

The Need to Believe and the Archive

INTERVIEW WITH JULIA KRISTEVA

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KEREN MOCK: Thank you for sharing with us your thoughts about the archive in French and Hebrew contexts. Maybe we'll begin our conversation by raising the question of what qualifies as archive material for you.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Archive material obviously includes the notebooks where I've written down my thoughts, my interpretations of various things I've read, drafts, letters, but also photos, films. I've been thinking about all that for some time now, but this has nothing to do with the book that's appearing soon, because *Je me voyage* (I am my journey)¹ contains memoirs in the form of a series of interviews. Samuel Dock, a young psychologist, has read my work thoroughly, he knows it. He wrote a lovely piece for the Huffington Post, and my editor assigned him the task of generating a biography in the form of interviews. So, he asks me questions about my past, my childhood, how I arrived in France, my experience as a woman, a mother, a wife, about writing one or another of my books. He made some inquiries but his was not the job of an archivist or researcher into someone's personal history. His was the work of a reader who asks questions and interprets. As a result, there's no toolbox, no repository of documents that accompanies these memoirs. That being said, I have stored away in my basement—and I'm afraid that it all may have mildewed over time—all the material I just referred to, by that I mean, various notebooks, drafts, different books

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Je me voyage: mémoires, entretiens avec Samuel Dock* (Paris, Fayard, 2016).

especially, but also letters from a number of prominent figures with whom I have corresponded, or am still corresponding, letters to family members, personal letters, etc.

The way I see it is that all the archives will have to be filed according to theme and chronology, taking into account what could be considered personal, and what could be considered as conveying a political or intellectual message. This is the work of the archivist, this is what they do. Something I never realized before. I always thought it would be a matter of entrusting someone with this part of me that makes me what I am. This question of confidence is undoubtedly one of the issues that held me back. I'm not sure that a professional archivist knows how intimate the intellectual work I do can be.

I was discussing in fact the idea to sell my archives to a specialist in the field of manuscripts that happens to be an American, Glenn Horowitz, who made an estimation. He wanted to make the sale and finally it did not happen. The Bibliothèque Nationale de France was also interested in that material.

KEREN MOCK: Your thoughts about your own archive reminded me somehow of this project of inscribing the works of Freud on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. Why is this necessary, in your opinion? Does Freudian psychoanalysis constitute an archive that needs to be registered in the shared cultural memory of humanity?

JULIA KRISTEVA: In the current context, it's indispensable. Listen, I am one of those—perhaps slightly rare—intellectuals who think we are living in exciting times, with the spread of the digital revolution, of rapid means of communicating, of being in touch with each other, of accessing archives across the world. The softening of borders has allowed an extremely resourceful and lively generation of young people to study in various countries and learn multiple languages, and I see in them the early beginnings of a diverse world that might fulfill the conditions of that peaceful Europe of Kant's dreams. And yet at the same time, all of these innovations, which one could elaborate upon, go hand in hand with a return to intolerable and abject archaisms: because everything goes too fast; because population displacements aren't intelligently handled; because new inequalities take root. Paradoxically, this period which holds so much hope is at the same time what I call a "deep nihilistic crisis."

KEREN MOCK: What do you mean by that?

JULIA KRISTEVA: I mean that we are seeing a crisis, if not an outright failure, in our ability to educate, to govern, and to enter into contact with the mental lives of others (that is, the three professions Freud considered impossible: educating, governing, and healing). We are children of the Enlightenment, which cut all ties with religion and decried its abuses, but we have forgotten about the richness of the religious experience and the vistas it opens, for our self-knowledge just as much as for the social contract.

For two centuries, this absence of a theological dimension proved relatively viable and acceptable, notwithstanding the horror of the Holocaust last century, as we thought that this horror could be localized and kept forever in the past. Now, however, with the revival of religion—which ministers to, but also exacerbates, the identity and community crises that arise in our current context of globalization—we

are forced to acknowledge that we do not have any ideals to set against a religious revival in order, not to supplant, but at least to problematize the religious need or suggest other outlets for it. Does secularization lead to an incapacity to conceive of “our values,” to interiorize them, to attend to them as inner experience? That’s why I call this aspect of the existential crisis (in parallel with our economic and political crises) “a deep crisis of nihilism”: it calls into question the consequences of Enlightenment philosophy, because we have failed to construct a humanism capable of continuously reestablishing itself over time in necessarily different historical and critical contexts. Conversely, nihilism has another aspect that appears in the toughening of community identities when they become nationalistic or religious, even fundamentalist. And here nihilism reveals itself as an explosion of the death drive cloaked in religion. We see this very clearly in the case of jihadist fundamentalism, which, all while promising absolute purity and a religious ideal to a confused generation of youth, finally resolves itself into a promise of death conflated with sexual bliss, which culminates in the extermination of those who do not share this ideology or faith. Consequently, jihadist fundamentalism leads to another development, already prophesied to a certain extent by Kant: the accomplishment of radical evil, which is, as you know, the propensity of certain humans to declare other human beings superfluous and exterminate them. Hannah Arendt has shown this logic at work in the “final solution” of the Nazis, who assassinated six million Jews, and homosexuals, and mentally ill persons... This same movement—fortunately not yet on such a scale, though we do not know what the future will hold—is taking place today, whether in Africa with Boko Haram or in the regions of the Middle East that have fallen under the rule of ISIS.²

In this context, in a very regional, localized, perhaps limited way, and based on my experiences as a psychoanalyst, a woman, a mother, and an intellectual, I hold the conviction that, within the framework of the human sciences—which is to say, within that portion of our Enlightenment inheritance which perhaps constitutes its proudest accomplishment—psychoanalysis is best positioned to understand the identity crisis and communal desensitization we presently face, and attend to those who have been, as we say, “radicalized.” Why psychoanalysis?

