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On Kristeva's *Revolution* and *Revolt*: Dissolved Politics and Agential Imagination

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Abstract: Julia Kristeva uses two disparate concepts in her work: revolution and revolt. In this article I understand these concepts as different approaches to the relations between power, art and psychoanalysis. By placing the concepts of revolt and revolution in dialogue with each other, and by pointing out that their dialogue departs from the notion of experience, I attempt to reconstruct the important contribution of Kristeva's work. Her perspective reveals that artistic expression is linked to a specific kind of politics (dissolved politics). Kristeva's view of literary and psychoanalytic practice is then, arguably, something that may contribute to the realisation of this dissolved politics, albeit in a limited way.

In Julia Kristeva's theoretical work, the question of art's involvement in the process of social or political change is constantly raised. Throughout, while asking how artistic practices can contribute to such change, Kristeva also addressed the pitfalls of political engagement in art. And, to deal adequately with such issues, she first asks a much more fundamental question. What is change in general? What is its nature and at what level does it take place? Throughout Kristeva's work we find two ways in which she dealt with such questions: through the analysis of the two disparate conceptions 'revolution' and 'revolt', which are semantically related but not interchangeable. Moreover, each was developed in a different period of Kristeva's work. The concept

of 'revolution' can be found especially in her works of the early 1970s, with the famous *Revolution in Poetic Language* (originally published in 1974) at the forefront. The notion of 'revolt' is introduced nearly twenty years later, in a period when Kristeva is already confronting the vast majority of her theoretical concepts with her own psychoanalytic practice (while the concept of revolution can be understood as inspired by psychoanalytic theory). It is *The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis* series, consisting of texts *The Sense and Non-Sense of Revolt* (originally published in 1996) and *Intimate Revolt* (originally published in 1997), which will be primarily discussed here.

The difference between these two concepts has been widely discussed among Kristevan scholars. Joan Brandt argues that revolution was the 'beginning', the 'original' concept, whereas revolt was its actualisation and adaptation to a changing social and intellectual climate.¹ In the view of Kelly Oliver, revolution and revolt are analogous. She argues that while revolution takes place in society, revolt takes place in the psyche.² Sara Beardsworth, on the other hand, understands the two concepts as inverted: revolution as the destabilisation of the subject, whereas revolt as its stabilisation.³ What is missing from these theoretical contributions to the topic, however, is a perspective that would portray revolt and revolution as a dialogue. This paper presents such a perspective.

Kristeva's work on *revolution* is primarily associated with avant-garde literature, specifically Lautréamont and Mallarmé, whose writings she analyses in detail in *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Throughout her work, her scope becomes broader, but there is a certain canon of authors who interest her most. She repeatedly turns to Kafka, Bataille, Céline, Joyce, Dostoevsky or Artaud. In her work on *revolt*, she is focused mostly on the writings of Marcel Proust, but contemporary art, too, enters the field of her research. Kristeva sees art as another practice alongside literature that has the capacity to effect social and political change, yet is outside the realm of practical politics.⁴ This is because they share a certain dynamic and also a similar type of experience (a singular moment in the subject's life that defies categorisation, whether social or conceptual). Kristeva's perspective then reveals that literary and artistic expression is linked to a specific kind of politics which effects social and political change in ways that politics on its own cannot.

I. *REVOLUTION*: INVENTING A DISSOLVED POLITICS

In Kristeva's 1970s works, the concept of 'revolution' allows her to explore the possibilities for social change, including the ways in which literary practice can participate in this change. She uses avant-garde literature as both the material to be analysed and the inspiration for formulating political standpoints. In the preface to the (incomplete) English version of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, published ten years after the French original, this is noted:

The ‘revolution’ in her title refers to the profound change that began to take place in the nineteenth century, the consequences of which are still being sustained and evaluated in our own time.⁵

As such, Kristeva’s ‘revolution’ can be understood as a process that had already begun, surviving until then on the margins of official discourses, and which now needs to be brought into practice. There is a strong resonance here with the political programme of *Tel Quel*, whose allied authors defend the thesis that theoretical action (the formulation of a new theory of language precisely on the basis of literary practice / text / poetic speech) has its proper place within this practice and can be an effective support for social change.⁶ Kristeva’s work, then attempts to perform this theoretical action.

