

This article was downloaded by: [University of Leeds]

On: 17 May 2015, At: 13:26

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rept20>

Reading Kristeva through the Lens of Edusemiotics: Implications for education

Inna Semetsky^a

^a Institute for Edusemiotic Studies, Melbourne

Published online: 12 May 2015.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Inna Semetsky (2015): Reading Kristeva through the Lens of Edusemiotics: Implications for education, Educational Philosophy and Theory: Incorporating ACCESS, DOI: [10.1080/00131857.2015.1032187](https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1032187)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1032187>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Reading Kristeva through the Lens of Edusemiotics: Implications for education

INNA SEMETSKY

Institute for Edusemiotic Studies, Melbourne

Abstract

There are two focal points to this article. One is to address Julia Kristeva's theoretical corpus in the context of philosophy of education. Kristeva's notion of subject in process problematises education with its habitual emphasis on 'product'. Another is to consider her impact from the perspective of edusemiotics. Edusemiotics is a new direction in educational philosophy and theory, and Kristeva represents one contemporary French intellectual who implicitly inspired the creation, research and development of edusemiotics. The article will briefly address the distinguished features of edusemiotics, the central of which is process ontology in contrast to the old Cartesian paradigm of substance dualism that continues to haunt education. The article will also address the role of presymbolic (or semiotic) dimension in the process of self-formation and, as a follow up, reformulate the concept of lifelong education and teacher training.

Keywords: abjection, educational semiotics, ethics, experience, Kristeva, semanalysis, ontology

Introduction

Education is commonly perceived as exclusively formal, confined to traditional classrooms for children or adults alike, and focusing on rigid measurable objectives, even if under several different guises depending on times and political contexts. The fashionable term lifelong education is reduced to professional training and acquiring technical skills to feed back into contemporary knowledge economy. The dimension of human development that does not end up with finishing school is habitually ignored, and life experience, outside of the walls of formal schooling, is rarely considered educative. Yet it was John Dewey who noticed that if 'education ... is identical with the operation of living a life which is fruitful and ... significant, the ... ultimate value which can be set up is just the process of living itself' (Dewey, 1916–1924, p. 248). As Noddings (2006) notices, the neglect of real-life topics that would have called forth critical and reflective thinking pervades the present system of education.

Teachers and students alike are not given an opportunity to intelligently reflect on their own thought processes and work habits. When situated in life, in experience, critical thinking encompass not only the assessment of formal logical arguments but, importantly, matters of moral import and our real-life choices, decision-making and the range of habitual beliefs. Real events in human culture carry educative potential and should become important topics for education. Such way of thinking and knowing was precisely the mode that in antiquity defined true pedagogy as opposed to mere sophistry. The revaluation of life experience enables self-education through putting into practice the ancient *Know Thyself* principle; even if from time to time, we might remind ourselves that it was precisely the quest for meaning and evaluation of experience as an examined life that cost Socrates his life.

The crisis in education that started with Socrates continues today. Addressing the ambiguous status of ‘crisis’ *per se*, French philosopher, semiotician, and living classic Julia Kristeva asks whether it represents a merely pathological case or, rather, whether crisis serves a creative function of the renewal of our life and thinking. In the specific field of educational theory Kristeva’s thought and her vast body of works remain underexplored even as philosopher of education Lynda Stone, addressing ‘crisis of the educated subject’ (Stone, 2004), has employed some insights from Kristeva arguing for their significance in informing current debates especially with regard to the fixed identity of the subject as a product of education in contrast to the transient subject in process posited by Kristeva. When combined with recent research that resulted in a new direction taken by educational theory under the name edusemiotics (Semetsky & Stables, 2014; Stables & Semetsky, 2015), Kristeva’s philosophy acquires extra significance for education and especially for adult learning and teacher training. This article examines Kristeva’s conceptions of semanalysis, abjection and subject in process in the context of educational semiotics and their implications for practice.

What is Edusemiotics?

Edusemiotics—a hybrid term meaning educational semiotics—was coined by Canadian semiotician and cultural theorist Marcel Danesi who subtitled as such his Foreword to the comprehensive volume *Semiotics Education Experience* (Semetsky, 2010b). Stressing the importance of ‘sculpting a veritable *edusemiotics for the future*’ (Danesi, 2010, p. vii), Danesi commented that ‘until recently, the idea of amalgamating signs with learning theory and education to establish a new branch, which can be called *edusemiotics*, has never really crystallized, even though the great Russian cultural psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky had remarked ... that ... “human beings actively remember with the help of signs” ... In these words can be detected the *raison d’être* for establishing a connection between *semiotics* as the science of signs, *learning theory* or the science of how signs are learned, and *education*, that is, the practical art/science of teaching individuals how to interpret and understand signs’ (p. vii). Semiotics does not limit signs to their linguistic representations like in linguistics. Real-life events can be considered interpretable signs comprising human experience on the basis of which we can learn. Edusemiotics focuses on the signs of experience, yet it has strong

ontological presuppositions that change our very conceptions of what constitutes experience, subjectivity and rationality.

