a part of the series that started in 1929 with the legendary First Congress in Prague, where the Theses of the Prague Linguistic Circle were presented for the first time. Judging by the number and character of Slavic Studies publications before and after 1963, we see that the Congress was perceived as a major event in the humanities. As early as 1962, two extensive collections of articles dedicated to the Congress were published in the USSR, one at the University of Bashkiria in Ufa and one in Lviv (Lekov 1963a). In March 1963, a brief announcement in the journal *Language and Literature* reported on preparations for the Congress (Lekov 1963b). In May 1963, a couple of months before the Congress, a six-volume edited collection of articles was published at the Faculty of Slavic Studies in Sofia University, under the title *Studies in Slavistics, Dedicated to the Fifth International Congress of Slavic Studies in Sofia* (Lekov et al. 1963, 1–6). Another collection of articles, this time regarding the life and work of the Slovak Slavist P. J. Šafárik (1795–1861), was published in 1962 in Prešov and Bratislava, again dedicated to the upcoming Congress in Sofia (Dosev 1963). An extensive account of the proceedings of the Congress is given in Velchev 1963. Velchev reports that there were more than 1,500 participants and guests from twenty-six countries. However, in the Congress section on “descriptive and applicational linguistics,” Shaumyan and Soboleva are not mentioned, “transformational methods of [linguistic] analysis” being associated only with F. Pap and H. Walter; and we learn that Roman Jakobson delivered a paper on historic prosody in Slavic languages (Velchev 1963, 3–4).

## 2.2. Characteristics of Shaumyan and Soboleva's linguistic model

Shaumyan and Soboleva distinguish two types of models: analytic and generative (or, as we may put it, engendering), defining structural linguistics as “a science of linguistic modelling” (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, 5).<sup>3</sup> The modelling procedure could unfold in two directions: analytic and generative. We could also call them analytic and synthetic models, the second being of a higher rank, possessing the real cognitive and scientific value: “it is precisely generative [пораждающие, porozhdayushchiye – “engendering”] models – being analogs to axiomatic systems – that must possess the explicative power allowing the discovery of the deep connections in the communicative mechanism of language. As for analytical (or recognition) models of language, in theoretical terms they are of subordinate importance and are interesting only as complementary to generative models” (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, 5–6). Thus, we have analytic and synthetic models, the latter of a higher rank, possessing the real cognitive and scientific value.

## 2.3. Definition of the generative model

The applicational generative model is “linked by its very name to the operation of application that occupy the central part in this model” (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, 9). Application, in its turn, is defined as a form of calculus – a mathematical function of two arguments, which establishes a correspondence between two elements and a third (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, 10). Thus, this operation is formalizable. It engenders a formula. Within a system of four defined classes of linguistic objects (substantives, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, perceived as “atoms” of language), the formula of application functions as a set of rules governing two processes. The first process is that of *construction* of complex entities out of elementary ones (atoms), and the second is the *transformation* of elements, of whatever kind, into one another. The formula functions as a machine that generates, according to a number of previously defined rules, all the possible combinations of its variables. Its final aim is to generate discourse and it can be used for the purposes of theoretical cognition of language, as well as for practical tasks such as computer languages, automatic translation, etc.

<sup>3</sup> All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

Although the claim is that the essential use of the generative model is cognitive, we notice that, from a linguistic point of view, the uses are primarily practical. In the attempt to underline the usefulness of their study, the authors admit it in the preface: “the employment of the applicational generative model in the practice of linguistic research might have not only theoretical importance, but prove empirically useful, since this model could be employed for the purposes of mechanical translation, the construction of logico-informational languages, and for other uses of linguistics in the field of cybernetics” (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, 8).

#### **2.4. Shaumyan and Soboleva’s two-level theory – the divergence from Chomsky**

A problem arises here: Does this model actually correspond to the “machine” of natural language? It would only if a couple of premises about the nature of language hold true. These premises were given in the above-discussed book, but they rise to the order of a general philosophy of language. Therefore, we find a more elaborate exposition in Shaumyan’s 1971 book *Philosophical Questions of Theoretical Linguistics* (*Философские вопросы теоретической лингвистики*).