This new theory of language can be presented as a series of reformulations and reassessments on the *Marx – Hegel – Freud* axis. Marx’s point is a critique of economic reductionism and a refusal to understand language as a superstructure. Instead of the linguistically charged notion of language, Kristeva uses the term *signifying practice*, which includes language but does not privilege it over other forms of sign productions. For Kristeva, signifying practice is not in principle separate from socio-economic production, and these two productions meet in the speaking subject. This view is important for Kristeva’s concept of revolution: when language positions are reshaped within literary practice (Kristeva discusses several examples of how grammatical, syntactical, or narrative structures are disrupted in avant-garde literature), she argues that a new subject is produced. Avant-garde literature is described as a laboratory where this production takes place.⁷ According to Kristeva, revolution is precisely this production of a different subject, linked to the dissolution of language – of language as a tool of communication – as it occurs in avant-garde texts.

Kristeva uses the Hegelian notion of negativity in her thematisation of revolution: she refers to a process that traverses structures of communication, but is irreducible to them, which cannot be positively conceptualised. In contrast to Hegel’s conception, negativity in Kristeva’s rendition has a materialist basis and is based on Freud’s psychoanalysis.⁸ Kristeva uses the term rejection, linking it to the movement of the drives. For Freud, drives are a difficult element to grasp, split between the psychic and the physical: they cannot be placed on either side of this dichotomy. For Kristeva, drives are representatives of elusiveness in general: they will always escape the determination of language, or to put it another way, they do not fit into language, they are something that resides – but undoubtedly passes through it, generating the movement of the structure of communication and, in principle, its possible collapse. Kristeva thus makes negativity more than anything else a problem of representation.

The drive element in language is called the semiotic. Together with the symbolic (the language of purpose, the language of communication, creating

identity), it constitutes two modalities of *signifiance*.⁹ The semiotic-symbolic distinction helps Kristeva specify how revolution takes place: according to her, it is 'the movement of the symbolic under the pressure of the semiotic'.¹⁰ Although language as a structure of communication and the existing (oppressive) socio-economic formations are thus disintegrated, the principle of the symbolic as such is not destroyed. In the place of what is broken, there is space for the formation of other forms of signification – Kristeva speaks of a 'specific discourse closer to the body'.¹¹ The 'new symbolic' does not seek to form identity and unity but becomes the vehicle, a medium of drives and bodily impulses which are not marginalised in this new paradigm, but on the contrary are allowed to constantly disrupt identity and unity. This means there is not only a transformation in language, but also in the functioning of institutions (the state, family, religion) which under the influence of this 'bodily discourse', are brought to constantly question their own agency – something that Kristeva argues is not happening at the time she formulates this conception of revolution.

For many commenting on Kristeva's work, even straight after the publication of *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the 'translation' of change in socio-symbolic formations into the political realm was problematic. They ask: what conception of politics does social change presuppose? What is the vision for politics after the change has occurred?

According to many authors, Kristeva fails to answer these questions sufficiently, if at all. Rudi Lewis suggests that the 'power' of theoretical and textual practice alone is not enough.¹² Carol Bové assumes that the process Kristeva describes would need a link to politics for it to be implemented. She claims this link is absent from the entire conception.¹³ The need for a 'supplement' in the form of a political strategy is also demanded of Kristeva by American feminist theorists. Nancy Fraser, for example, argues that Kristeva's revolutionary subject, as formulated, cannot become a (feminist) political agent.¹⁴

This absence of a political strategy in Kristeva's conception of revolution is an argument for its lack of power. This list of rejections draws attention to an important element in the whole conception. For this powerlessness is the point wherein the often overlooked critical potential of Kristeva's revolution lies. Cecilia Sjöholm touches on this issue in her work, which is devoted to the political aspects of Kristeva's work. She writes that 'subversion is not supposed to be translated into a politics of emancipation, justice or recognition'.¹⁵ What she suggests is that a certain dissociation of language from politics is a feature of Kristeva's theory, not a deficiency. One finds support for this in Kristeva's own work:

The ramification of capitalist society makes it almost impossible for the signifying process to attack material and social obstacles, objective constraints, oppressive entities, and institutions directly. As a consequence, the signifying process comes to the fore in the matrix of enunciation, and, through it, radiates toward the other components of the space of production.¹⁶

Kristeva emphasises revolution in discourse not because she is convinced of its societal importance, but simply because there is no other option under capitalism. According to Kristeva, the literary text – as a specific type of discourse – is the only possible sphere that remains open to the effects of negativity under these conditions (and as such becomes capitalism’s weak link), while the sphere of politics remains closed to the processes of transformation. Indeed, Kristeva views politics not as a tool to enforce the changes, but as another signifying practice, such as language. So if Kristeva outlines a ‘politics of revolution’, it is best to understand this as proposing a ‘revolution of politics’. That is, its dissolution. Kristeva writes:

Conservative politics is a preservation of the measurement represented by the sovereign ruler (the leader) who is supposed to be able to self-regulate. The politics of revision (revisionist) replaces one common measurement with another, the new code being supported by a new leader (Stalin) or by a dull anonymity (modern technocracy). Revolutionary politics, when it is not a repetition, should be the time when politics (the common measurement, hence language) breaks down.¹⁷

However, Kristeva also hints at a very significant moment in which a rupture arises in the analogy between language and politics. This rupture creates an empty space, but can certainly serve as a position for further interpretation. In fact, Kristeva takes unprecedented care in her work to show that there already exist ‘models’ for this broken language in history: not only in literary history (avant-garde literature), but also in the individual histories of subjects (a child’s first utterances, laughter, Freudian slips of the tongue e.g.). In the case of broken politics, however, the matter is more complex: there may be no model for it, there is not much to say about it. There is no basis for its imagination (under capitalism) to at least sketch its basic outlines. Hence it is much easier to dismiss broken politics as a naive concept.

Perhaps Bakhtin’s concept of the carnival could be considered a ‘model’ of the broken, dissolved politics, that Kristeva discusses. Bakhtin presents it as a form that does not belong to the category of literary phenomena – corporeality and sensuality are lived at the level of society. It carries with it a certain ‘carnival sense of the world’, which is characterised by an intimate, human proximity and familiarity, which disrupts existing social hierarchies.¹⁸

Carnival is . . . a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. The behaviour, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions (social estate, rank, age, property) . . . it permits – in concretely sensuous form – the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves.¹⁹

Besides hierarchies, carnival also dissolves the ordinary language and creates a new one, irreducible to non-carnival language: ‘This language cannot be translated in any full or adequate way into a verbal language, and much less into a language of abstract concepts.’²⁰ In many parameters, this ‘the sum total of all diverse festivities, rituals and forms of a carnival type’ (as Bakhtin understands carnival) could serve as the aforementioned ‘model’ and therefore facilitate the formulation of a dissolved politics.²¹ This, however, leads to a difficulty in that Bakhtin and Kristeva both show that if carnival as a specific state of the social was possible at all, it was in pre-capitalist societies. They treat it primarily as a theoretical concept: as has already been outlined, they understand it rather as a specific type of experience. From a certain time, this experience no longer finds its place at the level of a social order (which represses it) but permeates literature and causes its transformation (the so-called carnivalisation of literature).²² The idea of the mere existence of a carnival is as inconceivable from the point of view of the existing order as the aforementioned concept of politics. In order to talk about a dissolved politics, one certainly cannot rely on the existence of a model (this is what Kristeva implies when she contrasts repetition with a dissolved politics). What can serve as a starting point, however – and this is briefly discussed in Kristeva’s thought – is precisely the type of experience that is associated with the carnival. Following on from the critical responses to the lack of politics in Kristeva’s work mentioned above, there is also another reading that gives an impulse to discuss such a thing as experience.