In contrast to Cartesian substance dualism that continues to haunt education, edusemiotics adopts process metaphysics whose historical precursors include philosophical figures such as Plato, Leibniz, James, Peirce, Dewey and Whitehead (Rescher, 1996). The philosophy of stable substances prevalent in Cartesian dualism with its separation of *res cogitans* from *res extensa* gives way to the philosophy of sign-relations as processes and events. Signs are relational entities, and edusemiotics in effect takes dynamic relations forming a process, and not stable ‘things’, to be ontologically basic. Human subjectivity as being in process cannot be sufficiently understood without examining more closely the notion of a process *per se*. Process can be defined as a ‘coordinated group of changes in the complexions of reality, and organised family of occurrences that are systematically linked to one another either causally or functionally’ (Rescher, 1996, p. 38). As a function of time, process represents non-biological evolution whence signs grow in meaning: they become other, and more fully developed, signs. Such dynamics of signs, in culture or nature alike, was called by Charles S. Peirce semiosis.

The term semiosis derives from the Greek σημείωσις, *sēmeiōsis*—a derivation, in turn, of the verb *sēmeiō* meaning to mark. Human experience is *marked* by signs, and all thinking and living proceed in signs. Human beings are living signs amidst other signs that they use, read and interpret—thereby acquiring a capacity to learn and also grow in meaning. Edusemiotics sees living in terms of engaging with, and responding to, signs so as to create meanings for lived experience. Signs are always involved in relations, participating in interdependent dynamics rather than remaining static substances independent of each other. Learning, in semiotic terms, is a relational process of growth as a function of engaging with, and learning from, signs. Teaching and learning are embedded in semiosis, and the study of processes of learning and teaching is part of, and contributes to, the study of the ontogeny of signs, their communication and their meanings (cf. Nöth, 2010). Learning from signs implies synthetic rather than purely analytic reason and is over and above the traditional educational paradigm critiqued as such by Biesta (2006).

Danesi remarked that research in education ‘has traditionally turned to psychology to help it transform teaching into a more “learning compatible” and “performance-oriented” activity’ (2010, p. x). The shift to philosophy provided by edusemiotics brings into sharp focus the often-missing dimensions of epistemology, ontology, ethics and deep perennial questions positing those as especially valuable for education and in an urgent need of exploration. Edusemiotics can educate us by leading us out of our old habits of mind and action alike. Indeed, *educare* literally means to lead out as well as to bring out something that is within and of which we may as yet remain unconscious. Signs cannot be confined inside the *a priori* conscious *Cogito* who declares ‘I think’ with certainty. Signs, via the dynamics of multiple interpretations, incarnations and translations into other signs, evolve and furnish both human mind and non-human nature (De Tienne, 2003). Learning becomes an experiential process that exceeds the usual product of the educational system as a measurable quantity of certain evidential facts. Indubitable (presumed as such) facts give room to

interpretable signs. By responding to signs' indirect and often subtle messages that exceed the infamous 'clear and distinct' Cartesian ideas but need to be interpreted (in the guise of words or actions alike) so as to become understood and acted upon, those who receive them also become signs, and signs functioning as 'texts' are transformed through their interpretation. The notion of cultural signs and events as texts from which we can learn is important.

Kristeva's Semanalysis and Abjection

Semanalysis is a *portmanteau* word coined by Kristeva that combines semiotics with psychoanalysis and focuses on unconscious drives and affects. A central concept in semanalysis is the text which is to be understood as not only verbal, but in a broader *translinguistic* sense. The crucial feature of such a text is that it is not reducible to just representing or literally meaning the real. For Kristeva, the textual (or rather, intertextual) signification derives from the text's ability to transform reality by capturing it at the moment of its non-closure. Etymologically, the position of the word analysis in semanalysis points to decomposition or dissolution of the sign and the text alike, which leads, through the process of work, to the empirical discovery in practice of some deep and hidden dimensions of meaning. Such signifying practice, reading and interpretation constitute textual productivity. This concept focuses on the dynamical character of the process of generative activity rather than on some final and stable product. This activity is understood as a process or work analogous to what, for example, Freud used to call dream work. According to Kristeva, 'Freud revealed production itself to be a *process* ... of ... permutation, which provides the very model for production. Freud therefore opens up the problematics of *work as a particular semiotic system*' (Kristeva in Nöth, 1995, p. 323, *italics in original*).