Freud opened identity up to a permanent inquiry. He offered a vision of mental life at several levels, in the first topic and in the second topic, unconscious/preconscious/conscious, ego/superego/ego ideal, which were refined by British psychoanalysts, in particular the Kleinians, the Winnicottians, and the Bionians. These refinements carry on in France in the work of Lacan—however open to critique some may find this, which is the normal way things go—and then in the psychoanalytic research that, in spite of anything you might hear to the contrary, exists today. Therefore, we have a dynamic conception of psychological identity as a permanent contradiction of the life drive and the death drive, and we have a conception of the *analytic process* which attends to them in this light, not to deny their dangers, but even to accompany the reviviscence of wounds and the capacity to overcome them by transference, and thus permit the formation of a new authentic mental life, an authentic creativity. And so, on the basis of this clinical experience, which is derived from psychoanalysis but shifted

² <http://www.slate.fr/story/110805/comment-peut-on-etre-djihadiste>.

onto new ground rather than simply locked up in a psychoanalyst's office, the writings of Freud allow us to address religious crises and identity crises simultaneously. This demands a great deal of flexibility and creativity from the psychoanalysts themselves. They have to get out of their abstract and hypertechnical circles and come face-to-face with problems that they have observed on a couch but which are also social symptoms. The media, public authorities, and universities need to be able to transmit these ideas and this analysis through ethnological, sociological, and pedagogical research, so that the question of the human person and the question of belief, which is the foundation of all religions in their many differences, become objects of study, inquiry, and interpretation. I think it's illusory to create ecumenical frameworks and then hope we'll all be able to live together in a utopian way just because we're "brothers" and we should. Or, as Kant says, because it's a small world and we ought to realize we have to get ahold of ourselves. This kind of voluntarism isn't enough. We need to be able to enter into the depths of human necessities, of belief and murder, and be able to explain these and transform them into greater possibilities of mutual understanding. That is what analysis does every day in a microscopic frame. But one cannot export this experience and this type of thought in a mechanical way. If we take them as our starting point, I think we can develop new approaches to the political problems inherent in the crises of our time.

KEREN MOCK: You've often spoken of the religious experience, the need to believe and atheism, and certain of your works bear on the Christian world, on the complex figure of Theresa of Avila. You yourself received a religious education. That's where you learned French...

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes, my education started out in a fairly peculiar religious frame. This was in Bulgaria, after the Second World War. The Dominicans ran a preschool with a French curriculum. My parents signed me up and for two years I learned how to say what time it is, La Fontaine fables, how to curtsy in France, and a few Victor Hugo poems, but, strictly speaking, there wasn't really any religious instruction. Very soon the nuns were accused of espionage and expelled from Bulgaria in the early fifties. Their work was taken up by the Alliance française, where I kept on learning French, in a setting that couldn't have been more secular. But my interest in religion stems, perhaps, from the fact that my father had studied theology before getting a degree in medicine, and he never lost his extremely discreet faith, a very personal and rebellious faith which he never tried to impose on us, but which was there in our household. And then my mother, who had completed her studies in biology, a Darwinian, represented the exact opposite camp, and as she was very discreet, I was the one who took up the dispute, and so I violently opposed my father's archaism. It was the basis of his experience: he would go sing in church, and when we were very little he would bring us along with him, my sister and me. He would also have us attend mass, until we refused to go. All while opposing this spiritual dimension, I could feel that it somehow constituted my father's rebellion and that it allowed him to keep a kind of autonomy and freedom in communist Bulgaria. Therefore, from the very beginning the religious sphere was present in an underlying way, an object of curiosity that would deepen later, somehow or other, still during my time in Bulgaria,

because it is impossible to read Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare without considering their biblical roots. Therefore, under my father's influence, I tried to elaborate a kind of secular approach to the codes and scripture, but this remained purely speculative.

KEREN MOCK: You speak of the need to believe, of the necessity of belief.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes. I discovered this paradoxical dimension or, rather, my ability to speak of it by regarding the need to believe as at once universal and problematic, and this was based on my reading of Freud, whose work I didn't know yet when I was in Bulgaria. My father had the first Bulgarian translation of *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis*, but the book was stored at the very top of the bookcase, and no one was supposed to touch it because Freud was considered a decadent author. At the University of Sofia, I had studied philosophy, Hegel especially, and some Husserl, and then in France Philippe Sollers brought me to Lacan's seminars, and I started trying to read Lacan, which led me to immerse myself in Freud. I won't tell you the whole story of my journey toward and within psychoanalysis. After a deep immersion in theory, to which my book *Revolution of Poetic Language* (1974) bears witness, I became involved in the analytic experience, after our return from China. I had seen the impasses of political discourse as such, even beyond the crimes of Stalin's totalitarianism, and I had acquired the conviction that only psychoanalysis could allow me to attempt a certain kind of "engagement": at once a constant personal inquiry and a co-presence with others—a certain usefulness to civilization and its discontents. Freud's texts showed me that *Homo sapiens* is *Homo religiosus*. From *Totem and Taboo* to *Moses and Monotheism*, including *The Future of an Illusion*, he considers religion to be coextensive with humans' capacity to create meaning. It's true that *The Future of an Illusion* shows Freud to be an atheist rebelling against religious abuses and even depicting religion as an atavism set to disappear in the very long term. Nevertheless, one also has to read the work's title, *Future of an Illusion*, which implies that this atavism is here to stay, and in other texts he emphasizes, in passing but in a reasonably profound way, the importance in the development of the ego of this dimension that he will call "the need to believe" (*Glaubige Erfahrung*), at the base of the Ego ideal.