The premises concern the features of a general theory of language. Is a general theory of language possible at all – this is one of the key questions of linguistics. According to Shaumyan, it is possible, and it must be envisioned as a two-level apparatus in the terms of “abstract linguistic modeling.” The apparatus is described in terms analogous with genetics:

The task of abstract linguistic modelling comprises: 1. A reconstruction of the universal semiotic system which we name genotypical language [i.e. language genotype]; 2. Examination of the formal traits of this universal semiotic system; 3. Examination of the transformations of the universal semiotic system into concrete semiotic systems serving as natural languages; as well as the expression of intermediary semiotic systems serving as transitional units between the universal semiotic system and the concrete semiotic systems; 4. A semiotic typology of natural languages according to the types of transformations of the universal system they exhibit [...]; 5. Examination of the rules regulating the functioning of semiotic systems; 6. Explanation of

the transformations that the universal semiotic system undergoes with a view to semiotic rules, and prediction of possible types of semiotic systems. (Shaumyan 1971, 13)

Thus, there are two levels in any semiotic system: the abstract model of a universal semiotic system, which exists virtually, a genotypical language; and the concrete level of a certain natural language (e.g. Russian) that exists empirically, a phenotypical language (a language phenotype). The most interesting question in this regard is of course the one raised by the third point: How does the language genotype transition into a language phenotype, according to what rules, factors, aspects?

In Shaumyan-Soboleva's presentation at the 1963 Sofia Congress (Fig. 1), this process was represented as a system of coding devices moving from genotype to phenotype in an inductive (or even abductive)<sup>4</sup> manner. The two authors claim that this theory is entirely constructivist – it presupposes a maximally simple number of building blocks, and proceeds by examining the rules of their combination, as it carries out two main tasks: 1. to replicate the rules of natural language; 2. to exhaust all possible combinations of the existing building blocks, and their relational terms, even if some combinations wouldn't exist in any language phenotype (Shaumyan & Soboleva 1963, Appendix between pp. 36–37).

In Fig. 1, we can see that on the genotype level, there are “generators” (of signs and of sign complexes), then, in a number of transitional steps, three coding devices that lead to the language phenotype. The production of speech, then, would be just putting the combinatory machine (named language) into action. But how do we put the machine in motion? In what way do the generators generate at all? The very engendering procedure is somehow obscure.

<sup>4</sup> The pragmatist term of abduction is useful although it involves some terminological eclecticism. Abduction describes the generation of method in the course of reasoning, and not beforehand. See, for example, the definition of abduction by Umberto Eco: “Abduction is, therefore, the tentative and hazardous tracing of a system of signification rules which will allow the sign to acquire its meaning” (Eco 1986, 40). Charles Sanders Peirce provides the initial concurrent pragmatist definition of induction and abduction: “In the former case, the reasoning proceeds as though all the objects which have certain characters were known, and this is induction; in the latter case, the inference proceeds as though all the characters requisite to the determination of a certain object or class were known, and this is hypothesis [abduction]” (Peirce 1998, 32).