In her famous *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva (1984) develops the psychoanalytic significance of semanalysis by differentiating between two dimensions, the semiotic and the symbolic. The semiotic is related to Freud's primary process that expresses itself pre-linguistically, at the level of unconscious drives and instincts. While conscious mind speaks directly and discursively in verbal language, the unconscious is extralinguistic. The semiotic dimension, by definition, is compiled by 'distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign ... imprint' (Kristeva, 1984, p. 25). It is something that, even if non-representational (extralinguistic) by itself, still leaves its mark (as a sign of something other than itself) in the form of the observable effect at the level of individual or collective behaviours or the whole of culture. Any semiotic system, as part of the typology of cultures, needs certain means for its identification within a field of communicative and social relations. Culture itself could be seen as a set of texts inscribed in collective memory (cf. Lotman, 1990), and texts, to repeat, need not be reduced to a solely linguistic form. The non-verbal or semiotic dimension precedes the symbolic or linguistic one, and the two are related to each other dialectically. Kristeva takes Hegelian dialectics with its logical operation of negation and the synthesis of opposites to be the basis for symbolic activity. Building upon psychoanalytic 'psycho-logic', Kristeva posits a dialectical logic as a foundation for the signifying

practice and the production of meaning—especially under the conditions of abject experiences.

Abjection is one of the composites comprising ‘the “structure” of the subject in process’ (Stone, 2004, p. 108). Such unstable structure accords with the edusemiotic perspective and is constituted by dynamic processes and relations that transform it. The dictionary definitions of abjection include the condition of being servile, wretched, or contemptible. Abject experiences represent something utterly hopeless, miserable, humiliating, and cast aside as if traversing the ‘border of ... condition as a living being’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3) when it becomes nearly impossible to withstand the effect of a rapid and shocking change characterising any crisis. Abjection represents ‘one of those violent, dark revolts of being’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 1) when the habitual binary opposites as the categories of true vs. false, right vs. wrong etc. betray their strict logical boundaries and become uncertain, fragile and fluid. They become subject to semiotic interpretation in life, in experience. Indeed, a genuine sign as a minimal unit of description in edusemiotics is a relational entity fluctuating between what is commonly perceived as isolated dualistic categories, such as Cartesian substances of mind and matter.

Human beings as abjects literally exist in-between such categories as life and death because in such events ‘death [is] infecting life’ (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). Instead of the logic of identity that guarantees certain unambiguous references corresponding to their linguistic representations (such as life *or* death), semiotic logic defies the either-or dualism. The paradoxical logic of both-and is a distinguished feature of genuine signs, and ‘abjection is above all ambiguity’ (1982, p. 9). Thinking exceeds its sole adherence to Cartesian consciousness; instead it is ‘the twisted braid of [unconscious] affects and [conscious] thoughts’ (1982, p. 1, brackets mine) that permeate abject experiences in the midst of a crisis which is strongly felt rather than merely (re)cognised. Describing abjection, Kristeva uses the infinitive ‘to fall’, *cadere* in French, hence cadaver or corpse, choosing dramatic vocabulary to describe affects at the level of the bodily, involuntary (hence unconscious) actions in contrast to Cartesian rationality or conscious will: ‘My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border ... my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. ... “I” is expelled’ (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 3–4).

This part of one’s self that is ‘I’ is so desperate and feels overwhelmed to such an extent that it becomes greater than its own stable subjectivity: an autonomous heavy body ‘which is dissociated, shattered into painful territories, parts larger than the whole’ (Kristeva, 1998, p. 152). But because such is the only and immediate life-world known by the ‘I’, the very act of the fall or separation leads to the *subject* becoming a jettisoned *object* in this process. There is no anthropocentric ‘I’ as the self-conscious Cartesian Cogito; and we understand why Kristeva says, ‘it is no longer “I” who expel, [but] “I” is expelled’ (1982, p. 4) in an involuntary and unconscious action. Kristeva borrows the notion of the *excluded* from Mary Douglas, thus affording abjection a greater, social dimension in terms of taboos based on binary coding and resulting in separation and segregation of gender, class, race, age, language, or culture.