I was captivated by this *investment* (*Besetzung*—which harkens back to the Sanskrit **kred-*, and the Latin *credo*) that belongs to the "father in individual pre-history"; in turn, I became very interested in the work of analysts of my generation who had already made the connection in Freud's works between the *need to believe* and the *desire for knowledge*, which established the place of these two dimensions in the analytic experience. Without the "need to believe," there is no transference. The analysand has to invest in the analyst in order to establish the psychoanalytic link of transference and countertransference. The *desire for knowledge* can only develop on the basis of this reciprocal trust-investment, by which the child (and also the analysand) develops the capacity to call things into question, to problematize, to deconstruct. Which is not the same thing as killing, decapitating, or committing other acts of violence. In short, we could say that when the first part of this duo isn't sufficiently stable, the corrosive capacity of the Ego explodes into release, into destruction of oneself and others, and finally into radical evil.

KEREN MOCK: Freud nevertheless raises doubts about the origins of monotheism, with his hypotheses about Moses, suggesting that Moses was an Egyptian prince.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes, he thinks that monotheism has a moment of genesis and he calls into question the divine (or even accidental) original novelty of the appearance of Judaism. He tries to root it in the history of human societies, as a qualitative leap that had been prepared by various traditions, but which crystallized during a given period of the Egyptian religion, that of Ahkenaton and Atenism.

KEREN MOCK: He also speaks of murder.

JULIA KRISTEVA: The murder of the father is, according to Freud, the fundamental act which constitutes the social pact. In *Totem and Taboo*, Freud writes of how the brothers of the patriarchal horde murder the primal father and transform his arbitrary power into rules: “society” replaces the “horde” (I am simplifying excessively). According to Freud, the Egyptians’ inflexible monotheism (to return to *Moses and Monotheism*) was transformed by the followers of the Mosaic religion into a “flexible reed” in this new land “that flows with milk and honey.” Freud suggests that Judaism, and especially Christianity in all its explicitness, are almost on the point of acknowledging this founding murder of all sacrificial religion and, in particular, of monotheism centered on the *killing of the father*.

KEREN MOCK: But this murder remains hidden, archived.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Freud’s emphasis on parricide, this murder which the killing of Jesus “nearly” confesses, suggests a structural continuity between Judaism and Christianity: on the one hand, we have a permanent presence and problematization of the paternal function (in the Prophets and in the Rabbinic tradition), and on the other hand, we have vitality and the putting to death of the paternal function, (in the kenosis and Christ’s resurrection). We could speak here of a Jewish-Christian duo. However, what about Islam? Freud asks: does Islam enact a “recovery” (*Widergewingung*) of the primal father (*Urvater*)? In the end, he finds that it lacks “the profundity which in the Jewish religion resulted from the killing of its founder.” Even though Islam belongs to the “monotheistic religions,” according to a distinction which is itself subject to debate, one can even wonder—and some theologians do—whether Allah is a true heir of Yahweh or Jesus. Under this interpretation, Allah more closely resembles the god of Aristotle as an unmoved mover “on the edge of the universe.” The dimension of a sacrificed, sacrificing, sacrificable fatherhood might not be present in Islam as it is in Judaism and Christianity? This too would constitute a peculiarity or even a failing of Islam, which would spare itself the problematics of sacrificial violence, even though Isaac and Abraham do exist in Muslim forms. But the outlines of the question of murder would be obscured, and consequently, a whole *interior* dimension of the Muslim believer in his impulses of love, hate, violence, and belonging—the interior dimension in which questioning occurs—would not be as present in the Koran as it is in Judaism and Christianity? The Muslim believer wouldn’t be led to realize the bottomless complexity of his bond, his faith, his *emuna*

or *credo* but rather would submit to a text that is created outside of a humanity which gives itself license neither to interpret it nor to rebel against it. Even though their bonds with Yahweh are indissoluble, Moses immediately begins to ask questions and Job passionately rebels; each of them fulfills his bond only in all the torment and tribulation of its impossibility: an unbearable liberty. All these impulses to problematize belief, even to the point of laughter, tears, all this psychological complexity which fills Judeo-Christianity might be muted or perhaps even closed off in fundamentalist Islam. There wouldn't be an account of the individual experience, of the "I."

We can leave this an open question, and there are many discussions to be had on it. It's true that, indeed, there hasn't been a movement in Islam comparable to the Haskalah or to the Enlightenment, which carried this explicit and fervent questioning of faith all the way to a critical analysis of the religious feeling itself. More brutally, the French Enlightenment pushed toward an outright rejection of the religious dimension in favor of mechanical atheism. And yet one can also claim that this same capacity to raise questions is an integral part of Judaism and Christianity. Cardinal Lustiger used to say that Judaism created the human subject. Well, is there a subject in Islam? Is there a subject if the believer is called upon to submit himself to rules and not to use his feelings or judgment?

EXODUS, EXILE, AND RETURN

KEREN MOCK: In the book *Rêves de Freud* by Stéphane Mosès, to which you wrote the preface, you speak of three key moments in Judaism: exodus, exile, and return,³ which constitute its history.

JULIA KRISTEVA: The originality of Freudian thought—which is strongly rooted in the Enlightenment spirit, in literature, the Greek myths, Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoyevsky—is also imbued with biblical thought, and I proposed a few hypotheses in this regard. I took well-known moments in the history of the Jewish people that are also, for the psychoanalyst, acts that can be interpreted as metaphors for the construction of the ego, as Lustiger's words suggest.