In his study of Kristeva’s analyses of Mallarmé’s texts, Robert Boncardo arrives at a conclusion similar to Lewis’s – the revolutionary potential of texts of this type, he argues, is undermined by the fact that such literary practices are only accessible to prominent artists and theorists. He assumes, however, that Kristeva already deals with such a question. Her conception implies, he argues, that in order to ensure the political impact of literary practice, it needs to be spread throughout society: ‘In short, Mallarmé must be read by all.’²³ Boncardo’s formulation then suggests that Kristeva is calling for the (previously rejected) authoritarian enforcement of the new code or the introduction of ‘technocratic approaches’, which to her are in direct contrast to revolutionary politics. However, considering Kristeva’s formulations of revolution, material negativity or the semiotic, this *reading of Mallarmé by all* is already taking place.

A literary text with revolutionary potential, according to Kristeva, works on the one hand with an ideological critique of the social order, but inherently

contains a ‘heterogeneous contradiction’, on the other hand.²⁴ This is based on a very specific way of working with experience. Bakhtin’s carnival can serve as a tool in sketching its features. He speaks of ‘the spontaneity of the inconclusive present’ with which literature (the novel) is always engaged.²⁵ For Bakhtin, its representative is laughter, which takes objects out of their ordinary context, devours them and brings them to the verge of destruction:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it.²⁶

What Kristeva calls laughter multiplies the perspectives through which its object can be viewed. In doing so, it abolishes its identity, even abolishes an object in general. The very principle of experience becomes clear in its relation to the subject: the subject merges with the decomposed object in that all-consuming moment, the subject-object relation disappears. Experience itself consequently becomes a challenge to represent. What Kristeva calls heterogeneous contradiction is then the very clash between two heterogeneous spheres: experience and the level of representation (ordinary language). The text attempts to express this experience, and in doing so it encounters the impossibility of expressing it fully. In short, avant-garde literature attempts to tell something that cannot be told. When viewed through the prism of experience, literature so-conceived shows a certain ‘democratising’ dimension: by emphasising such a thing as laughter, Kristeva’s conception of revolution potentially reaches beyond the circles of prominent intelligentsia. Laughter is not the only example of an unspeakable experience that activates existing linguistic formations for change. A major theme of Kristeva’s later work is the experience of motherhood, in which (without any normative claim) not only the mother but also her child ‘cease to exist’ as a consequence of not yet being symbolically separated from each other.²⁷

Kristeva thus potentially extends this principle to every subject. The nuances that become visible upon Kristeva’s focusing on the notion of experience, can be understood as a rebellion against the tendency of capitalist production to let negativity operate only in literature. Kristeva’s thematisation of motherhood is, more than anything else, a way of exploring the notion of revolution in broader contexts and pointing to the possibilities of change beyond the register of literary practice.²⁸ The basis for an articulation of a dissolved politics is not the reading of avant-garde texts or the application of carnivalesque principles. A dissolved politics can only emerge from experience, or from the attempt to speak about experience.

II. REVOLT: RETURNING TO PAINFUL PLACES

In her conception of revolution, Kristeva only touches on the connection of social change with the psychic life of its possible agents. But, although in the conception of revolt the relevant psychic life is absolutely central, it would be problematic to conceive of the shift from revolution to revolt as a shift from exteriority to interiority. Indeed, the very notion of drive, so crucial to Kristeva's conception of language, undermines this dichotomy. Revolt is primarily concerned with the question of the capacity of subjects to represent experience. It is a transformation of their relation to meaning, and consists of a 'return / turning back / displacement / change', involving a return to the agent's past life.²⁹

Instead of avant-garde literature, which formed her thinking of the revolution, Kristeva turns to Proust now. It is the Proustian *motif* that Kristeva uses to subvert the understanding of revolt as a purely political term. Revolt remains political in her conception, but not exclusively so. It is therefore possible to relate it to Kristeva's notion of 'dissolved politics', which she outlined, but apparently (and justifiably) did not fully develop. The lack of a model is an obstacle to its formulation, but at the same time this obstacle must not be removed. This calls for an examination of the conceptual field in which Kristeva develops the concept of revolt and on this basis ask the question: what can revolt bring to a dissolved politics? Can it bring us any closer to a notion?