Still, albeit destructive, as a Freudian death drive, the expulsion of the 'I' is also the mechanism of 'relaunching ... of life' (Kristeva, 1998, p. 144), that is, abjection's role doubles as a creative function in the construction of subjectivity and the transformation of reality. Such is dialectics inscribed in the dynamics of semiotic process when signs are bound to become other. The 'I' partaking of the corpse indicates a semiotic breakdown of the distinction between subject and object, and the corpse serves as a primary example traumatically reminding us of our own finitude, fragility and materiality; but according to Kristeva, so does Auschwitz, which serves as a symbol of a real-life particularly destructive, violent and immoral event. Such events function as signs to educate us in the edusemiotic process of creating their meanings.

Semiotic Logic of the Included Middle

An a-signifying rupture is produced between subject and object, and it is in this rupture where a Peircean *interpretant* that creates a synthetic 'sense of learning' (Peirce, 1931–1935, CP 1.377) is inserted. It is a distinctive feature of edusemiotics that our experience represents an informal school with its many life-lessons. The logic of identity, of the excluded middle (either–or), gives way to the logic of the included middle (both–and). Such elusive, yet included, third element—an interpretant—is part and parcel of the relational dynamics of signs. Prior to direct verbal representations of the conscious mind there are unconscious affects as signs that act at the level of the body. So an interpretive work needs to be done, not unlike Freud's dream interpretation. Affects comprise a semiotic dimension that indeed precedes a symbolic one consisting of definite words (at the level of propositional consciousness): instead, it needs to be interpreted and articulated in semanalysis so that acquire meanings. The breakdown of existing meaning in abject experiences is a precondition for creating a new one! The confrontation with the old unconscious habits produces crises that serve as living, informal, lessons whenever we are confronted with the otherness inherent in signs. The alien other appears to forever remain foreign, strange, bordering on what Lewis and Kahn (2010), in the context of exopedagogy, designate as 'monstrous contaminant that undermines notions of [habitual] dichotomy' (p. 13) between what, in the framework of the logic of the excluded middle, would forever remain in the comfort zone on its own side of the border.

Abjection is monstrous and uncanny (as Freud would say) because of its terrifying in-distinction that breaks down the logical categories and dichotomies of rational thinking. It is crisis that 'draws me toward the place where [old] meaning collapses' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2). Abject experience is a sign of 'the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4)—thus, it initiates the edusemiotic process of becoming other. Edusemiotics posits the process of becoming as the very condition for being! Signification, according to Kristeva, always functions as a fluctuation between stability and instability, or a static quality and the negation of a stasis. The breakdown of the old habits comprising the usual 'order of things' (using Foucault's trope) negates one's static self-identity within the existing order. Still it simultaneously creates the conditions for the production of new order and new identity, albeit through abjection, an abject becoming an ambiguous sign as the very

subject in process. It is because of abjection, that the Ego undergoes extreme humiliation and the loss, in the psychoanalytic tradition, of its defence-mechanisms: it is driven to 'a downfall that carries [it] along into the invisible and unnameable ... Never is the ambivalence of drive more fearsome than in this beginning of otherness' (Kristeva, 1997, p. 188); still such downfall is the necessary precursor for becoming-other!

The principle of non-contradiction that continues to haunt education since the days of Aristotle's syllogistic logic on the basis of which teachers demand unambiguous, 'right' answers becomes moot. Instead it is contradiction—in the form of abjection or crisis—that is not to be silenced but needs to be acknowledged in edusemiotics because it is lived experience that elicits genuine learning in contrast to formal instruction. Speaking of contradiction, Kristeva stressed that its conditions were 'always to be understood as heterogeneity ... when the loss of unity, the anchor of the process cuts in [and] the subject in process discovers itself as separated' (1998, p. 149). The loss of unity indicates an a-signifying relation between the categories, a gap or difference as a learning space bridged by a semiotic interpretant in its function of making sense for abject (unthinkable and contradictory, from the analytic perspective) experiences. In the midst of such perplexing event it is 'the impossible [that] constitutes [the subject's] very being' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5). Such event is as yet beyond our conscious comprehension, it 'cries out' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 148) in unconscious affects and unspoken emotions hiding in the pre-symbolic, pre-expressive—semiotic—dimension. Still we can evaluate it and thus learn from such abject experience.

Although the interpretation of the cultural text when 'revelation bursts forth' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9) seems by itself to be a violent act, in the sense of its shattering one's set of habitual beliefs and accepted norms, such violence 'rejects the effects of delay' (Kristeva, 1998, p. 153) and hence—rather than breaking the subject—contributes to making the subject anew, to re-making it! Signs are ever-changing in their becoming other signs, and logic as semiotics implies, respectively, that education becomes transformative and creative. Breakdown in existing meaning indicates a breakthrough towards a new meaning, a new way of life betraying a privileged state adopted by an individual or by culture as a whole. The learning space is produced when one's 'fortified castle begins to see its walls crumble' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 48): signs often portend, and the subject experiences a kind of psychoanalytic catharsis or revelation whenever a psychological, ideological, cultural, political, educational or any other stagnant system of outlived habits, beliefs and values begins to break down. Human subjectivity is a genuine sign, a subject in process permeated by the string of interpretants producing ever new meanings in the circumstances of experience due to the paradoxical logic of the included middle inscribed in semiosis as the transformative process of the evolution of signs.

The change at the level of awareness represents dialectics that constitutes the double process of negation and affirmation embedded in the construction of identity of the subject in process: signs-becoming-other-signs; self-becoming-other. Negation is characterised by a temporary interruption in the periodic dynamic process, within which a pause appears, as claimed by Kristeva, in a form of a surplus of negativity, which would ultimately destroy the balance of opposites. The subject, contrary to the

a priori constituting Cartesian subject, becomes in fact constituted in the process of learning from experience. The dialectical process exists in its semiotic, quasi-objective reality even before becoming an object of conscious recognition when presented in the form of affective and portending signs.

Learning Practical Lessons

Kristeva, acknowledging the presence of the gap existing between her analysands' verbal expressions and the non-verbal affects perceived by the analyst, points to the loss of meaning in contemporary life due to dissociation between affects and language: the words become meaningless because the psyche is empty. But in the context of edusemiotics such dissonance can be overcome. The presence of the semiotic, affective, dimension indicates that the psyche is never really empty, even if unconscious of itself: its contents are constituted by extralinguistic signs reflecting our affective participation in life events despite their existing prior to being consciously articulated. These signs are potentially meaningful because of their affective capacity to produce real effects at the level of actual human experiences in accord with Charles S. Peirce's pragmatic maxim constituting the core of his semiotics as the logic of signs in action.

The pragmatics of interpreting abject experiences consists in carrying the signs over to the level of conscious awareness so as to bridge the said gap by returning the meaning to its edusemiotic 'origins'. Kristeva emphasised 'the working of imagination [in] the experience of the want' (1982, p. 5); that is, the realm which is 'logically preliminary to being and object' (Kristeva, 1982, p. 5): it is the oft-unconscious and pre-symbolic process of becoming. She considered the affective world to be enigmatic because of being irreducible to the verbal mode of expression. All affects exist only through signs that stand for the

psychic representations of energy displacements ... [whose] exact status ... remains, in the present state of psychoanalytic and semiological theories, very vague. No conceptual framework in the relevant sciences ... has proven adequate to account for this apparently very rudimentary representation, presign and prelanguage. (Kristeva, 1997, p. 192)

Edusemiotics, however, provides a specific new conceptual framework and enables the shift of the subject-position from abstract to concrete: it is living signs comprising our practical experience that function as a potential 'modality of significance' (Kristeva, 1997, p. 193) and meaning-making for affects, moods and feelings. Such pre-linguistic signs represent 'inscriptions [and] become the communicable imprints of affective reality, perceptible to the reader' (1997, p. 193) as the interpreter of signs who can thus be called edusemiotician. Edusemiotics posits human experience as a cultural text to be read and interpreted because it 'contains' lessons to be learned in the informal school of life.

The start of the twenty-first century has been marked (or 'signed') by cultural conflicts, clash of values, and catastrophe that represents one such practical lesson. The Age of Abjection, as I call it, demonstrates, from the perspective of semanalysis, the confrontation with the Law of the Father when humankind risks not only symbolic

castration but also the destruction and loss of its whole being. The power of horror (Kristeva, 1982) may always turn into the power of terror! Another influential French cultural theorist and sociologist Baudrillard (2002), in his analysis of the spirit of terrorism, talks about symbolic sphere where an initial event, ‘as quite a good illustration of chaos theory’ (p. 23), becomes subjected to unforeseeable consequences. Such a singular event, like the destruction on 9/11, propagates unpredictably, causing a chain of effects ‘not just in the direct economic, political, financial slump in the whole of the system—and the resulting moral and psychological downturn—but the slump in the value-system’ (Baudrillard, 2002, pp. 31–32) as a whole.

The collapse of the Twin Towers represented the fact that ‘the whole system has reached a critical mass which makes it vulnerable to any aggression’ (Baudrillard, 2002, p. 33) and which can propagate and amplify itself in the sequence of subsequent events such as the continuing Iraq and Afghanistan wars. No longer projected inward, abjection becomes re-directed into the outer space. The subject, if *not* in process—that is, not learning their life-lessons—is spaced-out and seems to be out of place both symbolically and literally: ‘the space of the subject collapses in on itself and the subject without psychic space is prey to aggressive drives and paranoid projections of the kind exhibited in misogyny, nationalism, racism and war’ (Kirkby, 1998, p. 111). Terror manifests in the unleashed rage of violence against violence when the long-repressed emotions and implicit feelings deprived of expression explode and ‘spill out from their ... container’ (Casey, 1997, p. 323). Still, it is precisely ‘abjection [that] allows us to move beyond the Law of the Father’ (Bogue & Cornie-Pope, 1996, p. 10) and begins interrogating the existing norms and prevalent codes.

From the edusemiotic perspective, abject experiences always ‘contain’ the signs of hope, this eschatological concept related by Kristeva (2002) to what she called a joyful revolt. Abjection and violence abound in contemporary culture where beliefs and values are continuously clashing do function as precursors to what has been designated as new philosophies for change (Zournazi, 2002). Edusemiotics indeed is the philosophy of education for change and transformation: a revolt, due to its own dialectics and the logic of becoming other, can potentially produce hope, love and wholeness as a positive resolution of a catastrophic, negative, event. As Stone (2004) reminds us quoting from Kristeva, ‘we are subjects in process, ceaselessly losing our identity, destabilized by fluctuations on our relations to the other. Interpretation ... is itself a revolt’ (p. 104). In the framework of edusemiotics, however, we do not have to bring about a *revolution* in the societal value system but rather need to align ourselves with the process of *evolution* as the very flow of semiosis.

Reading and interpreting diverse cultural texts as abject events in our lives may produce a joyful revolt in terms of deconstruction of habitual subjectivity with its old set of privileged yet presently dysfunctional beliefs—while simultaneously resulting in the construction of new subjectivity equipped with newly created meanings and values. It was precisely on the date of 9/11 after the collapse of the Twin Towers that Kristeva remarkably redefined her idea of revolt as an event enabling one to move into a space of hope. The very ‘logic of symbolic change’ (Kristeva, 2002, p. 75) presupposes the ‘necessity of the symbolic deconstruction, the symbolic renewal, which comes from creation—psychic creation, esthetic creation, rebirth of the individual’ (p. 76). Such is

the revaluation of the psyche contributing to the renewal of the self, which embodies events represented by ‘symbolic mutations’ (p. 76) embedded in real-life experiences.

In her interview with Australian journalist Zournazi (2002), Kristeva presents the concept of hope positing it as a transformative, humanistic and even religious idea embedded in the economy of care. Sure enough, the ethics of care is a must for educators (Noddings, 1984–2003), as is edusemiotics that provides us not only with care and hope but demonstrates how logic as semiotics that aims towards interpreting facts rather than taking them at face value leads to integration and reconciliation without which this very hope may remain futile (Semetsky, 2010a, 2012, 2013). The loss of hope produces powerlessness, due to which we often succumb to resignation. Care, as a type of psychoanalytic cure, is ‘a concern for others, and a consideration for their “ill-being”’ (Kristeva, 2002, p. 66), thus bringing ill-being into a semiotic relation with well-being in the evolution of signs enabled by the productive tension between Hegelian thesis and antithesis. In the age of global abjection, care theory becomes a powerful resource that allows us to approach the world via relations. In the framework of care theory and edusemiotics alike, it is the relation (and not an individual agent) that is ontologically, epistemologically and ethically basic.

Real-life events, when evaluated, interpreted and reflected upon, acquire extra-textual productivity, which is extremely important as a means of/for unorthodox cultural education and the edusemiotic pedagogy in terms of our learning from experiences and participating in the process of lifelong education. Edusemiotics teaches us that life itself is educative: it is a long experiential process overcoming the limitations of narrow egocentric knowledge. Edusemiotic perspective allows us to take human experience out of the confines of the individual Cogito of the Cartesian subject and to align it with the greater social dimension that always involves others—people, events, nations, cultures.

