


Key Contemporary Thinkers

KRISTEVA

s. k. keltner



Kristeva

Published

Jeremy Ahearne, *Michel de Certeau*
Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–1989*
Michael Caesar, *Umberto Eco*
M. J. Cain, *Fodor*
Filipe Carreira da Silva, *G. H. Mead*
Rosemary Cowan, *Cornel West*
George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin*
Maximilian de Gaynesford, *John McDowell*
Reidar Andreas Due, *Deleuze*
Eric Dunning, *Norbert Elias*
Matthew Elton, *Daniel Dennett*
Chris Fleming, *Rene Girard*
Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir*
Andrew Gamble, *Hayek*
Neil Gascoigne, *Richard Rorty*
Nigel Gibson, *Fanon*
Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin*
Karen Green, *Dummett*
Espen Hammer, *Stanley Cavell*
Christina Howells, *Derrida*
Fred Inglis, *Clifford Geertz*
Simon Jarvis, *Adorno*
Sarah Kay, *Zižek*
Valerie Kennedy, *Edward Said*
Chandran Kukathas and Philip Pettit, *Rawls*
Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler*
James McGilvray, *Chomsky*
Lois McNay, *Foucault*
Dermot Moran, *Edmund Husserl*
Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes*
Stephen Morton, *Gayatri Spivak*
Harold W. Noonan, *Frege*
James O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*
William Outhwaite, *Habermas, 2nd Edition*
Kari Palonen, *Quentin Skinner*
John Preston, *Feyerabend*
Chris Rojek, *Stuart Hall*
William Scheuerman, *Morgenthau*
Severin Schroeder, *Wittgenstein*
Susan Sellers, *Hélène Cixous*
Wes Sharrock and Rupert Read, *Kuhn*
David Silverman, *Harvey Sacks*
Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Bauman*
James Smith, *Terry Eagleton*
Nicholas H. Smith, *Charles Taylor*
Felix Stalder, *Manuel Castells*
Geoffrey Stokes, *Popper*
Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer*
James Williams, *Lyotard*
Jonathan Wolff, *Robert Nozick*
Ed Pluth, *Badiou*
Oliver Davis, *Rancière*
Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi*

Kristeva

Thresholds

S. K. Keltner

polity

Copyright © S. K. Keltner 2011

The right of S. K. Keltner to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2011 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3896-6 (hardback)
ISBN-13: 978-0-7456-3897-3 (paperback)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Palatino
by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Group Limited,
Bodmin, Cornwall

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: www.politybooks.com

for Jay and Brando

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction: Thresholds	1
Kristeva's Autobiographical Reflections	3
Chapter Descriptions	11
1 Kristeva's Theory of Meaning and Subjectivity	19
The Semiotic and the Symbolic	21
From the Symbolic to the Semiotic – The Phenomenological Theory of Meaning	24
From the Semiotic to the Symbolic – The Psychoanalytic Theory of Meaning	28
The Dialectic of Semiotic and Symbolic	31
2 Kristeva's Psychoanalytic – Abjection, Love, and Loss	38
Kristeva's Theory of Subjective Diachrony	41
Abjection, Love, and Loss in the Wake of Symbolic Collapse	55
3 The Public Stakes of Intimacy	61
What is Intimacy?	63
Intimacy and the Event of Natality	65
Freud's Involution of Intimacy	68
Abjection – Intimate Suffering/ Public Horror	71
"Ravaged Intimacy" and the Event of Death	74
What's Love Got to Do with It?	79