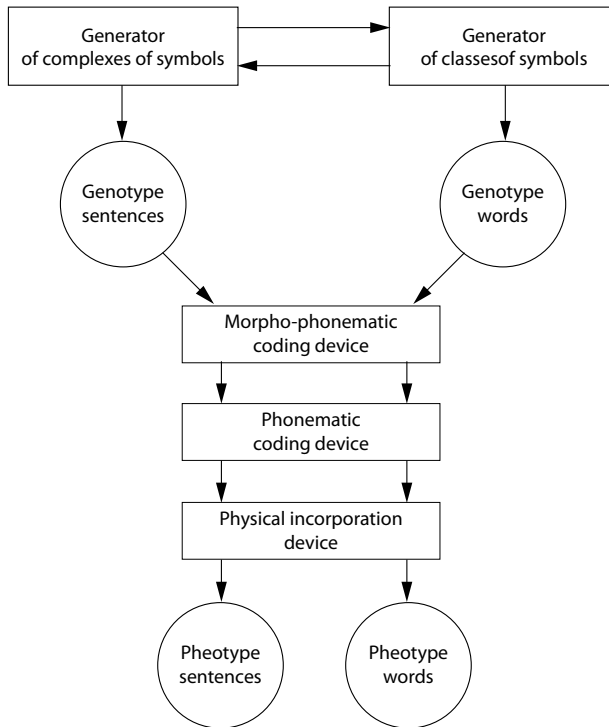


Fig. 1: Language-generating process according to Shaumyan and Soboleva 1963, 34.

### 3. Julia Kristeva's revision of Shaumyan and Soboleva's linguistic model

#### 3.1. Preliminary remarks: Switching the level of analysis

In her essay "Engendering the Formula," Julia Kristeva focuses precisely on these questions (Kristeva 1969, 278–371). Given that "Engendering the Formula" is the last essay in *Semeiotiké*, any interpretation of it must take into account the theoretical perspective of all the previous essays. Thus, we can distinguish two main conceptual procedures Kristeva uses to reshape Shaumyan-Soboleva's theory.

First, referring to both Chomsky's, and Shaumyan-Soboleva's ideas, and borrowing the notions of genotype and phenotype, Kristeva changes the very level of analysis. In the essay's preliminary notes (Kristeva 1969, 278), she indicates the major difference: her analysis is not located on the level of language, but on the level of text because the central object of study of semioanalysis is not language, but text. So, instead of speaking about genotypical and phenotypical language,

she proposes to research the opposition of genotext and phenotext (Kristeva 1969, 280–81). The notion of the text and its understanding is the first to be addressed in Kristeva’s book, in the opening essay “The Text and Its Science” (“Le texte et sa science”) (Kristeva 1969, 7–26).

Second, she introduces a shift regarding the general presupposition about the nature of linguistic and semiotic activity. If the Soviet linguists perceive language as a signifying system, intended for *communication*, Kristeva’s work is centered on the notion of a signifying system at “work” (*travail*, in the Marxist sense, productive work, production). This background is introduced at the very beginning of the book, in the second essay “Semiotics: Critique of Science and/or Critical Science” (“La Sémiotique: Critique de la science et/ou science critique”) (Kristeva 1969, 34–40), as well as in the essay “The Productivity Called Text” (“La productivité dite texte”) (Kristeva 1969, 208–45). It is worth mentioning that, although she here shows interest in a Marxist terminology of production and in various technological metaphors, in a later phase of her work Kristeva shifts from a more mechanical to a more organic conception of text and discourse. We may even suppose that this shift has its origins precisely in the essay on engendering, where growth and giving birth appear to have a higher value than producing and technology.

### 3.2. *Signifiance* and germination: Introducing new parameters

In “Engendering the Formula,” Kristeva goes beyond, one might even say *beneath* the notion of production, precisely in the effort to discover the very logic of production. Production (of sense) might sound well and fine, but just as Shaumyan’s “generators of symbols” remained unclear, production as the element of a larger model (that of text) needs further clarification. And this would be the model of *engendering*, or even *germination*, as Kristeva puts it. This is related to her notion of *signifiance*, a notion that will become central in Kristeva’s later work (Watkin 2003, 94) and eventually lead to the emergence of the distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic (McAfee 2004, 14–18).

The new concept of *signifiance* is intended precisely to designate the actual process of sense production in texts, and is linked to the idea of engendering from the very first page of *Révolution du langage poétique*, where we read that capitalist society represses precisely the *process* that would lead us to an understanding of “that social



mechanism which is the engendering of signifiante” (*l’engendrement de la signifiante*) (Kristeva 1971, 11). Thus, *signifiante* appears as a process of constant *engendering*. What matters in its analysis is that the latter should go beyond signs; thus, the science about it should go beyond semiotics. A comparison could be made to the difference between the linguistics of language and the linguistics of speech or discourse (as found in the projects of Benveniste or Greimas).