Exodus is the act of leaving the original container. We begin in Egypt; we each have a birthplace, an origin where we are more or less the excluded middle or the included middle. The infant is always the newcomer, the odd one, condemned either to remain stuck in his family or to find some form of originality or, inevitably, both at once. To leave Egypt is exodus. So in the beginning was exodus.

Exile: this is a period of solitude; subjectivity builds itself amid constraint, persecution, frustration.

The return to origins is the capacity to commit this journey to memory, to integrate it and interpret it, in the knowledge that freedom from it can be achieved only by means of the infinite. The analytic experience, terminable and interminable, at once freedom and finitude, turns upon this sense of the infinite—a horizon, a construction-deconstruction, a possible new beginning. Freud certainly drew this

³ Stéphane Mosès, *Rêves de Freud. Six lectures* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

logic, this ethics of the analytic cure, from his biblical heritage. Of course, he also drew it from his self-analysis and from life's hardships that teach us humility of the kind he showed (rather than the pessimism we attribute to him): a humility that arises from the experience of coming face to face with our own biological and intellectual capacities, not to mention communal constraints. Does this state of mind, this meeting of humility and the infinite have a place in modernity? I'm very aware of, or even preoccupied with, the difficulty that psychoanalysis has in trying to make itself heard. I'm not a declinologist: like many others, I've benefited greatly from the opening of borders, memories, customs, all these vertiginous capacities, infinite even, that globalization has brought us. But I also see our mental space shrinking, like our liberties and rights, under the constraining elements of this world—its procedural, entrepreneurial side, which forces us to live in the “how” and not in the “why.” This obstructs and threatens the subjectivity of an exodus, exile, and return, which requires time alone in an inner space. Technology—our focus on the “how”—papers over these rules and stages of existence when a person can just type on a screen and achieve satisfaction because someone delivers a pizza or there's a romantic encounter waiting on the street corner.

This vertical dimension of psychosexual complexity is shrinking where it hasn't collapsed entirely. Mental space is closing itself up, and this shrinkage causes psychosomatic illnesses, depression, vandalism, or, currently, that exaltation paid for in suicide and death that we call jihadism.

For a few decades now, this process has been taking place; I observed it when I diagnosed “the new sicknesses of the soul,” but it has grown worse with the revival of fundamentalist religion.

FRENCH THEORY AND HEBREW

KEREN MOCK: In reading your works, I've noticed that you make frequent reference to Hebrew⁴. For example you use the word *dmut*, the word “stranger” (*ger*), “earth” (*adama*), the word *hava* (Eve), which you've translated as “life.”

JULIA KRISTEVA: Doesn't it mean “life”?

KEREN MOCK: It's a fairly complex word. *Hava* means “life” but it also means “experience.”

JULIA KRISTEVA: For me, life is an experience.

KEREN MOCK: Are they exactly the same thing?

JULIA KRISTEVA: No, but this polysemy is very interesting, and I call attention to it in my biography that's just been published, in the form of interviews with a young psychologist.⁵ Hannah Arendt makes a distinction between *zoé* and *bios*. *Zoé*

⁴ Keren Mock, *Hébreu, du sacré au maternel* (Paris : CNRS Editions, 2016, prefaced by Julia Kristeva and Pierre-Marc de Biasi).

⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Je me voyage* (see footnote 1).

is physiological life. *Bios* is the life-experience in a shared bond; it's a creativity, a bio-graphy. For example, the Greek heroes are in *bios* and not simply in *zoé*. It's a vitality that is more drive based, intellectual, and social. For Hannah Arendt it's essentially political in the sense that it fosters an interchange with others, with the *polis*. In the Bible, the place of the other sex is immediately inscribed in the alterity that constitutes humans. It's Eve who reveals life as a risky experience, dangerous even, because she comes to be *with* Adam, to be his other, all while aspiring to the unknown, the forbidden. In my book on Simone de Beauvoir,⁶ I propose the idea that there can be no thought in the fullest sense if it is not a dialogue between the two sexes. It's like Adam and Eve trying to think together. Not thought as calculation, but thought as shared experience, a path through the impossible.

KEREN MOCK: You're interested primarily in biblical texts but also in the Talmud and the Kabbalah. Your range of reference is quite vast, and you insist on giving the Hebrew in your text, either visually, with images, or through a phonetic transcription.

JULIA KRISTEVA: My interest in the Bible and in Hebrew is purely philosophical. It first began with Freud, of course, but perhaps in a more straightforward way later, when I started to write what is apparently a series—*The Powers of Horror*, *Tales of Love*, and *Black Sun*—on melancholia and abjection⁷.

Tales of Love includes a reading of the Song of Songs. All while remaining in the frame of psychoanalysis, greatly moved by the Freudian vision of the human and of human history, I was trying in turn to write my own experience of the bond of love, of depression and abjection. These personal experiences seemed unbearable to me without a historical perspective, which necessarily lead me to the Greek, Jewish and Christian tradition.

In fact, from the very beginning, my life in France as an intellectual within so-called poststructuralism went hand in hand with my own research which contributed to this new opening. I said that structure alone is not enough to elucidate *meaning* and you have to situate it in history: hence the notion of “dialogism.” Continuing on this path, in writing about love I tried to examine the universals of love by considering the history of the bond of love. As far as Europe is concerned, this history comes to us by way of Greece and the Bible. In tackling the biblical texts, I came to the Song of Songs.

KEREN MOCK: That's a great phrase: “in tackling.”