4	Intimate Revolt, Temporality, and the Society of the Spectacle	82
	The Spectacular Horizon of Kristeva's Concept of Revolt	84
	The Scandal of Timelessness – Kristeva's Phenomenological-Psychoanalytic Concept of Time	87
	In Search of an Experience, or Revolt	92
	Sex and Time – The Interminable Revolt of Female Genius	96
	The Future of Intimate Revolt	103
5	So Many Oedipuses, So Little Time	108
	Reviving Oedipus	110
	Oedipus is Dead, and We Have Killed Him	120
	The Irony of Antigone, Pariah of the Phallic Sacred	125
	Anti-Oedipus – Beyond Sexual Difference, an Incurable Stranger	127
6	Kristeva's Novelistic Approach to Social and Political Life	131
	Homo Spectator	133
	Detective Fiction – A Proper, Specular Inquiry	137
	Inspector Freud; Dr. Delacour	141
	My Own Private Byzantium; or, the Odd Future Anterior of Kristeva's Hero	143
	Conclusion: Politics at the Margin – Kristeva's Wager on the Future of Revolt	149
	<i>Further Reading</i>	155
	<i>Notes</i>	166
	<i>Bibliography</i>	176
	<i>Index</i>	184

Acknowledgments

The present work is indebted to a diverse, yet deeply interrelated, set of communities, philosophical, feminist, and personal, old and new, to which I owe the existence of this book.

I am deeply indebted to several people who, for various reasons, have not been directly involved in the technical writing of this book, but without whom it would not have been written. I owe a special thanks to my mother, Sheryl Allen, who stands at the crossroads of my personal and public life, who taught me to speak, to think, and to love. I am grateful to Anthony Beavers, my first intellectual mentor, whose philosophical spirit, close mentorship, and personal encouragement first shaped my philosophical development. I am indebted to Julia Galbus, my first feminist mentor, for selflessly guiding my initial introduction to feminist thought. I especially thank Tony and Julia for their support and friendship during my earliest years in the academic community.

I owe a profound debt to several people who have stimulated, encouraged, and supported in infinite ways my professional and intellectual development in general and this book in particular. I am indebted to Sara Beardsworth for her intellectual and spiritual generosity. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the fruit of the whole book is indebted to her mentorship, scholarship, and friendship, as one will no doubt note in the endnotes and suggested reading sections for nearly every chapter. Kelly Oliver's generosity is also responsible for this book. I've had the good fortune to experience in concrete and multiple ways Kelly's commitment to inspire, support, and befriend junior scholars. My thanks to Tina Chanter

for pushing me to develop my initial hunches about Kristeva's Oedipus, but also for modeling unparalleled critical rigor and for supporting my philosophical and professional development more generally. I especially thank Robert Bernasconi for his long-standing support and philosophical inspiration. Robert's critical questions and keen insight initially inspired my turn to explicate the phenomenological dimension of Kristeva's thought. I thank Jena Jolissaint for her general irreverence and idealizations as a thinker, an activist, and a friend.

I am greatly indebted to the invitations of several people who provided the opportunities to develop and revise the central insights of the present study, including those thanked above, but also Sean Kirkland, Maria Margaroni, Hugh Silverman, Rochelle Green, and the WIPsters (Women in Philosophy) at Goucher College. The greatest thanks to Kelly Oliver, Ewa Ziarek, my ever patient editor Emma Hutchinson, and Matthew Stewart for reading and commenting on the full manuscript of *Kristeva: Thresholds* during the final months of its development. Their critical insight provided the final push and confidence to finish it. Special thanks to Matthew for preparing the index.

Finally, I am most profoundly indebted to the loves of my life, Jay and Brando, to whom I dedicate this book. – To Jay for listening to my love–hate diatribes on Kristeva for over a decade, for commenting on the various ideas and papers from which this book began, and for supporting me emotionally and intellectually through all of the trials of its development and beyond. – To Brando for teaching me the patience and love of motherhood (which I discovered to be essence of thought and writing) and for returning me to the joyful novelty of the world in all of its risks. They are the real authors of the present work.