Revolt is not only a return to a painful place in the subject's life, as Kristeva claims, also raises some questions that seemed unresolved in her earlier work on revolution. I touched upon this when emphasising that the mechanism of revolution, insofar as it lies in a universal (but necessarily singular) experience, is *potentially* available to every subject. The fact that experience, i.e. the challenge for representation, is a mere potentiality in the case of most subjects is a crucial circumstance to why Kristeva speaks of revolt at all. Her formulation of the concept of revolt begins with a certain diagnosis of (post-communist and post-industrial) power relations in which the realisation of the challenges of representation becomes problematic.³⁰ This motif is also present in Kristeva's work from the 1970s, although there is a shift: in the case of the unifying establishment which the revolution is meant to confront, experience is met with a consistent, systematic repression, or reduction to a form which is convenient for the preservation of the repressive system.

Twenty years later, however, Kristeva views the relationship between power and experience differently. She speaks of a 'power vacuum' in which the subject is normalised, reduced to a 'patrimony of organs': these organs are an objectified individual, a body that can be fully circulated, a body that can be fully owned.³¹ A body that does not undergo experiences, which are affectively charged events, does not encounter structures of communication the moment the self is lost. Kristeva therefore speaks of the subject's inabil-

ity to revolt. It is questionable, however, to assume that such a change of perspective is due to a radical change in power relations. Rather, her contact with patients had an enormous influence on her understanding of power relations; she began to perceive certain nuances that, from the perspective of the psychoanalyst suddenly became much more apparent and important. Along with this, a possible strategy for dealing with such a situation is also developed: Kristeva does not primarily seek a way out in changing the mechanisms of power towards giving experience a platform. Her strategy is different. The clash of experience and structures of communication needs to be reconstituted at the level of the psychic apparatus of the subject itself, which would restore the capacity to revolt. This, she argues, is the main task for contemporary psychoanalysis: it is therefore not to be another normative practice, but a constant problematisation of identity. On the basis of this work with the individual, Kristeva argues, revolt can acquire its proper place in society.

What exactly does Kristeva mean when she speaks of the need to reconstitute the conflict between experience and structures of communication? This issue points back to her notions of the semiotic and the symbolic, whose interrelation is actualised and refined by Kristeva in relation to Freudian models of language. In the context of the revolt, she promotes those moments in Freud's work that suggest the irreducibility of the unconscious and the psychic apparatus to language. These include Freud's 'pre-analytic' texts from which Kristeva reconstructs the notion of 'layered representations' irreducible to language by highlighting Freud's understanding of the psychic apparatus as a combination of these representations and bodily energetic charge.³² By emphasising this part of Freud's work, she provides a counterweight to the 'optimistic Freud' who believes that the unconscious can be fully accessed through language. This phase of Freud's thought was later favoured by Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, which, according to Kristeva, in effect entirely dispensed with the notion of the drive. She summarises the position of Lacanian psychoanalysis as follows: 'The drive is a myth . . . because we do not have access to it except through language. It is therefore useless to talk about drives; we should be content to talk about language'.³³ According to Kristeva, in contrast, the drive is irreplaceable in the conception of the semiotic and the symbolic: the participation of the drive is what creates the experience on which the revolutionary movement of signifying structures is built. Thus, Kristeva's label 'optimistic' also implicitly marks the political implications of this conception.

It is particularly Freud's text *Totem and Taboo* that enables a reflection on the possibilities of revolt. Kristeva reads it as a text which, through the key moment of the murder of the father, describes the psychological dynamics and dichotomy between the unrepresentable and the symbolic. Freud describes the situation as follows:

One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde... The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength.³⁴