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes, it's a shock and it's a battle. To understand is always a battle, but that doesn't mean a war or a fight to the death; it means, let's say, a trial of strength. It is also a way to come to terms with otherness. While reading the Song of Songs in that light, I set out to familiarize myself with the many interpretations of the Hebrew text. I would ask myself, “Which one of these is right?” An ocean of interpretations,

⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Beauvoir présente* [Beauvoir presents] (Paris: Fayard, 2016).

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Idem., *Tales of Love* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); Idem., *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

how fascinating... My writing drew inspiration from this wrestling, this seduction, which I explored from the perspective of my own story and its place among global transformations.

Then, I became convinced that the history of Europe (along with the current events of Europe and even of the world, for we are only one of its symptoms) is the history of Greco-Judeo-Christianity. This is fairly different from the standpoint of a believer living in Israel who thinks, probably, that the truth of Hebrew and the Bible is the only truth. For my part, as I said earlier, I think that the biblical text gave humanity a construct of universal value: it gave us our subjectivity. Of course, Greek mythology and philosophy masterfully explore and analyze the complexities of human existence and being, but our consciousness of the inherent unicity of the speaking subject crystallizes only in the experience, narration, and interpretation of exodus, exile, and return, which Christianity renders explicit and extends, alongside and in spite of the conflicts and atrocities of the Jewish/Christian duo. Indeed, the Greco-Judeo-Christian trio is experienced today more as a Jewish and Christian duo, because the Greek dimension has been confined to the arts and letters, as an aesthetic memory: far from today's burning issues, it dwells in a very archaic unconscious, always distressing. We find it in certain behaviors, in culinary habits and daily rituals. Though we might speak of Oedipus or Orestes or Medea, they become comprehensible to us only through the filter of Judeo-Christian subjectivity, or rather what's left of it, in this worldlessness of the hyper-connected Web.

We can also wonder how matters stand for the *person* in China or in the Arab-Muslim world, and consequently how much meaning might or might not be accorded to such notions as *freedom*, *gender equality*, or even the *universality of human rights* itself.

As you know, I am a child of the Enlightenment, but my universalism has nothing absolutist about it; it's closer to a mosaic: the One remains, and at the same time it realizes itself in plural forms. What I mean is that the universality of human rights can lead to a *multiverse*, as certain astrophysicists speak of in cosmology. What do I mean by that? Instead of ONE "universe" there might be A NUMBER of universes possessed of time and space in 5, 6, 8... dimensions! This is unimaginable, but mathematically possible. Well, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, today the task at hand is to "transvalue" the Enlightenment, to call the Enlightenment itself into question when it contents itself with targeting the relentless and at times lethal abuses of religion, when it sets itself against the complexity of this heritage and the potentialities of the need to believe. Voltaire doesn't lead only to the guillotine or *Charlie Hebdo* (Charlie weekly). Voltaire leads to Freud.

It seems to me that this kind of coexistence, not living together but calling ourselves into question together, owes a great deal to Judaism and Christianity. Could this more-or-less unconscious conviction be what led me to become interested in Theresa of Avila, of whom I knew almost nothing? I knew only Lacan's text on feminine *jouissance* with Bernini's sculpture on the cover. I spent ten years reading her, and I learned of her Marrano origins and her marginal status akin to exile—this wasn't the brutal, unbearable pain of the unconverted Jewish families who were forced into exile because they had been expelled, but it was a disturbing experience

to suffer, and her grandfather and her father were each put on trial for secretly practicing Judaism. This experience forced her into an extreme solitude, which she managed to plumb in all its depth, secretive and inventive. It might be said that one doesn't necessarily have to be persecuted to develop these qualities. And yet, at the margins of society, the more one is required to find the courage to be alone, the more insistent is the call to reinvent oneself.

I discovered in Theresa a capacity to transmute pain into the invention of a new kind of freedom. It stays in the church; it shuts her in a convent, but she invents a new form of feminine monasticism. She has this extraordinary phrase: "It is permitted to play games in monasteries!" As she herself was a chess player herself, she asks her daughters to play: "to give checkmate to God." For me this freedom resonates with the words of another, earlier, Rhenish mystic, Meister Eckhart, who said: "I pray God that I may be free of God."⁸ I don't think such a "provocation" is ever expressed so explicitly in Judaism, but the trajectory of Moses, of Job, of David the Psalmist could be summed up in the perpetual questioning of these words, at once tragic and jovial, fit for laughter and tears: "I pray God that I may be free of God." Which does not mean they deny Yahweh. He is there, but so am I; perhaps, of course, next year.... This idea of freedom is simultaneously present in separate ways in both these monotheisms. Especially after the Holocaust, it has become vital to try to reflect upon these variations, these interferences and transmissions which have taken place over the centuries.

THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

KEREN MOCK: To conclude, perhaps, on the need to believe, the archive, and Hebrew: I've had in mind your novel that was just published last year, *L'horloge enchantée* (The enchanted clock),⁹ and I wanted to ask you about a trace that surfaces—sometimes biographically, sometimes theoretically—in several of your texts, a kind of recollection of the moment when the experience of the sacred was written directly on your body by Émile Benveniste.

JULIA KRISTEVA: I wrote a preface to Émile Benveniste's *Dernières leçons* (Last lessons),¹⁰ and I delivered a lecture at the Ecole normale supérieure (ENS), which was later published in the collection of reflections: *Autour d'Émile Benveniste* [About Emile Benveniste]¹¹. Benveniste, the man and the scholar: he was an extremely enigmatic and interesting figure who has not received his due share of honor and renown. While Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss are famous throughout the world, Benveniste is read only in comparatively limited circles of linguists. Perhaps people think the science of linguistics isn't emotional enough, isn't narrative enough or seductive enough, a little too frigid and technical. I discovered his personal story

⁸ Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*, trans. Maurice O'C. Walshe (New York: Crossroad, 2010).