Abbreviations

AR	<i>L'avenir d'une révolte</i>
B	"Beauvoir aux risques de la liberté"
BRF	"Beauvoir and the Risks of Freedom"
BS	<i>Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia</i>
C	<i>Crisis of the European Subject</i>
CDN	<i>Contra la depression nationale</i>
D	"Dialogue with Julia Kristeva"
DL	<i>Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art</i>
ENM	<i>Étrangers à nous-mêmes</i>
FeS	<i>Le féminin et le sacré</i>
FGA	<i>Hannah Arendt (volume 1 of Female Genius – Life, Madness, Words)</i>
FGC	<i>Colette (volume 2 of Female Genius – Life, Madness, Words)</i>
FGK	<i>Melanie Klein (volume 3 of Female Genius – Life, Madness, Words)</i>
FS	<i>The Feminine and the Sacred</i>
GFA	<i>Le génie féminin: Hannah Arendt</i>
GFC	<i>Le génie féminin: Colette</i>
GFK	<i>Le génie féminin: Melanie Klein</i>
HA	<i>Histoires d'amour</i>
HP	<i>La haine et le pardon: pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse III</i>
I	'Intimité voilée, intimité violée'
IR	<i>Intimate Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis</i>
JKI	<i>Julia Kristeva Interviews</i>
LI	<i>Le langage, cet inconnu</i>
LU	<i>Language, the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics</i>

M	<i>"Mémoires"</i>
MB	<i>Murder in Byzantium</i>
MBR	<i>Meurtre à Byzance: Roman</i>
MH	<i>"My Memory's Hyperbole"</i>
ND	<i>"'Nous Deux' or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality"</i>
NMA	<i>Les nouvelles maladies de l'âme</i>
NMS	<i>New Maladies of the Soul</i>
NN	<i>Nations without Nationalism</i>
NV	<i>"La Nation et le Verbe"</i>
OMW	<i>The Old Man and the Wolves</i>
P	<i>Possessions</i>
Ps	<i>Possessions (French)</i>
PH	<i>Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection</i>
PdH	<i>Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection</i>
PST	<i>Proust and the Sense of Time</i>
RI	<i>La révolte intime: pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse II</i>
RLP	<i>La révolution du langage poétique</i>
RPL	<i>Revolution in Poetic Language</i>
SeNS	<i>Sens et non-sens de la révolte: pouvoirs et limites de la psychanalyse I</i>
SN	<i>Soleil noir, depression et mélancolie</i>
SNS	<i>The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis</i>
SO	<i>Strangers to Ourselves</i>
TL	<i>Tales of Love</i>
TS	<i>Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature</i>
TSe	<i>Le temps sensible: Proust et l'expérience littéraire</i>
VHL	<i>Le vieil homme et les loups</i>

Introduction: Thresholds

A quick tour through the themes of Julia Kristeva's works reveals an overarching intention to interrogate the personal trials of singular psychic life. Experiences of horror, fear, rejection, crime, love, loss, despair, grief, suffering, violence, alienation, banality, strangeness, foreignness, migrancy, and intimacy, for example, fill the titles and pages of her corpus. Her style of approach may be heard as equally intimate, drawing as she does from her experiences as an analyst, a reader of literature, a writer, a foreigner, a woman, a mother, a daughter. Descriptions of personal experience, autobiographical reflections, the personal stories of her patients, and biographical accounts of philosophers, artists, writers, saints, and psychoanalysts all punctuate Kristeva's critical, as well as her fictional works. Even her descriptions of psychoanalytic structures and dynamics are overwhelmed by the narrative of a personal "I." Kristeva's works are intent on returning her reader to the animating experiences of everyday life, in all of its joys and failures.

Kristeva's characteristic style is undoubtedly one of the aspects of her work that makes her so attractive, but it is also the controversial source of a set of social, historical, and political questions. These questions may be framed around two central themes: the role, status, and significance of the individual and her/his experience, on the one hand, and the role, status, and significance of psychoanalysis, on the other. From the perspective of traditional and contemporary social and political thought, Kristeva's object domain falls outside the proper standards of debate insofar as her focus seems to attend to the private individual at the expense of the

public space. Moreover, Kristeva's reliance on psychoanalytic theory may initially appear as a radical withdrawal from social and political concerns or to blindly support hegemonic structures of power. Importantly, however, such conclusions prematurely delineate the framework of interpretation by restricting meaning to a governing set of inherited philosophical binaries, including matter/form, soma/psyche, affect/word, subject/object, self/other, individual/society, personal history/social history, private/public, and space/time. The "object" of Kristeva's work cannot be located on one side of an opposition. Rather, Kristeva critically occupies their permeable thresholds to expose dynamic processes of subjectivity and meaning resistant to these basic presuppositions.