Kristeva then points to the dual nature of this act: the murder of the father is not, in Freud's conception, simply a violent, 'unrepresentable act' that would be traumatically repeated again and again without any way of grasping and dealing with it. By eating and thus identifying with, the father, by internalising a hitherto external authority, it is also a 'structuring representation'. The formative character of this act is highlighted by Freud when he refers to murder as a 'memorable and criminal deed, which was the beginning of so many things – of social organisation, of moral restrictions and of religion'.³⁵ As a reminder and celebration of this founding act, a totem meal appears in society, during which a totemic animal is killed and eaten as a substitute for the father. This is an event in which 'every instinct is unfettered and there is licence for every kind of gratification. Here we have easy access to an understanding of the nature of festivals in general'.³⁶ The murder of the primitive father, and especially the fact that it is accompanied by identification and is represented, enables the aforementioned experience. As Kristeva points out, the possibility of experience is something that today's 'patrimonial individual' lacks. She proposes to return within psychoanalysis to similarly pivotal moments in the subject's life, an equivalent to the murder of the primitive father in personal history. These are the moments when '... the namable and the unnamable, the instinctual and the symbolic, language and what is not language, are dissociated'.³⁷ As mentioned, Kristeva observes, more and more often, that subjects are not able to represent these difficult subject positions. Instead, symptoms and traumas are developed. In psychoanalysis, then, it is necessary to 'invent and create' appropriate representations for these fractured moments, to link affect to representation, and thus to strengthen the subject's capacity for revolt. Given the emphasis on identification and the formation of a certain symbolic bond, revolt may at first sight seem rather conservative.³⁸ In my view, however, it is not too far from the concept of revolution. It is again the setting in motion of a structure of communication as a result of the action of an affectively charged moment. The catalyst for change, however, is psychoanalysis, rather than literature.

But even so, literature plays a significant role for Kristeva – when considering, for example, the Proustian inspiration that constantly accompanies the formulation of revolt, as was mentioned earlier. Kristeva refers to Proust as a translator. He is a translator of the 'singular language of his involuntary memory and his sensations', and into a readable, comprehensible language of the community.³⁹ Kristeva adds:

This sensory language is not a language of signs: it is a ‘language’ in quotation marks, a chaos and order of pulsations, impressions, sorrows, and ecstasies at the borders of unformulatable biology.⁴⁰

What Kristeva called the semiotic is thus transposed to the level of representation in Proust’s work. It is ‘the return, or access, to a timeless temporality’.⁴¹ The process that takes place in his writing is the equivalent of what should take place in psychoanalysis. This puts literature into quite a different role: this is mainly because Kristeva views literature (and lists it alongside writing and thinking) as a social manifestation of psychic life.⁴² Literature is not a means of effecting social change (as suggested and subsequently criticised by Kristeva’s many commentators), but rather a unique bearer of experience. We should be inspired by its mechanisms in psychoanalytic practice.

III. CONCLUSION

Kristeva’s conception of possible change seems very minimalist – Noëlle McAfee calls such a strategy a ‘micropolitics of the couch’, which, however, needs to be transferred to the polis.⁴³ According to Kristeva, such a ‘culture of revolt’ can be constituted on the basis of psychoanalytic work. From individual positions, a social space can be constituted in which returns to timelessness, renewed capacities for experience, and the actualisation of symbolic constructions occur through a certain self-movement. But is psychoanalysis alone sufficient for such a task? The question remains the same as in Kristeva’s ‘revolutionary’ period when literature was subject to similar doubts. It would be misleading, however, to assume that Kristeva attributes this crucial role for social change to psychoanalysis alone. Psychoanalysis is rather one of the areas where the principles of revolt can be worked with.

We may say that Kristeva’s writing invites this principle to be put to test in other discourses and practices where the possibility of working with the materiality of the subjects and their experience is offered, as in psychoanalysis. As she writes, contemporary art can certainly be seen as another space in which a culture of revolt is born. She mentions the artworks of her patients, Pollock’s drip paintings or installations of disparate objects, which produce ‘experimental psychosis’. Such artworks are, according to her, situated in a pre-linguistic experience (she speaks of delirious states, violence and turmoil of thinking), but at the same time they carry out social meanings.⁴⁴

The next question concerns the relationship of revolt, or the culture of revolt, to politics: both in the general sense and in the sense of the ‘dissolved politics’. Indeed, the development of Kristeva’s work suggests that she is abandoning such thinking for good, turning instead to an intimate sphere that remains radically separated from the realm of politics. As this paper tried to show, however, these two spheres are not separate; it is the notion of experience that binds them together. This turn to the ‘intimate sphere’ can

thus be seen as a possible continuation of thinking about dissolved politics. Indeed, the advantage of Kristeva's conception of revolt is that it is not purely political. When Kristeva comments on this issue, her statement may sound slightly pessimistic and resigned: '...one cannot expect psychoanalysis to solve social problems'.⁴⁵ This statement, however, continues in a way that can mark the possible relationship between psychoanalysis and a dissolved politics:

... it is also true that it is not the role of psychoanalysis to prepare people for union activism or to become members of political parties, whether left or right. What concerns me essentially is to provoke people's anxieties and to free their creativity. At that point, it is up to them to decide if this creativity will play itself out at a political level, at a union level, at a cultural or sexual level, but again it is not a role of the analyst to train political protesters.⁴⁶

Literature does not play the role of 'preparation' for political engagement—and never did in Kristeva's work. Instead, both domains work with creativity, playing out the imaginative capacities of the subject or community. If, then, the main point of a dissolved politics is its inconceivability, the role of revolt, is the following: among other things, it can become a way of imagining such a politics precisely because it does not actively pursue this goal. Kristeva herself says of revolt that 'it *poses the question* of another politics, that of permanent conflictuality'.⁴⁷ The caution in her expression suggests that even if Kristeva moves away from politics as her main subject, the urgency and irreducibility of the revolutionary politics she outlined in her early work still exerts its influence from the background.

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NOTES

- ¹Brandt 2001.
²Oliver 2005.
³Beardsworth 2005.
⁴Kristeva 2002b, 115.
⁵Roudiez in Kristeva 1984, 1.
⁶<https://www.marxists.org/history/france/tel-quel/no34.htm>. On the same topic Kristeva writes: 'metalanguage can cease to be a funeral inventory of signs that are always already there and to be shaken by the same turmoil of life that drives the literary text'. Kristeva 1969, 6.
⁷Kristeva 1980, 26.
⁸Kristeva's attitude towards Hegel is

summed up in this passage: 'Already in the Phenomenology of Spirit negativity is presented under the rule of the One and the Understanding, even in those moments when it appears most material and independent – closest to what we have called a semiotic chora (energy discharges and their functioning) – in other words, when it appears as Force [Kraft]' see Kristeva 1984, 114.

⁹Kristeva 1984, 13.

¹⁰Kristeva 1977, 14.

¹¹Kristeva 1986, 200.

¹²Lewis 1974, 31.

¹³Bové 1984, 220

- ¹⁴Fraser 1992, 189.
¹⁵Sjöholm 2005, 40.
¹⁶Kristeva 1984, 105.
¹⁷Kristeva 1977, 15.
¹⁸Bakhtin 1984, 123.
¹⁹Bakhtin 1984, 122.
²⁰Bakhtin 1984, 122.
²¹Bakhtin 1984, 122.
²²Bakhtin 1984, 122.
²³Boncardo 2018, 101.
²⁴Kristeva 1984, 191.
²⁵Bakhtin 1981, 27.
²⁶Bakhtin 1981, 23.
²⁷A very illustrative text that confronts the experience of motherhood and utterance is *Stabat Mater*. (Kristeva 1987, 234-263.)
²⁸Integral to this exploration is an evaluation of possible risks that subversive discourses can bring to the social level. An outstanding example is Kristeva's analysis of fascism through the work of L. F. Céline, see Kristeva 1982.
²⁹Kristeva 2002a, 11 and 5.
³⁰These comparisons also reveal an important aspect of Kristeva's thought: it can be said that experience itself has no history, but history can be written according to the 'attacks' experience finds itself under.
³¹Kristeva 2000, 5-6.
³²Kristeva 2000, 33.
³³Kristeva 2000, 43.
³⁴Freud 2004, 164-165.
³⁵Freud 2004, 165.
³⁶Freud 2004, 163. We can recognise a connection with Bakhtin's carnival (although Freud's and Bakhtin's concepts certainly differ).
³⁷Kristeva 2000, 50.
³⁸Joan Brandt 2001, 91 evaluates it as 'less conflictual' or 'non-confrontational'.
³⁹Kristeva 2002a, 248.
⁴⁰Kristeva 2002a, 249.
⁴¹Kristeva 2002a, 248.
⁴²Kristeva 2002a, 11.
⁴³McAfee 2014.
⁴⁴Kristeva 2002b, 115.
⁴⁵Kristeva 2002b, 103.
⁴⁶Kristeva 2002b, 103.
⁴⁷Kristeva 2002a, 11, author's emphasis.

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