In other words, we have Shaumyan’s *generative* linguistics of language as opposed to Kristeva’s *engendering* linguistics of text. Kristeva translates the Russian *порождающий* as “*engendrant*” (“engendering”), and not as “*générateur*” (English “generative”). By stressing the idea of generation and germination, Kristeva establishes a new relationship between the levels of the genotype and the phenotype, considering them as genotext and phenotext. What is this relation and how does it present the model of sense production? Let us analyze the following quotation: “Text is not a linguistic *phenomenon*; in other words, it is not a structured signification which presents itself in a linguistic corpus understood as a flat structure. It is its *engenderment*: an engenderment inscribed within this linguistic ‘phenomenon,’ this *phenotext* that is the printed text, but which is not readable otherwise than by going back vertically across the *genesis*” (Kristeva 1969, 280).<sup>5</sup>

In this passage we already encounter the two central notions – *phenotext* and *genesis* – which will later be replaced by the notion of genotext, but also the relation between them. The phenotext is the “printed text,” that is, the surface of the semiotic process. The text we can read on the page. But reading it does not prove to be so simple. Or rather, we *can* read it, but that wouldn’t mean it is *readable* without a supplement.<sup>6</sup> The object called “text” is not of the order of linguistics, understood as a theory of language, *even though* it is inscribed in its field. Text contains a linguistic component, insofar as it is “a structured signification,” at least to a certain extent. But that is not enough to make it readable (*lisible*). Text must be perceived not as the structured

<sup>5</sup> “Le texte n’est pas un *phénomène* linguistique, autrement dit il n’est pas la signification structurée qui se présente dans un corpus linguistique vu comme une structure plate. Il est son *engendrement* : un engendrement inscrit dans ce « *phénomène* » linguistique, ce *phéno-texte* qu’est le texte imprimé, mais qui n’est lisible que lorsqu’on remonte verticalement à travers la *genèse*” (Kristeva 1969, 280; emphasis in original).

<sup>6</sup> We can point to the conceptual pair of *écriture-lecture*, “writing–reading,” in the essay “Towards a Semiology of the Paragrammes” (Kristeva 1969, 181–82), related to the work of Roland Barthes. For a detailed analysis of these Barthesian notions, see Richaudeau 1970). It must be pointed out that Kristeva’s notion of text itself goes back to the Barthes’s influential work.

signification we find on the printed page, but as the *genesis* (of this very structured signification), that is, as engendering.

The process of reading (*lecture*) is thus envisioned not as the process of decoding a linear chain of signs, but as a *vertical piercing* of the phenomenal surface to the depths of a certain genesis. “What opens up within this vertical is the (linguistic) operation of the generation of the phenotext. We will name this operation ‘genotext,’ doubling thereby the notion of text into phenotext and genotext (surface and depth, signified structure and signifying production)” (Kristeva 1969, 280).<sup>7</sup>

Text thus becomes essentially double. It is neither writeable (capable of being written, of being the object of *écriture*), nor readable (*lisible*, the object of reading) without this doubleness.

### 3.3. Kristeva’s critique of Chomsky’s notion of transformation

Since the term “generative” leads back to Noam Chomsky’s linguistics,<sup>8</sup> Kristeva insists on drawing a firm distinction between her concepts and those of Chomsky. Kristeva describes the difference between her and Chomsky’s use of the word “generation” as follows: the analytic procedures of generative grammar may be prodigiously useful in technical terms, but they in fact remain on the level of the phenomenon, since “Chomsky’s deep structure has as its goal, and its limit, the generation of the *phrase* which in fact it only *represents* as a *linear* abstract structure, non-grammatized and non-lexicalized (‘basic subject-predicate form’), without going back through the different possible steps of structuration anterior to the linear phrasal structure (subject-predicate)” (Kristeva 1969, 281).<sup>9</sup>

In Kristeva’s arguments against Chomsky’s premises, we can also discern a criticism of Shaumyan-Soboleva’s model, to the extent that it commits the same mistakes. First, it equates linguistic activity to logical thinking. Second, it presupposes pre-given entities of thought with accurate correspondences in language. Third, and most important, it

<sup>7</sup> “Ce qui s’ouvre dans cette verticale est l’opération (linguistique) de génération du phéno-texte. Nous appellerons cette opération géno-texte en dédoublant ainsi la notion de texte en phéno-texte et géno-texte (surface et fond, structure signifiée et productivité signifiante)” (Kristeva 1969, 280).