⁹ Julia Kristeva, *L'horloge enchantée* (Paris: Fayard, 2015).

¹⁰ Émile Benveniste, *Dernières leçons: Collège de France, 1968 et 1969* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

¹¹ Julia Kristeva, "La linguistique, l'universel et le 'pauvre linguiste,'" [Linguistics, the Universal and the 'poor linguist'] in: *Autour d'Émile Benveniste: Sur l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 2016), pp. 97-152.

when I was starting to write my preface, and I was stunned. When he was a very young boy, named Ezra, his parents sent him to study at the rabbinical school in Paris, “Le petit séminaire” on rue Vauquelin. He stayed there for seven years. Later there’s no trace of this education in his linguistic works, because he became interested in the Indo-European languages, Iranian in particular. Benveniste wrote magnificent studies in linguistics that not only reestablished the foundations of general linguistics but also hold implications for sociology. For example, there’s his *Dictionary of Indo-European Institutions*, in which he tries to explain the “family,” the “sacred,” the “paternal,” the “maternal,” on the basis of the roots of words and how they advance from the Sanskrit by way of Greek, Latin, English, French, Russian. . .

This took very great finesse, by which he uncovered the specific traces of *subjectivity* and *the social* contained in language and discourse. One finds this throughout his work: in his distinctions between *designation* and *signification*; in his analyses of intentionality, of *interpretance*, of semiotics (which concerns the *word* and other nominal entities) and of semantics (which is based on a grammar that links words in a tense, in a dialogue, in an enunciation related to others); in his insistence upon the subject of *enunciation* and upon *signifiante*; in his insights concerning the place of language in the Freudian unconscious, and later in poetry (posthumous notes on Baudelaire). . . the list goes on . . . in all of his work he broke new ground and issued a challenge to contemporary research. I also detect in his work a sensitivity and a transposition into linguistic theory (“linguistics is universal,” he once wrote) of something he must have felt and reflected upon in his encounter with the Hebrew language and Hebrew scholarship during his years at the seminary.

At the end of his life he suffered a long time from a stroke, from aphasia, isolation, and loneliness. During one of my last visits, with his finger he traced on my chest the word “Theo,” which has always remained enigmatic to me. The neurologists treating him thought it might be only scribbles. I’m convinced that his gesture was a reference to the transcendence that dwelled in him and that he called “*signifiante*” or the “signifying capacity” of language. Why did it surface in Greek “form”? The science of linguistics belongs to Greek onto-theology. The human sciences emerge, as we’ve just said, from the dismantling of the Greco-Christian theological continent. And yet in its written word, its trace, its voiceless and always meaningful wrestling, this *Theo* awakens the Jewish experience of the unspeakable tetragrammaton—at the heart of this Greek, Jewish, and Christian European inheritance.

KEREN MOCK: As if it had been archived somewhere and were resurfacing.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes, resurfacing, and in a form that, according to the interpretation Rabbi Marc Alain Ouaknin gave me, wouldn’t entirely lack precedent as a vision that the body dwells with the transcendental. One finds this vision in certain rabbinic texts as early as the ninth century. For instance, a text of the Babylonian Talmud depicts the sight that a person in prayer in the synagogue has of the Torah hidden

behind its veil: he can see only the scroll's housing, the two shafts which hold the Torah and poke at the veil like breasts.¹²

One can draw a relation between *Shaddai* (which is one of the names of God), and the identical Hebrew word which means "my breasts" in the verse of the Song of Songs that refers to the Beloved's bosom: the Hebrew (like the French, *seins/saints*) gives us a single word for two things, feminine desire and the incorporation of the feminine in the divine message. Benveniste's gesture written on a female chest seems to "translate," in his own way as a linguist, this biblical experience. In his work, Benveniste repeatedly insists that "to signify" constitutes an "internal principle" of language; he insists that meaning does not lie "beyond linguistics" but rather constitutes an internal "transcendence": language's "signifying nature," which does not limit itself to "designating" and "communicating" but rather manages to generate itself and to generate other systems of signs, to create translinguistic *signifiances* ["capacities for signification"]. Does this mean that the capacity for signification *is* "transcendence"?

For Benveniste—who is a child of the Enlightenment—the divine consists in the concrete reality of a human language. This reality is always already double, an "I" and "thou" whose sexual connotations lie beyond the province of linguistics, though Benveniste does glance upon them in an early text, "Eau Virile," a kind of literary autoanalysis which will eventually lead him to the unconscious and, finally, to Baudelaire, whose "sensitive" language "issues from the body." This suggests, if one interprets *signifiance* in this way, that there is an original copresence of the body and of meaning: a copresence which lays the foundations of the speaking being and constitutes in that sense an original conscience, incorporating the feminine in this "transcendental"—or rather, as I like to call it, eminently "birthessential" [*naissancielle*—labor which is the act of signifying. To put it otherwise, language, by its very rules, makes transcendence immanent: language is not only bodily but also immediately and directly a relation with the Other in an enunciation. "To signify" is always already an enunciation between two persons. Therefore, both dialogue and "living in relation" are to be taken as facts of language as well; they can exist only by the fact of language.