Likewise, neither can Kristeva's choice of psychoanalysis be settled by a logic isolating psychoanalysis from social history and other discursive systems. Kristeva does not simply adopt a predetermined field of study, nor simply obey the rules of a theoretical approach that would limit her analyses according to its devotees. Psychoanalysis is neither the *sine qua non* of Kristeva's approach, nor accepted as a scientific discourse of metaphysical truth. One of the central arguments of this book is that Kristeva's psychoanalytic must be contextualized within social history and its intersections with other theoretical approaches, including aesthetics and phenomenology. Kristeva's interdisciplinary approach and revaluation of psychoanalysis circumscribes an altogether different dimension of meaning that challenges and transforms the logical oppositions that regulate our understanding of experience, subjectivity, and language. She delineates a subjective-symbolic dimension of meaning that avoids turning one side of an opposition into the mirror image of the other. That is to say, she foregrounds a mode of thinking that refuses any myth of origins. If she privileges psychoanalysis, it is because she understands it to be among the only discourses preoccupied with a dynamic of meaning and subjectivity irreducible to philosophical binaries.

According to Kristeva, and in her own words, "the only concrete universal is the signifying process itself" (PH 67; PdH 82). Kristeva's *concrete universal* establishes a dynamic site of meaning and subjectivity that may be articulated within, but is ultimately resistant to, the fixed oppositions of binary thinking. By focusing on signification as a *dynamic* constitutive of subjectivity and meaning, Kristeva draws upon the inherited oppositions of philosophical thought (e.g., soma/psyche, matter/sign, self/other, subjectivity/sociality), but the processes of meaning production that underlie

them resist both the traditional logic of noncontradiction, on the one hand, and the dialectical logic of reconciliation, on the other. For Kristeva, the signifying process denotes a logic of relation between two poles in which each represents a term of the relation and the movement or process of relating. Relation presupposes separation and vice versus. Kristeva thus often refers to her central object of concern as a *frontier*, a *border*, a *limit*, a *crossroads*, or a *threshold*. It indicates a material process of differentiation and non-differentiation that refuses any unity of subjectivity or meaning and instead thrives on the transitive tensions and passions of concrete life. *Kristeva: Thresholds* follows Kristeva's foregrounding of the signifying process as the concrete universal motivating her development. The central thesis is that the "threshold" clarifies the central thought of Kristeva's work, but more specifically, it offers an account of how her work coheres as social, historical reflection. Two of Kristeva's autobiographical reflections may serve to bring more concrete precision to the complexity of what this book argues is Kristeva's central thought: "My Memory's Hyperbole," originally published in 1983, and "Nous Deux: A History of Intertextuality," originally presented in 2002. Taken together, they provide a good overview to the newcomer to Kristeva's work of the formative experiences (personal, social, and intellectual) influencing her development, as well as an anchor in the central arguments of the present study.

Kristeva's Autobiographical Reflections

In "My Memory's Hyperbole" (1983) – an autobiographical essay appearing in a special issue of the *New York Literary Forum* on "The Female Autograph" (1984), one year after its original publication in *L'Infini*, the journal that replaced *Tel Quel*¹ – Kristeva recounts the formative political, intellectual, and personal circumstances that animated her development from the mid-1960s, when she arrived in Paris, to the early 1980s and the publication of *Powers of Horror* (1980). Kristeva arrived in Paris at the age of 25 to encounter an intellectual climate underwritten by the political mood of 1960s Paris and world politics. Any account of the "intellectual path of this period," she says, "should primarily be an account of change – and for some it was an explosion – of bodies, of discourses, of ways of being" (MH 5; M 40-1). According to Kristeva, a revolution in thought was transforming the centuries old relationship between