<sup>8</sup> The central text by Chomsky Kristeva refers to here is *Cartesian Linguistics* (1966).

<sup>9</sup> “Autrement dit, la structure profonde de Chomsky a pour but, et limite, de générer la *phrase* qu’elle ne fait que représenter comme une structure abstraite *linéaire* non-grammaticalisée et non-lexicalisée (« basic subject-predicate form »), sans remonter les différentes étapes possibles de structuration antérieures à la structure phrastique linéaire (sujet-prédictat)” (Kristeva 1969, 281; quotation in English in original).

“doesn’t actually generate anything at all” (“ne génère à proprement parler rien du tout” [Kristeva 1969, 282]); it only projects the rules for constructing an English phrase into their general principles. Thus, it remains on the level of the phenomenon, without any opening towards its depths. Whereas “germination defends itself against becoming a generation” (“la germination se défend de devenir une generation” [Kristeva 1969, 285]).

Here, we can see Kristeva’s reasons for replacing “generative” and “generation” with “engendering” and “engenderment,” both being correct translations of the Russian – порождение, порождающий. These words also exist in Bulgarian, in forms which are very similar to the Russian and have a similar double meaning. What needs to be recalled here is the well-known linguistic fact that semantic distribution is different in different languages. It is one of the strongest arguments against the idea of a pre-existing logical order governing all rational languages.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the moment we stop speaking of language and start speaking in terms of text, generative linguistic models (both the applicational and the transformational) are disclosed as remaining on the level of the phenotext. They explain only the generation of phrases but not provide an account of the reasons informing this generation. This is not a genuine transformation; it is a transformation based on *equation* – what stands on the one side must be in a way the same as what stands on the other side.

### 3.4. Kristeva’s alternative

In Kristeva’s interpretation, transformation and engendering are intended to explain not the generation of phrases, but of *a signifying one* (un *signifiant*) in the process of *signifiante*. Now, how is that to be reached? The aim is “the opening up of the phenotext to the genotext” (“l’ouverture du phéno-texte au géno-texte” [Kristeva 1969, 280]). Kristeva defines the procedure that she develops (on the basis of her analysis of Philippe Sollers’ novel *Numbers*) as follows: “to analyze a signifying production in terms of textual production would mean to demonstrate how the process of generation of the signifying system is made manifest in the phenotext” (Kristeva 1969, 281).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, it is also one of the strongest arguments against the very idea of a general linguistics at all.

<sup>11</sup> “[A]nalyser une production signifiante comme textuelle reviendrait à démontrer comment le processus de génération du système signifiant est manifesté dans le phéno-texte” (Kristeva 1969, 281).

This means that the phenotext maintains a very complex and puzzling relation to the genotext – it is not its “product.” We cannot read the phenotext as the “final result” of a process, the product of a certain production. It is something much more challenging – a phenomenal counterpart to the genotext, which discloses the process of building the genotext itself as a signifying system. Thus, if the genotext is the model of a whole signifying system, the phenotext is the “manifestation” of the constitution of this signifying system. This would lead to the conclusion that we are supposed to read (in the sense of “*écriture-lecture*”) the phenotext as a model of the model that produces it. There is an obvious double interdependence here: to read the phenotext means to have knowledge of the signifying system that governs its emergence, but in order to acquire knowledge of that system, we first need to observe the regularities within the phenotext, since the phenotext is the level where “the process of the generation of the signifying system” (*le processus de génération du système signifiant*) (Kristeva 1969, 281) becomes manifest. In other words, phenotext and genotext model each other. The modes of development of this mutual modelling are locally and singularly given – by each and every poetic text. Sollers’ *Numbers* is but one (though very revealing) example among others, such as Mallarmé and Lautréamont, analyzed in other essays in *Semeiotiké*, as well as in Kristeva’s most profoundly conceptual work of literary theory, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