I see a kind of trace in Benveniste's work, a latent questioning which never takes the form of a religious exhortation but which translates the mental construct of a scholar molded by secularization and the French university system in this secular Republic that adopted him and in which he lived for seventy years. The debt that he feels towards these institutions does not constrain him, as some have implied. He bears fruit in this tradition, becomes a seminal linguist. His innovations incorporate his foreignness but they take root in the field of linguistics not as an unbearable exclusion or as an inassimilable conflict that one must work to integrate, but rather as universal properties, unrecognized or implicit. He holds this role in common with other so-called secular or agnostic Jews, who do not deny religion but rather translate its questionings into the language of secularization, into the codes of their respective disciplines which they reinvigorate. Far from jeopardizing secularization, they open it to depths it wouldn't have reached without these roots.

¹² Ibid.

KEREN MOCK: Like Freud.

JULIA KRISTEVA: More explicitly in the case of Freud. Unless we recover other texts, Benveniste never spoke of his Judaism. I've been told there are certain unpublished notes in which he makes a few very brief remarks on the Jewish religion. We already have an edition of his notes on Baudelaire, who was very Catholic: could this fervor be what struck Benveniste, the sober linguist? He speaks mostly of the sensibility of the poet and his manner of transposing sensation into language, as if this were the preeminent—or only—way to immanentize the transcendental motion: I-thou; body-meaning.

In *L'horloge enchantée*, the character of Nivi, who's based on me, is a person whose speech is her transcendence.

KEREN MOCK: You were thinking of Hebrew and of your grandmother, perhaps.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Yes, her name was Niva.

KEREN MOCK: *Niv*, in Hebrew, means “dialect.”

JULIA KRISTEVA: I had also read that it means “my speech.” Nivi seeks hers out in French, with an “astronomical clock.” This clock resides in the “holy of holies” of Louis XV's Versailles, which is to say, the King's Cabinet. It's designed to sound the hours, minutes, seconds, and thirds until the year 9999, which is a Kabbalistic number of the apocalypse, evoking not only destruction but also creation. It's probably no coincidence that these thinkers and inventors, whom we call enlightened and who cultivated secret traditions, considered that “there can't be a clock without a clockmaker,” as Voltaire would say. Their deism took a form that flirts a little with the Kabbalistic tradition.

KEREN MOCK: All in all, it interested you to find a Kabbalistic origin. Why?

JULIA KRISTEVA: Because I felt that it's too easy to reduce the Enlightenment tradition to an eradication of transcendence or a struggle against the abuses of oppressive religion. We haven't insisted enough on the search for the infinite that it implies as well, a search that develops as a desire for knowledge coupled with a desire for spiritual understanding. To me, the character of the clockmaker represents this inspiration that expresses itself through science and technology but is lined with a spiritual heritage.

KEREN MOCK: It's at once spiritual and occult at the same time.

JULIA KRISTEVA: For some, this unease lodged itself in occultism. Less so in the case of Voltaire, if at all, and even less so in the case of Émilie du Châtelet, the feminist and mathematician, who stands as a counterpart to the clockmaker in the novel: for her, the infinite took the form of an idealization of Leibniz's thought and its monads which contain infinity. She saw it as an emblem of the happiness and ardor with which she began her love affair with Voltaire, for instance, or, after this ended, her relationship with the poet Saint-Lambert. The latter would become the father of a child she had at forty-two years old, whose delivery led to her death. Emilie is the author of a *Discourse*

on *Happiness*, in which she praises the infinity of illusion—it's almost Winnicottian—and advocates that one not merely accommodate illusion but even take pleasure in it, welcome it as a physical *jouissance* and thereby give it form and act in one's experience of life. Feminism has turned Emilie du Châtelet into an icon of the woman in revolt, the free-spirit, which indeed she was, but one mustn't forget that this behavior, which alternately shocked or delighted, was rooted in a philosophy of the infinite, a transreligious philosophy—one might say—in which she often evokes the divine all while recomposing it in her capacity as a mathematician, a scientist, and a passionate woman: never one without the other. This kind of polyvalent humanity fleetingly took shape at the opening of the Enlightenment, but it became much poorer after the Terror and the reduction of human experience to its political and legal dimensions. Might not today's crises of the modern world stem from this reduction? I think so. It's not a question of returning to the synagogue or to Émilie du Châtelet: we have to come to terms with these traditions, re-experience and reinterpret them, in order to seek out new forms of complexity.

NEW EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL VALUES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

KEREN MOCK: You also address this in your text *Pulsions du temps* (Drives of Time).¹³ You write that there's no modern discourse on motherhood.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Psychoanalytic research has now been focusing more and more on early mother-child relations and the potential extensions of maternal *reliance* in the psychoanalytic experience through transference. We also feel its lack in our social relations. When someone has been deprived of the maternal bond in childhood, where does he or she look to repair this trauma? One can raise these questions in a political light.

The director of the journal *Passages*, Émile Malet, and the psychoanalyst Charles Melman took an initiative that fell in with my own line of questioning: they had the idea of requesting that the works of Freud be inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. For that to happen, UNESCO would need to foster public debate in light of this vision I have been outlining, namely, that Freud's thought allows us to attend in depth to the blocks and inner catastrophes that threaten individuals and communities and spur them towards fundamentalist nihilism.

When my book *Cet incroyable besoin de croire* (This incredible need to believe) was published,¹⁴ we held a conference of this kind at the Mishkenot in Jerusalem on *the need to believe* and its current repercussions, where we had artists, writers, members of clergy, teachers, and, of course, psychoanalysts. We would need to take up these conversations again, but make them even more open to the general public and address matters such as motherhood, education . . .

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Pulsions du temps* (Paris: Fayard, 2013).

¹⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Cet incroyable besoin de croire* (Paris: Bayard, 2007).