Teacher Training

The problem of teacher training becomes crucial. How can teachers be prepared to conduct lessons based on real-life events that include often-time silenced abject experiences? In her book *Critical Lessons: What Our Schools Should Teach*, Noddings (2006) says that when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, teachers in public school were generally forbidden to discuss the war in their classrooms. They and their students thus missed an opportunity to exercise edusemiotic reasoning and meaning-making in regard to this and related controversial real-life events, even as such a restriction on free discussion appears to be simply outrageous in a liberal democracy. Surely, teacher preparation courses should emphasise semiotic relations and connections—and not only to other disciplines and methods but also and more importantly to the common problems of humanity so as to create meanings for often abject events abound in contemporary culture.

The concept of lifelong education thus becomes interrogated: rather than emphasising continual professional training and acquiring new skills, it extends to the level of informal edusemiotic pedagogy that also includes personal development and self-formation outside of the walls of formal classrooms in institutional settings. In

fact, one “skill” is involved in such pedagogy: the ancient Stoics developed the idea that virtue is a kind of *techné* or craft of life which, when blended together with the theoretical knowledge of the world, forms the art and science of living. A moral dimension is part and parcel of Kristeva’s semanalysis and edusemiotics alike. However, even if classical ethical theories are included in teacher preparation courses (and often they are not included at all), the adequacy of those theories becomes doubtful in contemporary global contexts permeated by cultural differences and conflicts of values. The continuing debate regarding the methods of ethics appears unending: ‘since Socrates [philosophers] have sought ... criteria for distinguishing between right and wrong and between good and evil’ (Baron, Pettit, & Slote, 1997, p. 1). What is common to all approaches, however, is that they are framed by the reasoning of an independent moral agent that presents ethical categories in the form of dualistic opposites. Yet we understand that real-life dialectics (as invoked by Kristeva) embedded in human experiences erases the borders between categories and makes it impossible to lay down strict theoretical rules as indubitable moral yardsticks.

The edusemiotic perspective overcomes the dualistic split inherent in simple moral algebra with its traditional binary division into ‘good’ vs. ‘evil’ or ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’. It enables us to move beyond such separation and towards the integration of those dualistic opposites that are still deeply ingrained in individual and cultural consciousness. In this respect, an apparently evil event, such as the destruction of the Twin Towers on 9/11, when reevaluated edusemiotically for the purpose of learning from this abject experience, might itself become a teachable moment and serve a positive pedagogical function. Indeed, the Hegelian contradiction, as presented by Kristeva, together with its resolution as the negation of the negation leads to signs traversing their apparent thresholds. Learning from experiential signs, including the signs of abjection, is founded on discovering the meanings of experiences and establishing some previously unthinkable and seemingly impossible connections in our practical life. In this framework, a particular abject event embedded in a singular experience may provide a unique and creative opportunity for our understanding of its significance and meaning, while also bridging some apparently conflicting values within the overall *integrative* dynamics of signs becoming other.

Another French philosopher, Deleuze (1983), in his contrasting analytic philosophy with the Greek *paideia*, commented that culture usually experiences violence that serves as a force for the formation of our thinking and referred to Plato’s simile of the Cave where the prisoner was forced to start thinking. Genuine philosophy and, by implication, genuine education must always act critically and self-reflectively anticipating new values ‘that are yet to come’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5) as newly created by subjects in process. Thus both Kristeva’s project and edusemiotics lay down a future-oriented process-philosophy as a somewhat ‘untimely’ dimension within current educational research, theory and practice (cf. Gidley & Inayatullah, 2002; Inayatullah, Milojevic, & Bussey, 2005; Peters & Freeman-Moir, 2006; Semetsky, 2006). Process ontology affects ethics: because of uncertainty inscribed in polyvalent signs, human subjects are always in process and exceed the unambiguous ‘I think therefore I am’. Abject experiences partake of being unthinkable because they hit us

at the level of the unconscious affects that are brought to awareness indirectly, via edusemiotics as unorthodox learning.

We learn from experience by transcending this experience in our empirical practice and interpreting subtle, barely representational traces and marks as signs of something other than themselves. Edusemiotics as a philosophy for education is inseparable from the relational dynamics of experience, of life, of culture serving as a medium for life-long moral education of subjects in process, and the ‘origins’ of such education may be marked by real, even if abject, events. The central tenet of semiotics is that signs develop, grow and evolve towards ever new signs and new meanings. Teachers’ informal education becomes a must: self-knowledge as a relation to oneself is at the core of edusemiotics. Without knowing oneself one cannot know others, hence one would be unable to establish a semiotic self-other relation in practice. It is by virtue of edusemiotics that we as signs among other signs can learn from them and discover the deeper dimension of meaning in real-life events and thus grow morally even (or especially) in the midst of Kristeva’s abjection and crisis.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Inna Semetsky has a PhD in Philosophy of Education (2002, Columbia University New York) in addition to MA in Family Therapy (1994) and Grad.Dip.Ed. in maths/science (1984). She was a teacher of mathematics before embarking on academic career and, since 2006, has published nine books, the latest being *Edusemiotics: Semiotic Philosophy as Educational Foundation* (Routledge, 2015; co-authored with Andrew Stables). She is on the editorial board of four academic journals, and her research is informed by Pragmatic, Continental and Hermetic traditions in the context of educational philosophy and theory. She currently serves as a chief consultant at the recently established Institute for Edusemiotic Studies (IES) in Melbourne, associated with the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS). Email: irs5@columbia.edu

References

- Baron, M. W., Pettit, P., & Slote, M. (1997). *Three methods of ethics: A debate*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Baudrillard, J. (2002). *The spirit of terrorism and requiem for the Twin Towers*. (C. Turner, Trans.). London: Verso.
- Biesta, G. (2006). *Beyond learning: Democratic education for a human future*. Hendon: Paradigm.
- Bogue, R., & Cornie-Pope, M. (Eds.). (1996). *Violence and mediation in contemporary culture*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Casey, E. (1997). *The fate of place: A philosophical history*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Danesi, M. (2010). Foreword: Edusemiotics. In I. Semetsky (Ed.), *Semiotics education experience* (pp. vii–xi). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- De Tienne, A. (2003). Learning qua semiosis. *SEED Journal—Semiotics, Evolution, Energy, and Development*, 3, 37–53.
- Deleuze, G. (1983). *Nietzsche and philosophy*. (H. Tomlinson, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

- Deleuze, G. (1995). *Negotiations, 1972–1990*. (M. Joughin, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dewey, J. (1916/1924). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Gidley, J. M., & Inayatullah, S. (Eds.). (2002). *Youth futures: Comparative research and transformative visions*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Inayatullah, S., Milojevic, I., & Bussey, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Educational futures: Neo-humanism and transformative pedagogy*. Taipei: Tamkang University Press.
- Kirkby, J. (1998). Julia Kristeva: A politics of the inner life? In J. Lechte & M. Zournazi (Eds.), *After the revolution: On Kristeva* (pp. 109–123). Australia: Artspace Visual Arts Center.
- Kristeva, J. (1982). *Powers of horror: An essay on abjection*. (L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1984). *Revolution in poetic language*. (M. Waller, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1997). Black sun. In K. Oliver (Ed.), *The portable Kristeva* (pp. 180–202). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1998). The subject in process. In P. French & R.-F. Lack (Eds.), *The Tel Quel reader* (pp. 133–178). London: Routledge.
- Kristeva, J. (2002). Joyful revolt. In M. Zournazi (Ed.), *Hope: New philosophies for change* (pp. 64–77). Annandale: Pluto Press.
- Lewis, T., & Kahn, R. (2010). *Education out of bounds*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lotman, J. (1990). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. (A. Shukman, Trans.). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984/2003). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Nöth, W. (1995). *Handbook of semiotics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Nöth, W. (2010). The semiotics of teaching and the teaching of semiotics. In I. Semetsky (Ed.), *Semiotics education experience* (pp. 1–20). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Peirce, C. S. (1931/1935). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce, 1860–1911*. (Vol. I–VIII, C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, & A. Burks, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Peters, M. A., & Freeman-Moir, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Edutopias: New Utopian thinking in education* (Vol. 5). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Rescher, N. (1996). *Process metaphysics: An introduction to process philosophy*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Semetsky, I. (2006). *Deleuze, education and becoming*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Semetsky, I. (2010a). Towards an ethics of integration in education. In T. Lovat, R. Toomey, & N. Clement (Eds.), *International research handbook on values education and student wellbeing* (pp. 319–336). New York, NY: Springer.
- Semetsky, I. (Ed.). (2010b). *Semiotics education experience*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Semetsky, I. (2012). Living, learning, loving: Constructing a new ethics of integration in education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33, 47–59.
- Semetsky, I. (2013). *The edusemiotics of images: Essays on the art-science of tarot*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Semetsky, I., & Stables, A. (2014). *Pedagogy and edusemiotics: Theoretical challenges/practical opportunities*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Stables, A., & Semetsky, I. (2015). *Edusemiotics: Semiotics philosophy as educational foundation*. London: Routledge.
- Stone, L. (2004). Crisis of the educated subject: Insight from Kristeva for American education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 23, 103–116.
- Zournazi, M. (2002). *Hope: New philosophies for change*. Annandale: Pluto Press.