the speaking being and language. In *Language, the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics* (1969), she describes this transformation as a new ear in which the “cult of Man” was being demystified and replaced by “language” as the primary tool of philosophical and social analysis (LU 4; LI 10). In her autobiographical essay, she characterizes the event in grammatical terms. She says, “[w]hen thought admits its indebtedness to language . . . the speaking being is thrown into the infinite conceived as the power and cunning of the verb” (MH 7; M 42). For Kristeva, the insight into the functioning of language fundamentally alters our assumptions about who and what we are. No longer could subjectivity be understood as a substantive (“Man”) that stood alone, independent of its primary activity, i.e., speaking. Rather, subjectivity would have to be theorized as an activity, event, or process of signification. This insight into the *speaking being* challenged the most seemingly basic metaphysical distinctions – including the distinction of the subject from materiality, others, society, history, language, and so on – and led Kristeva to an analysis of what had hitherto remained obscure to social understanding: “The labyrinths of the *speaking subject* – the microcosm of a complex logic whose effects had only partially surfaced in society – led us directly toward regions that were obscure but crucial, specific but universal, particular but transhistorical, far from society’s policed scenarios” (MH 7; M 42-3). Henceforth, phenomena that had once seemed extraneous to philosophical and social analysis – “modern art, madness, subjective experience, various marginal phenomenal” – made possible “an oblique grappling with ‘the social’ ” (ibid.).

Kristeva’s concern to analyze the social *obliquely* (i.e., through what she takes to be its hidden background, revealed in seemingly extrinsic and superfluous phenomena) helped to shape her more general methodological technique. Whereas for some, she insists, the task was to deconstruct more popular methods of approach (i.e., phenomenology and structuralism) in order to show their hidden metaphysical assumptions, her own task, she claims, was “to ‘dynamize’ the structure by taking into consideration the speaking subject and its unconscious experience on the one hand and, on the other, the pressures of other social structures” (MH 9; M 44). This methodologically unique task persists throughout Kristeva’s oeuvre. For example, in one of her later works, *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt: The Power and Limits of Psychoanalysis* (1996), Kristeva outlines her aim in similar terms, this time emphasizing the implications for philosophical and political claims to universality. She clari-

fies the “source of thought and language” as a double movement between the universal (i.e., the inherited meanings of communal life) and the singularity of personal life. Singularity is inscribed in the universal through the transformation of the ideas, concepts, and frameworks of inherited meanings. Kristeva seeks to reveal the process of meaning production and the speaking being concealed by and within common codes of communication by drawing the latter to its limits. – “‘There is meaning’: this will be my universal. And ‘I’ use the words of the tribe to inscribe my singularity” (SNS 19; SeNS 32-3). Kristeva’s intent to expose the obscure yet formative processes inherent in social, as well as theoretical, structures was simultaneously stimulated by her confrontation with modern literary texts. Her experience, she claims, conditioned her development of a semiotic approach to literature, as well as her eventual turn to psychoanalysis, the latter of which, she claims, is the logical consequence of her initial interrogations (MH 10; M 45). Literature and psychoanalysis subsequently became Kristeva’s privileged sites for examining and exposing the fundamental processes through which meaning and the subject are both made and unmade within specific social-historical contexts.

It is important to note Kristeva’s emphasis on her relationship to the social, cultural, and political context of her work because the autobiographical essay could be received as a confession of her abandonment of politics for a region of concern that is socially and politically irrelevant. The tenor of the Parisian scene in the 1960s and 1970s; world politics and the clash between capitalism and communism; her own nomadic, cosmopolitan status as an Eastern European in France; and her travels with her new Parisian friends from America to China – all eventually led to Kristeva’s revelation of what may seem to the reader of “My Memory’s Hyperbole” to be her own political naivety. Kristeva’s trip to China in particular exposed what she foresaw as the inevitable transformation of the Cultural Revolution into a nationalist and Soviet-socialist variation.² This, she says, marked her “farewell to politics, including feminism,” on the one hand, and “definitively inaugurated” her return to the most intimate of continents, “internal experience,” on the other (MH 19; M 52). If Kristeva became disaffected with the political activism of her youth and decided to devote herself to the intimacy of internal experience, it would be remiss to interpret the meaning of her comment divorced from the essential, animating insight of her memory’s hyperbole. For Kristeva, social and political analysis, action, and discourse must be understood against the