KEREN MOCK: Ideology, in particular, once tried to fill this gap left by religion.

JULIA KRISTEVA: The political vision that issued from the Enlightenment relegated religion to the private sphere in the best of cases; in the worst cases, this reduction gave rise to persecutions, as we remember, with people stringing up popes and priests in the Slavic countries under communism. The attempt to eradicate religion belongs to a dangerous utopia: this particular need has to be sublimated, as we've said. In "cutting ties" with religion, the political sphere tried to found itself only on the basis of law and ideology. The current identity and social-contract crises in the contemporary nation state demonstrate that this foundation is not enough. Does our constitution need to be amended? This debate shook the French Republic and its secular frame. Our laws have to punish crimes and incitements to crime that flout or threaten our fundamental principles, but neither penalties, nor ideologies, nor even social values—in their varying degrees of fragility and permanence—can satisfy the demands of personal identity and a languishing need to believe. A commitment to one-on-one mentoring; a reevaluation of parental roles, both maternal and paternal; a continuing education program for the teaching professions: all of these are urgent necessities which, in time, would allow us to face up to the malaise of civilization. The goal is not to deny, or trivialize, or indoctrinate, but rather, as Nietzsche once said, to set "a great question mark in place of the greatest seriousness": in other words, to present the facts of religion and make people think.

KEREN MOCK: To integrate religion: like the psychoanalyst who helps a patient to integrate parts of his experience that were beyond his ego.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Analysis means dissolution. It doesn't mean definitive solution, much less cancellation. Well, doesn't one find this principle in the permanent questioning peculiar to rabbinic discussions, which Saint Augustine also expresses when he says: "I have become a question to myself." Who remembers this?

KEREN MOCK: Likewise, Hillel says, "*Im ein ani li mi li?*": "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?"

JULIA KRISTEVA: There is another phrase of Augustine's: "*In via, in patria,*" "The homeland is the journey." And before him, there's exodus, exile, and return. Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur delivered a speech that moved me deeply, during the Kaddish for Elsa Cayat, the psychoanalyst and columnist at *Charlie Hebdo*. I recounted her words in the preface to the new edition of *The Feminine and the Sacred*, written with Catherine Clément.¹⁵

¹⁵ Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, *The Feminine and the Sacred* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

KEREN MOCK: Perhaps you could read us a passage? There's a very beautiful phrase of Freud's, which I'm sure you know, in his correspondence with Pastor Pfister: "Build the temple with one hand, hold the sword against the destroyer of the temple with the other. I believe that is a reminiscence from Jewish history."

JULIA KRISTEVA: Permanent rebuilding. Here's what Delphine Horvilleur said: [*reads*] "In her final column, Elsa bristled at the abuses of religion: 'Suffering comes from error; error comes from belief, which is to say, everything we've swallowed whole, everything we've taken on faith.' In paying tribute to Elsa at her funeral, Delphine Horvilleur, also a woman, recalled the Talmud: A virulent debate is under way between the great sages. Rabbi Eliezer stands alone against the rest of them, and when he appeals to the heavens, strangely the voice of God rings out and decides in his favor. This, however, does nothing to convince the assembly. The sages, not without insolence, turn and address God himself: 'You gave us a law, a responsibility; it is in our hands now. Stay out of our debates.' Most astonishing of all, at these words God begins to laugh and says tenderly: 'My children have bested me.' Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur draws the conclusion that the ("sacred"?) texts are here to be interpreted, to be digested, sometimes in ways far different from their literal sense. Otherwise, they alienate us, lock us up in suffering, fill us with their abuse. They condemn us."¹⁶

KEREN MOCK: Each generation owes it to itself to do the work of reflection you propose.

JULIA KRISTEVA: Heidegger—whom people never cease to censure, and with good reason—reads Hegel on the subject of *inner experience*, and he begins to reflect: *inner experience* is a "speculative Good Friday." What happens on Good Friday? Christ-God is dead: kenosis; he will rise again. Heidegger specifies that "God is dead" does not mean "God doesn't exist," because (I am summarizing here) God keeps returning in our thoughts as an experience, a dismantling and beginning again. Christianity develops along a similar path: from the very outset it is not simply Greek but mythological (though already interpretative in its echoes of the text of the Torah); then later it becomes theological, even more vivid in its imagery, more aesthetic, more philosophical, edged with catastrophes, abjections and impasses.

"God is dead" means that God can disappear, he can cease to manifest himself to us, but that does not stop us from thinking of him and remaking him constantly, so long as "I" speak, "I" signify, "I" create meaning. Without this vector, which is that of investment or the need to believe, there's no humanity worthy of the name. There are consumers, there are people who have submitted, there are performers, there are workers, but that subjectivity which asserts itself today—and lays claim to the Enlightenment—grows dim, splits apart, and often fails even to exist. Here, I'll take up the words of Cardinal Lustiger I mentioned earlier: Judaism created "the subject in man." And I'll add: let's not forget about women, and let's accept this only if the questioning always burrows deeper and remains in contact with the human and social sciences.

¹⁶ Catherine Clément and Julia Kristeva, *Le féminin et le sacré* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2015), 15.

If we want all emerging nations to participate in the struggle for human rights, it is up to us to express our story with pride and precision and make it known to them, the better to reevaluate it and remake it together in newly fertile forms. This is the lot of our generation, a trying and long-term endeavor.

With this in mind, I hold that Jerusalem has to be a protected site to bear witness to the universality of the Jewish experience and serve as a spur to all those who arrive on the world scene, so that globalization can mean something other than the trivialization of evil and the rise of a hyper-technical transhumanism. A