The specific features of the relation between genotext and phenotext presuppose that the analysis of a literary text acquire the characteristics of a singular event. This means that we cannot develop a universal system of interpretation applicable to all texts, since every text discloses *signifiance* as a dynamic process starting each time anew, applying the procedure of recursive modelling.

It should also be noted that recursive or mutual modelling is already present in the second essay of *Semeiotiké*, “Semiotics: Critical Science and/or Critique of Science,” (“La Sémiotique: Critique de la science et/ou science critique”, first published in 1968). Here semiotics is defined as “a formalization, a production of models” (“une formalisation, une production des modèles”) (Kristeva 1969, 29); models themselves are defined as “formal systems whose structure is isomorphic or analogous to the structure of another system (the object of study)” (“de systèmes formels dont la structure est isomorphe ou analogue à la structure d’un autre système (du système étudié)”) (Kristeva 1969, 29). However,

in the final analysis, semiotics appears to be defined not only as a science that produces models, but as a science that constantly revises the very modelling procedures it generates (“la sémiotique est aussi la production de la théorie du modelage qu’elle est”) (Kristeva 1969, 30). By reflexively and recursively remodelling itself, semiotics proves to be “a constant critique that returns to itself, i.e. it is an auto-critique, it criticizes itself” (“une critique constante qui renvoie à elle-même, c’est-à-dire qui s’auto-critique”) (Kristeva 1969, 30). Here it might be added that the poetic text seems to function according to the same model as semiotics – it is its own critique.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, in affirming this, Kristeva doesn’t reject critical activity. Quite the contrary, it appears that the criticism of literary texts is only possible as a metadiscourse, which would reveal the specific model of the intertwining of genotext and phenotext in a particular case (e.g. the novel *Numbers*). A whole section of “Engendering the Formula” is dedicated to this metadiscourse, and in the end, Kristeva announces its name: the discourse of theory (Kristeva 1969, 288–89).

This model of modelling (which would be called “theory”) is only possible within the framework of a certain theoretical presupposition, which we cannot elaborate in detail here. We shall only mention the crucial factor developed in “Engendering the Formula”: the presupposition of the multiplicity of the genotext. In a sense, the genotext must be one, and only one system, that would produce all possible phenotexts. But that is not enough, since the genotext is affirmed as *infinitely multiple* (Kristeva 1969, 283; 293–94). This multiplicity is what allows the structuring of the formula as *a signifying one*, the formulated formula being the phenotext itself. On the other hand, according to the recursive procedure of mutual modelling, the formula discloses the infinite potential of *signifiance*, born of the genotext: “This signifying, the textual signifying, is a *nombrant*” (“Ce signifiant, le signifiant textuel, est un *nombrant*”) (Kristeva 1969, 294). On the peculiar notion of *nombrant* and its links to the Kristeva’s works of the 1970s, the reader is referred to Miglena Nikolchina’s essay “From Praxis to Chora: The Filter of (In)Humanization in Julia Kristeva’s Early Work” (Nikolchina 2024).

The conceptual pair of phenotext and genotext, together with the idea of *signifiance* as a process originating all meaning, reappear

<sup>12</sup> On the problems and possibilities of self-modelling or metamodelling, see Darin Tenev’s “Models of Poetics” (Tenev 2017).

in later Kristeva as a component of the notions of the *semiotic* and the *chora* – that is, on the level of a pre-symbolic, pre-linear and pre-logical maternal origin and basis of linguistic signification and communication. But we can see how the idea of the maternal function of germination, the organic metaphor of engendering, emerges already in this very early text, despite its mathematical and logical overtones.

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