background of its most intimate manifestations – love, hate, violence, conflict, despair, madness, alienation, etc. – and vice versus. To dichotomize and exclude subjective experience, as well as their signifiers (i.e., literature and psychoanalysis), from social forces eclipses a key region of social understanding. A more generous evaluation of Kristeva's comment, situated in the context of the essay as a whole, might be that her "farewell to politics, including feminism" marked the consolidation of an approach to politics, including feminism (though Kristeva rejects this term), from the perspective of the sphere of concern of concrete experience at the threshold of internal and external forces. For Kristeva, psychoanalysis, as well as the literary text, and its concern for subjective experience exposes the most basic and yet most obscure enigmas of social and historical life.

Kristeva's emphasis in "My Memory's Hyperbole" concerning her object, approach, and relationship to social and political issues remains constant in her more recent autobiographical reflections. In a lecture delivered to Columbia University in 2002, subsequently published by the *The Romanic Review* as "'Nous Deux' or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality" – the essay from which the current book, *Kristeva: Thresholds*, happens to derive its title – Kristeva identifies one of her earliest concepts from the 1960s, "intertextuality," as an exemplary instance of her methodological approach and general concern. Kristeva here defines "intertextuality" as "mostly a way of making *history* go down in us" (ND 8). For Kristeva, the literary text (or any meaningful "text") is not a closed system of self-referential meaning. Rather, its meaning lies in its dependence on other texts or the "several texts within a text" (ibid.). To grasp the meaning of a literary text, it must be put back into its social and historical context, i.e., the other texts constitutive of the intertextual system of which it forms a part. Intertextual analysis is thus a way of introducing diachrony or history to an otherwise seemingly static, synchronic, independent structure of meaning. What is significant about Kristeva's more recent commentary on her early work is her attempt to tie this concept from the 1960s to subsequent concepts and concerns – from her work in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., the subject in process / on trial, abjection, melancholic crisis, migrancy, strangeness) to her more recent work of the 1990s and beyond (e.g., revolt). Kristeva invokes the term "threshold" (Fr. *le seuil*) to indicate "the common point" at which her major concepts converge (ND 9). To signal the complexity of her choice of the term, Kristeva references several figures and traditions of influence: Russian Formalist Mikhail

Bakhtin and the literary tradition, political phenomenologist Hannah Arendt, and psychoanalysis. Immediately following the introduction of the term, she says: "Here I want to remind you of the short episode in the Bakhtin story in which he talks about the '*chronotope du seuil*' [chronotope of the threshold], taken as an emblematic figure for the whole literary tradition. Now, within the psychoanalytical story, the threshold, that in-between zone Hannah Arendt spoke of, is able to render not only a temporal connection or a spatial point of contact, but also a social melting spot, a political openness and most of all a mental plasticity" (ibid.; my emphasis).

Kristeva's first reference recalls Bakhtin's sense of the threshold in the context of what he called "the chronotope of the threshold" – one of the major chronotopes of the literary tradition. According to Bakhtin, a "chronotope" (Gr. *chronos* for time; Gr. *topos* for space/place) is a formal category of literature that represents the inseparability of space (geographical, cultural, material, corporeal) and time (historical, biographical). Bakhtin describes the chronotope thus: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."³ The chronotope is the primary means by which the novel's most abstract elements (ideas, philosophical generalizations, etc.) "take on flesh and blood."⁴ Within the multiple and varied chronotopes of which Bakhtin speaks, the chronotope of the threshold represents a break, a crisis, or a moment of change: "The word 'threshold' itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic, sometimes openly but more often implicitly."⁵

According to Bakhtin, the novels of Fyodor Dostoyevsky offer exemplary representations of the chronotope of the threshold. In the works of Dostoyevsky, staircases, hallways, and corridors, as well as streets and squares are, Bakhtin says, "the main places of action . . . places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man. In this chronotope, time is essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical